Aggregates Unseen: Imagining Post-Katrina New Orleans

James Johnson

Photography, understood as a technology for amplifying imagination, affords a useful tool for coming to terms with the massive forced migration caused by the Katrina catastrophe. Specifically, photographic projects by Robert Polidori and Richard Misrach reveal the exigencies of communicating in the wake of the disaster.

> Here the word 'impartiality' is not mentioned. In its stead we find the notion that one can 'enlarge' one's thought so as to take into account the thoughts of others . . . . The faculty that makes this possible is called imagination . . . . Critical thinking is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection. Hence, critical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut itself off from 'all others.' To be sure it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides . . . . To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting.
>
> —Hannah Arendt[1]

Photography and politics intersect on the terrain of visibility and imagination. Although Arendt offered her remarks for considerably different purposes, I take them as an invitation to explore—in a partial and preliminary way—that intersection.[2] It is a commonplace to observe that politics operates in and on the terrain of visibility. It is a commonplace, too, that this requires that political agents not just see extant realities, but imagine how things might be otherwise.[3] Photography is a technology used, among other things, to "amplify" our own imagination and to "incite" the imaginings of others.[4] Like photographic depictions more generally, the work I discuss in what follows allows us to imagine actual but quite alien states of the world and, simultaneously, to see ourselves doing so.[5] In that sense photography facilitates the "enlarged mentality" that Arendt endorses. It dispatches our imaginations on visits to places and events that, in all likelihood, we never experience first hand.

This inference, from Arendt's remarks on imagination to a brief for relying on photography as a technology for thinking about politics, may seem a stretch to some readers. Arendt herself, however, provides a useful example of just how that connection might work. In her controversial 1959 essay "Reflections on Little Rock," she takes a "photograph reproduced in newspapers and magazines throughout the country, showing a Negro girl . . . walking away from school, persecuted and followed into bodily proximity by a jeering and grimacing mob of youngsters" as the "point of departure" for a series of pointed questions.[6] Specifically, and first, Arendt seeks to imagine herself in a role she would never occupy: "What would I do if I were a Negro mother?"[7] This hardly is an appropriate place to assess Arendt's analysis, let alone the substantial, critical response her essay generated. Instead, it is important to note that in this instance she relied on photography as an instrument in a quite public exercise in critical thinking and judgment.

Four and a half decades later, Danielle Allen took up a conversation with Arendt (and others) about racial politics in post-Little Rock America in an instructively similar way. Again, I do not aim to assess Allen's argument in detail here. But she too starts from a photograph, which she uses as the basis from which to examine both the dynamic of racial "dominance and acquiescence" in the American South circa 1957 and its legacy for contemporary American politics. Allen, however, does not deploy the photograph as an illustration. Instead, she uses it is a tool to think with. Sure, Allen suggests that the searing image of Hazel Bryan screaming invectives at Elizabeth Eckford "recorded a nightmarish version of a town meeting" in the wake of political decisions made elsewhere.[8]

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But she also insists that this image is compelling in a straightforward political sense; on her account it confronted viewers at the time, just as it confronts both Allen herself and her readers, with the "inescapable" task of reconsidering citizenship and public space.[9]

Like Arendt, Allen turns to photography for its "power to engage the imagination" generally and, more particularly, for the way it serves to "amplify" the experience and the voice of participants in political interactions.[10] Photography, in other words, makes others present and, at least in imagination, allows viewers to examine quite foreign standpoints. This, of course, is not the only way that political scientists have engaged the intersection of photography and politics.[11] The approach Arendt and Allen exemplify nonetheless is provocative. It also is incomplete. For in many instances we must not just traverse distance, whether temporal or spatial, but grasp aggregates, large numbers of people whose experience and predicaments it is especially difficult to imagine. In such instances a focus on individuals—the focus both Arendt and Allen adopt—is misplaced.

Categorizing Katrina

The vast majority of Americans experienced Katrina only vicariously.[12] It nevertheless seems safe to say that, for many Americans, Katrina is among the defining events of the current century. Yet what does it mean to say that? In an obscure but influential essay originally written in the late 1960s, philosopher Donald Davidson observes that "it is easy to appreciate why we so often identify or describe events in terms of their causes and effects. Not only are these the features that often interest us about events, but they are features guaranteed to individuate them in the sense not only of telling them apart but also of telling them together."[13] We invoke causal relations, and the place of events in some scheme of such relations, on this view, in order to identify events, to give them meaning, to differentiate them, and to group them under common descriptions.

The initial intellectual and political task, then, when confronting an event like Katrina, is to figure out how to categorize it, how to tell it apart from some events and together with others. I already have offered a hint of how I plan to approach this task because I have not mentioned *Hurricane* Katrina, the shorthand term that typically suggests that we are dealing with a natural disaster. Any effort to categorize the event surely must consider the brute force of high winds and storm surge. But, while central to the telling, such natural factors hardly exhaust the effort to identify the causes or the effects of Katrina.

It may help here to consider other sorts of putatively natural disaster. It now is well understood, for instance, that famines result not from an absolute lack of food but from mal-distributed entitlement and access to such food as exists. Thus, famine most appropriately is conceptualized as a political-economic catastrophe rather than "natural disaster." This insight has been extended lately by analyses of other sorts of putatively natural occurrence, such as floods, heat waves, earthquakes, and, yes, cyclones and hurricanes.[14] In other words, events that consist to some (often considerable) extent of "natural" occurrences typically assume catastrophic proportions, when they do, against a background of distributional and institutional factors that themselves are generated and sustained politically. Katrina surely falls squarely within any such analytical extension.[15] This, however, simply identifies a general class of causes and, in this case, I believe the consequences—Katrina's *effects*—are especially important. For those effects allow us to narrate Katrina together with other events.

Consider, for instance, this observation: "The Katrina disaster set in motion the largest mass displacement in U.S. history, surpassing the Dust Bowl migrations of the 1930s in scale. Over the span of two weeks, more than one million evacuees were relocated to every state in the Union."[16]

This is a provocative categorization, because it likens Katrina to one of the most evocative, visible, and *photographed* American catastrophes of the twentieth century. But it also raises a host of questions about whether and how we might ever be able to envision so diffuse an event. As the residents of New Orleans and the surrounding region fled, they dispersed very widely.[17] And as they returned home, they did so in thoroughly uncoordinated fashion. Katrina, then, precipitated a massive forced migration that, ironically, remained extremely difficult to see.

This claim will perhaps strike many readers as perverse. We have, after all, many images of people stranded, indeed abandoned, in the days immediately following the storm. Those images depict the brutal initial consequences of Katrina. And in many instances they are simply horrifying. But, however disturbing, they afford only a relatively partial, temporally truncated glimpse of the catastrophe. In order to see Katrina as the initial episode in an extended and extensive mass migration, it is important, at the same time that it is difficult, to look beyond the initial tragedy.

Depicting Forced Migration

Katrina drove over a million and a half people from their homes in the coastal region of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama in late August 2005.[18] These people were not refugees, a status defined by technical legal criteria. And, indeed, those displaced by the catastrophe often were adamant about that fact, objecting vocally when media reports characterized evacuees as refugees.[19] Yet this population was displaced involuntarily, induced by flooding and a mandatory evacuation order to flee their homes. It therefore is entirely appropriate to describe the post-Katrina evacuation as a forced migration.[20]

It is perhaps necessary to enter a caveat here. Much of post-Katrina politics and much discussion of that politics

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5979 West End Boulevard, New Orleans, LA, **2005. Photo taken in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Provided courtesy of the artist, Robert Polidori. Color reproduction in these pages courtesy of James Johnson.**



has revolved around matters of race. In what follows I have relatively little to say about race. This hardly is because I think it unimportant; quite the contrary. Patterns of racial inequality, thoroughly inflected by matters of class and gender, operated within the institutional structure of the American political economy to amplify a "natural disaster" into a catastrophe.[21] And, in the event, racial inequalities, again inflected by class and gender, certainly influenced the particular effects and the timing of displacement. Likewise, and even if we focus on sheer numbers, it is clear that race significantly impacted rates at which evacuees returned to their pre-Katrina residences. African American evacuees were less likely to return than others. In turn, evacuees who did not return experienced significantly less success on the labor market than both those who did return and populations unaffected by the catastrophe.[22] So, race matters here and it does so in a variety of ways. That said, because the evacuation was mandatory, it was nearly total, with the result that displacement *per se* "was spread fairly evenly across demographic groups." In other words, the population forcibly displaced by Katrina reflected quite closely the resident population in the region affected by the catastrophe.[23]

How might we envision well over a million persons scattered across every, or nearly every, part of the country? The options, at least photographically, are limited. As Aric Mayer observes:

> Across the media landscape, the means of visually depicting the storm break down into two basic aesthetic positions. One is the traditional documentary realism, which works to focus on the humanitarian issues to evoke a kind of empathy in the viewer by depicting suffering and deprivation. The other depicts the landscape to point to the scale of the destruction in an effort to generate an experience of the breadth of the event.[24]

The first of these positions is common to the lineage of broadly "liberal" documentary photography from Jacob Riis through Lewis Hine to the works of Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and other photographers employed by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in the 1930s, and on to contemporary photographers such as James Nachtwey. Photographers in this familiar lineage conventionally focus on individuals and the hardships they endure, even as they present those individuals as exemplars of a group or circumstance. In the direct aftermath of Katrina, photographers such as Thomas Dworzak produced striking images of individuals, both dead and alive, of just this sort.

Perhaps the paradigmatic instance of this approach, however, is Dorothea Lange's 1936 portrait "Migrant Mother." This photograph is the most famous of Lange's works and was taken during the half-decade she spent documenting the travails of Americans displaced by the Great Depression. It depicts systemic hardships resulting from massive environmental transformations and economic dislocation by refracting them through the pathos of one particular woman, seeking to engage viewers by inviting them to share that pathos.[25] This individualizing strategy is no surprise. Lange had abandoned a successful career as a portrait photographer to work for the FSA, where she helped establish the conventions of modern documentary photography. In her recent biography of the photographer, historian Linda Gordon persuasively suggests that Lange democratized the practice of portraiture by photographing working people with the same artistry and technique she had used on her wealthy clients. Moreover, Gordon stresses that Lange quite consciously came to focus her photographs on individuals because she believed that that was the most effective way to generate an active political response in viewers. And while Gordon does not draw an explicit connection between Lange's political views and her photographic strategies, she does note that Lange embraced a staunchly individualist politics.[26] All of that said, what arguably is the single most familiar depiction of forced migration in the United States reduces an unavoidably aggregate phenomenon to an image of a single woman and her small children.

I largely set this conventional documentary approach to one side. In part, this is because, for reasons I will not rehearse here, I find it deeply problematic, indeed de-politicizing.[27] There are, however, two more proximate reasons for so doing. First, in the immediate aftermath of Katrina the coastal regions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama that bore the brunt of the catastrophe, were radically de-populated. There simply were very few individuals left behind to photograph. Second, the alternative approach—focusing on devastated landscapes—raises important questions about how we visualize large-scale phenomena. Moreover, there are striking examples of such work available.[28] Here I will focus on just two such examples—the work of Robert Polidori and Richard Misrach.

Desperate Marks

Robert Polidori arrived in New Orleans in mid-September 2005. His prior work had included a long-term project photographing the exclusion zones surrounding the destroyed Chernobyl nuclear facility in what is now the Ukraine. In New Orleans he encountered a similarly devastated and deserted landscape. The book documenting his repeated trips to the city, *After the Flood,* is massive. It consists of three hundred-plus pages of 12-by-15 inch color images, printed on heavy paper, depicting in a truly unrelenting way the landscape of post-Katrina New Orleans.

It is perhaps not quite accurate to say that Polidori offers us landscapes. Many of the images in *After the Flood* show the interior of deserted homes. That said, he situates those interiors within an oppressively expansive perspective. Indeed, much of the force of Polidori's individual images derives from the context he affords. We see the

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Untitled, **2005. © Richard Misrach, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles and Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York. Color reproduction in these pages courtesy of James Johnson.**



inside of homes, furniture typically in an impossible jumble, belongings of all sorts coated with filth, walls and ceilings stained with the distinctive mottled orange and green shades of mold. But those interiors are themselves framed by images of damaged exteriors, houses stained line-by-line by the receding flood waters and sporting collapsed roofs, assaulted by uprooted trees and ensnared by tangles of telephone or power lines. Those images in turn are located in cockeyed streetscapes strewn with debris of all sorts, in which cars and trucks have been tossed about, coming to rest at unlikely angles to the ground, often having collided with trees and utility poles themselves penetrating the ground at unlikely angles. Nothing is as it should be.

The landscape Polidori puts on display is not so much sobering as stupefying. And, as if to say "I could go on . . . and on . . . and on," having already given us one hundred seventy full-page images, Polidori offers up roughly fifteen pages consisting of 2-by-2.5 inch images of damaged homes arrayed in four-by-four grids, one after another. The homes are in various stages of disrepair—windows boarded, doors ajar, roofing damaged. It seems obvious that, relative to the newer, larger and brick homes, the smaller, wood framed dwellings have been harder hit and are lagging from the point of view of repairs undertaken. But, regardless, each house is more or less a mess. Polidori punctuates this series of grids with a full-page aerial shot of multiple square blocks that have been virtually leveled. And then he proceeds to offer another hundred and fifty full-page images of devastation.

Polidori depicts a desolate, alien terrain that indeed seems to simply go on and on and from which there is no shelter or refuge. His interiors make that much clear. Two things are important. First, Polidori's images work through accumulation. It is difficult to find one single image that stands out. This is hardly a criticism. His composition is invariably strong, the colors crisp, but what strikes a viewer is the *sameness* of the conditions that the displaced residents have left behind. The houses and neighborhoods he depicts all share the same predicament. Each has been left in some more or less drastic state of disarray. One wonders what might be done to remedy damage on this scale. Second, in hundreds of images Polidori shows us virtually no people.[29] His landscapes are uninhabited. A photographer hoping to pursue the conventional, individualizing documentary approach would, from what we can see, find no subjects. This is terrain from which nearly all traces of human interaction have disappeared.

Notice that I said *nearly* all traces. On the final page of *After the Flood,* adjacent to the notice that "a portion of proceeds" from the book would be turned over to cultural institutions in New Orleans and a 1964 snapshot of the photographer, then a teenager, outside Brother Martin High School in the City, Polidori offers the following brief observation:

> After Hurricane Katrina, the National Guard and other special military units from Louisiana and other states attempted to inspect every home in New Orleans to search for survivors and to offer assistance. The crews did not have wireless devices to communicate with each other, the city administration, or any centralized database. Nor did they have a master list of streets and residences from which to design an operational plan or the luxury of time to develop one. But with a surprisingly simple tool—a can of spray paint—the city-wide survey proceeded. The crews painted an "X" on the front of each home; the date of the visit was noted in the upper quadrant ("9–12" for example); the left quadrant recorded the agency ("FL-1" for the first Florida Team); the lower quadrant recorded what was discovered ("1 dead in attic," "3 dogs," or, more often, simply "0"); the right quadrant seems to have been used only when the house was not entered, "NE." Concurrently, the ASPCA and other animal relief agencies made similar visits and left their own coded notes including where food should be deposited for abandoned animals. These desperate marks are slowly disappearing as the city begins its long act of recovery.[30]

In other words, even in the first days of the catastrophe there were indications of life in New Orleans. And even if those signs consisted in "desperate marks" scrawled across the facades of heavily damaged homes, they were marks made by people seeking to communicate and to coordinate relief. There is no need to be naïve about the ineffective response of government officials or law enforcement to Katrina.[31] The point rather is simply that the very earliest signs of social interaction, what we might consider official graffiti, pervade Polidori's bleak landscapes.

Reorienting Ourselves in Oz

Nearly three-quarters of those who had been forced to flee by Katrina had returned home within a year or so. The largest number of those persons did so in the last months of 2005. Katrina evacuees, in other words, typically did not stay away long. Unlike participants in the Great Migration of the early twentieth century or those who headed west out of the Depression-era Dust Bowl, most post-Katrina migrants, figuratively speaking, travelled on round-trip tickets.[32] Upon returning however, residents clearly faced an almost wholly illegible landscape. Like the search and rescue personnel, but in significantly less uniform and infinitely more revealing ways, they took to re-inscribing their homes and neighborhoods.

In *Destroy This Memory* Richard Misrach offers without comment a tour of post-Katrina New Orleans. He takes as his vehicle the ample supply of graffiti residents put on offer. Most obviously he depicts the efforts of residents to reestablish some orientation by spray-painting their names, addresses, and cell phone numbers across the facades of their homes. In his images of destroyed vehicles and houses and storefronts Misrach also depicts many other things. He shows us the faith ("Isaiah 26:3"), the humor ("T + E—We love what you've done with the place!"), the hope ("Keep the Faith!"), the bravado and defiance ("Hey Katrina!! That's all you got? You big sissy!!!! We will be

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back!!! Norman, Keena, Sean, Lil Norman."), the grief ("R.I.P Zack"), and the simple need to re-establish contact ("547-1347 JANE") among people who've fled the catastrophe and returned. He also depicts scrawled indictments of insurance companies ("Family Home $200K Classic Jaguar $5K, Insurance Won't Pay—WORTHLESS!") and government officials ("YEP, BROWNIE. YOU DID A HECKUV A JOB"), attempts to locate friends and family who have gone missing ("Michael Where Are You? 9858751247"), and anguished concern for pets, dead, lost, found, on the loose ("9/30 SPCA 2 DOA K-9"). There is plenty of profanity and some misogyny ("Katrina is a Bitch!"). And there is bluster leavened by humor, exemplified in the warning scrawled across one boarded up storefront—"Don't try. I am sleeping inside with a big dog, an ugly woman, two shotguns and a claw hammer!"

The parallels between Misrach and Polidori are striking. Like Polidori, Misrach has devoted a significant portion of his career to photographing desolation and devastation. In his case, the subject has been the Nevada Test Site, an enormous portion of the Nevada desert that, over the course of decades, has been the target of conventional and nuclear weapons testing by the US military. It is unsurprising, then, that he was attracted to the post-Katrina landscape.[33] Like Polidori, Misrach it seems, knows a political-economic catastrophe when he sees one.[34]

One image of post-Katrina New Orleans encapsulates Misrach's enterprise. It shows a wood frame house, ripped by the storm from its foundations and deposited obliquely in the middle of an unnamed residential street. In the background a red sedan, trunk popped open, is perched precariously astride a link fence between two less-mobile houses. Overhead utility lines spread like tentacles in a dozen directions. The displaced house in the foreground, clapboards yellowed and stained by receding water levels, shingles partially stripped from its roof, windows thrown wide open, has come to rest atop of a clutch of dark cloth visible where the uneven edge of the house meets filthy pavement. Someone has spray-painted a large black arrow pointing downward to the fabric and inscribed in block letters over the whole "Wicked Witch." In this scene, as in the land of Oz, we witness the demise, however inadvertent, of danger. Here, of course, the figurative rescue assumes a humorous twist.

Like the other graffiti Misrach documents, this message leaves the future unresolved—bleak perhaps, but less ominous than it might be. Misrach depicts an opening. The question is what can be made of it. After all, no one provided returning evacuees with magical ruby slippers. The back cover of *Destroy This Memory* depicts a boarded window on which someone has posed that question acutely—"WHAT NOW?" With that, we viewers of Misrach's work come around to a quintessentially political question: What is to be done?[35]

Making Others Present

I do not aim to answer that question so much as to re-pose it. There, at least, I agree with Arendt, who insists that although her account of how imagination animates critical thinking "has political implications," it nevertheless affords no specific lessons about how to act politically in any given instance. Instead, I want to point out how photography, exemplified by the work of Polidori and Misrach, amplifies our ability to imagine both the disorienting situation confronting New Orleans after Katrina and the ways that people approached that situation. Their work "makes the others present," in Arendt's phrase, not by depicting suffering individuals themselves but by depicting the nearly unfathomable destruction from which they fled and the seemingly incalculable tasks they confronted once the danger had passed. By focusing on graffiti, official and otherwise, in the nearly unpopulated neighborhoods of post-Katrina New Orleans, Polidori and Misrach bring into view the dire experience of those who comprise an otherwise unseen aggregate. In so doing they subvert the choice of photographic strategies we seemed to confront, between conventional fixation on suffering individuals and a retreat to impersonal landscapes.

Who do these photographers make present? How do they do so? Minimally, we can imagine three groups directly involved in the photographs: the photographers themselves (accompanied, no doubt, by assistants and guides), the teams of emergency responders, and the returning evacuees. The storefronts, homes, and neighborhoods we encounter in *After the Flood* and *Destroy This Memory* expose the sheer extent of the destruction. This in itself is an arduous task. We can imagine Polidori and Misrach, carting their equipment up and down blocks of the city and, in many instances, photographing virtually every building on those blocks. With a bit of effort we can conjure some appreciation of the stench, heat, and disconcerting stillness that surely pervaded the post-catastrophe city. Polidori and Misrach, however, do not just show us physical ruins. Inscriptions, superimposed one on the other, mark those ravaged structures as sites of suffering and hardship, of lives lost either literally or figuratively. The "official" graffiti identifies immediate casualties in a direct, unsentimental, almost administrative, way. But it just as surely reflects the commitment, perseverance, and ingenuity of the many people who responded to the catastrophe early on. The marks left by "unofficial" graffiti, hardly less desperate, articulate hope, fear, despair, insecurity, outrage, and determination, among many other things. One can imagine responders entering scores of strange buildings—residences and businesses—seeking survivors or corpses. Likewise, one can imagine evacuees, newly returned, confronting especially raw realities. In both cases, the graffiti "makes present" the individuals who wrote it. Especially in extended series, one after another and another, the photographs Polidori and Misrach have made allow us to tack

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back and forth between two insistent subjects. On the one hand, there is material calamity on a massive scale. On the other hand, there are (mostly anonymous and invisible) individuals and the cryptic traces of personal testimony they have left behind. These are images of forced migration in which no migrants directly appear. They are also, ironically, images of forced migration from which individual migrants are never wholly lost from sight.

This photographic strategy clearly departs from the resolute focus on individuals central to the sort of conventional documentary exemplified by Lange. It leaves those of us familiar and comfortable with that tradition in an unsettling position. The conventional documentary preoccupation with individual suffering aims to elicit a response to large-scale, man-made hardship and degradation by tapping the compassion or anger of viewers. Polidori and Misrach deprive our compassion and anger of traction. There are no identifiable individuals whose suffering we might share. And there is no identifiable individual or group at whom we can reasonably direct our anger. The scale of the catastrophe these photographs depict surely is too large to be blamed on particular actions of specifiable agents.

Polidori and Misrach do not diminish the pain and hardship of individuals who remain notable both by their absence and by the graffiti they have scrawled across their city. They simply deflate the sort of moralism that conventional documentary fuels.[36] Instead they prompt viewers to imagine what it might be like to confront first hand—as aid workers and the thousands upon thousands of returning evacuees in fact did—so many abandoned houses in ruins, on so many vacant streets, in empty neighborhood after empty neighborhood. In the process, their images also prompt viewers to question what they are seeing, to ask how it might possibly have occurred, and to cast about for an appropriate response to the mayhem the images depict. In other words they force us back upon the unavoidably political questions: What now? What is to be done?

To the extent that now, years later, those questions remain open, the political task of imagining post-Katrina New Orleans remains pressing.

Notes

1 Arendt 1992, 42–43. I am very grateful to Mark Button for calling this passage to my attention.

2 This is not the place either to explicate Arendt or to spell out the tensions between her views and my own. Instead, I concentrate on how the Katrina catastrophe allows us to think about the difficulties involved in depicting large scale, man made events.

3 For instance, "the key to politics . . . is always how human beings see their world (above all, the role and significance of one another in making it what it is), and how they choose to master it, to bend it to their wills. How they judge and how those judgments impel them to act. Often, perhaps on careful examination always, mastering it includes, and perhaps principally requires, subduing, eluding, persuading or enlightening one another"; Dunn 2000, 4–5.

4 Maynard 1997, 94–7, 106–9.

5 Here it is important to note that depiction and representation are distinct endeavors. "Depictive perception . . . involves a complicity that mere representation does not: that is, participation through reflexive imagining about our own perceptual activities . . . When we look at a picture depictively—for example, a photographic picture of something—we imagine our own actual looking, and that is an aspect of our action that we may find fulfilling, enjoyable, uninteresting, unpleasant, distasteful. This is what makes a picture graphic"; Maynard 1997,109. This, I believe, is part of what John Berger has in mind when he remarks that "photography is the process of rendering observation self-conscious"; Berger 2001, 216.

6 Arendt 2003, 203, 193. There is some confusion, starting with Arendt herself, over just which photograph she refers to in the essay; Allen 2004, 197, n1. That matter is not germane here.

7 Arendt 2003, 193.

8 Allen 2004, 5.

9 Ibid., 6, 8.

10 Ibid., 5, 24.

11 Some of the very best analyses of photography and politics are produced by writers like David Levi Strauss, Susie Linfield, Rebecca Solnit, and Susan Sontag, who are not political scientists. Yet, within the discipline, numerous political scientists have produced exemplary work on that same terrain. They have done so in wholly standard ways by, for instance, contributing to essays to journals and books (e.g., Campbell 2003, Bleiker and Kay 2007, J. Johnson 2011, Shapiro 1988) and by producing book-length studies (Azoulay 2008, Sliwinski 2011). But they also have done so in less conventional ways by curating exhibitions (Reinhardt et al. 2007), by contributing to exhibition catalogues (Weinstein 2007), by collaborating with photographers (Lyons and Straus 2006), and by exploiting new media (see, for instance, David Campell's superb web page http://www.david-campbell.org/). I would argue that these scholars—and others working on photography and politics whom I surely have overlooked—are pushing disciplinary boundaries in productive and provocative ways.

12 "To put the national Hurricane Katrina experience in perspective, fewer than several hundred thousand people witnessed the storm in person. For the other

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99.8 percent of Americans, the disaster was a media experience with lasting implications for the public opinion and action"; Mayer 2008, 178.

13 Davidson 1980, 179.

14 See, for instance, Sen 1981 and Kahn 2005.

15 Young (2006), for instance, plausibly suggests that the Katrina disaster unfolded against a background of "deteriorating infrastructure, festering poverty, racism, and government incapacity." For more systematic analysis of these political-economic factors see the perceptive analyses collected in C. Johnson 2011.

16 Whitehall and Johnson 2011, 64.

17 It may be an overstatement to say that Katrina evacuees fled to literally *every* other state. If so, it is only a modest overstatement: "Current Population Survey interviewers found evacuees in nearly every State of the Union (45 States and the District of Columbia)"; Groen and Polivka 2008, 39.

18 Ibid., 32. This is a conservative estimate insofar as the Current Population Survey data are restricted to persons over 16 years old.

19 Whitehall and Johnson 2011, 60, 63–6.

20 "Forced (or involuntary) migration includes a number of legal or political categories. All involve people who have been forced to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere. Popular speech tends to call them all 'refugees', but this is quite a narrow legal category. The majority of forced migrants flee for reasons not recognized by the international refugee regime, and many of them are displaced within their own country of origin"; Castles 2003, 12.

21 See Frymer, Strolovitch, and Warren 2006; Young 2006; and C. Johnson 2011.

22 Groen and Polivka 2008, 41, 43.

23 Part of the reason race rightly looms large in assessments of Katrina is that the percentage of African-Americans in the population of the coastal region of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama is roughly three times that of the nation as a whole; see Groen and Polivka 2008, 36.

24 Mayer 2008, 179.

25 See Harriman and Lucaites 2007 (53–67, 87–92, 163) who discuss the convention among documentary photographers to capture an "individuated aggregate." The woman in the photograph, Florence Thompson, was originally from Oklahoma and of Cherokee descent. She and her family were migrant workers in California's central valley. See Gordon 2009, 235–37.

26 See Gordon 2009, 213–24, 136. For a considerably less positive assessment of Lange see the more or less passing comments on she and her work by Rosler 2004.

27 J. Johnson 2011. See more generally Reinhardt et al. 2007.

28 In addition to Mayer 2008 see, for instance, Jordan 2006, Polidori 2006, Misrach 2010, and Towell 2006.

29 One exception: On page 159 Polidori depicts the interior of "2606 St. Peter Street" in which there appears to be a corpse swathed in bed linens. The exterior of the house is on the opposite page.

30 Polidori 2006, 235.

31 See Young 2006 and Solnit 2009.

32 Of course, not everyone returned to their pre-Katrina residence. Indeed many did not return to their pre-Katrina state of residence. And those who stayed away were distinctive: "blacks, persons who had never married, and persons with lower levels of education were much less likely to return than were individuals in other racial, marital, or educational groups"; Groen and Polivka 2008, 41. For a sophisticated, insightful analysis of the factors inducing evacuees to return to their pre-Karina residences in New Orleans see Go 2012.

33 Misrach has donated his entire author royalties to the Make It Right Foundation which is working to rebuild sustainable, middle-income housing in the Lower 9th Ward. He also has donated prints of the images in *Destroy this Memory* to a handful of museums in New York, New Orleans, Houston, and Washington, DC.

34 Ironically, one house (at least) appears in both *After the Flood* and *Destroy This Memory*. It is inscribed with a reassuring message—"LISA + DONNIE R OK"—and appears on pages 174 and 32 of the books respectively.

35 Geuss 2008 (23–30) offers a helpful frame for approaching this question.

36 The conventions of documentary photography encourage a moralism that distorts political judgment precisely by diverting attention to the individual level—to those suffering or those to blame for that suffering. Susan Sontag (2001) exemplifies this moralism. Mayer (2008, 180–1) and Young (2006) examine the dynamic underlying the sort of moralism she articulates specifically in the context of Katrina and its aftermath. For more extensive reflections on this point see J. Johnson 2011.

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