Polysèmes

Revue d'études intertextuelles et intermédiaires

19 | 2018

Photography and Trauma

Reading Abu Ghraib

Walter Kalaidjian

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/polysemes/3454>

DOI: 10.4000/polysemes.3454

ISSN: 2496-4212

Publisher

SAIT

Electronic reference

Walter Kalaidjian, « Reading Abu Ghraib », *Polysèmes* [Online], 19 | 2018, Online since 30 June 2018, connection on 03 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/polysemes/3454> ; DOI : 10.4000/polysemes.3454

This text was automatically generated on 3 May 2019.

Polysèmes

Reading Abu Ghraib

Walter Kalaidjian

EDITOR'S NOTE

Kalaidjian, Walter. *The Edge of Modernism: American Poetry and the Traumatic Past*. pp. 189-196. © 2006 The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press.

- 1 Trauma plays havoc with time. Haunting the new millennium, the legacy of loss bequeathed by modernity makes an uncanny claim upon the present. Modern genocide, total war, as well as modernism's unresolved social antagonisms of race, class, and sexual difference remain charged with the traumatic affect of histories that, because they cannot be fully known, are subject to endless repetition. Lacking sufficient representation, the traumatic events of the past century cannot be fixed in history's knowable archive but persist "out of joint" with conventional understandings of linear temporality. The traumatic edge of modernism—as we find it in the latest human rights violation, in the specter of terrorism, in the "shock and awe" of state reprisal, in the setbacks of continuing economic disparities and discriminations—intrudes upon the present as if from an unimaginable future. At the same time, that edgy horizon possesses us, paradoxically enough, as something strangely familiar from the past: an unsettling *déjà vu* where we encounter exactly what we once pledged would happen "never again". Increasingly in the postmodern public sphere, such revenants of atrocity, oppression, and political clash have come—in their seemingly ubiquitous recycling—to constitute "information" as such.
- 2 The productive task of democratic "nation building"—that belongs to the globalizing agenda of Empire—demands, paradoxically, the regulation and reproduction of everyday information in ways that extend the internal relations of power, law, and order sustaining imperial sovereignty. Yet the rule of Empire, as Giorgio Agamben, Antonio Negri, and Michael Hardt have argued, always already rests on a relation of exception whose authority suspends the internal juridical order of common law from a position

outside the legal status quo.¹ Increasingly, such political exceptionalism has itself become the rule of the day sustained under the guises of perpetual war, police and security actions, and other, more contingent civil emergencies. The spectacular “shock and awe” belonging to martial forms of imperial exceptionalism find their counterpart in the obscure, covert, and—it must be said—“criminal” arts of persuasion and torture that involve certain longstanding communicative techniques of psychological warfare. As Agamben has shown, the regime of modern exceptionalism parts company with the “juridicopolitical foundation of classical politics” even as it produces the biopoliticization of “bare life”. For Agamben, the biopolitical exceptionalism that increasingly defines modernism’s extrinsic relation to the law leads to Auschwitz. The “camp”, he writes, “is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule” (Agamben 168-169). Arguably, America’s own relation of exception to international law has witnessed the spectral return of the camp environment in US detention centers at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prison. While no one would compare the scale of torture of Abu Ghraib to the genocidal novum of the Holocaust, the persistent iconicity of atrocity that otherwise links Auschwitz to Abu Ghraib nevertheless makes for an uncanny repetition of the traumatic past. Abu Ghraib prison, in particular, discloses an analogous locale at the heart of Empire: one whose psychological operations or psy-ops record a uniquely intimate witnessing to the arresting biopolitics of imperial exceptionalism as it assumes the status of the global norm.

- 3 As we have seen since 9/11, managing the ongoing crises of Empire entails a certain routinization of violence: one that also involves techniques for easing the latent side effects of considerable social trauma. Extending the reach of American Empire into the electromagnetic spectrum of broadcast news, the “embedded” media practices that link the frontline to the headline would regulate the “live feed” of the moment through networks of normalized sign exchange. That attempt to manage trauma in the public sphere involves not just repression and censorship but also the artful screening of images that buffer horror through propaganda, spectacle, and entertainment. Yet “it would be a mistake”, as Judith Butler has argued, “to think that we only need to find the right and true images, and that a certain reality will then be conveyed. The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers” (Butler 146). Reversing the claim of state representation to “capture” through *prosopopoeia* the readable faces of patriot and terrorist, victim and perpetrator, Butler argues that the regard of the Other beheld in the face demands another kind of witnessing: one sensitive to what Emmanuel Levinas has described in terms of the “extreme precariousness of the other” (Levinas 167, qtd. in Butler 134). It is such “precarious life”, Butler argues, that is effaced by the media’s “occlusions”, particularly in its ideological representation of the other by means of figurative personification. Supplementing Butler’s salutary reading of Levinas, we may also discern via a return to Freud certain specters and revenants of modernism that haunt the contemporary representation of violence with the violence of representation. Just as the media coverage of Vietnam was ghosted by unauthorized images of atrocity, torture, and other violations of the human—most notably, in the indelible scenes of the My Lai massacre—similar, bootlegged photos have come to complicate the official state “picture” of the American presence in Iraq. In particular, what are we to make of the photographed “psy-ops” of Abu Ghraib prison? And more to the point, how does the psychic life of the digitally mediated photograph exceed the conscious communicative intent of its

ideological production to engage and disseminate the more overdetermined political unconscious of Empire as such?

- 4 Not insignificantly, shortly after the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib circulated in the global media, a *New York Times* editorial concluded that “[t]he invasion of Iraq, which has already begun to seem like a bad dream in so many ways, cannot get much more nightmarish than this” (Keller 22). That the photographic record of the Abu Ghraib interrogations should invoke the figure of “nightmare” and “bad dream” should come as no surprise. The power of these unregulated photographs communicates in analogous ways to what Freud theorized as the dreamwork’s pictorial force: its reliance on the uncanny image to express wishes and thoughts that would otherwise be repressed by rational discourse. Unlike conceptual thought, “dreams”, Freud wrote, “think essentially in images” (Freud 1980, 82). Similarly, Freud’s “explanation of hallucinations in hysteria and paranoia and of visions in mentally normal subjects is that they are in fact regressions—that is, thoughts transformed into images” (583). Regression of thought into image, whether in the dream or hallucination, marks a return to the “psychical locality” of the unconscious: a locality marked by impulses, wishes, fantasies and “thoughts cut off from consciousness and struggling to find expression” (585). Not insignificantly, Freud described the “mental apparatus” of regression by way of a figure “resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus [...] [whose] psychic locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being” (574). Curiously enough, the American interrogation center at Abu Ghraib served as a military special-access program (SAP) not just for gathering valued intelligence information. More provocatively, this “black” program—run by what Brigadier General Janis Karpinski described as the “disappearing ghosts” of CIA officers and anonymous contract intelligence operatives—became a kind of “psychical locality” in Freud’s sense: one that—through digital photography—literally brought into focus the repressed truth of American foreign policy “otherwise cut off from consciousness and struggling to find expression”.
- 5 Belying America’s altruistic mission of liberating Iraqi citizens from Saddam Hussein’s tyranny, Abu Ghraib disclosed another more profoundly repressed counter-narrative. Tier 1-A—the hard-site, high-security zone of Abu Ghraib prison—revealed a fantasy of imperial domination that went to the heart of America’s political unconscious: one that found expression not in reasoned discourse but in visceral images of atrocity. Such psychological operations acted out a profound regression, in Freud’s sense, to primal scenes of classic sadomasochism, bondage, and domination as in Pfc. Lynndie England’s photographed pose of walking a naked Iraqi detainee on a dog leash.
- 6 “I was instructed”, said Private Lynndie England, “by persons in higher rank to stand there and hold this leash and look at the camera [...] Well, I mean, they [the photos] were for psy-op reasons [...]. We thought that’s how they did it”, “We’re not trained as MI or CIA—mind games, intimidation, it sounded pretty typical to us” (England).
- 7 As Seymour M. Hersh has convincingly demonstrated, Abu Ghraib represents the Defense Department’s policy disaster of mixing the covert psy-ops of military intelligence and CIA information gathering with the ordinary military policing of Iraqi prisoners of war. Psy-ops, or psychological operations, have constituted a typical weapon in the arsenal of psychological warfare whose institutional base reaches back as far as World War I when in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appointed George Creel to lead the Committee of Public Information made up of the U.S. Secretaries of War, Navy, and State. The rubric of

psychological warfare actually derives from the German coinage of *Weltanschauungskrieg* (literally, worldview warfare) referring to new techniques of propaganda and covert acts of terror employed to secure ideological consensus during the Second World War. In America, Wild Bill Donovan was an early practitioner of psychological warfare within the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—a forerunner program to the Central Intelligence Agency, whose Office of Policy Coordination was charged in 1948 with the covert tasks of “propaganda, economic warfare; preventative direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states”, and so on (Simpson 40).

- 8 The conjuncture of mass communication, persuasion, and terror that come together by degrees in military psy-ops runs the gamut from overt or “white” propaganda through “gray” acts of media subversion to the “black” arts of covert terrorism and torture. Photography, of course, has a long history of mass persuasion reaching back to the Constructivist era of the former Soviet Union, and psy-ops that rely on the photographic image had tactical pertinence in the Iraq war. Major Harry Taylor, head of the 42 Commando Royal Marines’ Psyops, offers an apt summary of the uses of photographic propaganda: “We use tactical and strategic methods. Tactically, on the first stage, we target the military by dropping leaflets stating the inevitability of their defeat, telling them they will not be destroyed if they play our game and exactly how they can surrender. On the second wave we show them pictures of Iraqi officers who complied. On the third wave we show them pictures of those people who did not” (Edwards, qtd. in Miller 99). It is the third category of retributive photography that, arguably, Lyndie England was “instructed” to produce in the black psy-ops of Abu Ghraib.
- 9 Yet, in performing imperial mastery, England’s fantasy of domination goes beyond the orientalist stereotypes that otherwise script Abu Ghraib’s scenes of sexual humiliation, derived as they were from Raphael Patai’s 1973 *The Arab Mind*: what Seymour Hersh cites as the “bible of the neocons on Arab behavior” (Hersh 2004 [b], 39). In this fantasy of imperial power, the abject Iraqi subdued at the end of England’s leash counterbalances the regressive oral-sadism literally unleashed in the attack dogs that otherwise mutilated the bodies of Iraqi prisoners inside Abu Ghraib. Significantly, the psychic fantasy of the man/dog is not unlike the “loup garou” or werewolf that, as Agamben explains, is a figure for both the exilic status of “homo sacer” and the sovereign’s relation of exception to the juridicopolitical order.² Whether on or off the leash, the “loup garou” can be read here as a condensation for the mutual constitution of imperial subject and “homo sacer” in extrinsic relation to the Law. Similarly, the other definitive image of Abu Ghraib—the infamous “thumbs-up” sign—became a definitive marker of phallic posturing: one that instantiates imperial sovereignty precisely from the production of the Iraqi as “homo sacer”.
- 10 The imperial aim of giving the “thumbs-up” to what George Bush and other neo-conservatives hail as the “Iraqi people” nevertheless confronts the trauma of in Agamben’s phrase a “biopolitical fracture” whose excess always already inhabits the civic populus in the bare life of the “homo sacer”. Indeed, it is only the “homo sacer”’s abjection that instantiates Empire’s idealized imagined community. Thus, Agamben writes “[p]araphrasing the Freudian postulate on the relation between Es and Ich, one could say that modern biopolitics is supported by the principle according to which ‘where there is bare life, there will have to be a People’—on the condition that one immediately adds that the principle also holds in its reverse formulation, which has it that “where

there is a People, *there* there will be bare life" (Agamben 179). The digitally recorded "psy-ops" of Abu Ghraib were intended to manipulate the thinking, the psychology, and the aims of suspected and would-be terrorists, but perversely they actually came to shed more light on America and its disturbing production of the "homo sacer".

- 11 Such arresting images of "bare life" broadcast an ironic "blowback" to the Defense Department's "shock and awe" war plans. "You read it", Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated in his Senate Armed Services Committee testimony, "as I say, it's one thing. You see these photographs and it's just unbelievable [...]. It wasn't three-dimensional. It wasn't video. It wasn't color. It was quite a different thing" (Rumsfeld, qtd. in Hersch 2004 [b], 43-44). Symptomatic perhaps in the pattern of repetition marking Rumsfeld's perplexed attempt to account for what "it was" there in the image—and, equally important, what "wasn't" there in the readable report—is not just an unconscious truth "struggling to find expression" but, more to the point, the traumatic force of precarious life sacrificed to imperial fantasy. Indeed, the photographs of Abu Ghraib capture not just the psy-ops's scripted scenarios of humiliation, cruelty, and dehumanization. They not only frame what Roland Barthes describes as the photograph's *studium*: the cultural and ideological codes by which "the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions" take on a readable historical meaning (Barthes 26). Neither can they be fully grasped as sociological documents in the manner of what Pierre Bourdieu defines as the "middle-brow art" of family portraits and tourist snapshots: the photograph's "means of solemnizing those climactic moments of social life in which the group solemnly reaffirms its unity" (Bourdieu 21). Certainly, the conventions of posing that belong to the family photo and tourist shot underwrite Spc. Charles Graner's and Spc. Lynndie England's posturing as a couple for the camera. Graner and England oddly enough became lovers and even parents together at Abu Ghraib. Beyond any of these readable narratives, however, the photos of Abu Ghraib communicate what Roland Barthes describes as the *punctum*, whose force punctuates, pricks, and wounds the scene of its *studium* with the trauma, Barthes writes, of "what Lacan calls the Tché, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real in its indefatigable expression [...]. [P]hotographs are signs which don't take, which turn, as milk does [...]. In short, the referent adheres" (Barthes 4, 6). If photography is spectral in its arrest of time and its punctuation of the referent, then the images produced at Abu Ghraib are doubly possessed by the punctum of the Real.
- 12 For it is the death imprint as such that shadows the infamous thumbs-up photos of Spc. Charles Graner and Spc. Sabrina Harman taken beside an iced Iraqi corpse, subsequently identified by *The Guardian* magazine as Manadel al-Jamadi, otherwise inventoried as body E63 for months in the cold storage of a Baghdad mortuary (Harding). Al-Jamadi was allegedly brought to Abu Ghraib in healthy condition only to die shortly thereafter under brutal CIA torture. The horror of this crime against humanity was psychically redoubled after his death in the grotesque photo taken of Graner and Harman giving the "thumbs-up" beside Al-Jamadi's ice-packed corpse. Not insignificantly, the thumbs-up sign accompanies virtually every act of corporeal violation photographed at Abu Ghraib. "Two Thumbs-Up" serves as a metonym for the imagined self-possession of the imperial subject produced out of its relational difference from the "homo sacer"'s lack of being. This defining fetish of American identity, more than any of the other images of Abu Ghraib, signifies Empire's biopolitical fracture and its symptomatic disavowal. It points redundantly and thus uncannily to what Barthes describes as the "pure deictic language"

of the photo's invitation to the viewer to "Look', 'See', 'Here it is'" (5). As an indexical sign it both gestures to and disavows its grounding in the Real. The thumbs-up flashed at Abu Ghraib solely in proximity to prostrate Iraqi bodies and corpses instantiates the imperial subject through the symptomatic logic of the fetish. That is, its indexical sign of victory always already encrypts a reference rooted in the traumatic Real whose powers of abjection, annihilation, and death, paradoxically enough, it at once invokes and magically dispels.

- 13 What makes these photographs such a "different thing"—as Rumsfeld's testimony has it—is, arguably, not just the impact of such literal images of death and bodily violation but also the return of a certain specter of modernism haunting the photographic archive of American foreign policy. The gleeful and thoroughly banal sadism captured in the "thumbs-up" sign that Graner and Harman flash beside a desecrated and unburied corpse—the same "thumbs-up" that they sport in the back of a human pyramid of naked and anonymous Iraqi bodies surely conjure the phantoms of atrocity witnessed in the pictorial record and survivor accounts of the Holocaust and other modern genocides. For while Abu Ghraib's human pyramid of stripped prisoners invokes what former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger characterized as a "kind of 'Animal House' on the night shift", its image does not merely gloss fraternity hazing rituals. Such piles of nude prisoners also recall the heaps of naked bodies stacked like cordwood at the killing centers of Auschwitz and Treblinka" (qtd. in Schmitt). Again, while the event of Abu Ghraib would surely not appear on any scale or continuum with the Holocaust, its iconicity nevertheless signifies on the conventional representations of what has come to define the modern biopolitics of "bare life" in the camps.
- 14 Yet in the photographs, what Hannah Arendt would define as Abu Ghraib's "crime[s] against the human status" seem strangely invisible to their American perpetrators (Arendt 268). Atrocities otherwise captured by the camera's lens inside Abu Ghraib elude the knowing eye and recede into what Walter Benjamin would characterize as the photograph's "optical unconscious" (Benjamin 243). Given the fact that Abu Ghraib's widely broadcast images seemingly had little impact on the American electorate, one might well question whether "ordinary Americans" can bear witness to their government's psychological operations. Here again, Freud's photographic figure for time as deferred action (*nachträglichkeit*) remains salutary: "it [latency] seems so strange that we might try to make it easier to understand by a simile; the process may be compared to a photograph, which can be developed and made into a picture after a short or long interval" (Freud 1967, 162). Perhaps ordinary Americans are not unlike ordinary Germans who similarly turned a blind eye on the production of bare life precisely because the imperial Ich only emerges where the homo sacer's Es has been.
- 15 Like the overdetermined associations that ramify the dream work, digitized photographic representation is susceptible to iteration: to multiple citations beyond the psy-ops's performative intent. Such powers of symbolic articulation may well baffle the imperial chain of command so as to call in question Empire's fiction of the *bellum justum*. Mediated by the latency of time, such images of atrocity will perhaps prove susceptible to alternative counter-narratives capable of a "just" witnessing to Empire's traumatic historicity. Such testimony will, no doubt, call for new modes of poetic expression, for the high modernists' aim of writing poems capable, as Pound had it, of "containing history" is complicated in the postmodern era by the return of modern traumas that remain—as Toni Morrison described them—"uncontained and uncontainable".³ Indeed, such

traumatic historicities can no longer be considered as somehow external to the verse medium but, “first and foremost”, as Marjorie Perloff has observed, “a condition of language” (Perloff). Anticipating, perhaps, that postmodern horizon of poetic testimony, William Carlos Williams avowed late in his career that

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.⁴

- 16 Set off in Williams’s formal pattern of enjambment is the poet’s passionate attention precisely to what much of contemporary verse has come to inscribe in its special field of discourse as a signifying “lack”. Composed in the wake of the extreme event, poetry offers a “difficult” and necessarily belated linguistic response to what otherwise goes missing from the conventional regimes of representation regulating the breaking “news” of the day. That “lack” of authorized, consumable, and often coerced information—afforded by the poetry of traumatic witness—speaks to the heart of “what is found there”, long deferred even now at the edge of modernism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. New York: Viking, 1964.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage, 1981.
- Benjamin, Walter. “A Small History of Photography”. *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. London: Verso, 1992.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Photography, A Middle-Brow Art*. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London/New York: Verso, 2004.
- Eliot, T.S. (ed.). *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1968.
- England, Lynddie. “Interview with Brian Maass”. May 12, 2004, CBS News: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/05/12/iraq/main616921.shtml> (last accessed May 18, 2018)
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Avon, 1980.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Moses and Monotheism*. Trans. Katherine Jones. New York: Vintage, 1967.
- Harding, Luke. “How Abu Ghraib Torture Victim Faces Final Indignity: an Unmarked Grave”. *The Guardian* (June 1, 2004): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,1228666,00.html> (last accessed May 18, 2018)

- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000.
- Hersh, Seymour M. [a] *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.
- Hersh, Seymour M. [b] "The Gray Zone: How a Secret Pentagon Program Came to Abu Ghraib". *The New Yorker* (May 24, 2004):
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/24/the-gray-zone>
 (last accessed June 29, 2018)
- Keller, Bill. "The Nightmare at Abu Ghraib". *New York Times* (May 4, 2004), Late Edition – Final: Section A, 22, Column 1.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. "Peace and Proximity". *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (eds.). Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996, 161-170.
- Miller, David. "The Propaganda Machine". *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion on Iraq*. David Miller (ed.). London: Pluto Press, 2004.
- Morrison, Toni. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature". *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (Winter 1989): 1-34.
- Perloff, Marjorie. "'A Small Periplus along an Edge': Rosmarie Waldrop's Auto-Graph". *How2* 1.8 (Fall 2002):
<http://marjorieperloff.com/essays/waldrop-auto-graphs/>
 (last accessed May 18, 2018)
- Schmitt, Eric. "Abuse Panel Says Rules on Inmates Need Overhaul". *New York Times* (August 25, 2004):
<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/25/politics/abuse-panel-says-rules-on-inmates-need-overhaul.html>
 (last accessed May 18, 2018)
- Simpson, Christopher. *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945-1960*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Williams, William Carlos. "Asphodel That Greeny Flower". *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*. Volume II. Christopher MacGowan (ed.). New York: New Directions, 1988.

NOTES

1. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000.
2. Agamben defines the "homo sacer" in terms of the "sacred man" of antiquity "who may be killed and yet not sacrificed [...]. An obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which human life is included in the juridical order [*ordinamento*] solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed), has thus offered the key by which not only the sacred texts of sovereignty but also the very codes of political power will unveil their mysteries" (*Homo Sacer*, 8). See also "The Ban and the Wolf" in *Homo Sacer*, 104-115.
3. In Pound's definition "an epic is a poem containing history". See *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, T. S. Eliot (ed.), New York: New Directions, 1968, 86; and Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature", *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (Winter 1989): 1-34.

4. William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel That Greeny Flower", *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, volume II, Christopher MacGowan (ed.). New York: New Directions, 1988, 318.

ABSTRACTS

This essay argues that what makes the photographic archive of Abu Ghraib so unique is not just the impact of its literal images of death and bodily violation, but also the return of a certain specter of modernism haunting the photographic archive of American foreign policy. The digital snapshots of Abu Ghraib not only stage scripted scenes of military sadomasochism, bondage, and domination, but gesture toward a more elusive revenant of violence: one whose uncanny repetition stains the fiction of America's *bellum justum* with the persistence of the modern camp's zone of exclusion. As documents of the Real, Abu Ghraib's digital archive witnesses to the horror of American exceptionalism: its sovereign powers and traumatic side effects.

Cet article défend la thèse selon laquelle ce qui rend les archives photographiques d'Abu Ghraib si particulières ce n'est pas seulement l'impact que peuvent avoir les images littérales de mort et de violences corporelles qu'elles présentent, mais aussi le retour d'un certain spectre du modernisme qui hante les archives photographiques de la politique étrangère américaine. Les clichés numériques d'Abu Ghraib ne mettent pas seulement en évidence des mises en scène de sadomasochisme, d'asservissement et de domination militaires, mais pointent du doigt un spectre de violence plus difficile à cerner, spectre dont la troublante répétition vient entacher l'illusion de *bellum justum* entretenue par l'Amérique, qui maintient la zone d'exclusion constituée par le camp moderne. En tant que documents du Réel, les archives numériques d'Abu Ghraib témoignent de l'horreur de l'exceptionnalisme américain, avec ses pouvoirs souverains et les conséquences traumatiques qu'ils entraînent.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Abu Ghraib, Histoire, photographie, opérations psychologiques, trauma

Keywords: Abu Ghraib, History, photography, psy-ops, trauma

AUTHORS

WALTER KALAJDJIAN

Walter Kalaidjian (B.A. Kenyon College; Ph.D. University of Illinois) is Professor of English at Emory University. He has authored four books on 20th-Century American literature, and he is the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* and the *Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry*. His research and teaching focus on transnational modern and contemporary literature and culture specializing in poetics, critical theory, and psychoanalysis. A recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and Andrew Mellon Foundation, Professor Kalaidjian in his forthcoming research explores textual linkages among globalization, terrorism, and extraordinary experience.