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American Studies Without Tears¹

I want to start with a simple proposition: America does not make Americanists happy. As Americanists, we commonly approach “America” with suspicion, fear, even anger; we view it as a powerful, duplicitous force to be denounced or demystified.² I want today to speculate on why this might be so and in particular to consider what I see as the troubled relationships at the heart of this dilemma – relations between pleasure and knowledge, and between sentiment and critique. This trouble is evident in the difficulties we experience in working through this relationship in our critical approaches, the difficulties in balancing intellectual comprehension and emotional apprehension of America. In this talk, I will be reflecting on aspects of our intellectual relationship to America as an object of knowledge, to American Studies as the field formation that frames that object and to the field imaginary that shapes American Studies. I will posit the field imaginary as a sphere of collective knowledge that is regulated by disciplinary practices but also as a field of less-regulated desires. And so I also want to talk a little about what the construction of a field imaginary leaves out, what it represses or disavows, in producing America as an object of knowledge. In an attempt to illustrate some of these rather abstract considerations in relation to critical practice, I will conclude by looking at a photographic image.

To propose that America does not make Americanists happy is not to suggest we do not take pleasure in selected aspects of American culture – indeed, that pleasure is often defining of the topics we choose to write about – but this pleasure, I suggest, is itself a sublimation of the troubled relationship we have to our primary object of knowledge, “America,” which for all our theoretical acumen and critical demystifications remains a stubborn, defining totality. Of course, part of the problem here is that our object of knowledge is not innocent, it is a geopolitical entity, and so, critical perspectives in American Studies are always caught up in mirroring the mutations of this entity, while the field imaginary remains tethered to formations of state power, haunted by and compulsively reiterating the Cold War origins of the field.

For many Americanists, critical distance is a mirror of intellectual and emotional distance – we are wary of sentiment, we are wary of nationalism – and antipathy towards or suspicion of America can function as an ethical stance. But I want to suggest that this is a pathological stance, a positionality conditioned by our troubled sense of the relationship between pleasure and knowledge and characterized by the hermeneutics of suspicion that underlies much of our critical practice. All too often, we treat our object of knowledge as a problem to be solved, or the same thing, we project its meaning in the frame of our interpretations. The urge, often, is to demystify, to reveal the truth, the horror of American power. This can be a productive and enlightening approach, but there are other ways to engage the object, ways less involved in acts of interpretive mastery and that make the relationality of critic and object a key component of the field of investigation. This is hardly an original suggestion. By suggesting we shift our critical encounters with America from a model of interpretation to a model of recognition I am building on distinct theoretical models, including psychoanalytical and feminist forms of cultural analysis.

The idea is to turn analysis of America towards questions of process and affect and to put in question the critic's position: what demand, desire or need is expressed by America? Who or what is the target of that demand, desire or need? What demand, desire or need do we express in return? In following this idea, somewhat speculatively (and somewhat tongue-in-cheek), I will posit America as a phantasm – an imaginary projection of our disciplinary knowledge and of our less-disciplined desires – to argue that America often functions to condition our sense of the real (including our “passion for the real”) and so also functions as a vanishing mediator of our identities, ethical, political and critical.³

THE TROUBLE WITH AMERICAN STUDIES

We are not surprised at the allure of America in the real and imaginary worlds of others (indeed, some of us analyse this allure, often via study of popular culture), but what happens to that allure, that fascination, in our own worlds as American Studies scholars and students? Were we not once hailed by America

(interpellated by America), was this not some part of the reason why we chose to study America? What happens to that allure and fascination? One answer, of course, is that it becomes tempered, perhaps curtailed, certainly disciplined through our academic studies of America. It becomes an object of knowledge, we learn different ways to frame it, to write about it, to talk about it – different paradigms emerge to reframe that object, and these are constantly shifting under pressure of new knowledge formations. American Studies has arguably been more prone to “paradigm dramas” than most disciplines, a state of perpetual conceptual transformation that characterizes the field imaginary.

The allure of America within the formation of American Studies is of course differently conditioned and rooted in different parts of the world. It can pose a reflexive relationship to the disciplinary field that is much less commonly invoked in Europe than it is in the United States. U.S. Americanists have a more self-conscious relationship to the history and boundaries of the field, we might even say an obsessive relationship. The Cold War origins of the discipline and the contingent associations with nationalism and exceptionalism have been widely perceived as an intellectual burden by U.S. Americanists. The so-called “New Americanist” movement of the 1980s and 1990s took much of its intellectual energy from formulating and deconstructing this narrative of burden. The result is that the field imaginary in the U.S. is marked by a powerful sense of agonism, which for the U.S. Americanist is both strategic and libidinal – strategic in that it allows them to continuously renew their field operations and libidinal in that this is often an obsessional or spectacular activity with its own rites and rituals. One such is the Presidential Address of the annual American Studies Association conference, a genre in which the expectation is that the new president will revisit the origins and history of the field to discuss the blindness and insight of its development and provide a corrective vision on current paradigm dramas. Such ritual returns to origin as a means to envision a better future has suggestive symmetries with the genre of the jeremiad. One of the most absorbing articulations was Janice Radway’s famous presidential address in 1998, “What’s In a Name?” – rhetorical evidence if it were needed that U.S. Americanists wear America on their chests like a scarlet letter.

In Europe, on the other hand, it is relatively rare to find Americanists obsessing about the history of the field. This is not to suggest that European

American Studies does not have its own complex histories of intellectual affiliation and disavowal, but it has only barely begun to acknowledge its origins as a “Euro-American” paradigm of knowledge formation shaped by the cultural wakes of the Second World War and the geopolitical emergence of the Cold War.⁴ To be sure, the field of American Studies in Europe has become more questioning of American exceptionalism in recent years, enjoining some of the academic discourses that seek to dislocate the nation as axis of focus – the transnational, the postnational, the transatlantic, the Black Atlantic, the circumatlantic. All offer frames that European Americanists are becoming keen to discuss, and I believe these more comparative frames offer promising grounds for the critical inquiries about the American empire that are needed to make European American Studies critically commensurate to the current international crises.

However, the legacies of “Euro-American” studies still linger and require comment. For much of the last fifty years, European Americanists have tended to write as though part of a transatlantic intellectual class, and in so doing have not questioned but lent support to the authority of U.S.-centered knowledge based in American institutions and publishers. Until recent years they have been generally disinclined to engage homegrown theoretical movements until after they had been digested by U.S. American Studies and fed back to Europe. The German Americanist Heinz Ickstadt makes the point: “Although European theories (structuralism and poststructuralism, or the sophisticated socialism of the Frankfurt School) had a considerable impact in the United States, they influenced American studies in Europe only after they had been absorbed and recycled as deconstructionism, or new historicism, or feminist theory” (Ickstadt, “Teaching American Studies Abroad”). The relation of American Studies in Europe to American and European circuits of knowledge production is of course much more complex than Ickstadt summarized, but his point has force in reminding us of the spell of intellectual authority cast by American academia.

European Americanists find themselves in a peculiar bind: after all, “America” is our purported object of study, the *raison d’être* of our professionalization, and the privileged medium for our passions for the Real. By this last comment I do not mean to suggest that European Americanists are bound to

false consciousness; rather, there is a tendency within European-based American Studies (differentially located and articulated) to study the sign of America as a locus of otherness or difference, without pursuing what I think is the necessary concomitant of such study: asking how this passion for the Real structures our intellectual frames of enquiry (not to mention our cultural fantasies). Here I am thinking, for example, of the romance or fetishization of the trope of race in European studies of American culture. What might we learn about the investment in race (most commonly translated as “blackness”) by European Americanists as they constructed various national syllabi of American Studies in the 1950s and 1960s, say? Why has there been such an overdetermined attention to African American history and culture in the canons of European American Studies? Why is it that in Europe, the “problem” of race is so often identified as the problem of America? In part, I suggest, it is because race offers an opportunity to productively disidentify with America – that is, to identify with, to take pleasure in, exploring what America has seemingly disavowed in its own identity.

I intend no summary judgement, rather I want to draw attention to this aspect of European American Studies as evidence of the troubled relationships between pleasure and knowledge, between sentiment and critique that I referred to at the beginning of my paper. For many years American Studies has functioned as a marginal or alternative academic space throughout Europe, attracting scholars, teachers and students who wanted to work beyond the boundaries of what had come to seem traditional disciplines. This sense of marginal or alternative academic perspective that American Studies can lend in many institutional settings outside the U.S. should not be underestimated as a very valuable impetus for (critical) study of the U.S., but it can also function as a prison house of representation, reproducing an American exceptionalism through the valorization of American culture as sites of marginality, of dissent, of the new and subversive. In short, the field imaginary of American studies in Europe has all too often coalesced with the marginalised self-image of faculty and displaced more local, non-academic concerns onto the phantasm called “America.”

For Europeans who purport to write as Americanists a more careful attention to our frames and grounds of interpretation is required. This means that European Americanists should be wary of the Atlantic divide as a device of

disengagement. Writing in *American Quarterly*, Ickstadt suggested that European scholars “can look at the United States as an object of political, social, and cultural analysis without running the risk of being considered chauvinistic or parochial,” a privileged “outside-position” (Ickstadt, “American Studies in an Age of Globalization” 555) – but this is the privilege of a view from nowhere and I do not think European Americanists should endorse it as a way to frame “America.” Rather, we should look to understand the dialectics and dynamics of our investments in our object of knowledge as they shape and are shaped by the field imaginary.

This privileged “outside-position” assumed by European Americanists is an illusion that facilitates certain ways of thinking about and writing about America and is further sustained by a fallacy of critical distance that misrecognizes the relationship between the subject and the object of knowledge. This fallacy has begun to show signs of strain in recent years, in part due to the emergence of transnational paradigms of American Studies and more recently due to the imperial extensions of American power under conditions of national security as the state pursues a war on terror. This advent of the American empire has made it more difficult to maintain the illusion of a view from nowhere. The U.S. government’s stated commitment to a “war of ideas” as a crucial component of the “war on terror” has deeply politicized the production and dissemination of knowledge. This includes the production and dissemination of the meanings of “America,” a matter of some importance for those associated with the field of American Studies. This “war of ideas” is a sublimated political warfare, a cultural front of America’s hegemonic ambitions. It is a war that American Studies should not ignore, as “we” are already caught up in it. It is a war that (ex)poses the question of American Studies’ relation to the state, a question that is now being taken up by some interested and concerned scholars.

BEWARE OF THE CHICKENS

The U.S. Americanist Paul Bové has written a troubled reflection on the complicity of “‘progressive’ American Studies” with “the business of the state.” Bové poses the question “Can American Studies be area studies?” to answer

“No,” because it does not “exist to provide authoritative knowledge to the state” and because “American Studies best serves the interests of the nation-state in terms of hegemony and culture rather than policy.” While he stresses the impossibility of American Studies becoming area studies, he uses this question to underline his view that American Studies intellectuals misrecognize the workings of the state: “American studies scholars have principally focused on matters of culture and history, the areas of ‘civil society’ or ‘the public sphere,’ acting as if, in this way, they were accessing the U.S. state through its extensions ... nor do they take the fact of the U.S. state as itself an agent that must be confronted, in itself, by means of detailed, concrete, material and theoretical analyses” (222, 206).

I believe Bové is right to argue that American Studies scholarship has not tended to recognise the specificity of the state in formations of “American” power and knowledge, but question his need to bracket off “the theory of the extended state” as the terrain of civil society and redundant cultural theorizing. His realist model of state power is limiting and suggestive of a parochial vision. To some degree, Bové’s pained scepticism is symptomatic of a very *American* American Studies perception of the global immanence of an empire that has no externality. Bové summons the unipolar spectre of the American imperium to ask: “If America has had this structural intent to be identical to the world – for what else can it mean to be the world’s only remaining superpower – then where can American Studies people stand to get a view of all this ...?” (232). The spatial logic of Bové’s question – that there is nowhere for American Studies scholars to stand given their epistemological blindness – verifies the unipolarity of U.S. global power.

This is bleak and I think ultimately unhelpful, though Bové’s essay is a brave and challenging intervention – its title “Can American Studies Be Area Studies?” is one of the two most important rhetorical questions posed of American Studies in the last ten years, the other being Radway’s “What’s In a Name?” It is fitting to mention them together because they both exist in a curious dyadic relation to their object of knowledge: they share a conceptual bind, a corner into which many U.S. Americanists paint themselves once they interrogate the aporia of America as the locus and focus of American Studies. A similar point may be made of the New Americanists more generally – as Donald Pease has recently remarked, they worked to imagine new ways of

“becoming americanist otherwise,” a “postnational” project that worked to dislocate the nation from its geopolitical and intellectual axes while remaining in a complex supplementary relationship with the “national” narratives of American Studies. (This double bind is the inverse to the fallacy of critical distance enjoyed by European Americanists – the Americans see themselves as trapped within the signage of the nation, the Europeans see themselves observing it from afar. Both are deluded.)

Need this double bind be debilitating in producing critical knowledge about the U.S.? I think not. Because the state abjures critical knowledge – it is turning increasingly to advocacy-oriented think tanks for legitimations of its own policies – this does not mean we should abdicate “anthropological study of civil society” as Bové suggests. Rather we should work to understand and acknowledge our own positions in the circuits of power and knowledge – this should include questioning the idea that critical distance is a precondition of critical analysis and insight.⁵ And so we should open ourselves to what we disavow in order to create the illusion of distance – we should know what binds us to America – we need to recognise our critical and libidinal investments in the object of knowledge, and know that at certain points these may be one and the same thing.

This is no simple matter of stating belief or disbelief. The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek alerts us to what is at issue in his discussions of the limits of freedom of thought. In one such discussion Žižek relays a classic joke:

A man who believes himself to be a grain of seed is taken to the mental institution where the doctors do their best to finally convince him that he is not a grain of seed but a man; however, when he is cured (convinced that he is not a grain of seed but a man) and allowed to leave the hospital, he immediately comes back trembling – there is a chicken outside the door and he is afraid that it will eat him. “Dear fellow,” says his doctor, “you know very well that you are not a grain of seed but a man.” “Of course *I* know that,” replies the patient, “but does the chicken know it?” (Žižek 385).

For Žižek, the joke illustrates the true stake of psychoanalytic treatment and confronts us with the externality of belief. To put this in more parochial (Americanist) terms: even if we don’t believe in God, patriotism or America, we cannot differentiate our identities from the symbolic systems. What

Žižek's joke also underlines is our stake in the fantasy that is America. The situation it describes is suggestive of that of the analysand in the grip of fantasy. Fantasy, in the Lacanian schema, does not name our desire for the Other, but rather posits the question of what the Other wants, and our identities and actions are shaped by the response to this question (Lacan 214). I have already suggested that America has long functioned as a phantasm of Americanists' disciplinary desires and knowledge formations in Europe. To critically understand America as fantasy is to begin to respond to the question of what the Other wants and to compose our Americanist identities in terms of this response.

While we cannot simply differentiate our identities from our symbolic systems – this is the point of Žižek's joke – we can work to strategically acknowledge the fantasy that structures our sense of the Real. To ask the question “What Does America Want?” is to foreground the field imaginary and shift the axis and focus of American Studies critique. It is to *not* ask “What is the Meaning of America?,” an originating question of American Studies as a field. The question “What Does America Want?” is a question of desire rather than meaning. It is also a strategic question that moves us away from the hermeneutics of suspicion and demystification towards forms of cultural and political critique that impel recognition of the limits of critique.

So, with this question in mind I return to Bové's challenging question: “If America has had this structural intent to be identical to the world – for what else can it mean to be the world's only remaining superpower – then where can American Studies people stand to get a view of all this ...?” The question presents suggestive visual metaphors, suggesting that the potential for critique is an issue of perspective. Another way of formulating Bové's question is: how and from where can we see American empire? By way of conclusion I want to suggest one possible answer by commenting on a photographic image that might be said to represent a primal scene of American empire.

BETWEEN CARE AND DOMINATION

I turn to a photographic image for several reasons. Firstly, the image world of contemporary globalisation is the sphere in which fantasies of America are

most powerfully projected and consumed today. Secondly, photographs as a medium foreground what I have described as the troubled relations in the field imaginary of American Studies, between pleasure and knowledge, sentiment and critique. Photographs do not explain the world to us but offer us an emotional apprehension of the world represented and so the viewer has the task of working out the relation between emotion and knowledge.⁶

The image I want to discuss is a photograph by Jean-Marc Bouju, a French photographer working for Associated Press, who was embedded with the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq. It depicts a man and child in a POW camp in Najaf.⁷ This photograph won the World Press Photo of the Year Award in 2003. Bouju has said the boy was crying when his father was arrested and so the American soldiers allowed the two to stay together, then cut off the father's plastic handcuffs so he could hold his child. We can read the photograph as a symbol of compassion (of the soldiers towards the prisoner, of the father toward the son) but we could also read it as evidence of a lack of compassion.⁸ The admixture of cruelty and kindness signified by the image is disconcerting. The dissonance is indicative of the ambiguities inherent in using photography as a documentary witness. We traffic back and forward between the particular and the universal, between the humanistic and the imperial, between care and domination, between sentiment and critique – where does our gaze rest?

The dissonance is in part due to the complex interplay of formal conventions and ethical considerations that characterise the production, display and perception of photojournalistic images of subjugated bodies. Photojournalism has long assumed an ethical function to bear witness to the suffering or degradation of others, and often, photographers have directed this function to arouse concern and perhaps even action. This ethical function, though, is complexly embedded within ideas of the human and of humanitarianism that shadow the ideologies of imperial governance and expansion by European and American powers since the mid-nineteenth century. If we take a primarily American perspective, we would have to note that photojournalism has been instrumentally involved in the visualization of U.S. foreign policy and more broadly the representation of America's geopolitical visions from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.⁹ In part this is due to the historical connection between the evolution of photography and the development of a young

nation. The origins of photography in the United States are tied up with the documenting of westward expansion, and with internal and external conflicts that defined the boundaries of the nation and the role of the state. From the 1840s, photographs were used to inform the public about events, people, and places in the news, and the roots of modern photojournalism are evident in these uses. It developed conventions and frames, a way of seeing that conjoined the democratic and imperial impulses of an emergent American worldview. In the twentieth century it played an important role in linking this vision of America's growing will to power to a new landscape of international relations and communication systems. The "golden age" of American photojournalism was from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s, a period in which picture magazines and news magazines came to the fore as the premier conveyors of photojournalistic imagery. As picture magazines such as *Life* articulated narratives of national identity, photojournalism took on a leading role in representing the intersections of national and international affairs. A key tenet of the visual philosophy of mid-century photojournalism was its commitment to a democratizing vision of human affiliations – it posited a culture of humanity as a universal ideal and human empathy as a compensatory response to global threats, and particularly to the threat of nuclear annihilation.¹⁰

To be sure, that idealization of the culture of humanity in mid-century photojournalism has been sorely tested in more recent times. In the 1970s it came under sustained critique by critics who charged that it was burdened by formal, ethical and historical questions that contributed to the crumbling authority of its evidentiary forms.¹¹ And yet, the use of formal compassionate frames to represent the suffering of others continues in American and more broadly "Western" photojournalism and indeed has influenced other visual media. Today, that framing (within the more general visualising of war, conflict and human rights abuses) does need to be understood in relation to the history of such framing in Western visual cultures, but also in relation to the shifting conditions of relationality that shape the looking relations (of recognition and identification) that configure our affective responses to images of suffering. Today, these conditions of relationality are significantly shaped by the effects of new media technologies on global communications and by the geopolitics of liberal capitalist expansionism, and in particular, I suggest, by the emergent frames of humanitarianism in the wake of the endings of the

Cold War. Accordingly, some theorists of globalization now argue that the spaces of our emotional imagination have been expanded in a transnational sense as we are connected (virtually) to new spaces of empathy and aggression.¹² Certainly, the image-world of globalization is also our shared world of affective human attachments. As this image-world becomes more and more saturated by images of corporeal violence and vulnerability, it becomes imperative to consider the aesthetics and ethics of the claims the suffering bodies of others make upon us.

And so, back to the Bouju photograph. What can we say about the image? That it depicts the dialectics of freedom and oppression in the activity of empire? Perhaps, but that only begs further questions. Where does “freedom” reside in this photograph? Does it reside in the motivations of the captors? Does it reside in the transcendent humanism of the parent and child embrace? Does it reside in the very act of looking? This last question entails a whole history of looking relations surrounding imagery of subjugated bodies and bodies in pain, particularly those framed by colonial or postcolonial conditions of power and conflict. In such instances the subjugated body, often subjected to a natal alienation, as is visually illustrated here, is the focus of mute testimony. As Allen Feldman observes, “geographies of alterity are linked to their authentication in geographies of violence”; “a buried truth is located in the alien body sited in the postcolonial peripheries” and must be brought up to the surface in modes of exposure and display (182). Documentary photography is one such mode of creating this display, which is to say this photograph works off a long history of photojournalistic imagery of violent conflict, using a frame and conventions common to the genre. The *pietà* posture, for example, is a commonplace in such imagery.

However, there is considerable ambiguity about the truth being displayed by the subjugated body in this image. What is being more complexly displayed here is an over-determined *performance* of compassion. This includes the compassion of the father in relation to the son, the compassion of American soldiers in relation to the father and the son, and the compassion of viewers in relation to the scene. It is also a performance of the power of the American military to humanize and dehumanize, a performance of an unlimited power that “promises to liberate the other from his non-existence” (Badiou, *Polemics* 29). What this visual performance of compassion performs

is the ethical knot in viewing relations conditioned by American imperialism. Is this a scene of care or a scene of domination? Part of the difficulty in making a judgement about this is that the postures of care and domination draw on the same foundation, the primal scene of human vulnerability.¹³ This nexus of care and domination has become a prominent and disturbing feature of the image world of globalization and of the geopolitical world of war, conflict and human rights abuses that this image world often if unevenly represents. In mass media, images of domination and vulnerability meld into one another. Think, for example, of the image banks of famine, sustainable development and ethnic warfare that overflow one another. In international relations the discourse of humanitarianism inflates the demand for care as an issue of liberal governance of failing states and a legitimate rationale for intervention. In this discourse, the meanings of care and domination are carefully parsed to meet dominant politico-economic interests. Wherever we look, we find that the political structures of domination intersect with ethical structures of care.¹⁴ This is what the photograph re-presents, the performance of that intersectionality – as such, it exceeds interpretation.

The photograph fails to provide us with an interpretive frame that might allay or organize our confused thoughts and feelings as we look at it. The ambiguities of the image and very failure to provide answers make it valuable as an indicator of the limits of our knowledge formations and ethical imaginations.¹⁵ This is where photographic images can be a useful pointer for Americanists, for they are suggestive of how we might understand the role of affective relationality, of how we might integrate it into analysis and not simply subdue it through analysis. As already observed, the image-world that is the surface of globalization is also our shared world of affective human attachments. The critical task is not to get behind this surface but to give it definition through our critical work. This is to say that the error of Bové's question is to assume that there is a position in which we can see American empire in some revelatory way, that the truth of American power can be revealed. I don't think this is how we apprehend American empire. Our critical task is not iconoclastic, tearing away the veil of empire to reveal the truth of its horrors; rather it is to stretch the image surface and understand our own investments in its workings.¹⁶ It is to acknowledge the limits of our capacity to make sense of our object of study, even as we interrogate the emergence and the vanish-

ing of America as a mediator of identities, including our own as critical intellectuals and as sensate citizens. It is to reinvigorate Americanist projects of critique by asking not what America means but what does America want.

Notes

¹ This is the text of a paper presented at the interdisciplinary seminar on “Pursuits of Happiness” which took place at the Centre for American Studies in Rome. I am grateful for the invitation from Donatella Izzo to participate in this gathering and for her inspiring, ongoing dialogue on the perils and pleasures of pursuing American Studies in Europe. This essay retains many of the oral registers of its original presentation.

² The references to “Americanists” and the use of third-person identifications with this category are intended to designate my own emplacement and identification as a European Americanist.

³ On the concept of a “passion for the real,” see Badiou, *Century*.

⁴ See Kennedy.

⁵ See Cherniavsky.

⁶ See Sontag.

⁷ The image is widely reproduced on the Web. See, for example, arts.guardian.co.uk/gallery/0..1203890.00.html.

⁸ See Linfield.

⁹ See Moeller.

¹⁰ See Kozol.

¹¹ Susan Sontag in her mid-1970s writings on photography provided what was probably the most challenging and influential critique, arguing that photographs cannot tell us political truths and that the “humanistic” strain in American photography was exhausted. What Sontag and her acolytes so abjured was the manipulation of sentiment in this photography. See Sontag; Sekula; Solomon-Godeau.

¹² See Beck.

¹³ See Butler.

¹⁴ See Green, Mann, and Storey.

¹⁵ Such photographs trouble the more conventional evocations of human empathy to produce a more challenging perspective, one in line with Judith Butler’s conception of regard for “precarious life” amidst “conditions of heightened vulnerability and aggression” following 9/11. Addressing photographic representation in the last few pages of her book, Butler argues that representation only succeeds when it fails, when “the ethical claim of the other is not pinned down, exhausted and therefore silenced by the ... image” (126).

¹⁶ See Buck-Morss.

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