

## Invisible Culture: The Cultural Visualization of Hurricane Katrina

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Hurricane Katrina

CALL FOR PAPERS

Invisible Culture: A Journal For Visual Culture

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Guest Editors: Nicola Mann and Victoria Pass, University of Rochester

The Cultural Visualization of Hurricane Katrina

Over the past four years, various forms of visual media have focused their lenses on the swathes of watery land that make up the Mississippi delta. Since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in summer of 2005, the region and its residents have been subject to intense televisual, filmic, artistic, and media-based scrutiny. From Geraldo Rivera's tearful live reports from the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, to Kanye West's frustrated declaration at the NBC Concert for Hurricane Relief that "George Bush doesn't care about black people," to the widely acclaimed documentary film *Trouble the Water* (2008), images of the hurricane, the people it affected (and continues to affect), and the land it ravaged have been projected into our living rooms through a series of visual representations.

Much of the scholarship on this topic has focused on socio-cultural issues including rebuilding strategies, the failure of homeland security, and testimonial accounts of "survivors" or "witnesses." This issue aims to analyze representations of Katrina and its aftermath using the methodologies of visual and cultural studies. We are interested in the ways that analyses of the politics of representation, as exemplified in the case of Katrina, opens up into a discussion the evolution of visual and cultural studies in the last ten or twenty years.

We seek papers that consider visual representations of Hurricane Katrina in a way unimaginable at earlier points in the intersection

between visual studies and cultural studies. From CNN.com's award winning "Voices from the Gulf Coast" podcasts, to the various discussion blogs that have emerged in the wake of the event, to Google Earth's satellite imagery overlays of the devastation in the affected region, to the television show "Extreme Makeover: Hurricane Katrina Home Edition," we have seen in Katrina's aftermath a plethora of new modes of visual diffusion. Furthermore, the intensification of mass media, both in terms of the sheer quantity of media outlets and in the reach of its dissemination, has given rise to a new experience of historical time and geographic proximity, in which we experience historical events through media representations almost immediately as they happen and regardless of where they occur.

Additionally, the interactivity of new media has reoriented the producer/consumer binary of traditional media. We are interested in the representational politics of these new visual rhetorics and in the new and often hybrid apparatuses through which we experience them. For example, a critical alternative to the mainstream news media's coverage of Hurricane Katrina arose across multiple platforms. When compared to more "traditional" documentary forms of disaster representation such as the Associated Press' controversial global dissemination of "looting" photographs, does the immediacy and interactive nature of new media responses render their vision more absolute, real, and perhaps most importantly, "true"?

Is the semiotic approach of, for example, Roland Barthes on photography—which arose in relation to a very different mode of cultural production—still relevant? Can the even earlier model of Frankfurt School-style ideology critique help us to understand popular culture and its capacity for social change? How might these now-familiar methodologies be refashioned for the current culture? Or what methods have eclipsed them? One key concern of this issue is whether technological shifts and advancements in the dissemination of media over the past twenty years have changed the way we see beyond the recognition of our interpretive paradigms. If the object of visual studies has changed, how might we adapt the discipline to engage with the current mode(s) of cultural production?

Accepted essays will accompany the transcript of an upcoming Roundtable discussion between the founders of the Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester's co-founders, on the occasion of the program's twentieth anniversary (Mieke Bal, Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, Kaja Silverman, Constance Penley, and Janet Wolff; moderated by Douglas Crimp).

Possible avenues for the exploration include, but are not limited to:

Films:

- The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (2008)
- Trouble the Water (2008)
- When the Levees Broke (2008), Spike Lee
- Hellp, Darren Martinez

Blogs:

- New Orleans Ladder
- The Survival of New Orleans weblog
- Nola blog

Televsual depictions of the hurricane and responses to it,  
for example:

- news coverage of "looting"
- Comic Relief (2006)
- House (May 16, 2006), FOX
- Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip, "The Christmas Show," (Dec. 4, 2006)
- The Daily Show

Artistic responses to Hurricane Katrina:

- Prospect 1: New Orleans (international biennial)
- News photographs
- "Remembering Katrina," the official Hurricane Katrina souvenir program.

Mainstream news journalism

- Urban renewal efforts
- Personal photographs

NOLA:

- NOLA tourism
- The disappearance of "authentic" indigenous NOLA culture
- NOLA outside of Bourbon Street
- Representations of local culture in New Orleans

Please send inquiries and completed papers (MLA style)  
of 2,500 - 5,000 words to Nicola Mann  
([nmann2\[at\]mail\[dot\]rochester\[dot\]edu](mailto:nmann2@mail[dot]rochester[dot]edu)) and Victoria Pass  
([vpass\[at\]mail\[dot\]rochester\[dot\]edu](mailto:vpass[at]mail[dot]rochester[dot]edu)) by October 15, 2009.

In Visible Culture is also currently seeking submissions  
for book and exhibition reviews (600-1000 words).

To submit book or exhibition review proposals please  
email [ivcbookreviews\[at\]gmail\[dot\]com](mailto:ivcbookreviews[at]gmail[dot]com).

For a list of reviewable titles, see:

[http://www.rochester.edu/in\\_visible\\_culture/Reviews/review\\_copies.html](http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Reviews/review_copies.html)

Reference:

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(accessed Apr 3, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/31818>>.