



UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs

Author(s): Alan Trachtenberg

Source: *Representations*, No. 9, Special Issue: American Culture Between the Civil War and World War I (Winter, 1985), pp. 1-32

Published by: University of California Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3043765>

Accessed: 26/01/2010 12:05

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucal>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Representations*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs*

I

The mere notation of photography, when we introduce it into our meditation on the genesis of historical knowledge and its true value, suggests this simple question:

COULD SUCH AND SUCH A FACT, AS IT IS NARRATED, HAVE BEEN
PHOTOGRAPHED?

—Paul Valéry

ON AUGUST 17, 1861, not quite a month after the first serious blood-letting of the Civil War, at Bull Run, the *New York Times* reported that “Mr. Brady, the Photographer, has just returned from Washington with the magnificent series of views of scenes, groups, and incidents of the war which he has been making for the last two months”: views, the report adds, that “will do more than the most elaborate descriptions to perpetuate the scenes of that brief campaign.” Few signs of actual bloodshed show in the Bull Run series; on the whole Civil War photographs depict preparations and aftermaths rather than battle itself.¹ Nevertheless the point holds: the photographs perpetuate a collective image of the war as a sensible event, what it must have looked like had we been there. As Paul Valéry implies in his “simple question,” the idea of the camera has so implanted itself that our very imagination of the past takes the snapshot as its notion of adequacy, the equivalent of *having been there*. Photographs are the popular historicism of our era; they confer nothing less than reality itself.²

The first significant crisis in modern history to occur within the memorializing gaze of a camera,³ the Civil War offers an occasion to examine this historicism-by-photography, this notion that historical knowledge declares its true value by its photographability. It does not exaggerate to say that, while historians may still debate causes and meanings,⁴ the Civil War enjoys a physical presence, a palpable cultural reality, entirely the legacy of a handful of photographs. Indeed, proclaimed historian Francis Trevalyan Miller in the monumental *Photographic History of the Civil War* (1912), “these time-stained photographs” are the only unarguable facts to survive the war:

We must all be of one and the same mind when we look upon the photographic evidence. It is in these photographs that all Americans can meet on the common ground of their beloved traditions. Here we are all united at the shrine where our fathers fought.⁵



FIGURE 1. General Robert B. Potter and staff, with Brady (photo by Brady; from Frassanito, *Grant and Lee*, 256).

By their apparent incontrovertibility the images possess a veritable sacral power; they define a “common ground,” they delineate a symbolic “shrine,” they provide us with “fathers.” Thus the photograph not only historicizes, bringing “past history,” as another writer put it, “into the present tense,”⁶ but it discloses a hidden nerve within the event: the war as a unifying experience in our common “Anglo-Saxon” heritage: “No Grecian phalanx or Roman legion ever knew truer manhood than in those days on the American continent when Anglo-Saxon met Anglo-Saxon in the decision of a constitutional principle that beset their beloved nation.”⁷ With hardly a mention of slavery or of blacks, the *Photographic History* depicts a war that makes visible an overarching trope: “the American War of the Roses.” Thus the photograph seems to remove itself, and us, safely beyond controversy and threat.

The closer we look at the Civil War photographs, however, the more does their incontrovertibility come into question. They are, we learn, vulnerable to exactly the same obscurities of other forms of evidence. The simplest documentary questions of who did what, when, where, and why may be impossible to

answer. And much more consequential matters of meaning and interpretation, of narrative and ideological tropes, of invisible presences and visible absences, have rarely even been asked. Much of the hard archival scholarship seems to have gone in pursuit of one particular red herring: the role of Mathew B. Brady, with whose name the entire Civil War project has long been unshakably identified. As everyone knew at the time, Brady was more an entrepreneur than a photographer, the proprietor of fashionable galleries in Washington and New York. It seemed to trouble no one that he was not himself the cameraman who made the pictures he signed “Brady.” The first to organize a corps of photographers to cover the war at the front,⁸ he also bought or otherwise appropriated all the war images that came within his reach to include within his several published series of stereographs, album cards, or large mounted prints. Recent scholarship has attempted to sort out just what role Brady performed during the war, what credit he deserves for the images he sold under his name.⁹ This question of credit proves misleading, however, for it applies a category, of authorship, only marginally relevant to the commercial and discursive practices of photography at the time. To be sure, practices were in flux, and controversies over authorial credit as well as copyright came to a head at least once, in the quarrel between Brady and the manager of his Washington gallery, Alexander Gardner.¹⁰

More important than who made each image is how what was made came to be viewed as a communication—how it came to have a meaning. It can be said that whoever may have authored Brady’s images, “Brady” authorized them, gave them imprimatur. Indeed on occasion he placed—we might say inscribed—himself within the picture, clearly not as the photographer but the impresario or producer of the event itself (Fig. 1). Most important, he placed the images in a distinct context, a structured discourse that has sealed them indelibly as “Civil War photographs.” Although priority in this matter is minor, Brady does seem to have been the earliest to conceive of a form for the presentation of the pictures, a structure to contain and articulate them as a whole entity, a totality—and to enunciate them one by one as parts of that totality. “Among the sun-compellers,” remarked the *New York Times* in November 1862 on the appearance of *Brady’s Photographic Views of the War*, “Mr. Brady deserves honorable recognition as having been the first to make Photography the Clio of the war.” While it is not astonishing that Brady should appear in the role,¹¹ it is striking that the muse of retrospection should be evoked about the picturing of an event still in progress. Brady’s 1862 publication is the earliest effort to organize a rapidly accumulating mass of war and war-related images, to present, even as the war progressed and images piled up, the entire mass as a single whole, an emergent totality. We can gain some sense of the scope of the project, the range as well as the quantity of images, from Brady’s account of the collection he offered for sale to Congress in 1869: “The pictures show the Battle-fields of the Rebellion, and its memorable localities

Dix's autograph order ("If any one attempts to haul down the American flag, shoot him on the spot.")
 Japanese Embassy,
 The little Joker,
 Two native Americans,
 A big thing,
 A disgusted Seesch, leaving "Dixie,"
 A "specimen brick," from the "Rogues' Gallery," N. Y.
 "Home, Sweet Home, in autograph of J. Howard Payne,
 "Skedaddling,"
 "Don't see it,"
 Burn's cottage,
 Merrimac & Monitor,
 Mount Vernon, Washington's Grave,
 Washington's Statue,
 The Great Surrender,
 Young America, or Crying Baby,
 Young America jubilant, (after the fall of New Orleans.)
 Young Africa, or the bone of contention
 Young Europe, the crown prince of Russia,
 A Wisconsin Legislator, on his winter's journey to the Capitol,

Young Asia—the little Chinaman
 Commissioner Perrin, as he appeared on mule-back, in New Mexico
 Commissioner Perrin, and chief of the Navajo Indians,
 Band of Navajoes in War Costume,
 The Hoosier Twins,
 Potawatomi, Indian Chief,
 "Ho! in the Day," Chief of the Chipeways.
 Imperial guard of France (Group)
 Arabic letter—complimentary to our consul Mr. De Long for course adopted in capturing the officers and crew of the "Sumpter"

Le Petit Corporal } Prince Imperial,
 Le Petit Gend'arme }

Keeper of Cattle, Hungary
 Country Gentleman of Tycnar, Slavonia,
 Grecian Woman near Tarogbe, Fisherman on the Tiber,
 Married Woman of Arokgallas, Wt. Russia.
 Gipsy family on the Peusta, S. H.
 Hungarian Shepherd on Peusta }

Signatures to the Declaration of Independence.

The Neglected Picture } Series of celebrated painter
 "Done Gene." }
 Hall Columbia. }
 The Oath of Exemption } side to the
 or Escaping the draft } times, by
 Wm. M. Davis.

A Stern reality.
 Naturalia, non sunt turpia
 His time.
 Waiting turn,
 Ha, Ha, I've eaten the canary,
 Outward bound.
 Homeward bound.
 Forget not my album.
 Young 1776.
 Why don't you take it.
 The village barber,
 The Lords prayer,
 The Declaration of Independence,
 The Melody.
 The Jig,
 The Combat between the Merrimac and the Monitor,

Class 11.

VIEWS, CAMP SCENES, &c.

Series of Greenwood Cemetery views, of the principal monuments and places of interest, already about 50 in number. These are arranged as cards for albums or as views for stereoscopes.

Fort Sumpter views, taken after the evacuation, 16 in number (card size)

Fort Pulaski views, taken immediately after the bombardment, 9 in number, (large and small size cards)

Niagara Falls views, for albums.

Camp scenes of various kinds

BRADY'S WAR VIEWS.—Views of the War in Virginia, together with views in and around Washington, views of Cedar Mountain, Bull Run, Manassas, Yorktown, and Fair Oaks battlefields, with camp scenes—interesting groups &c., &c., large and small cards. For a description of these views, see list annexed.

Brady's Photographic Views of the War.

Mounted for Albums, same size as Cartes de Visite.

Price 25cts. each.

Washington City Views.

- 1 Capitol from near Trinity Church.
- 10 Old Capitol, Washington, D. C.
- 11 Jackson's Statue and White House, Washington.
- 12 Presidential Mansion, Washington, South Side.
- 13 Gateway Lafayette Square, Washington.
- 14 South Front of White House, Washington.
- 20 Avenue House, Washington.
- 21 Metropolitan Hotel, Washington.
- 22 Willards' Hotel, and Treasury, Washington.
- 99 Anacostia Bridge, Navy Yard, Washington.
- 100 Long Bridge.
- 102 Long Bridge from Fourteenth street.

Fort Pulaski Views.

- 188 Fort Pulaski, Georgia. Front View.
- 189 Fort Pulaski, Georgia. Rear view.
- 190 Fort Pulaski, Georgia. Distant view, showing the effect of the fire from the assailing batteries.
- 191 Ruins of Fort Pulaski, Georgia. Inside Casemates. Wall 14 feet thick.
- 192 The Breech, Fort Pulaski, Georgia.
- 193 Fort Pulaski, Georgia, Rear Parapet, with Magazine in corner.
- 194 Fort Pulaski. Rear Parapet, Entrance and Officers quarters.
- 195 Fort Pulaski. Ruins on Channel side.
- 196 Jeff. Davis Gun, Fort Pulaski, Georgia.
- 197 Beauregard gun, Fort Pulaski, Georgia.

- 198 Fort Pulaski. View on Front Parapet.
- 199 Damomed Mortar, Fort Pulaski.
- 200 View of Jeff. Davis, Beauregard, and Stephens Guns, Fort Pulaski.

Plantation and Camp Scenes, Beaufort, S. C.

- 180 Negro Family on Rhett's Plantation.
- 181 Group on J. J. Smith's Plantation, Beaufort.
- 182 Negro Family, Representing five generations, all born on the plantation of J. J. Smith, Beaufort, S. C.
- 183 Headquarters Gen. Stevens, Beaufort, S. C., formerly the Residence of John J. Smith.
- 184 Scouting Party on J. J. Smith's Plantation.
- 185 Rhett's House, Beaufort, S. C.
- 186 80th Penn. Vols. [Col. Chris] at Beaufort.
- 187 Erecting Pontoon Bridge across Port Royal River, at Beaufort, S. C.
- 188 Moss-covered Tomb, over 150 years old, on Rhett's plantation, Port Royal Island, S. C.
- 189 Preparing Cotton for the Gin, on Smith's plantation, Beaufort, S. C.
- 190 Negro Quarters on Smith's plantation.
- 192 View in Beaufort, S. C.
- 193 Gen. Stevens and Staff, Beaufort, S. C.
- 194 Gen. Stevens, at Beaufort, S. C.
- 197 Mary Stewart's House, Beaufort, S. C.
- 198 Puller's House, Beaufort, S. C.
- 171 Boat Landing, at Beaufort, S. C.
- 172 Signal Station, Beaufort, S. C. formerly residence of J. G. Barwell.
- 177 Fort Beauregard, Bay Point, Philips Island, S. C. Rear view.

FIGURE 2. Page from Brady's *Photographic Views of the War* (1862).

and incidents: such as Military Camps, Fortifications, Bridges, Processions, Reviews, Siege Trains, Valleys, Rivers, Villages, Farm Houses, Plantations, and Famous Buildings of the South: together with Groups and Likenesses of the prominent actors, in the performance of duty; before and after the smoke of battle; around bivouac fires; in the trenches, and on the decks of iron-clads—the whole forming a complete Pictorial History of our great National Struggle.”¹² The suggestion here of an inventory, of simple record keeping, implies a regularity among the images, a uniformity of value, each image serving equally well to delineate a detail within a total view. At the same time the list suggests something sweeping and epic, a motive as much rhetorical as inventorial, as much to tell as to show, to encompass a great struggle as if from the grand perspective of Providence (Fig. 2).

The inventorial form was, of course, neither Brady’s invention nor unique to his practice; it was simply the most obvious, even “natural” way to list such images. The very obviousness of the form is precisely what makes it at once so potent as a vehicle of cultural meaning and so hard for us to see. The archival form permitted the photographer-editor to hold together all the particulars of an emerging whole, to endow each image with what Foucault calls “enunciability.”¹³ As the maker and purveyor of galleries of images, Brady would have understood that without an encompassing structure, an archival totality, individual images remain empty signs, unable to communicate a determinate meaning. The archive empowers the image, but specifically by depriving it of its traditional powers as picture, as a unique formal event occurring within an enframed space. Taken as a discourse the archival mode of Brady’s catalogs implies a much-diminished role for the individual image, no more than a single variable within a set of categorical regularities—e.g., “559. Killed at Battle of Antietam.” The catalog empowers the image, then, not as a picture but as a datum, an item of sequential regularity.

In actual presentation the image underwent other transformations of status, none more crucial for the evolution of a popular culture in the decade of the war than that represented by the stereograph. Indeed so popular was this mode of dissemination that any discussion of the Civil War photographs and the problems of reading they pose must take the stereograph into account.¹⁴

The stereograph was an outgrowth of a major technological change in photographic reproduction. In the decade before the outbreak of war the wet-plate process had introduced two critical innovations. Reduction in exposure time (relative to the older daguerreotype process) made possible instantaneous or stop-action representations of motion; and as a negative-positive process the new development enabled the mechanical reproduction of unlimited editions of images from individual negatives. As developed by commercial photographers and manufacturers these innovations introduced a new popular imagery of everyday life:

views of crowded city streets, of figures in motion caught in stride and, when photographed from above, in random patterns never before perceived. The stereoscope, meanwhile, introduced three-dimensionality as a new condition of viewing images, particularly images whose exactitude of representation made them seem virtual simulacra of the perceptible world. The importance of this small hand-held wooden device cannot be stressed enough; it not only made possible portable and private panoramas, but facilitated a decisive moment in the evolution of bourgeois domestic life: the transformation of the living room into a microcosmic world unto itself. Designed as a decorative item as well as an optical instrument, the stereoscope bespoke interiors and family hours; it bespoke new satisfactions of experiencing oneself as witness to the entire palpable world, a sedentary spectator of the outside now safely and sedately brought inside. Thus the stereoscope permitted not merely a discovery of what the quotidian consisted of—detail in such “frightful amount,” wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes, that “the mind feels its way into the very depths of the picture”¹⁵—but a way of savoring that pleasurable fright from the safest of distances: that between one’s eyes and a photograph. Seeming to chart new realms of visual (and vicarious) experience, the stereoscope made images appear as if boundless, unframed and unbordered, experienceable as intimate personal events, as private spectacles. The design of the viewing device itself encouraged this privatization of spectatorship, the hooded eyepiece requiring total concentration upon the three-dimensional effect—a “half-magnetic” effect Holmes described as follows: “The shutting out of surrounding objects, and the concentration of the whole attention which is a consequence of this, produce a dream-like exaltation of the faculties, a kind of clairvoyance, in which we seem to leave the body behind us and sail away into one strange scene after another, like disembodied spirits.”¹⁶ The minuteness and clarity and magnification of photographic detail resulted, then, in an enjoyable estrangement from the familiar, the alien appearing safely and as if for one’s own delectation, directly within the sphere of the familiar.

Issued in groups and series, stereographs often offered verbal information along with their visual data. In this capacity for a sequential viewing, stereographic series resembled another popular form, perhaps less pervasive as a mode for the distribution of Civil War images, but more accessible for analysis: the album. Like the stereograph the album had emerged only recently, as an adjunct to the extremely popular *cartes de visite*, small paper portraits mounted on cards.¹⁷ Like the stereoscope the album belonged by design in a living or drawing room, a place of display and family viewing. In structure the earliest albums consisted of slotted pages permitting the insertion of cards within proscenium-like openings, a theatrical frame for the portrait. Presumably Brady adopted this mode as one of the formats for his war views, a mode that would have encouraged the

interchangeability of images. The viewer might arrange and rearrange the order of pictures according to whatever rules or purposes—to create, in effect, one's own sub-archive.

Strictly speaking the archive assembled by Brady recognized only spatial regularities and differences; temporality appeared only as a subcategory, not a major organizing principle. Non-prescriptive (one can pick and choose and rearrange at will), the archive is non-narrative; it tells no stories. Nor, taken as a physical vehicle, does the album, which does, however, invite and facilitate a restructuring of the order of things and thus the making of countless personal sequences and stories. Mediating between the archive and innumerable unspecified cultural functions, the album (a kind of folk form of the age of mechanical reproduction) provides endless narrative-making possibilities. The form itself, by its very blankness (blankness being at the very root meaning of “album”) prompts us to invert Valéry's innocent-seeming question, to ask whether it is possible to imagine photographs without narratives, without configurative structures to focus isolated images into a meaningful sequence or diegesis.

The albums of war we most wish to examine may well be lying forgotten in dark cellars or unused archives, the constructions of those many thousands who must have purchased *Brady's Album Gallery* and the blank book to go with it. Whatever albums Brady himself may have assembled and sold also seem lost or disassembled, and out of circulation.¹⁸ Three remarkable and original works remain. Technically speaking, bound and including texts they are books or portfolios, but their mode of discourse, of presentation, is that of the album. Two have been reprinted and remain in circulation: Alexander Gardner's *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War* (1866) and George P. Barnard's *Photographic Views of Sherman's Campaign* (1866).¹⁹ The third is a little-known work by a well-known photographer: *Photographs Illustrative of Operations in Construction and Transportation* (1863), an instruction manual written by the military engineer Herman Haupt, illustrated with photographs made by A. J. Russell, and “sent to officers in command of Departments, Posts and Expeditions, with a view to increase the efficiency and economy of the Public Service.”²⁰

Differing as they do in uses, in their construction of narratives, in their relation to accompanying texts, each of these albums arises from or presupposes an archival base and thus represents a contradiction or discursive tension typical of this early moment in the emergence of photography as a medium of everyday (which is to say, historical) life. They share a dilemma that remains fundamental to the practice of a serious photography: how to make pictures in a medium incapable of suppressing its appetite for indiscriminate detail, a medium thought to be anti-pictorial in its disregard for hierarchies of representational value. How each of these albums of war confronts this intractable power to depict war as an

event in everyday life, and by what ideological tropes they attempt to exploit or subdue those “obdurate realities” represented by the camera lens, are questions I want to ask of each album, questions, I want first to suggest, related to difficulties of perception arising from the war itself.

II

The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present. EVERYTHING IDEOLOGICAL POSSESSES SEMIOTIC VALUE.

—V. N. Vološinov (M. M. Bakhtin)

“Let him who wishes to know what war is,” wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes in July 1863, “look at this series of illustrations.”²¹ The remark launches an extraordinary digression on images recently issued by Brady of the Antietam battlefield in what had otherwise been Holmes’s charming and entertaining *Atlantic Monthly* essay (Fig. 3).²² Appropriately titled “The Doings of the Sunbeam,” the essay had betrayed until then no particular sense that a war was then in progress, that casualties were grievous and mounting, that blood and dismemberment had become commonplace items of daily news. The elder Holmes had rushed to the site of the battle in search of his wounded son—a disheartening experience he had recounted in an *Atlantic* essay a few months earlier;²³ the horror and revulsion now returned in a rush. “It was,” he wrote, “so nearly like visiting the battle-field to look over these views, that all the emotions excited by the actual sight of the stained and sordid scene, strewn with rags and wrecks, came back to us, and we buried them in the recesses of our cabinet as we would have buried the mutilated remains of the dead they too vividly represented (12).”

Only a paragraph buried in an otherwise cheerful essay, Holmes’s account of his revulsion from the “terrible mementoes,” his need to lock them safely away “in some secret drawer” conveniently at hand in his study, cannot help but draw attention to itself as an extraordinary eruption. It is a compelling moment of discomposure on the part of perhaps the most composed, the most properly buttoned and self-possessed of the Boston Brahmins (it was he who coined the phrase “the Brahmin caste of New England”), suggesting an overdetermined response, his language of repression seeming more appropriate to guilt than to disgust. Of course the horror may measure a father’s conscience-stricken response to his son’s hurt. Like others of his caste Holmes had welcomed the “war fever” for the very opportunity it would avail “our poor Brahmins” to test themselves and learn the virtues of heroism befitting aristocrats.²⁴ Whether or not the human wreckage he had just witnessed at Antietam chastened his fervor, the photographic remains of that sad event proved too much like tokens of the real thing to be endured. Shattering the security of that “dream-like exaltation” and disem-



FIGURE 3. Stereograph of dead in a ditch, Antietam.

bodiment he had in an earlier essay described as comforting oneiric effects of the stereograph, these simulacra of dismembered bodies intruding upon his interior space somehow *re*embodied the viewer as one who “sickens at such sights.” As if they were the “mutilated remains” themselves, the photographs must be stricken from sight.

But burial does not come easily. Undeniably, Holmes writes, the photographs represent actuality; better than the hand of a fallible human artist the “honest sunshine” provides at least “some conception of what a repulsive, brutal, sickening, hideous thing” war is. Still, such images compel us to face the following dilemma: “The end to be attained justifies the means, we are willing to believe; but the sight of these pictures is a commentary on civilization such as a savage might well triumph to show its [*sic*] missionaries.” Is civilized savagery any less

savage? The inescapable clarity of the question suggests another motive for repression of the pictures, for now they appear not merely as tokens of a remembered horror, but also of an unendurable contradiction: a war fought for unequivocally admirable ends—with means such as those represented by “mutilated remains.” The question wins no reply, only a counterassertion:

Yet through such martyrdom must come our redemption. War is the surgery of crime. Bad as it is in itself, it always implies that something worse has gone before. Where is the American, worthy of his privileges, who does not now recognize the fact, if never until now, that the disease of our nation was organic, not functional, calling for the knife, and not for washes and anodynes? (12)

The ploy here, of yoking together medical, religious, and legal allusions into a single metaphor, defines yet another role for the photographs. By linking war with surgery, the “crime” of rebellion (slavery being the lesser evil in Holmes’s mind) with organic disease, and the knife with martyrdom and redemption—all in defense of putative privileges of a putative American, the metaphor not only authorizes Antietam, but also adds a sacred aura to the photographs. If what is “repulsive, brutal, sickening, hideous” is in fact the sign of surgical martyrdom, then are not the photographs—the only lasting vestige of actual surgery, the remains of the remains—relics of a sort, emblems of that which we refuse to look at and yet cannot avoid seeing?

What makes the pictures unseeable seems not the gruesome depictions themselves but what they portend: a potential fissure within Holmes’s system of belief, the structure by which Northern intellectuals ranging from patricians to abolitionists explained to themselves the unexpected savagery and mass destruction of the war. The seeable represented the unspeakable: was Union worth the cost? Can the future rising from such unleashed violence be faced without a shudder? It is such vagrant and anarchic thoughts that must be buried, expunged from the experience of the pictures. To revise them as sacral emblems is to preserve at once the sight of them and one’s peace of mind. Indeed peace of mind seems what Holmes’s essay is chiefly about: a worldly-wise Brahmin’s keeping (and displaying) his equanimity. While photography may be the overt theme, urbanity is the subliminal message, urbanity even in the face of the unseeable horrors of war. After recovering his poise Holmes proceeds upon the main business of the essay: to review the current state of photography, the “doings of the sunbeam.” By watching him at work in the essay as a whole, we can better grasp the ideological underpinnings of his treatment of the war pictures.

The essay opens as a jaunty behind-the-scene tour of one of the “principal establishments in the country, that of Messrs. E. and H. T. Anthony, in Broadway, New York.” Holmes wants here to establish “what a vast branch of commerce this business of sun-picturing” has become. What he finds is that behind closed doors

the photography trade is an elaborate manufacturing enterprise complete with steam power, mass-production, and unskilled wage labor. Observing the making of such commodities as decorative portrait albums for the drawing room (and perhaps for the war views just then beginning to arrive upon the market), Holmes casts his eye upon the “operatives,” many of them young women:

A young person who mounts photographs on cards all day long confessed to having never, or almost never, seen a negative developed, though standing at the time within a few feet of the dark closet where the process was going on all day long. One forlorn individual will perhaps pass his days in the single work of cleaning the glass plates for negatives. Almost at his elbow is a toning bath, but he would think it a good joke, if you asked him whether a picture has lain long enough in the solution of gold or hyposulphite. (2)

As an account of fragmented and alienated labor this could hardly be improved upon, particularly since Holmes then proceeds to describe in detail his own attempts at exactly those tasks of production that the assembly line keeps its operatives from learning—presumably even from wishing to learn—the preparation and exposure of the wet-plate negative, the development of the negative, and the making of the print. “Every stage of the process,” he boasts, “from preparing a plate to mounting a finished sun-print, we have taught our hands to perform, and can therefore speak with a certain authority to those who wish to learn the way of working with the sunbeam.” The “those” are not likely to include the operatives whose labor, not incidentally, supplies the material and the tools for the very simplification of the production of photographs that makes it possible for Holmes to remark “how little time is required for the acquisition of skill enough to make a passable negative and print a tolerable picture.”

The second half of the article takes up particular genres of photographs, especially stereographs: landscapes, instantaneous city views, bird’s-eye views of cities from balloons, microscopic and celestial photography, the fad of “spirit” photographs, the growing fashion of unacquainted correspondents exchanging photographs and developing a “photographic intimacy” as “a new form of friendship”—and war views. It is in effect an archival survey of applications, all presupposing the processes described in technical detail in the first section of the essay. Yet in the second half Holmes somehow neglects to recall what he disclosed in the first half—that so far from being a pure reflex of nature, the free “doings of the sunbeam,” photography was a distinctly commercial enterprise undertaken under distinct social relations, those of industrial capitalism—a mode of production and of social relations that in particular ways constrained and prescribed the practice of both professionals and the growing number of “amateur artists,” including those growing numbers of lonely persons who found in photography some forlorn hope of alleviating isolation through exchange of images. Moreover, after his discovery that behind the doors marked No Admittance, at the

very heart of the “inner chamber,” the “sanctuary of art,” lies the worm of unskilled wage labor, unaccountably Holmes begins to weave within his descriptive language allusions to Acheron and Styx and Hades, to speak of “mysterious forces” and “that miracle” of photographic reproduction. Like the images of Antietam, so the memory of those forlorn operatives has been buried in some secret drawer—all the more striking when we recall that the very Antietam stereographs whose ostensibly unmediated actuality brought horror to his soul were *produced* by the very E. and H. T. Anthony Company where he observed a “young person” mounting—blindly, as it were—“photographs on cards all day long.”

As in his compressed account of the burying of the Antietam remains, so in the essay as a whole Holmes virtually diagrams a process of self-blinding, of seeing and forgetting, repressing and displacing, that is a sign of ideology. What difference that forlorn countenance might have made to Holmes’s experience of those pictures, or ours, is not simple to say, but we can say that to the extent that such social facts remain out of sight, invisible, irrecoverable, to that extent photographs more easily seem unmediated, innocent representations—their seeming to be without mediation being precisely the message of an ideology: that they represent a pure capture of nature by a marriage of science and art. In the very act of seeming to make the world visible the photograph as such vanished from sight, the social labor it embodied banished from thought. Thus the “mutilated remains” of the war embraced hidden truths of the photographic process itself.

III

*For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own
concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.*

—Walter Benjamin

“The real war will never get in the books.” We think of Whitman’s words as a lament, a loss for which, however, we can find consolation in photographs.²⁵ For are not the albums of war just that real war gotten into a book, the war made visible, and in its visibility a *legible* event? Consider the formal problems faced by Gardner and Barnard: to provide an appropriate text for a given image (Gardner) or an appropriate image for a given text (Barnard). The apparent simplicity deceives us, however, as it may well have deceived the photographer-authors themselves, for the passage from visibility to legibility proves a more treacherous crossing than the figure of a photographic historicism allows.

Although they adopt logistically different relations between image and text—Gardner places a text opposite, along with a dated caption under each of the one hundred prints that make up the two volumes of *Gardner’s Photographic Sketchbook of the War* (1866); Barnard provides only a number and identifying caption with each of the sixty-one pictures in *Photographic Views of Sherman’s Campaign* (1866)

and adds a separate booklet with a narrative essay and maps—both assume a mutuality of picture and text in rendering a narrative: the story of a specific campaign in Barnard's case, of an entire war in Gardner's. In both the image is primary; Barnard would surely agree with Gardner that "verbal representations of such places, or scenes, may or may not have the merit of accuracy; but photographic presentments of them will be accepted by posterity with an undoubting faith." They share as well a physical or artifactual trait. They are both constructions in a mode without definite precedent: the book or portfolio of text and original photographs (*not* reproductions). Gold-toned albumen prints taken directly from the glass-plate negatives and mounted on heavy paper pages, the photographs are large and bold in size (roughly 8 × 10 inches in Gardner; close to 11 × 14 in Barnard), sensuous and vivacious in surface texture. They are decidedly not album cards or stereographs, nor popular photography. If any photographs at that time might lay a claim to fine art, it would be such prints. Indeed a review of Barnard's book in *Harper's Weekly*, remarking that "they are splendidly mounted and bound in a single volume in the most elegant style," recommended that "although, from its expense, the book cannot be popular, those who can afford to pay one hundred dollars for a work of fine art can not spend their money with more satisfactory results than would be realized in the possession of these views." Both books lay out of reach of a popular audience—for example, of former soldiers. Products of labor (printmaking; bookbinding) associated with fine art, they present themselves as artworks; not merely views but possessions. They soon became collector's items, redeeming their original commercial failure.²⁶

Barnard's work seems the simpler; his text tells a continuous story with little direct mention of the pictures. Text and maps permit placement of each image within a narrative of events as well as within two distinct symbolic discourses: the spatiality of the map, the temporality of the text. No explicit evidence of narrative detail need be present in the actual images—indeed many of them are so bare of explicating detail that only the separate text makes sense of them as parts of a sequence. We can say that Barnard's text not only tells a story but *reads* the photographs, makes pictures of them even without direct allusion. Gardner does not aim at the same kind of continuity. He embraces the entire conflict; his pictures take their meaning not from their place within a specific unfolding event, but in relation to an immanent whole: the war. While Barnard's overt argument is simply to recount the events of a single campaign, Gardner's is to memorialize particular places, the site of events ranging from pitched battles to encampments to the fording of rivers, as "mementoes of the fearful struggle." While Gardner's sympathies are unmistakably with the Union, the struggle itself remains implied, not articulated either as a history of warfare or as a political event. Each of Gardner's texts addresses its specific image, often recounting brief narratives or random details incidental to the explicit subject of the photograph or to the large



FIGURE 4. “Stone Church, Centreville, Va., March, 1862” (Gardner, Plate 4).

patterns of the war. Without accompanying maps, without any systematic effort to cover all major battles and campaigns, the *Sketchbook* assumes a unity given by the war itself, by the reader’s presumed knowledge of the shape of events, the popular narrative that opens at Sumter and concludes at Appomattox. Thus Gardner feels free to open his book *in medias res* and to proceed excursively. His is a *tour* of the war, a series of sketches only casually connected by chronology.

So much seems obvious and unproblematic. Are these photographic constructions free, then, of the difficulties experienced by Holmes and apprehended by Whitman—difficulties arising from the antithetical character of the war itself, its fissure we can think of as sundering not only hearthstones but also livid details of war from overarching ideologies, from containing narratives? It is in the relation between parts and whole, between the single image and the enclosing structure, where we might find signs of strain, of rupture of image and narrative, perception and ideology. Of course we might say that the need for a determinate structure, a specific unvarying sequence more rigorous than the interchangeability of the album, derives as much from the character of photographs as from

any ideological crisis arising from the war: their intransigent ambiguity, for example, under all but the most controlled situations. But ambiguity appears typically in relation to some particular claim of certainty, some notion of distinctness; it appears as a resistance to specific pressures, as a local trope.

Take, for example, Plate 4 of Gardner's book, "Stone Church, Centreville, Va., March, 1862" (Fig. 4). It appears also as "Eve of the Conflict" in the essay on Bull Run in volume one of *The Photographic History of the Civil War* (1911), where it is described as a scene of troops en route to battle:

Past this little stone church on the night of July 20, 1861, and long into the morning of the twenty-first marched lines of hurrying troops. Their uniforms were new, their muskets bright and polished, and though some faces were pale their spirits were elated, for after their short training they were going to take part, for the first time, in the great game of war.²⁷

The text weaves the image into its own narrative of the eve of the first battle of the war, a moment of light-hearted innocence, the laughing young soldiers "hardly realizing in the contagion of their patriotic ardor the grim meaning of real war." But does close examination sustain this role the text imposes on the image? In fact we can hardly tell what the ten men visible in the image are doing there except looking at the camera, signifying their knowledge of and complicity in the making of a photograph from an elevated point above them. The blurred figure on the left tells us that the exposure was of long enough duration for his movement to be recorded, while the others are more successful in holding their poses, presumably as directed by the photographer. The country looks poor, the rutted road hardly inviting for the cart behind the line of soldiers. The expanse of bare and stony foreground heightens a sense of barrenness—strange for July. It is not a scene merely stumbled upon, but chosen by a photographer who wanted us to see something, though the 1911 text leaves us in the dark about what that might be.

The Gardner text is more helpful, though here too the explicit message remains invisible in the image, while the actual event recorded in the image—a group of soldiers in a particular landscape having their photograph taken—remains unacknowledged and unexplained. We learn that the stone church is the center of interest and that the image was made in March 1862, in the early spring almost a year after the Bull Run battle. Gardner's text evokes the natural cycle as the subtext of the picture itself. The prose begins by portraying the village as "perched upon the gentle slope" of a ridge, "looking across fertile fields," there always being "an odor of wild roses and honey-suckle about it, and a genial hospitality to welcome the stranger." But "war crushed it," and "scarcely a vestige of its former self remains." Now the land shows riflepits, redoubts, and graves; armies have passed through. "Guerillas have swarmed about it, cavalry have

charged over its untilled fields, and demoralized divisions have bivouacked for roll-call behind its hills.” What we see, then, is a trace of a history: the rutted road, the rocks lying about, a deserted town inhospitable to the soldier-strangers. Although the description is specific to this town, it seems an emblem of the war itself, a disruption of the peaceful self-contained world that was the American countryside.

Gardner’s text takes hold of the image, saturates it with a meaning, and allows the viewer to incorporate its details into a generalized narrative of the war as an unnatural event, a disruption of America’s self-sufficient pastoral harmony. And indeed the image seems to answer to some of the interpretive demands placed upon it—the rutted road can be taken as a fortuitous sign of the very rift of the war slashing between past and present—but only as long as we repress a troublesome question: what does the only determinate act recorded in the image—the making of the photograph itself—have to do with Gardner’s pastoral metaphor? The most immediate fact registered by the image is the presence of a camera at this particular scene.

Why is it there? Gardner’s account says nothing about that presence and its implications for the character of this war and for the return of the pastoral harmony he envisions. Similar disjunctions between image and text can be found throughout the two volumes; indeed in almost all instances the picture can be turned against the text. Of course the very presence of a text making metaphoric claims may itself bring forth ambiguity, a figure that may inhere in the relation of images and texts in the first place. But it is not the ambiguous relation we want to consider so much as the response to it: Gardner’s effort to contain the image, to suffuse or saturate its quiddity with ideological import—which is to say, to distance the viewer from the specificity of the image, the opacity of its everyday detail.

The main effort occurs in the brief essays attached to each image, but it begins on the title page (Fig. 5) and is evident in the loosely diegetic sequence of the images. The essays interpose, as we have seen, not merely data—names, dates, events—to supplement the image and enhance its power as a moment in the large design that is the war, but also a certain tone and manner, a literariness, an air of self-conscious art. The title page inaugurates this major intonation of the book: both *Sketchbook* and the engraved vignettes appropriating to *Photographic* an association with drawing, the recording with pen or pencil of quick, incisive first-hand impressions directly from life. *Sketchbook* implies a certain latitude of structure, a casualness of pace, the detachment of an interested but unhurried observer, a posture at odds with that of a working wet-plate photographer in the field. The title page captures the reader/viewer in one of the familiar discourses of fine art, and further it specifies those discourses in two iconic ways: its panoramic vista proposing an aesthetic unity in what follows, a whole view to which

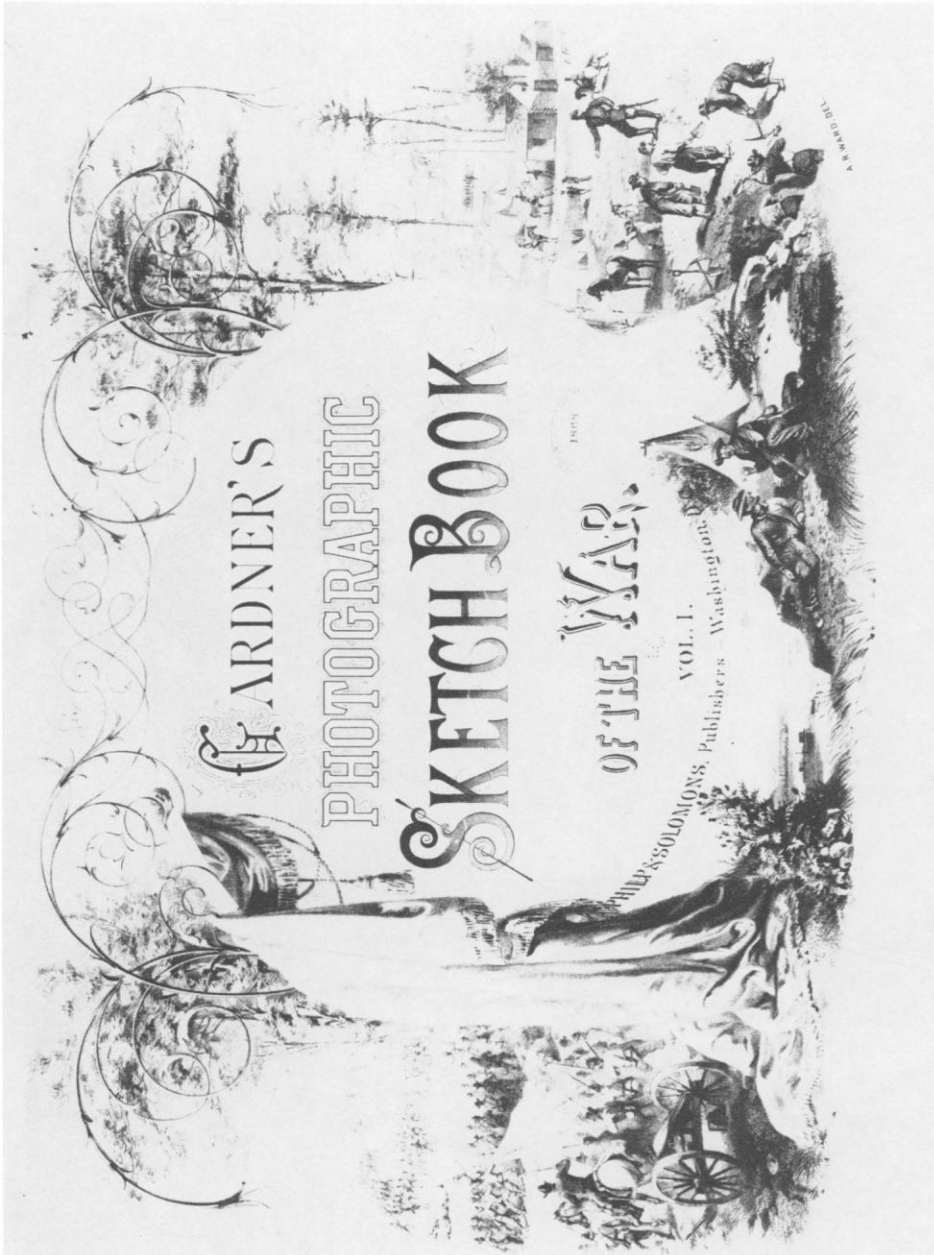


FIGURE 5. Title page of Gardner's catalog.

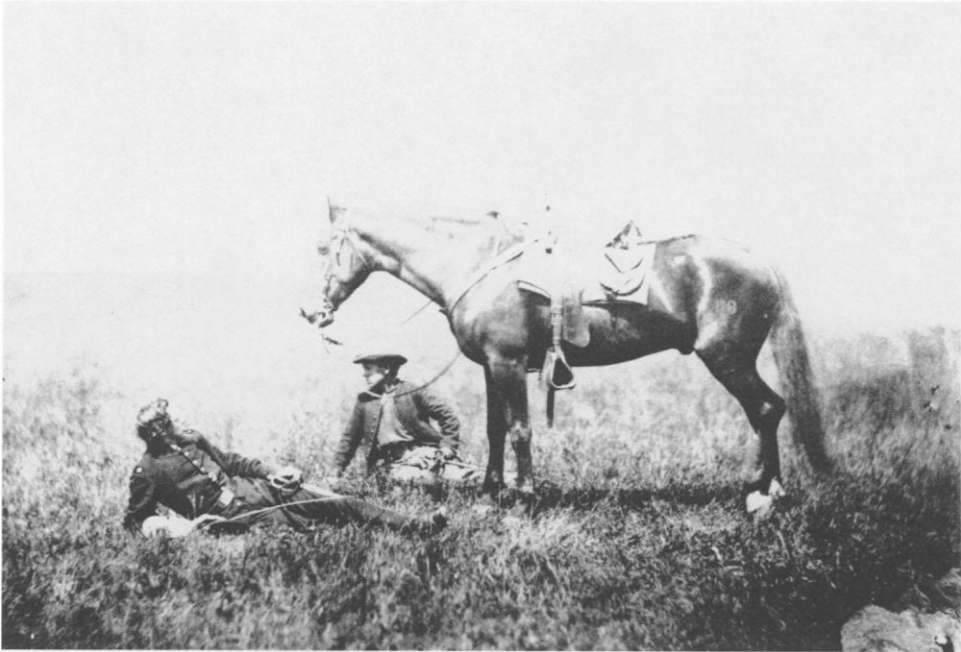


FIGURE 6 (*above*). “The Halt, May, 1864” (Gardner, Plate 50).

FIGURE 7 (*below*). “A Harvest of Death at Gettysburg, July, 1863” (Gardner, Plate 36).





FIGURE 8 (*above*). “Dedication of Monument on Bull Run Battle-Field, June, 1865” (Gardner, Plate 100).

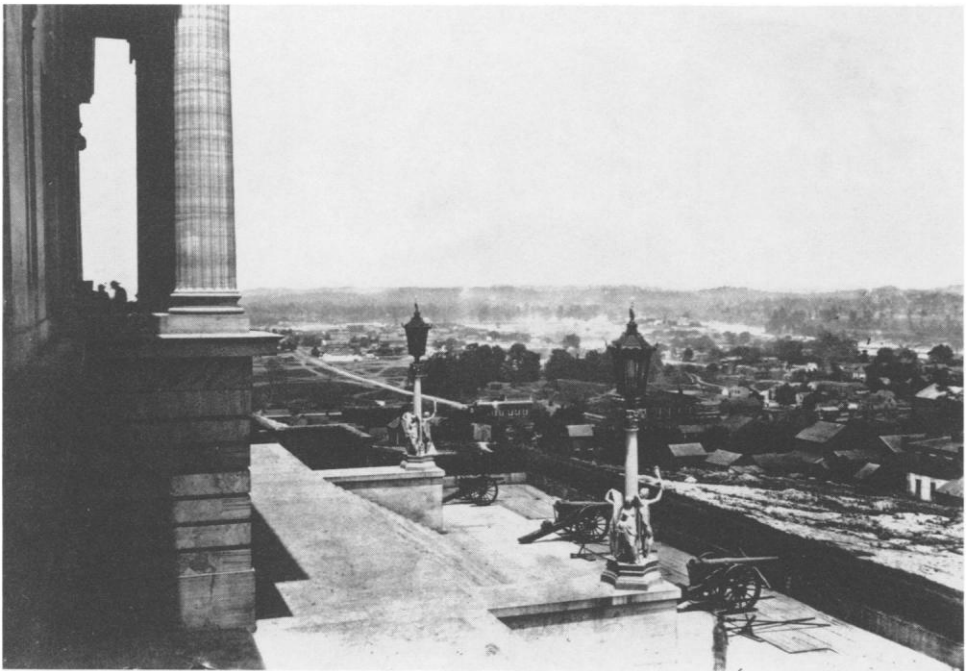
FIGURE 9 (*below*). “Ruins of the Railroad Depot, Charleston, South Carolina” (Barnard, Plate 61).





FIGURE 10. The Capitol, Nashville (Barnard, Plate 2).

FIGURE 11. "Nashville from the Capitol" (Barnard, Plate 3).



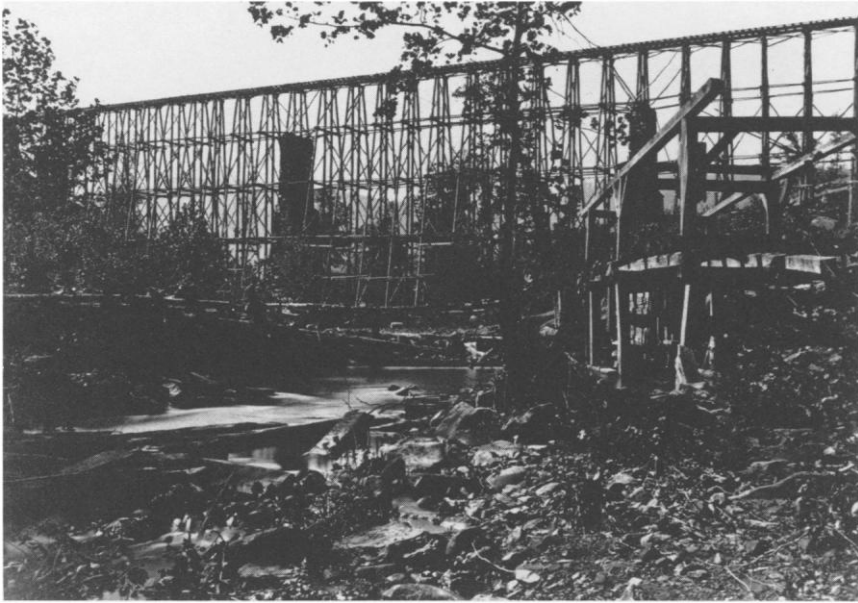


FIGURE 12. "Trestle Bridge at Whiteside" (Barnard, Plate 4).

FIGURE 13. "Ruins in Charleston, S.C." (Barnard, Plate 60).



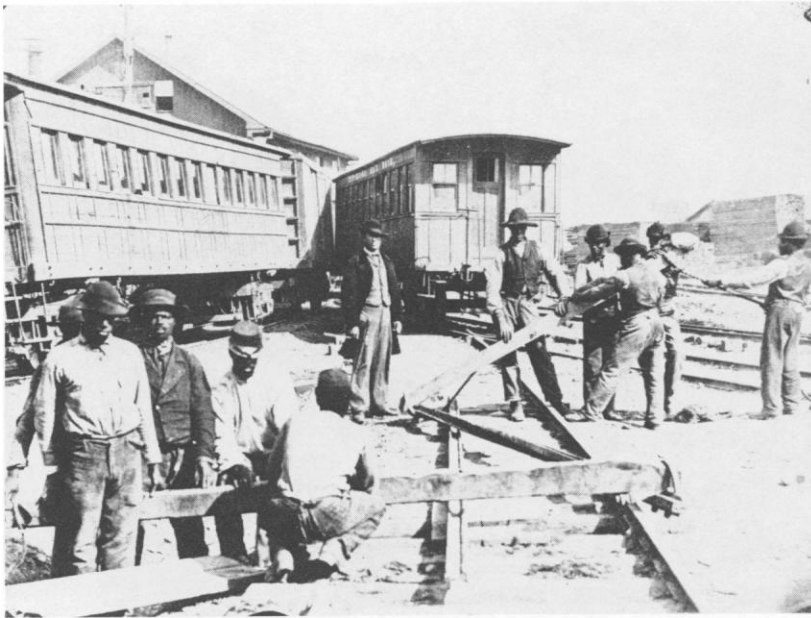


FIGURE 14. Twisting rails on Confederate railroad lines during Civil War (Russell).



FIGURE 15. Closeup of wrecking device (Russell).

the reader is invited as an eyewitness (as if, in the perspective of the title-page imagery, from a high elevation); its specific imagery preconceiving the subjects of the ensuing sketches to be the themes popular in actual newspaper and periodical sketches of the war—camp life to the right, battle to the left, draping flag framing the entire vista in the aura of a symbolic event, a suggestion continued by the setting sun in the deep vista glimpsed at bottom center, signifying nature and its ongoing cycles as the stage for what follows. Moreover in the prominence of an officer on the right (gesturing as if presiding over the scene) and of a mounted officer on the left, as against the foot soldiers in battle and the diggers of trenches, the imagery projects not only a social hierarchy but a notion of representation that gives priority to officers and leaders, the mass of soldiers filling in the scene. In the two figures lounging in the foreground, however, we catch an echo of an American frontier vernacular: the campfire, the space in the wilderness, the relaxed posture of swapping tales, the long rifle at the ready. Representing continuity with an earlier way of life, and one that presumably persists even through the war, this trope of casual interchange between males at the threshold of the scene (and of the book) confirms the aura of *Sketchbook*, a motif repeated in the course of the book, as in Plate 50, “The Halt” (Fig. 6).

Gardner’s discursive strategy of at once displacing attention from the figural surface of the print (its quotidian detail) and linking images into a large general narrative of the war²⁸ serves well the ideological principle he enunciates in the brief preface: the goal of preserving as “mementoes of the fearful struggle” images of “localities that would scarcely have been known, and probably never remembered” but that are now celebrated and “held sacred as memorable fields, where thousands of brave men yielded up their lives a willing sacrifice for the cause they had espoused.” Like Holmes he proposes remembrance of sacrifice as a way of remembering the dismembered, reuniting the dead with the living. Gardner also takes the war as disease and speaks of victory as healing. As mementos the pictures are trophies of that therapeutic consummation: by memorializing, celebrating, remembering as sacred, the images participate in the process of making whole again, restoring American society to its familiar place in the bosom of nature. They participate by proposing the visual terms on which victory and healing—the remembrance of sacrifice—might be conceived, proposing, that is, a way of *reading* traces of war on the landscape through the intermediary of the properly contextualized photographic sketch. Thus the book’s most famous image, probably the most frequently reprinted of all Civil War photographs: Plate 36, “A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, July, 1863” (Fig. 7). The title alone transposes the image from the realm of specificity to the realm of generality, of allegory and exhortation; indeed the title calls up associations by which we are led to read the figure of horse and rider dimly focused in the rear as the figure of the grim reaper, a symbolic presence materialized as if from the mist of battle. Without

surprise we read, “Such a picture conveys a useful moral: It shows the blank horror and reality of war, in opposition to its pageantry. Here are the dreadful details! Let them aid in preventing such another calamity falling upon the nation.” Thus the text reads the blankness, writes itself upon the scene. Frozen in their final agony, however, the corpses are self-memorializing prefigurations, not without reproach, of stone shafts and carvings that will shortly replace them as site markers of the horror of Gettysburg. Appropriately the book concludes not with an image of Appomattox, but of the “Dedication of Monument on Bull Run Battle-Field, June, 1865” (Fig. 8). The image shows not only the stone shaft in the rear, but the dedicatees monumentalizing themselves by standing obediently for their picture.

The Barnard book also monumentalizes, though differently.²⁹ The subject of its memorializing logic is not the Union or even victory, but Sherman: the modern professional soldier represented in the text as a visionary who grasps totally the single-minded purpose of war—to win by destroying the enemy. Proceeding as if ineluctably from that vision in the opening studio portrait of “Sherman and His Generals” to the concluding image of devastation in “Ruins of the Railroad Depot, Charleston, South Carolina” (Fig. 9), the tightly structured march of images here generates the illusion of an unstoppable force thrusting itself through space, overturning everything in its path. It is not the force of righteousness or political rectitude, but merely military power: superior numbers, weaponry, and communications. None of Gardner’s metaphorizing rhetoric is evident here. Yet the pictures employ a visual rhetoric that suggests a quite subtle relation between the arrangement of images and the ideological narrative (the celebration of Sherman and his methods). Two particular devices might be singled out, one formal and the other iconic: the consistent device of shifting the camera’s perspective in contiguous images, a shot/reverse-shot procedure that first shows a position from one point of view, then takes up that position for yet another view; and iconically, the strategic deployment of the imagery of classical revival architecture. We can see both devices at work in Plates 2 and 3, of the capitol at Nashville, the Unionist staging ground for Sherman’s movement into the Confederate South (Figs. 10, 11). The movement back and forth creates an illusion of spatiality and motion, an illusion that enforces the covert message of the images: the “city on the hill,” as the text informs us, “the citadel of the fortifications about the city”—an image not only to be gazed upon but to look out from, and in surveying the world from that eminence we are also, as we see, aiming guns upon it.

The opening chord resounds; classicism now represents political power backed by firepower. From this telling exchange of perspectives we proceed in Plate 4 (Fig. 12) across a trestle bridge hastily erected by the First Michigan Engineers and the Railroad Construction Corps on the ruins of a stone bridge destroyed

by the enemy—a symbolically apt instance of Union skill in replacing an older masonry structure with a new industrial form—into the rugged and wild landscape of the following pictures, eventually to find ourselves among the ruins of Atlanta, Columbia—and Charleston, where it all began. The concluding two images disclose the destination to be not a simple physical site but a symbolic event foretold by the opening images of Sherman's commanding presence and the fortified, redoubtable, and triumphant neoclassicism of the Nashville capitol: the ruination of Southern classicism, echoing the devastation of the landscape that had been the chief trope in the disturbingly depopulated images at the heart of the book. The penultimate image, Plate 60 (Fig. 13), places two contemplative figures and a mirroring pond in the midst of ruins, reclaiming the scene for culture by aestheticizing it. The final image puts the seal on this ideological appropriation of the devastated South as *national* experience by making of the ruined railroad depot a Roman aqueduct in a desolate landscape (Fig. 9), thus providing an aesthetically elevating ruin for the American landscape (the covert message being the real triumph over that classical portico by the trestle of industrialization).

It is striking how vacant, empty even of corpses, are Barnard's images, an emptiness perhaps in accord with the book's motive: the celebration of a military vision. It is, moreover, the vision of a *leader*. As does his text, Barnard's pictures efface the common soldier. The text opens with a Homeric (or Bancroftian) listing of generals under Sherman. The text always identifies armies and smaller units by the name of their commanding officer—certainly not unusual, but a convention that underscores the importance of hierarchy, of subordination and obedience, one of the war's significant subliminal lessons.

This aspect of both Barnard's and Gardner's books—the distancing if not expunging of the *working* war—becomes especially notable in light of the most remarkable of the albums of war: Herman Haupt and A. J. Russell's *Photographs Illustrative of Operations in Construction and Transportation* (1863), an illustrated instruction manual including “experiments made to determine the most practical and expeditious modes to be resorted to in the construction, destruction and reconstruction of roads and bridges.” Work is the entire theme here; the photographs themselves are working images representing particular tasks and tools. Each of Russell's photographs is keyed by number to Haupt's text, which in turn addresses the image entirely by its representation of an act or object associated with an act: “No. 1—Illustrates a mode of transportation which was adopted with great advantage on the Potomac in establishing a communication between Alexandria and Aquia Creek. It can be used to connect the various roads which have their termini on navigable rivers. . . .” And so on. Some of the images are closeups of tools or parts of rafts or bridges or torpedos for wrecking them. Most of them are scenes of labor, showing construction (or destruction) crews frozen in the



FIGURE 16. "What Do I Want, John Henry? Warrenton, Va., November, 1862" (Gardner, Plate 27).

performance of an act named and described in the text and made comprehensible as part of the larger picture of the construction and destruction of railroad systems. There is no diegesis, no telos, no memorial or monumentalization—only an archive of photographs illustrative of tasks and tools of labor. The text represents exactly the mentality of calculation and measurement that would turn immediately after the war to industrial production, especially to the training of an industrial working class: "Forty men, working in pairs, with the material placed in front of them (see No. 70), put together twenty frames in sixteen minutes, and several of the pairs finished their frames in eight minutes. No. 71 represents the frame partly, and No. 72 entirely, finished. From five to eight minutes were consumed in tying on the blanket. From two to four minutes were required to untie and take off blankets. Five minutes were found sufficient to take frames apart and pile the sticks." Thus does time study appear in the belly of the war, the camera in attendance (Figs. 14, 15).

It is clear from the Haupt-Russell album how concretely the Civil War served

as a proto-industrial experience.³⁰ Here there is no bother with an overtly ideological rhetoric, just as there is no display of that traditional flamboyance of the officer corps prominent in the other albums. Picture and text make instantly manifest the link between the war's regimentation and the industrialization that would so thoroughly transform the way of life of American society. The ideology of Russell's album lies in its transparency as a modernizing document, the clarity with which it concedes the role of its medium in representing the war's modernity—a modernity it shared, in fact, with the rest of the North's complex and, as it turned out, decisive communications infrastructure. Indeed photography proved a not inconsiderable element in the war's modernity, in what made that event such a profound watershed in the transformation of America into a modern nation-state and military-industrial power: the camera's endowment of *visibility*, in images virtually simultaneous with the event, sealing the final stamp of modernity on the war.

Taking them as evidence in the unambiguous sense of the word, moreover, we find that the Haupt-Russell pictures help establish one particular social fact: the use by the Union forces of free black labor. By their character as illustrations the photographs show particularities as generalities, events and objects particularized—as only the camera was able to perform that representational act—for the sake of demonstrating a general point about construction and destruction. Particularities are not effaced by the text; they are simply not acknowledged; they are irrelevant distractions from the abstract issue at hand. The text rationalizes for the sake of efficient production; the pictures particularize for the sake of effective empirical and heuristic communication. The fact that *blacks* comprise a large portion of the labor force manifest in the images is strictly incidental to the purposes of the book; they appear as *labor*, freely and openly shown as such. As they are not in the other two albums, where their relative absence makes blacks most conspicuously present, an invisibility that argues that what the albums show is not so much the war as one ideological version of it.³¹ The Russell pictures offer a perspective upon the other albums—not on their exclusion of blacks (or their confinement of them to marginal roles) but, using that as a major instance, on their containment of them within a finally restrictive and constricting ideology.

A genre scene in the *Sketchbook* shows a black youth standing next to a seated officer, poised as if to serve him a demijohn of whisky and a plate of food (Plate 27, "What Do I Want, John Henry? Warrenton, Va., November, 1862": Fig. 16). As if oblivious to this scene are three other figures, also white officers, arranged in quasi-studio poses, their eyes sliding off at an angle oblique to the camera (the standing figure may be looking at the transaction between the black servant and his officer, though not necessarily). The picture declares a stilted staging of a scene, a theatricalization of an event—a typical exchange between master and servant, the text informs us: one asks, "What do I want, John Henry?" and the



FIGURE 17. "A Burial Party, Cold Harbor, Va., April, 1865" (Gardner, Plate 94).

other, "that affectionate creature," replies with the demijohn of hard liquor, which is what "his untutored nature" always suggests. The rest of the sketch fills out the portrait of "an unusual capacity for the care of boots and other attentions," a propensity for master's "spirits" and for "the other sex," and a distaste for "manual labor." The theatricality of the image itself discloses, albeit unconsciously, the theatricality of the scene: how racism represents itself in the staging of roles, roles self-proclaimed as artificial and theatrical and obviously accessible throughout the culture, North and South.

Another text, attached to Plate 94, "A Burial Party, Cold Harbor, Va., April, 1865" (Fig. 17), offers the following:

This sad scene represents the soldiers in the act of collecting the remains of their comrades, killed at the battles of Gaines' Mill and Cold Harbor. It speaks ill of the residents of that part of Virginia, that they allowed even the remains of those they considered enemies, to decay unnoticed where they fell. The soldiers, to whom commonly falls the task of burying the dead, may possibly have been called away before the task was completed. At such

times the native dwellers of the neighborhood would usually come forward and provide sepulture for such as had been left uncovered.

At first we read that the scene “represents the soldiers,” who then turn out to be missing; in their place, we learn next, are “native dwellers,” though presumably *not* the ones alluded to as “residents of that part of Virginia” who allow the dead to remain unburied.

For whose benefit is this circumlocution? The resonance of the image continues beyond text and frame, its grim ironies and bizarre revelations suddenly flashing up before us, the very image of the remains Holmes and his culture wished to bury: the decomposing flesh and bleached bones of the dead attended by those very humans whose claim to full humanity represented an aim of the war already repressed during the war itself. In a gesture so simple that it eludes the author of the text, the two grand invisibilities of the war become palpable here: the dead in their state of utter decomposition and dissolution; blacks in the posture of field laborers whose performance of the task of sweeping the battlefield clean of its grim refuse prefigures a history we still inhabit. Shedding all conventional theatricality the image discloses a hidden logic: the visibility of the war has depended upon the invisibility of exactly the uncanny relation represented here.

How to recapture and recaption such images, to win them from authorized functions and meanings, away from practices that view them merely as “the past brought into the present tense”; how to save the image, in Benjamin’s words, “from a conformism that is about to overpower it.” The lesson of reading seems plain. If we assume a real war to which we might be present as surrogate spectators, we risk finding only the abstraction of disconnected moments. The real war lies in our own efforts to win images away from the clutch of historicizing ideologies, to recover a connected history by restoring those vanished mediators who might reconstitute the image as one of our own. The real war inhabits the albums of war only as we choose to wage it there.

Notes

- * I wish to thank the Wilson Center and the Rockefeller Foundation for their generous support during the research for and the writing of this essay; Joe Thomas, chief of the Still Picture Branch of the National Archive, for his gracious sharing of information; and especially Jerald C. Maddox, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, for helpful advice and many acts of kindness.

1. This limitation seems the result of the cumbersome wet-plate process, which made photographing on the field awkward and dangerous. See Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene* (1938; reprint: New York, 1964), Reese Jenkins, *Image and Enterprise* (Baltimore, 1975), and Doug Munson, "The Practice of Wet-Plate Photography," in *The Documentary Photograph as a Work of Art* (Chicago, 1976), 33–38. For an argument that distant and high perspectives and lack of closeup views typical of the war photographs represent not technical limitations but a set of pictorial conventions, see Joel Snyder, "Photographers and Photographs of the Civil War," *ibid.*, 17–22. But see "Photographs from the High Rockies," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (September 1869), 465: "The battle of Bull Run would have been photographed 'close-up' but for the fact that a shell from one of the rebel field-pieces took away the photographer's camera."
2. Of course cinema and video must also be included as photographic media. Even before D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) the Civil War was one of the most popular themes of early cinema. See Jack Spears, *The Civil War on the Screen and Other Essays* (New York, 1977), and Paul G. Spehr, et al., *The Civil War in Motion Pictures* (Washington, D.C., 1961).
3. See Pat Hodgson, *Early War Photography* (Boston, 1974). Also, Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *Roger Fenton: Photographer of the Crimean War* (London, 1954).
4. See Eric Foner, "The Causes of the American Civil War: Recent Interpretations and New Directions," in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980), 15–33. For a brief incisive discussion of the war in a world context see David M. Potter, "The Civil War in the History of the Modern World: A Comparative View," in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge, 1968), 287–99.
5. Francis Trevalyan Miller, ed., *The Photographic History of the Civil War* (New York, 1912) 1: 16. The total number of photographs reproduced in these volumes is about 3,800. Ideological uses of Civil War photographs to propagate one or another version of the war, especially in the decades just after the introduction of half-tone reproduction in the 1880s, awaits serious study.
6. George Haven Putnam, "The Photographic Record as History," *ibid.*, 60.
7. *Ibid.*, 16.
8. The suggestion that photography might be of use to the War Department seems first to have been broached by the American Photographical Society, an amateur group, in 1861. The proposal seems to have floundered, and Brady then organized his own private venture. See William Welling, *Photography in America: The Formative Years, 1839–1900. A Documentary History* (New York, 1978), 150.
9. The entire photographic project related to the war remains to be sorted out. See Josephine Cobb, "Mathew B. Brady's Photographic Gallery in Washington," *The Columbia Historical Society Records* (1953–54), 28–69; "Alexander Gardner," *Image 7* (1958), 124–36; "Photographers of the Civil War," *Military Affairs* 26 (Fall 1962), 127–35; Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene*; "M. B. Brady and the Daguerreotype Era," *American Photography* 29 (1935), 486–98, 548–60; Paul Vanderbilt, *Guide to the Special Collections of Prints & Photographs* (Washington, D.C., 1955), 18–25. The most ambitious effort so far to assign names, places, and dates to specific photographs can be found in the remarkably meticulous studies by William A. Frassanito: *Gettysburg: A Journey in Time* (New York, 1975), *Antietam: The Photographic Legacy of America's Bloodiest Day* (New York, 1978), *Grant and Lee: The Virginia Campaigns, 1864–1865* (New York, 1983).

10. Although the evidence is largely circumstantial, it seems that Gardner broke with Brady over the issue of credit. Gardner opened his own Washington gallery, fielded his own corps of cameramen, and always listed the maker of the negative (not always accurately) in his catalogs and publications. See Cobb, "Alexander Gardner." On the copyright situation at this time, see Welling, *Photography in America*.
11. On Brady as a popular historian during his career as a portrait photographer see Alan Trachtenberg, "Brady's Portraits," *Yale Review* 73 (Winter 1984), 230–53.
12. *Brady's National Historical Collection* (New York, 1869), 4. This document represents Brady's petition to Congress for sale of his collection. Cf. 3–4: "The Views were taken on the spot, during the progress of hostilities, by Mr. Brady and his assistants, and represent 'grim-visaged war' exactly as it appeared." For an account of Gardner's petition in the same year, see Cobb, "Alexander Gardner," 127: "That during that period he photographed all the important scenes and incidents which in the aggregate compose the only history of the Rebellion in that form and are known as *Gardner's Photographic Incidents and Memories of the War for the Union*."
13. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1976), 129. See also Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* 42 (Winter 1982), 311–19.
14. Edward W. Earle, ed., *Points of View: The Stereograph in America. A Cultural History* (Rochester, N.Y., 1979).
15. "The Steroscope and the Stereograph," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1859), 744.
16. "Sun-Painting and Sun-Sculpture," *Atlantic Monthly* (July 1861), 14–15. For valuable commentary on parallels between Holmes's rhetoric and commodity production see Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *The Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1981), 22–23.
17. Taft, *Photography and the American Scene*, 141–52.
18. Cobb refers to two Brady albums, *The Album Gallery* and *Incidents of the War*, in "Mathew B. Brady's Photographic Gallery in Washington," 53.
19. Both in Dover paperbacks: *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War* (New York, 1959) and Barnard's *Photographic Views of Sherman's Campaign* (New York, 1977). A commercial photographer in Oswego, New York, before and after the war, Barnard worked at various times for Brady, Gardner, and the Union army as the official photographer of the Military Division of the Mississippi.
20. Herman Haupt, *Photographs Illustrative of Operations in Construction and Transportation, as Used to Facilitate the Movements of the Armies of the Rappahannock, of Virginia, and of the Potomac, including Experiments Made to Determine the Most Practical and Expeditious Modes to be Resorted to in the Construction, Destruction and Reconstruction of Roads and Bridges* (Boston, 1863). A commissioned Union officer assigned as photographer to Haupt's U.S. Military Railroad Construction Corps, Captain Andrew J. Russell also produced large-plate prints for the trade and assembled several presentation albums of great interest. See Joe Buberger and Matthew Isenberg, "Preface," in *Russell's Civil War Photographs* (New York, 1982), and William Gladstone, "Captain Andrew J. Russell: First Army Photographer," *Photographica* 10, no. 2 (February 1978), 7–9.
21. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam," *Atlantic Monthly* (July 1863), 1–17. Subsequent references in text.
22. Frassanito attributes these images to Alexander Gardner. See *Antietam*, 14–18 and *passim* for his fascinating account. On October 20, 1862, the *New York Times* compared these pictures, displayed by Brady in his Broadway gallery, to "a few dripping bodies,

- fresh from the field, laid along the pavement." Such pictures "bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war."
23. "My Hunt after 'The Captain,'" *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1862), 738–64.
 24. See George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965), 33–34 and *passim*.
 25. See, for example, the sumptuously illustrated (133 photographs) edition of *Specimen Days* (Boston, 1971).
 26. *Harper's Weekly*, December 8, 1866. For a bibliography of works on "photographically illustrated books," see Julia Van Haften, "'Original Sun Pictures,'" *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* (Spring 1977), 355–61.
 27. *Photographic History of the Civil War* 1: 149.
 28. See, e.g., Plates 16 and 19 and their accompanying texts.
 29. In what follows I am indebted to the excellent unpublished paper on Barnard's text by Danna Blesser.
 30. See Foner, "Causes of the American Civil War." Also Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600–1865* (New York, 1976), 159–86.
 31. *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, vol. 9, presents the subject of "colored troops" under the heading of "The Lighter Side," 173–84. On blacks in Civil War photographs see William Gladstone, "The 29th Connecticut Colored Infantry," *Military Images* (May–June 1981), 16–27; Jackie C. Parker and William Gladstone, "James Monroe Trotter," *Negro History Bulletin* 45, no. 4 (December 1982), 95–96.