2013 Hawaii University International Conferences
Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences
January 6th to January 8th
Ala Moana Hotel
Honolulu, Hawaii

Land, Body and Imprint: The Photography of Stephen Chalmers

Deanna Pizzitelli
Instructor & MFA Candidate
University of Arizona

Land, Body and Imprint: The Photography of Stephen Chalmers

Deanna Pizzitelli, Instructor & MFA Candidate

University of Arizona

1206 East Lester Street, Tucson, AZ, 85719

520.743.6682

We move through the landscape; it does not move through us.[1]
-Susan Stewart

The body is often considered to be a microcosm of the land. This suggests that the body is a container of universal, natural processes, a miniature version of a larger landscape. Consider the notion of land as gendered feminine: this is the idea of Mother Nature, where the unpredictable weather or the curvaceous mountain is analogous to the female personality and form. This example is to emphasize that the body is always projected onto the land in some way, physically or culturally. In the case listed above, the body is an arbitrary means of description for the natural world. There are other ways in which the body is reflected in the landscape. We might consider the physical consequences that occur when people interact with or manipulate their environments, or even the echo of the body as it *once* inhabited or altered a space. The former scenario explores the intimate relationship that this paradigm of land and body has with the world of memory. This is the body *implied*, and it's use in artistic representation speaks to the human application of memory—what we choose to remember, and what we choose to forget.

This paper does not provide a history of the land-body tradition in art. Rather, it deals with issues of representation that exist within this tradition, as they relate to the theme of memory. Because this theme is broad in its reach, it is important to acknowledge some terms associated with it. Pierre Nora wrote: "We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left."[2] This is an acknowledgment of what memory entails: its relationship with time, mortality and preservation, its role in the tension between presence and absence, recognition and denial. Memory is revived or suppressed in a variety of ways—the memorial, the archive, the dominant

---

[1] Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection.* London: Duke University Press, 1993. Page 71.
[2] Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire." *Representations* 26, (Spring 1989), 7-24. Page 7.

history of a culture. These terms will be explored in greater detail through a case study of Stephen Chalmers' work, *Dump Sites*.

Chalmers explores the photographic representation of land and body as a means of remembrance. Trained as a social worker and ambulance technician, his interest in memory was expressed with *In Memoriam* (2000), a project documenting roadside memorials. Several years after its completion, Chalmers' accompanied his partner on a hike through Tiger Mountain in Washington State. He was later told that their path had been a site of violence: in this place, a serial killer had dumped the heads of three victims. This experience was the origin of *Dump Sites* (2009).

Dump Sites is a collection of large-scale, inkjet photographs.[3] It documents sites of trauma in the American West Coast, places in which bodies have been disposed of by serial killers. Using a large-format camera, Chalmers' distorts the plane of focus to render sharp the location where the corpse(s) was found. He photographs these sites months, even years, after the event, when no physical trace of violence remains. The only knowledge provided, aside from a generic and often pastoral landscape, is the name(s) of the victim(s). Rather than assert a particular argument, this essay explores the emotional possibilities of this work in relation to memory and representation. It is organized into four arenas, or threads of thought: the Incomprehensible, the Absent, the Spectacle and the Memorial. These headings deal, respectively, with issues of trauma, absence, looking and memorializing. In doing so, this paper explores questions both public and private: why does the media give prevalence to predators, rather than victims? How is a traumatic event processed, whether experienced directly or indirectly? How might an image fail or succeed in dignifying the dead? This paper analyzes the

[3] *Dumpsites* has also been exhibited under the title *Unmarked.*

relationship between land, body and imprint, exploring the ways in which the body asserts its memory onto the land.

The Incomprehensible: Understanding Trauma

Traumatic experience deals with the processing of psychological injury or pain, of extraordinary mental and physical stress. Reactions to traumatic events vary between individuals, but patterns between the trauma and its memory are apparent. "There are a number of *temporal paradoxes* that occur in patients with PTSD…One is that recall of the actual trauma may often be impaired, whereas patients may reexperience aspects of the trauma in the form of intrusive thoughts, nightmares or flashbacks." [4] The full or partial amnesia of an event not only suggests its degree of intensity, but also points to an inability to dissect, logically, the events in question. This incomprehensibility, as we will see, exists not only in the victim, but also in the observers of that victim—in our case, the audience.

It is necessary to ask to what extent *Dump Sites* is a form of flashback. In the sense that all photographs are flashbacks, they recall a singular instance in the time-space continuum. They also entail an act of re-photographing the initial visual documentation of the crime scene. Chalmers was familiar with such documentation, it being essential to discover the location of the body. Yet, the audience sees only the setting of violence, and not the circumstances that produced it. This is consistent with the phenomenon of traumatic experience, and with the events represented. Only the victim and the predator are privy to the experience of violence, only the victim privy to the experience of receiving it. But the victim is dead, and access to this

[4] John Krystal quoted in Caruth, Cathy. "Recapturing the Past: Introduction." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995. 151-157. Page 152.

information is locked in the unreachable memory of an unreachable person. The relationship of trauma and memory is such that this information would have been impaired, assuming that the victim was physically conscious during the attack. All this is to highlight the layers of distance that we, as viewers, experience in Chalmers' photographs, and photographs like it. These images are flashbacks, insofar as an accurate flashback is possible. Chalmers' is calling these events into memory by providing a secondary experience of them, those fragments provided by the image.

This lack of information is paralleled by a lack of explanation—the dialectic between knowing and understanding that informs *Dump Sites*. Many scholars, Cathy Caruth among them, have commented on the ineffable quality of trauma. Trauma lies outside of imaginable experience, its representation conveying "both *the truth of an event*, and the *truth of its incomprehensibility*." [5] In witnessing and experiencing trauma, we inevitably ask the question why. We dissect the life of the killer, the neurological predispositions of such persons. We consider the role of the media and popular culture. Whatever the case, there is never a satisfactory answer because we can never *really* know. These questions incite endless avenues of thought, but the issue of death and the concept of human nature are epistemological in trait and essentially untamed. The question why is an empty vessel and Chalmers is attempting to fill that emptiness with a sort of reverence.[6] These things may never be understood, but at least they can be acknowledged.

All this highlights the impossible task of memory and the burden of knowing. Figure 4 is a dumpsite that marks the discovery of thirteen identified bodies, and bone fragments from at least two-dozen John and Jane Does. As Chalmers' suggests, these places provide, for many, the

---

[5] Caruth. "Recapturing the Past: Introduction." Page 155. Caruth speaks specifically about this phenomenon in relation to *Shoah*, Claude Lanzmann's Holocaust documentary.
[6] Chalmers, Stephen. "Dump Sites—Artist Statement." *Askew View: The Photography of Stephen Chalmers.* 2007. Http://www.askew-view.com/statements/dumpsites.pdf. Page 1.

answer of a person's whereabouts[7]. But they also provide the knowledge of things that will never be answered. There were other bodies dumped here, those that science cannot identify. The audience is given the task of making visible a person that is in everyway invisible. Presented with this knowledge, the audience acts as a removed witness—aware of this need to remember, obliged to testify.[8] This is the paradox of the text. It allows us to categorize and to label these places: what they are, how they were used. By contrast, its minimal nature enforces the absurdity of the archive. To label something as remembered does not make it a memory. Rather, it becomes the representation of the need to remember. As we will discuss in the following pages, these images are competing with public perceptions of serial murder. They can infiltrate the minds of the audience without changing the collective memory, that which the public absorbs.

This lack of knowledge and understanding is traumatic in and of itself. Denied the specifics of place, time and action, the audience is confronted with an eerie unknowing. In viewing this work, we face the possibility of our own mortality. One line of thinking is specific to the circumstances of the site: is this killer active? Is this my neighborhood? Another is broader: could I face this kind of death? Herein lies the "capacity of photographs…to produce suffering through the very act of representing it."[9] Within these images, the traumatic imprint on the mind is paralleled by the body's imprint on the land. The land is a dual force of destruction and healing, simultaneously hiding the memory of place while allowing for more positive interpretations of it. The mind is no different as it rejects those experiences of ineffable trauma.

---

[7] Chalmers. "Dump Sites—Artist Statement." Page 1.
[8] Fitzpatrick, Blake. "Disaster Topographics: Landscape as History, Ruin and Trace." 2005. *Image and Inscription: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Photography*. Robert Bean, ed. Toronto: Gallery 44 and YYZ Books, 52-63. Page 60.
[9] Reinhardt, Mark. "Picturing Violence: Aesthetics and the Anxiety of Critique." (2006) *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain*. Chicago: Williams College Museum of Art and the University of Chicago Press, 13-36. Page 15.

Like the mental experience of flashback, Chalmers uses photography to assert this relationship of presence and absence—to inflict on the present the weight of the past.

The Absent: Aesthetics and the Invisible Victim

Theories on the representation of suffering often attend to images that physically show the victim—the starving child, the tortured prisoner, the mass grave. This type of imagery poses ethical questions regarding the aestheticization of suffering. Chalmers' photographs, however, render the body absent, symbolic of death and of the victim's initial status as missing. Considering the trope of absence, to what degree is Chalmers aestheticizing pain and to what extent is he successful?

These photographs differ from direct representations of suffering—the audience is not being asked to witness violence, but rather to reflect on sites with violent memories. The photographic medium is used to stress the beauty and solitude of these places. Using the large format camera, Chalmers renders the majority of the image soft; only the area where the corpse was found is sharp. He is emphasizing atmosphere, rather than subject. It is in this way that these images are a call to pictorialism. At times they echo the pastoral, at other times the wilderness, consistent with the American landscape tradition of the 19th Century. The equipment and technique adopted enforce these images as fine art photographs, produced within an artistic tradition, or at least within the knowledge of it. Herein lie the ethical issues of *Dump Sites*. The absence of the body and the beauty of the landscape belie our understanding of the horrific. This has the potential to distract, to further distance the viewer from the victim, compromising public reverence. If we adopt this perspective, these images are euphemistic: they ask us to remember, but cause us to forget. They negate the very purpose for which they were made.

There are also ways in which beauty can positively represent suffering. In her essay, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry defends beauty as a viable route to justice. "The thing perceived, the beautiful object, has conferred on it by the beholder a surfeit of aliveness: even if it is inanimate, it comes to be accorded a fragility and consequent level of protection normally reserved for the animate."[10] Because these landscapes are beautiful, we are inclined to care for them. Simply by looking, the viewer confers on the image the sentiments of the living—shock, anger, empathy. The humanity of the victim is emphasized: there exists a human presence, a receiver of sentiments. Given Chalmers' background in social work, and his departure from mainstream representations of pain, the defense of beauty is a logical perspective to take. The artist is credible as an individual that respects human life. This attests to the inherently selfless quality of beauty, for the act of looking at a beautiful thing or person is also an act of looking away from the self.[11] This is what Chalmers asks of his audience: to acknowledge a subject that most would avoid.

Because the absent body permits the scenic beauty of the image to dominate, the knowledge provided by text and title offend our initial perception of the land. This work confers on the audience a state of personal loss. The viewer is robbed of the sentiments provided by aesthetically similar spaces—serenity and calm. The paradox of a generic landscape and a site of violence produce shock. It makes these images memorable, and therefore asserts the victim's right to be remembered. To surprise the viewer is to "disrupt the complacency of the present with traces of ruin and victimization as dislodged from the continuum of history."[12] *Dump Sites* uses

---

[10] Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999. Page 41.

[11] Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just.* Page 40. Scarry's article can be considered a positive interpretation of the expression, 'beauty is the bait."

[12] Fitzpatrick, Blake. "Disaster Topographics." Page 53.

absence to stress the human relationship with time; the empty landscape is a metaphor for the death process, the forgotten event, and the body decayed. Chalmers suggests a multiplicity of bodies in the time-space continuum: the victim, the predator, the police, the photographer. We might also include the body of the unknowing witness, passing through these sites, unaware of their history, and the body of the viewer, witnessing these sites without passing through them. Both parties are appropriate metaphors for absence, truly distant from the subject that exists within their sight. The array of bodies that appear after and because of the victim's death—to investigate, to photograph, to look—attest to the body's ability to imprint itself on the land.

It is also necessary to consider absence as it relates to the ambiguity of the land. The generic and unidentifiable nature of these places reveals the intention of the predator to make us forget, to remove the victim from memory. Chalmers begins his artist statement with a quote from FBI profiler John Douglas: "The Northwest is 'America's killing field.' The weather—weeks on end of dreary rain punctuated by rare, brilliant days probably has something to do with it. Or the fact that this is where the frontier ends and America literally runs out of room."[13] These landscapes have a colonial history: European ownership of the Americas and rule over its native cultures was asserted by force. The murderer takes possession of a life and, in the act of dumping a corpse, inflicts this atrocity on the land. The colonizer and the serial killer are synonymous in their forced ownership of land and body. These bodies have been dumped in the last vestiges of American wilderness. Leaving the body on the edges of the nation, the predator attempts to push these events to the edges of the mind. By calling into consciousness an invisible body, Chalmers is exposing the predator's inability to complete this process.

[13] Chalmers. "Dump Sites—Artist Statement." Page 1.

All this highlights the role of scale in the land-body relationship. The landscape is only limited by the frame of the photograph, its boundaries unknown to the viewer. The body is a relational structure and immediately understood as a contained form. It is the unit of measurement used to perceive the world.[14] The boundlessness of the land compared to the limits of the body heightens our sense of mortality; it is a reminder that we are small and fragile. Paradoxically, these images suggest acts of violence that offend the body's contained structure—puncture, rape, dismemberment. All this exists in our imagination as possibilities of the victim's experience. The death of the body contradicts the vitality of the land. Through the natural processes of plant growth, these landscapes differentiate the now—beautiful and empty—with the past—grotesque and violent. The landscape, transformed through time, stresses the ephemeral nature of memory. Chalmers, however, grounds memory through the act of photographing, collapsing past and present into one image.[15] The result is a body that is inseparable from its changing backdrop.

The Spectacle: The Public Obsession with Criminality

Since photography's advent in 1839, it has been used to document the criminal body. In the eugenics movement of the late 19th and early 20th Century, the fields of physiognomy and phrenology came together in an attempt to produce composite images of the average criminal.[16] More recently, television has seen an overwhelming production of crime-based dramas, not to

---

[14] Stewart, Susan. *On Longing.* Page 132.
[15] Merewether, Charles. "Traces of Loss." (1997) *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*. Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 25-40. Page 26. Merewether is commenting specifically on the nature of ruins, and the ability of the photograph to make ruins—to make disaster—present.
[16] Sekula, Allan. "The Body and The Archive." *The MIT Press*, 39 (Winter, 1986), 3-64. Page 44.

mention the wealth of films, books and images that cater to this subject. These examples highlight the ways in which the criminal body is literally and consistently placed within our sight, favouring the language of criminology over the language of victimology. This represents an attack on the victim's right to be recognized, synonymous to the physical attack endured. By concealing the perpetrator, *Dump Sites* acknowledges the ongoing battle between victim and predator.

What does the criminal body look like? In 2010, *Life Magazine* published a special edition issue titled *"The Most Notorious Crimes in American History."* This volume outlines the details of 57 infamous crimes, divided into four categories: Politics, Passion, Profit and Pointless Mayhem (Figures 7 and 8). Its design is riddled with the usual tropes of criminal activity—blood spatter, evidence exhibits, fingerprints, mug shots. This magazine openly embodies the criminal as spectacle; as the editor's suggest, "Crime is awful, but it can be, in the retelling, awfully exciting."[17] In this publication, the criminal takes centre stage. Let us briefly consider its representation of the O.J. Simpson trial. Titled *"The Murder of O.J. Simpson's Wife,"* it denies the memory of the victim through the failure to include her name. Nicole Brown is presented as the wife of her alleged killer—a man to whom she was divorced—as if belonging to him. This title ignores this crime's status as a double homicide, an event in which Ron Goldman was also killed. This issue is but one example of the public obsession with criminality; not only is it recent, but it also acts as a compilation of spectacles. After viewing *Dump Sites*, it becomes a reminder of 57 times in which the public was interested in the narrative of the anti-hero, rather than the innocent victim.

---

[17] Sullivan, Robert, ed. "Life: The Most Notorious Crimes in American History." Indiana: Time Home Entertainment Inc, 2010. Page 7. This quote appeared in the magazine's introduction, titled "The Sinister Allure of Crime."

By directing our attention towards the victim and away from the predator, Chalmers addresses the relationship between what is real and what is constructed. Whereas the criminal body dominates the social landscape, glorified through media and popular culture, the victim's body dominates the physical landscape, the realm of lived experience. It is the victim that bleeds and rots, conveying the natural processes of death and decomposition. The criminal, however, is an agent of fantasy—acting, plotting, and surpassing the limits of what is socially and morally acceptable. The historical obsession with understanding what produces a criminal is a testament to this. Society has always built a narrative around the criminal body. This narrative is subject to change, dependant on what are considered racial, sexual, neurological or environmental predispositions. Diverse degrees of violence are thereby generated and consumed in overwhelming amounts. The effect of this is an overall desensitization to suffering. As Susan Sontag argues, "fantasy can…normalize what is psychologically unbearable, thereby inuring us to it."[18] The serial killer is less a doer of horrific deeds, and more a psychologically interesting character. This highlights the ways in which we, as a culture, distance ourselves from suffering. The serial killer is both the cause of violence and our protection from it. This is precisely why Chalmers' is successful; we are *so* accustomed to looking at criminals, that the presence of the victim—even the absent one—is at once impactful. By removing the predator, Chalmers' distances the audience from their learned neutrality.

Narratives that surround the victim are far less malleable. In our case, he or she is always possessed by another, always dead. This confrontation with mortality is why we choose to focus on the criminal:

---

[18] Sontag, Susan. "The Imagination of Disaster". *Against Interpretation and Other Essays.* New York: Picador, 2001. Page 225.

> "Most serial killers are impelled by a craving for power, by a desire for a sort of control of life and death that is usually attributed to God. When the murderer is the protagonist of a story, we can vicariously experience that power. The victim is a defeated soul, a loser in this contest of strength. Perhaps it is easier to identify with the murderer. To do otherwise means choosing the side of the powerless."[19]

To acknowledge the victim is to acknowledge an inability to control life's events, to always make choices for our bodies. From this perspective, serial killers embody an ultimate freedom: to act without regard for others, to take ownership of the body, to speed up or slow down death. Our attention to them is both an act of glorification and an act of othering. These predators are noted for their transformative power to appear normal.[20] By portraying the serial killer as having extraordinary abilities, the audience is not forced to relate to the criminal's humanity, or to acknowledge the human capacity for evil. In *Dump Sites*, the absent criminal forces the audience to cope with the possibility of powerlessness, of enduring or committing horrific acts.

Chalmers' presentation methods also deny this spectacle of criminality. He works with accredited institutions, choosing formats that demand concentration and quiet. *Dump Sites* appears as a book and in a gallery space. It was sponsored by *Light Work:* an artist-run, not-for-profit organization founded in the early seventies.[21] Chalmers creates a safe environment for the audience to think about violence—spaces that are private and contained. Paradoxically, the

---

[19] Schlosser, Eric. "A Grief Like No Other." *The Atlantic Monthly*, 280.3 (September 1997), 37-76. Page 38. Schlosser also reports that the main response to victims' families and friends is silence, evidence for the notion that no public language for victims actually exists.
[20] Chalmers. "Dump Sites—Artist Statement." Page 1.
[21] Light Work. "About Us." Company Website. 2010. < http://www.lightwork.org/about/index.html> 20 November 2011. Page 1. *Contact Sheet* is the publication released by *Light Work*: issue 156 was dedicated to *Dump Sites*. This is one of the longest-running photographic publications in the world.

solitary nature of these places forces us to contend with our thoughts. In this way, these images are more confrontational than the constantly running, constantly screaming realm of popular culture. The clean and minimal nature of both forms allows the viewer to psychologically step into the landscapes, cultivating a more intimate relationship with the victim. A parallel can be drawn between the space provided by book and gallery and the space of the dumpsite. The act of flipping through a book or exploring a gallery is not unlike the act of walking through a forest or field or trail: it is meditative, silent, and isolating. Herein lies the connection between the external space through which memory is produced, and the internal space—that of the mind—though which it is recalled.

The Memorial: Photographs and the Object of Memory

Memorials commemorate death; they are found at the cemetery, the roadside, the town square, and even online. Chalmers' photographs are a response to the fact that they are *not* found at dumpsites.[22] This suits the conclusions we have made about the human tendency to avoid powerlessness, and the physical and mental obscurity of these locations. The images of *Dump Sites* are objects that ensure the remembrance of these victims—they are, in themselves, memorials. Chalmers is working on the understanding that memory can reveal itself through place. Using the photograph to establish the victim's tie to the physical world, he emphasizes the co-dependency between *site* and *sight*. To look, after all, is to locate a thing in the field of vision. This highlights the dual nature of memory—not only is it the recollection of an event, but it is also a unit in the history of what has been looked at.

---

[22] Goodwin, Mary Ed. "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked." *Contact Sheet*, 156 (2010). New York: Light Work Visual Studies, Inc. Published in conjunction with the Exhibition "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked" shown at the Robert B. Menschel Media Centre, March 22nd – May 29, 2010, 2-3. Page 2.

The first act of memorializing is in fact the act of naming. These images and their text set person and place in a permanent cycle of reference. This is the binding power of the name—by nature, it attaches itself to the thing signified. These landscapes are forever dumpsites, these bodies forever dead within them. Naming is also a catalyst for conversation. As Sontag suggests, "there can be no evidence, photographic or otherwise, of an event until the event itself has been named."[23] Naming gives form and context; it informs us that these images of landscapes are in fact images of the human subject. The text also includes the year in which the image was taken—somewhere between 2007 and 2009. This date, however, can differ drastically from the date of the victim's death. This reminds us of the length of time that the victim might have gone unacknowledged, heightening this need for memory. Paradoxically, these dates indicate that the photographs were taken recently, bringing a sense of immediacy to the work—as if the violence portrayed is somehow current. This is the very function of the memorial: to create a space of perpetual memory, to give a past event a present day life. In this way, these images provide the body with a sense of ownership over the land. In memory, the victim gains a control over the landscape that he or she was not permitted in life, established through the endless reminder of a human presence. Perhaps the act of naming is also the first step to justice, for it calls the thing represented into consciousness.

Just as these images establish a memorial of those murdered, they also establish a hierarchy of memory. These are the places that no one bothered to mark, that no one wanted to remember. In this sense, *Dump Sites* represents an archive of absent memorials. All memorials represent a failure on behalf of the audience; they are, as Sontag suggests, "the emblem of an

[23] Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973. Page 19.

inadequate response."[24] This differs from a simple avoidance of violence as an uncomfortable subject. Even in the most modern of times, we are unable to save each other from ourselves. The guilt associated with these memorials is what differentiates it from a gravestone or a heroic monument in Town Square. These people died for *nothing*, and there was *nothing* we could do to stop it. All the visual and textual tropes used confront us with an unbearable horror, with the knowledge that no response can reverse what has been done. A common complaint of victims' families is that others refuse to speak about their loved ones violent death. This is the sound of silence, and it invokes in the audience a speechlessness that arises from the irredeemable nature of these acts.

The unforgettable quality of these images is established through our inability to give a specific narrative to them. Unable to tell a story with a beginning, middle and end, *we are denied closure*. There is no blaming these events on a distant other, no pushing them into the realm of storytelling. As Charles Merewether suggests, this "void seeks to preserve and acknowledge absence, and, therefore, to refuse the completion of mourning."[25] This work offends our natural inclination to move on, to undergo the psychological stages of grief that move us from denial to acceptance. It is interesting to note that Chalmers speaks about the spectacle of criminality as it began with the prototypical serial killer, Jack the Ripper.[26] The identity of this killer remains a mystery, and the public began its obsession with the criminal in the context of not knowing. It is the chasing of closure that enables us to forget. Although Chalmers shifts the gaze from predator to victim, his memorial maintains an open-ended quality that imbues these landscapes with

---

[24] Sontag, Susan. "The Imagination of Disaster." Page 224. Sontag speaks to all representations of disaster as inadequate—even science fiction films are an attempt to mask our inability to prevent disaster and to understand it.

[25] Merewether, Charles. "Traces of Loss." Page 36.

[26] Chalmers. "Dump Sites—Artist Statement." Page 1.

human life. As long as the audience has questions for these images, the body's imprint on the land will remain.

Final Thoughts: Reasons to Remember

This paper has analyzed Chalmers' exploration of the paradigm that exists between land, body and imprint. It has established the ways in which he ensures the remembrance of these victims, and the social, psychological and aesthetic issues that arise because of it. Considering the effects that trauma, absence, spectacle and memorializing have on the body, it becomes apparent that there is a wealth of ways in which the body imprints itself on the land, forever present in the physical world. As a means to tie together the various avenues of thought that these images apply to, it is appropriate to end this conversation with ideas on why remembering these victims is significant in the first place.

Dump Sites may be considered a response to the charge that by looking at the victim, we somehow, "prolong the shaming."[27] This is, perhaps, the most profound argument against the aestheticization of suffering. Because the victim is not here to support or deny this argument, no objective answer exists. A counter-argument, and therefore a support of Chalmers' method, would suggest that to not look at the victim is to instead look at the criminal, or else to not look at all. Both alternatives extend the predator's power, as both erase the victim from memory. To forget or to ignore is a double act of violence, to throw the victim out of the mind after they have been thrown out into the land. An attempt to dignify the victim, especially through the act of looking away, is not possible. These are undignified circumstances; they represent unimaginable experience induced for an illogical purpose. When we look at the victim, we can at least

[27] Reinhardt, Mark. "Picturing Violence: Aesthetics and the Anxiety of Critique." Page 16.

acknowledge the realities of human suffering. We can relate to the victim on the grounds that our own life experience is not wholly dignified. This is the force, negative or positive, that instills the body's weight on the land and makes tangible the trace of human loss.

Brian Whitcher, 2008
All images are pigmented inkjet prints, 24 x 30"

Figure 1. [28]

[28] Goodwin, Mary Ed. "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked." Page 5. This is the first image in Chalmers' sequence of photographs.

Figure 2. [29]

[29] Goodwin, Mary Ed. "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked." Page 13.

Figure 3.[30]

[30] Goodwin, Mary Ed. "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked." Page 19.

Paul Allen, Sigurd Beierman, Sam Bonafide (aka Joe Carriveau), Edward Martin Cupp, Charles Fleming, John Haluka, Albert Hayes, Clarence Hocking, James Howard, William Emery Kamp, John Jackson, Warren Kelley, Joseph Maczak, Raymond Muchache, Elbert T. Riley, Melford Sample, Mark Beverly Shields, Jonah Smallwood, Donald Smith, Lloyd Wallace Wenzel, Kenneth Whitacre, Four John Does, 2009

Figure 4. [31]

[31] Goodwin, Mary Ed. "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked." Page 31. This image is also the cover image of Chalmers' publication. It does not feel like a hidden landscape. Rather, the spacing between trees and the boundless sky suggest a safe and open environment.

35

Kathleen Allen, Lonnie Bond Senior, Lonnie Bond Junior, Mike Carroll, Paul Cosner, Deborah Dubs, Harvey Dubs, Sean Dubs, Jeffrey Gerald, Randy Jacobson, Brenda O'Connor, Cliff Peranteau, Robin Scott Stapley, bone fragments suggesting at least 25 other Jane/John Does, 2008

Figure 5. [32]

[32] Goodwin, Mary Ed. "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked." Page 35.

Figure 6. [33]

[33] Goodwin, Mary Ed. "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked." Page 46. This is the last image in Chalmers' sequence of photographs.

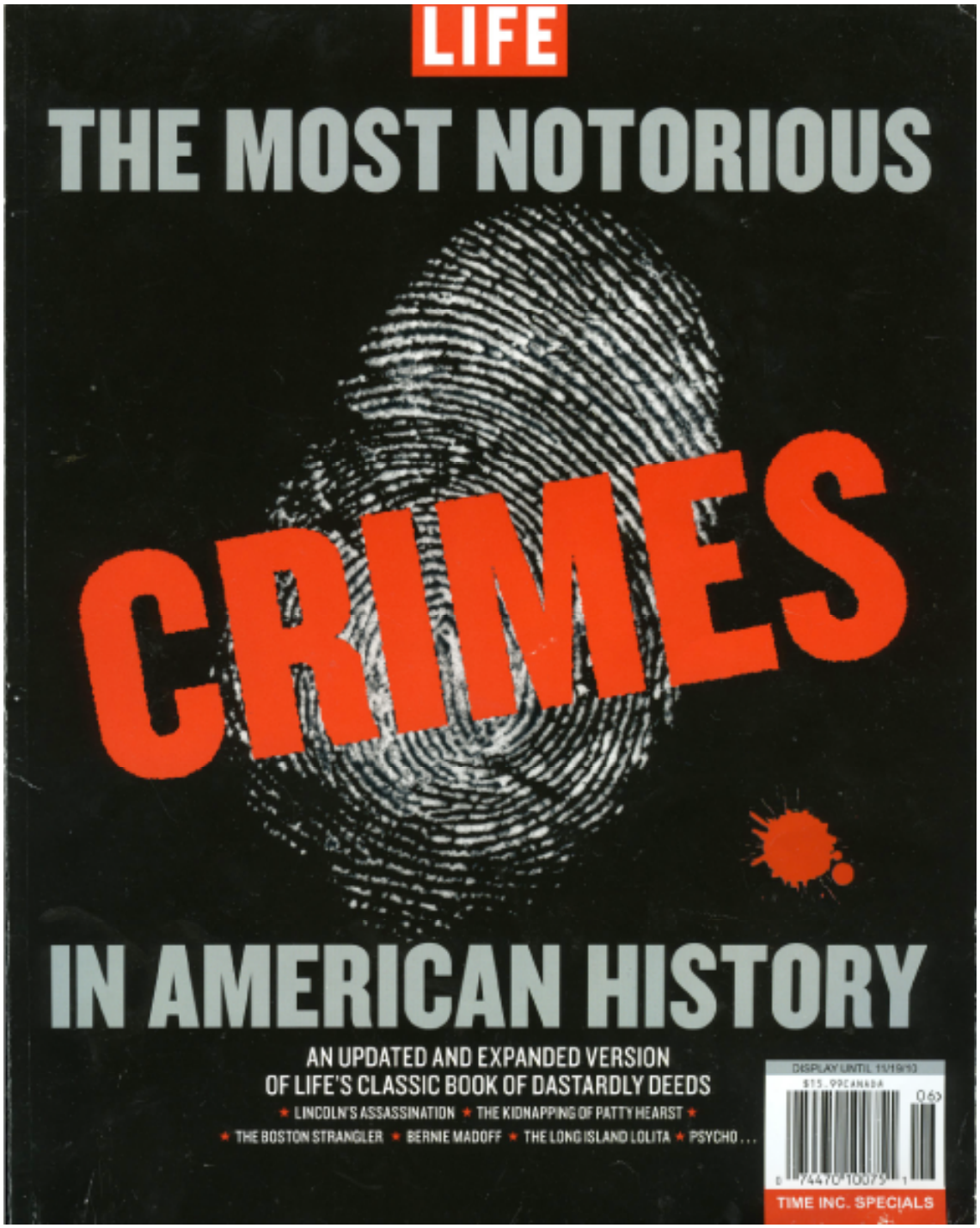

Figure 7. [34]

[34] Sullivan, Robert, ed. "Life: The Most Notorious Crimes in American History." Indiana: Time Home Entertainment Inc 2010. Cover Page.

LIFE

THE MOST NOTORIOUS CRIMES IN AMERICAN HISTORY

6 INTRODUCTION: THE SINISTER ALLURE OF CRIME

8 POLITICS
10 THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
14 THE DRAFT RIOTS
16 THE ROSENBERG SPY CASE
18 THE ASSASSINATION OF JFK
24 MISSISSIPPI BURNING
28 THE ASSASSINATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
32 THE ASSASSINATION OF BOBBY KENNEDY
34 THE KIDNAPPING OF PATTY HEARST
38 WATERGATE
42 THE SHOOTING OF RONALD REAGAN
44 THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING
46 THE OLYMPIC PARK BOMBING
48 THE ROBERT HANSSEN SPY CASE

50 Passion
52 AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY
54 THE SHOOTING OF STANFORD WHITE
58 ANN WOODWARD KILLS HER HUSBAND
60 THE DEATH OF JOHNNY STOMPANATO
64 SID AND NANCY
66 THE SCARSDALE DIET DOC MURDER
68 THE PAMELA SMART MURDER CASE
70 AMY FISHER AND THE BUTTAFUOCOS
72 THE MURDER OF O.J. SIMPSON'S WIFE
76 MARY KAY LETOURNEAU
78 THE MURDER OF LACI PETERSON
80 THE MURDER OF MEREDITH KERCHER

82 PROFIT
84 SACCO AND VANZETTI
86 THE SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE
88 THE LINDBERGH BABY KIDNAPPING
92 THE GREAT BRINK'S ROBBERY
94 IN COLD BLOOD
96 THE SPARKS STEAK HOUSE RUBOUT
98 THE GARDNER MUSEUM HEIST
100 THE HEIDI FLEISS SCANDAL
102 ENRON
104 THE MARTHA STEWART INSIDER TRADING CASE
108 BERNIE MADOFF'S PONZI SCHEME

110 POINTLESS MAYHEM (AND SENSELESS MURDER)
112 THE MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE
114 THE MURDER OF LIZZIE BORDEN'S PARENTS
116 LEOPOLD AND LOEB
118 THE BATH SCHOOL DISASTER
120 THE BLACK DAHLIA MURDER
122 THE SAM SHEPPARD MURDER CASE
124 PSYCHO
126 CHARLES STARKWEATHER
128 THE BOSTON STRANGLER
130 RICHARD SPECK
132 CHARLES MANSON AND HIS FAMILY
136 FATAL VISION
138 THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JIMMY HOFFA
140 THE SON OF SAM
142 TED BUNDY
144 THE MURDER OF JOHN LENNON
148 THE BELTWAY SNIPERS
150 THE SCHOOL SHOOTINGS
154 MURDER ON CAPE COD
156 MICHAEL VICK AND HIS DOGS
158 THE MURDER OF JULISSA BRISMAN

160 JUST ONE MORE

Left: A bloodstained knife dropped by Susan Atkins at the scene of her crime. Which one? Please see page 132.
Opposite: A cold-blooded killer named Smith. To learn his story, please see page 94.

Opposite: Photograph by Richard Avedon
© 2007 THE RICHARD AVEDON FOUNDATION

FRONT COVER Photo source: Corbis

CENTER COURTESY OF THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT

Figure 8. [35]

[35] Sullivan, Robert, ed. "Life: The Most Notorious Crimes in American History." Indiana: Time Home Entertainment Inc, 2010. Page 4. Note the use of alliteration in these subtitles, used to further push these crimes into the realm of a constructed fantasy.

Bibliography

Caruth, Cathy. "Recapturing the Past: Introduction." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995. 151-157.

Chalmers, Stephen. "Dump Sites—Artist Statement." *Askew View: The Photography of Stephen Chalmers*. 2007. http://www.askew-view.com/statements/dumpsites.pdf

Egan, Natasha. "Stephen Chalmers: Artist-In-Residence." *Contact Sheet: The Light Work Annual 2008 35th Anniversary Edition*, 147 (2008): 4-9. New York: Light Work Visual Studies, Inc.

Fitzpatrick, Blake. "Disaster Topographics: Landscape as History, Ruin and Trace." 2005. *Image and Inscription: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Photography*. Robert Bean, ed. Toronto: Gallery 44 and YYZ Books, 52-63.

Goodwin, Mary Ed. "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked." *Contact Sheet*, 156 (2010). New York: Light Work Visual Studies, Inc. Published in conjunction with the Exhibition "Stephen Chalmers: Unmarked" shown at the Robert B. Menschel Media Centre, March 22nd – May 29, 2010.

Light Work. "About Us." Company Website. 2010. < Http://www.lightwork.org/about/index.html> 20 November 2011.

Merewether, Charles. "Traces of Loss." (1997) *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed*. Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 25-40.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire." *Representations* 26, (Spring 1989), 7-24.

Reinhardt, Mark. "Picturing Violence: Aesthetics and the Anxiety of Critique." (2006) *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain*. Chicago: Williams College Museum of Art and the University of Chicago Press, 13-36.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Schlosser, Eric. "A Grief Like No Other." *The Atlantic Monthly*, 280.3 (September 1997), 37-76.

Sekula, Allan. "The Body and The Archive." *The MIT Press*, 39 (Winter, 1986), 3-64.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1973.

Sontag, Susan. "The Imagination of Disaster". *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Picador, 2001.

Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection.* London: Duke University Press, 1993.

Sullivan, Robert, ed. "Life: The Most Notorious Crimes in American History." Indiana: Time Home Entertainment Inc, 2010.