

SUSANNE LEIKAM

Framing Spaces in Motion

Tracing Visualizations of Earthquakes
into Twentieth-Century San Francisco

American Studies ★ **A Monograph Series**

Volume 255



Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg



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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Dissertation der Universität Regensburg aus dem Jahre 2013.

COVER ILLUSTRATION

“Happy tourists pass by the Fairmont Hotel,
which still stands, but is destroyed inside from the fires.”

Photograph from Shawn Clover's

1906 + 2010: Earthquake Blend (Part 1).

Courtesy of Shawn Clover.

ISBN 978-3-8253-6178-5

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Imprimé en Allemagne · Printed in Germany

Druck: Memminger MedienCentrum, 87700 Memmingen

Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, chlorfrei gebleichtem
und alterungsbeständigem Papier

Den Verlag erreichen Sie im Internet unter:
www.winter-verlag.de

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5. The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

5.1 'The day of the end of the world': April 18, 1906

All the cunning adjustments of a twentieth century city had been smashed by the earthquake. The streets were humped into ridges and depressions, and piled with the debris of fallen walls. The steel rails were twisted into perpendicular and horizontal angles. The telephone and telegraph systems were disrupted. And the great water-mains had burst. All the shrewd contrivances and safeguards of man had been thrown out of gear by thirty seconds' twitching of the earth-crust. [...] Here and there through the smoke, creeping warily under the shadows of tottering walls, emerged occasional men and women. It was like the meeting of the handful of survivors after the day of the end of the world.

—From Jack London, “The Story of an Eyewitness” (1906)¹¹³

Three decades after the Gold Rush, San Francisco had not only become one of the largest American cities, it had also become one of the nation's most productive economic centers. In addition to the rapid growth in the insurance and banking sectors, “[t]he city had more manufacturing establishments, more employees in workshops, greater capitalization, larger value of materials, and higher value of products than all the other twenty-four western cities combined” (Cherny and

¹¹³ Living forty miles away from the Bay Area in Sonoma, journalist and author Jack London went to San Francisco on the first day of the fires on behalf of *Collier's Magazine* to cover the earthquake and the fires. Together with his wife Charmian, he took a few photographs (cf., e.g., fig. 32), which were only publicly exhibited for the first time in an exhibition of the California Historical Society for the centennial celebrations in 2006 (Nolte, “Jack London's Lens”). On May 5, 1906, *Collier's* published London's famous eyewitness report (with 25c per word his best paid job ever). For more information on Jack London as a photographer, see Reesman, Hodson, and Adam.

Issel 23). San Francisco's economic rise paired with the sprouting buds of a metropolitan culture and the first accomplishments in the natural sciences as well as in the technological sector led to an immense pride in the city's natural riches, its commerce, its togetherness of diverse cultures, and the "lasting reputation for disorder" (Berglund 1). It goes without saying that San Francisco intended to communicate its political, economic, and cultural achievements, among others, in the architecture of its public buildings. Yet, while places such as New York, Boston, or Philadelphia had let their architectural sights triumphantly announce the grandeur of the city for quite some time, San Francisco still continued a tradition of provisional and temporary City Hall arrangements.

What had allegedly started out as an informal town hall in a barroom in Yerba Buena was moved to the back rooms of a hotel at the corner of Kearny and Pacific Streets and—after intermittent stints of moving to temporary accommodations after various fires—continued from 1852 on in the former Jenny Lind Theater.¹¹⁴ "By 1868 this ad hoc arrangement seemed inappropriate to some San Franciscans who had a grander vision of their city as the premier West Coast port and terminus of the new transcontinental railroad" (Tobriner 74). As a consequence, the city authorities decided on April 4, 1870, that it was high time to endow the largest city west of St. Louis with a suitably ostentatious City Hall (Board of Supervisors of San Francisco 599). Several times during the twenty-six-year-long building period, the originally planned height was raised to ensure the monumentality of the building. In this process, earthquake- and fireproofing were abolished in favor of a more pompous style and the reduction of costs (Tobriner 74-77).¹¹⁵ Adorned with a twenty-foot statue of the Goddess of Progress on top of the dome shortly before its completion in 1896, the building had epitomized the city's glorious feat for almost ten years before it—along with scores of other

¹¹⁴ For a detailed description of San Francisco's city halls, see the entry titled "City Hall, Civic Center, San Francisco, San Francisco County, CA" in the Historic American Buildings Survey available at the Library of Congress and Frank Soulé, John H. Gihon, and James Nisbet's *Annals of San Francisco*. On the first town hall, see Cherny and Issel 11.

¹¹⁵ The earthquake- and fire-proof architectural styles were largely considered to make buildings look outdated and were vehemently protested as an "erection of monuments to earthquakes" (qtd. in Tobriner 63).

buildings—collapsed “like an egg shell” into “a mass of charred ruins” on April 18, 1906 (qtd. in Linthicum and White 122).

Visible from almost any point in the city, the disfigured shape of the former architectural epitome of progress and grandeur provided an iconic scene in the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. The sight of City Hall was not only vividly described in the eyewitness reports but it also endowed thousands of graphic artists with intriguing motifs (cf., e.g., fig. 32, 33). San Francisco’s ruinscape has been considered one of the, if not *the*, most photographed event around the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, and visualizations of the disaster inundated the entire United States (Rozario, *Culture* 122). Within a few days, postcards and souvenir photographs were available all through the city, and soon after magazines, instant books, stereograph series, lantern slides, and a cornucopia of other visual formats related the visual narratives of the earthquake and the fires. “Told pictorially,” a thin photographic booklet issued by the San Francisco Fire Department proclaimed, “[f]or there is no need of words.”



Fig. 32: Untitled glass print photograph taken by Jack London. It shows the ruinscape as seen looking south from Nob Hill. City Hall on Market Street is in the center, framed between two burned trees. 1906. Courtesy of the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

The reliance on visualizations was pervasive: Maps illustrated the extent of the destroyed area, drawings allegorized the disaster, and, most importantly, photographs were credited with the authority of creating a true and authentic account of what had actually happened in San Francisco. Paintings and drawings contained disclaimers such as ‘Reproduced from Authentic Photographs’ or, as in the case of William Alexander Coulter’s famous oil painting “San Francisco Fire, 1906,” related how the artist had produced his work “from sketches he made while riding back and forth on the Sausalito Ferry helping to evacuate refugees.”¹¹⁶ Since the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906 coincided with the first peak in amateur photography, the urban devastation through earthquake and conflagration was for the first time also documented by a wide and diverse group of lay cameramen (Yablon 192-93).

This study understands the visual representations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire as sites of negotiation for the different framings of the calamity and investigates how the earthquake and the ensuing conflagrations are portrayed in the contemporary pictures. In accordance with W.J.T. Mitchell’s assumption that pictures have ‘lives of their own,’ the question “*What Do Pictures Want?*” is directed at the visual representations of the 1906 disaster in the contexts of their (ab)uses in efforts to support a particular earthquake narrative and their potential to resist this maltreatment. In this endeavor, great attention will be assigned to the visuals’ ability to complicate the prevalent framings, which denied or downplayed the earthquake and talked up the city by emphasizing its resilience and resourcefulness.

In the following, the analysis will begin with a brief synopsis of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire before it will turn to the particulars of its visual culture. Subsequently, the analysis will engage in the framings of the disaster and examine how place and place attachment figured in the visual corpus and in which manner the disaster pictures were able to provide geographical and ideological orientation. Furthermore, it will investigate to what extent the pictures fostered—or contested—previously existing framing patterns and conventions. The

¹¹⁶ The second quotation is taken from a postcard showing Coulter’s painting. In order to view Coulter’s “San Francisco Fire, 1906,” visit “Evacuation of San Francisco by Sea” in the Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco.

reading of the illustrations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire will finally be expanded by the inclusion of their inter pictorial frameworks. The last section is also devoted to the pictures' gaps and silences that complicate the dominant disaster framings of the 1906 disaster, which later became the "standard by which Americans judged natural urban catastrophes" (Smith, "Urban Disorder" 79).

At 5:12 a.m. on April 18, 1906, the city was finally awakened from its seismic slumber: A 296-mile-long segment of the San Andreas Fault with its epicenter not far from San Francisco ruptured, leading to an earthquake with an estimated magnitude of 7.9.¹¹⁷ The tremors tipped over lamps and stoves, caused chimneys to fall, and ripped apart gas lines, which caused more than 50 fires to break out in the city. The subsequent conflagrations raged for three days and, together with the earthquake, killed more than 3,000 people in the Bay Area. 250,000 San Franciscans—more than half of the city's population at the time—were left homeless. In the heart of San Francisco, the prestigious public buildings, the magnificent private mansions of the mining and railroad magnates and newspaper tycoons, the tenement houses in South of Market, and the entire Chinatown were turned into almost five square miles of smoking ruins and rubble. With an estimated damage of \$10 billion in 2001 U.S. dollars, the 1906 Earthquake and Fire remained the costliest natural disaster in the United States until 1992 (Geschwind 20).

While the earthquake was of a considerable magnitude, it alone would not have had the physical force to cause this much destruction. A variety of factors, mostly man-made, considerably worsened the natural extreme event and was thus responsible for the enormous extent of the

¹¹⁷ There are several different scales for the classification of earthquakes. The most popular, especially in the media, is the Richter scale. Other indicators such as the moment magnitude are preferred when talking about the actual energy released since this figure stands in direct relation to the physical force of the tremor. Since in 1906 the ways of measuring earthquakes were rudimentary, all values are approximations. Estimates of the Richter magnitude of the 1906 earthquake vary considerably from a mere 7.7 to an 8.3; the moment magnitude supposedly amounted to a 7.9. As the scales do not proceed in a linear but progressive manner, a rise in one digit already signifies a disproportionately much greater increase in the seismic energy released (USGS, "Earthquake Glossary: Magnitude," cf. also "Great 1906 Earthquake"; Tobriner 106).

destruction.¹¹⁸ Even though the calamity had undoubtedly been triggered by a natural force, it only accounts for one side of the coin to speak of a ‘natural disaster.’ One major aggravation of the situation was the human involvement in the ignition, spread, and continuation of the fires. That the temblor was able to spark so many blazes in the first place was, among other reasons, rooted in the absence of a seismic code for the densely built city center and the short-comings as well as the limited enforcement of the Building Code of 1903. The facts that—unlike in cities of comparable size—most of San Francisco’s buildings still had easily inflammable wood-frames and that considerable portions of the city were erected on made-ground additionally contributed their share (Hansen and Condon esp. 18-20, 32, 110-11; Tobriner esp. ch. 5, 198-99).¹¹⁹ Referring to these and further deficiencies, the National Board of Fire Underwriters, which rated fire departments nationwide, had stated in 1905 that “San Francisco has violated all underwriting traditions and precedents by not burning up; that it has not done so is largely due to the vigilance of the fire department, which cannot be relied upon indefinitely to stave off the inevitable” (qtd. in Geschwind 24).

During the earthquake of 1906, fire stations themselves were damaged, and countless streets were blocked off by debris, which considerably impeded all efforts to extinguish the fires. Besides, there was no clear protocol regulating the allocation and the responsibilities of the single fire companies for multiple-fire scenarios. Even if the fire-fighters made it to a fire, success was rare: Unlike other cities such as New York, San Francisco did not have an auxiliary water system to back up the basic water supply in case of an emergency, even though members of the fire department had vehemently campaigned for its establishment after the 1904 Baltimore Fire. Although none of the

¹¹⁸ Experts such as Karl V. Steinbrugge, Professor of Structural Design at the University of California, Berkeley, placed the amount of direct damage from the earthquake around 20 percent (224), and more recent assessments actually lower the percentage even more to about five percent (Tobriner 177).

¹¹⁹ The area south of Market Street, for example, stood out through densely-packed residential areas, which were mostly composed of adjoining wood-frame structures and consequently presented a great fire hazard. In addition, the vicinity was largely located on made ground, multiplying its vulnerability to earthquakes, and, in turn, also to fires. Not surprisingly, this was one of the hardest-hit districts (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 59-60; Tobriner 200-03).

Spring Valley Water Company reservoirs suffered damage from the earthquake, the city received only six percent of the expected flow of water since most distribution lines in the city had burst through the temblor (Tobriner 137). The older cistern system from the 1850s was still in place, yet, its pipes were either dry or clogged and the knowledge of its exact location had been fading among the fire-fighters at the turn of the century (Hansen and Condon 19).

Due to the lack of water, the army resorted to the dynamiting of fire breaks in order to starve the flames of further fuel. In numerous cases, the result was diametrically opposed to the intent: Since many of the persons handling the dynamite were not experts in the field, they used the wrong type of explosives or applied the right material in a harmful manner, either starting new fires or fueling the existing conflagration. Besides, as telephone and alarm systems were comprehensively damaged, problems in communication additionally hindered the effective coordination of all units engaged in the emergency operations. The situation was especially fuzzy in regard to the legal situation. Even though it had never been proclaimed, the visible presence of the California National Guard and U.S. Army troops in the city, rumors on the streets, and the press coverage nevertheless suggested the declaration of martial law. Mayor Eugene Schmitz issued a proclamation announcing that all officers had been “authorized by [him] to KILL any and all persons found engaged in Looting or in the Commission of Any Other Crime,” and a vigilante police force of six hundred volunteers together with uniformed students from Berkeley were armed to enforce Mayor Schmitz’s order (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* ch. I and II; Hansen and Condon ch. 2; Tobriner ch. 7 and 10).¹²⁰ To top the “murky legal situation,” the mayor appointed a Citizen Committee of Fifty that—even though it had no legal authorization—served as a quasi-government of the city and was in charge of the administration and financing of all recovery and rebuilding measures (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 65; cf. also 80-84, 195-248).

¹²⁰ Assessing the different estimates, Philip Fradkin places the number of persons shot in the aftermath at about 50. The most well-known incident was the shooting of Red Cross staff member Heber Tilden, who was killed by three vigilantes at a roadblock. Despite many colorful tales of violent havoc, looting and crime are estimated to have been comparatively low (*Great Earthquake* 80, 140).

When the federal army troops left the city on July 1, 1906, San Francisco was still far from having recovered. Until mid-1908, more than 250,000 people without home, at the time called ‘refugees,’ were housed in camps in squares and parks all over the city. Moreover, the physical rebuilding—aptly termed ‘upbuilding’—was terminated for the most part only in 1910. The positive nationwide media coverage of the Panama Pacific International Exhibition (PPIE) of 1915, the ostentatious architecture on the fairground, and the splendidly rebuilt downtown restored San Francisco’s reputation as the metropolis of the West and symbolically marked the very ending of the incision caused by the temblor. What happened between April 18, 1906, and the opening of the fairgrounds, however, was—despite opposing assertions—an “unparalleled period of racial, political, and social strife” (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 195). Even though official statements such as the Report of the Committee for the Housing of the Homeless stated that there had been no discrimination according to class, ethnicity, religion, or gender, the reality was quite different.¹²¹

Contrary to the prevalent rhetoric in the local press, the time in the refugee camps was not as serene as suggested, especially in the destitute areas of the city such as the cramped South of Market. April and May of 1906 were not only unusually windy but also cold and rainy. In addition, the lack of privacy, the constant noise, outbreaks of diseases such as typhoid fever and smallpox, and dire sanitary conditions were detrimental to the residents (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 211-14). On a political level, the already existing tensions between labor-oriented Mayor Schmitz and his supporters—above all the political boss Abe Ruef—and wealthy Progressives such as James Phelan and Rudolph Spreckels intensified a short while after the disaster. Immediately after the earthquake, both sides worked together on the Citizens Committee to enable San Francisco’s speedy rise, yet, starting in December 1906, Mayor Schmitz and Abe Ruef were tried and finally convicted in a

¹²¹ In detail, the report declared that “[n]o distinction was made in furnishing relief on account of the color, race, or religion of any individual; Chinese, Japanese and Negroes were cared for without any discrimination” (qtd. in Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 211). Segregated Chinese refugee camps, attacks on the Japanese, and the derisive attitude towards the poor contradict this statement vehemently (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 219-25, 289-303; Hansen and Condon 111-15; cf. also ch. 5.4 of this study).

series of highly dubious, privately funded prosecutions, which Philip Fradkin describes as “one of the darkest hours in American jurisprudence” (*Great Earthquake* 307).

The road to recovery hence constituted a period of personal, social, economic, and political hardship and profound discrimination that stood in stark opposition to the medially conveyed ‘glorious rise from the ashes.’ The impact of the earthquake and fires of 1906 was not limited to California but affected the entire nation. Since insurance companies had to withdraw considerable assets from the stock market in order to account for the losses, U.S. stock markets became anemic, which, among other factors, contributed to the panic of 1907 (Hansen and Condon 108). The ecological costs of the upbuilding efforts further complicated the narrative of the ‘heroic rising’ and the ‘bright future’ that newspaper headlines disseminated as early as April 22, 1906: 15,000 horses were worked to death during the rebuilding, the slow-growing species of the Pacific Northwest trees were depleted, and the timber trade transformed into a mass-producing, profit-maximizing industry (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 245-47).

San Francisco’s long-term fate was closely tied to the question of whether the city would finally acknowledge the seismic hazard and how well it would embrace earthquake and fire prevention. While previous studies have concluded that the hasty rebuilding largely progressed without any major regulations and that “building code standards were actually reduced from those in effect before the fire” (Hansen and Condon 137; Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 243-44), architectural historian Stephen Tobriner underscores that “blanket condemnation of all buildings is incorrect” and that even though the building codes were not specifically labeled ‘seismic,’ they nevertheless also included precautions against potential earthquake damage (236, 220).

Despite numerous well-built structures by prudent architects, pleas from scientists such as Grove K. Gilbert to raise earthquake awareness, and some positive changes in the building code, many predicaments nevertheless remained: the Fire District was not enlarged into South of Market, there were too few regulations for fire breaks and fire walls for the predominantly wooden residential houses, and the limitation of building heights (adopted in summer 1906) was already revoked in 1907 (Tobriner ch. 10). Furthermore, the efforts to deny and downplay the earthquake threats in the Bay Area persisted throughout the first two

decades of the twentieth century. To name but two striking examples: In 1911, the first course on earthquakes at the University of California, Berkeley, which bore a reference to seismicity in its title, had to be renamed into a nondescript 'Geology 114,' and an official geological state map of California was published in 1916 without any faults for the Bay Area at all (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 260-62).

The aftermath of the 1906 Earthquake and Fire nonetheless also saw the basic setup of the scientific infrastructure for the research of earthquakes, most prominently visible in the founding of the Seismological Society of California (1906) and the publication of Harry Fielding Reid's groundbreaking theory of elastic rebound in the *Lawson Report* (1908). When two more earthquakes took place in California, seismic awareness in the Bay Area rose significantly, and earthquake prevention became paramount. Due to its geographical proximity, the 1925 Santa Barbara Earthquake played an important part in this. Since no conflagrations disguised the earthquake damage in Santa Barbara, the precise effect of the seismic forces was unambiguously visible to the plain eye. As a result, the first two municipal seismic codes went into effect in California only a year later in 1926.

When the St. Francis Dam collapsed in 1928, the need for professionally trained and educated engineers became more apparent. This led to the formation of the Structural Engineering Society of California (1932), which, in turn, laid the groundwork for standards for earthquake-resistant design in the state. When the Long Beach Earthquake hit in 1933, the time seemed to have been right: "These were the years of the Depression, and people were responding to hard times with public action; the public was aroused and state government was receptive" (Tobriner 277). The Long Beach Earthquake triggered multiple legislative acts, most notably the first comprehensive statewide earthquake code. The Bay Area and the rest of the state had finally woken up to seismic risk. Up to this day, the regulations regarding fire and earthquakes in California have been repeatedly revised and increasingly tightened due to public pressure and efforts to standardize building practices nationwide (Tobriner 269-78).

San Francisco readily and proudly incorporated the earthquake and the fires of 1906 as the 'rise of the phoenix' into its cultural memory. The fascination with the 1906 disaster, which Jack London termed the "day of the end of the world" in his eyewitness report, lives on in the

national disaster imaginary and the profusion of references to the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire that one encounters all over the city. Bookshops and museums, for example, sell reprints of the original disaster pictures and the image of the phoenix rising is a popular icon in San Francisco's official, corporate, and private logos. The fact that the near-exact replica of the first seal of the city—featuring the rising phoenix—has been taken up, for example, in the badge of the San Francisco Fire Department and in the emblem of the San Francisco Museum and Historical Society (fig. 21) points to the enduring cultural efficacy of the iconography of the 1906 disaster.

5.2 The Visual Culture of the 1906 San Francisco Calamity

Within days after the earthquake, peddlers started selling souvenir photographs on the streets or out of makeshift stands all over San Francisco's ruinscape, and the company Kodak promised to do everything in its power to satisfy the earthquake-shaken city's rampant demand for cameras. For only 10 cents, lay and amateur photographers could have their films developed as picture postcards and share them, even free of postage in the first few weeks after the disaster, with their friends and family. The St. Francis Hotel organized daily automobile tours through the disasterscape for \$1.50, which were advertised with the slogan "See San Francisco in Ruins: On the Trail of the Greatest Fire in the World's History" (qtd. in Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 219). To ward off the deluge of disaster tourists, the authorities temporarily imposed restrictions on access to the burnt district and tried to outlaw photography without a press pass (Yablon 216).¹²²

In June 1906, when the camera craze was far from over, reporter and professional photographer Edgar A. Cohen remarked that

[t]he probabilities are that never since cameras were first invented has there been such a large number in use at any one place as there has been in San Francisco since the 18th of last April. Everyone who either

¹²² Although there are a few film sequences, which were shot in San Francisco in the late spring of 1906, the following chapter focuses only on the much more common non-moving pictures (photographs, stereographs, postcards, newspaper illustrations, etc.). For some of the early film clips of the ruinscape, see the Library of Congress's "Early Motion Pictures, 1897-1920" collection.

possessed, could buy, or borrow one, and was then fortunate enough to secure supplies for it, made more or less good use of his knowledge of photography. This has been the case not only with residents of the city but also with those of the surrounding towns [...] and not a few with whom I talked told me they were from other states. (183)

While photographs of urban scenes of disaster were far from novel at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century (cf., e.g., visuals of Charleston, SC, after Civil War battles, Chicago after the 1871 Fire, Johnstown after the flood of 1889, and Galveston after the Hurricane of 1900), the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire “exceeded all previous disasters in the degree to which its ruins were reproduced, circulated, and consumed through the medium of photography” (Yablon 192).



Fig. 33: “City Hall—Photographer in Foreground—Tall Brick Chimneys Left Standing in Foreground.” 1906. Stereograph. Griffith & Griffith Series. Author’s collection.

When Carleton E. Watkins had set out to photograph the Railroad House on Clay Street in the aftermath of the Great Earthquake of 1868 (cf. fig. 29), he had to haul a cart full of equipment through the city. Despite his two assistants, it took him quite a while to prepare the light-sensitive solution for the photographic plate, fix the camera on the tripod at the right angle, and develop the take on the spot. Due to the rather costly and time-consuming nature of photography in the late 1860s, the daily picture output was utterly meager in comparison to today's numbers. Besides, the selection of subject matter was limited through a relatively long exposure time and the necessity of plenty of light. In 1906, however, photography was already on its way to becoming a spontaneous leisure activity. The introduction of Kodak's first Brownie camera in 1900 symbolically marks photography's transition from a highly complex, costly, and time-consuming field of specialty to a pleasurable and easy pastime for the broad masses. What had started out as a cumbersome expert undertaking had been facilitated into 'pressing the button' through the invention of roll film, hand-held cameras, and standard film development service by mail.¹²³ These technological innovations transformed the camera into a household item: By the turn of the century, one third of the U.S. population owned a camera and even more Americans had access to one (Yablon 214).

While the majority of pictures was taken by recreational 'button pressers,' scores of trained photographers pursued very different, at times even opposing, purposes: Artists such as Arnold Genthe hunted for picturesque compositions and sublime ruins, inventor Frederic Eugene Ives experimented with his 3-D color photography, insurance agents looked for visual proof of grave earthquake damage to exclude these properties from fire insurance coverage, engineers documented the building remnants that had withstood the seismic forces the best, members of the U.S. Geological Survey and of the State Earthquake Investigation Commission collected data for research purposes, and yet

¹²³ Kodak's advertisement slogans of the time, e.g., "You press the button—we do the rest" or, slightly later, "Kodak as you go," signify these changes. The depiction of the Kodak Girl (or from 1900 on young children) similarly indicated that the Brownie was "so simple that it can be easily operated by [women and] any School Boy or Girl." For a compilation of historical Kodak slogans, see "The Kodak Camera" at the Duke University Libraries Digital Collections.

others simply sought to cash in on the obsession with disaster pictures, realizing that regardless of how poor the prints aesthetically and technically turned out to be they would nevertheless sell well (Cohen 186).¹²⁴

Well before the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, an enthusiastic engagement with photography had been under way. At the turn of the century, stereograph cards emerged as the “first visual mass medium” (Darrah 2), publications such as the textbook *The Photographic Picture Post-Card for Personal Use and Profit* (1906) and articles in *Camera Craft* instructed amateurs and lay photographers wishing to participate in the “picture postcard craze” (“Our Book Shelf” 227), and scores of souvenir photographs filled private photo albums. Accordingly, the most common photographic media picturing the 1906 calamity were stereographs, souvenir photographs, and picture postcards, which were either sold or sometimes given away as promotional gifts (e.g. by cigarette companies or department stores such as The Emporium). In *Facing Disaster: A Centennial Postcard Album*, the San Francisco Bay Area Post Card Club emphasizes that the 1906 calamity was the first major disaster to be extensively recorded on postcards (vi).¹²⁵ Most picture photographs were collected and arranged into personal albums, often interspersed with private documents, family photographs, and newspaper snippets.

¹²⁴ In 1906, Frederic Eugene Ives was trying out a so-called stereographic photochromoscope, which produced three-dimensional views of the ruins in color. Since his apparatus was never marketed, his pictures of the ruins, which might be “the only color photographs of the earthquake and perhaps the first color photos of San Francisco” (qtd. in Childs), stayed buried in his collection, where they were only discovered in 2009 in the National Museum of American History. For more information and sample views, see Childs.

¹²⁵ The first official postcard was issued in Austria in 1869, but it took four more years until postcards were introduced to the United States. On the occasion of the World’s Columbian Exhibition in 1893, advertisements included the United States’ first souvenir picture postcards. In the first decade of the twentieth century, it was common to send postcards without the inclusion of a written note. It was not until 1907 that personal messages—which before had to be arranged around/in the picture space on the front of the card—were officially allowed to be written on the verso (cf. San Francisco Bay Area Post Card Club; “Postal Cards”).



Fig. 34: Advertisement for earthquake stereograph views in the 1908 Sears, Roebuck, & Co. Catalogue. The set of 60 colored stereoscopic views cost 65 cents by itself and 80 cents including a stereoscope. From the Sears, Roebuck, & Co. Catalogue (1908).

The visual culture of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire included many shared experiences taking place in public or semi-public places. Professional and amateur photographers, organized in associations such as the California Camera Club, discussed the ropes and intricacies of their favorite occupation or set out for ruin shots together. Lectures and presentations were adorned with photographic material, either in the form of lantern slides or photographic handouts, and shops exhibited sets of pictures in their windows. The collected items were regularly displayed on parlor tables and, especially stereographs, viewed with friends and family. The visual culture of the earthquake and conflagrations of 1906 can hence be understood as the “shared practices of a group, community, or society through which meanings are made out of the visual, aural, and textual world of representations and the ways that looking practices are engaged in symbolic and communicative

activities” (Sturken and Cartwright 3), which also included very personal encounters, discussions, and interactions.

In his article “With a Camera in San Francisco,” Edgar Cohen complains about the dismal quality of the bulk of ruin and fire photographs, blaming the excessive demand for pictures that rushed experts and amateurs alike to churn out prints. Quoting a fellow commercial photographer, Cohen states that “anything showing ruins, ‘went’” (186). The fascination with visual accounts of disaster was indeed enormous as the great number of photographers, publishers, and distributors in the city and the far-reaching geographical dispersal of their visuals all over the United States and beyond show.¹²⁶ The Pillsbury Picture Company, for example, advertised an output of thirty photographic prints a minute and added that they sold their earthquake items on six different continents (qtd. in Yablon 192). In 1910, Louis J. Stellman’s *The Vanished Ruin Era* lamented the gradual disappearance of the city’s beautiful ruinscape, which suggests that the enchantment with visual representations of the disaster did not subside rapidly.

The powerful appeal of the disaster photographs and the crucial role visual culture played in the interpretation and memorialization of the 1906 catastrophe also surfaced much later, in 1956, in the “overwhelming response” to the Festival of Progress Committee’s call for photographs of the 1906 calamity (“Picture Plea”). In preparation of the fifty-year anniversary of San Francisco’s destruction, the committee

¹²⁶ The largest compilation of 1906 disaster visuals, the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire Digital Collection, which is accessible via the Online Archive of California (OAC) and its project website at the Bancroft Library, assembles digitized material from the Bancroft Library, the California Historical Society, the California State Library, Stanford University, the Huntington Library, and the Society of California Pioneers. It comprises approximately 14,000 illustrations and more than 7,000 pages of text, which often also include visualizations of the 1906 disaster. Despite multiple listings of particular items, these numbers are quite indicative of the sheer size of the corpus of the visualizations of the calamity since they leave out non-digitized material and only embrace a small selection of other substantial collections of visual representations of the 1906 disaster (e.g. the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire Digital Collection does not include disaster visuals of the San Francisco Public Library Historical Photograph and Postcard Collection nor those of the Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco).

encouraged the readership of San Francisco's major newspapers to send in some of their personal disaster visuals. Only three days later, on March 1, 1956, the *San Francisco Examiner* cited Carl Wallen, who was in charge of the commemorative photograph exhibition, stating that they were "indeed grateful for the terrific response, but [they] just can't accept any more pictures" ("Picture Plea"). Recent photo books such as David Burkhard's *Earthquake Days: The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake & Fire in 3-D* (2005) and Rodger C. Birt's *History's Anteroom: Photography in San Francisco, 1906-1909* (2011), together with the profusion of reprinted picture postcards now available in San Francisco's souvenir stores, bookshops, and museums, corroborate the enduring attractiveness of visualizations of the 1906 calamity.

The enthrallment with natural disasters and their visual representations has been researched extensively by sociology, psychoanalysis, and evolutionary biology, among others. Recently, the field of dark tourism has also vigorously examined the driving forces behind the pull of visiting sites of violence and calamity (cf. Lennon and Foley, "JFK"; Seaton). Although the increasing commodification of death and tragedy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries might have added a new intensity to dark tourism, scholars widely agree that the appeal of morbidity-related attraction has always existed (cf., e.g., Sharpley and Stone 4, 9; Stone and Sharpley 574). Evolutionary theories presume that over time humans developed a special sensitivity and attention toward potentially perilous situations, which psychologist Michael Apter calls 'the dangerous edge.' The precarious situations are only perceived as exhilarating, however, when they are experienced in a so-called "protective frame," that is, in controlled and safe situations (*Dangerous Edge* 11).¹²⁷

In this line of reasoning, the fascination with visual representations of disasters (cf., e.g., fig. 35) or reenactments thereof as, for example, in Coney Island (cf. J. Berman 62; Stanton) can be explained as the result of experiencing the thrill of a hazard from a safe distance and in a controlled environment. Kevin Rozario explains this enthrallment by pointing to "the power of such images to conjure up the tumultuous

¹²⁷ Apter's emphasis on the "protective frame" recalls the distance Edmund Burke claimed as a necessary prerequisite for experiencing sublime delight in nature (cf. *Philosophical Enquiry*).

drives, the desires for sensual gratification and acts of violence that are repressed when we are socialized into adulthood” (*Culture* 5). With reference to Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian reading of calamities in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), he later resumes that “if Freud’s depiction of the id as ‘a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement’” holds true, “it seems at least plausible that spectacles of destruction can exert a compelling hold over our imaginations, speaking to our yearnings of a life less ordered” (*Culture* 6). Those Californians who experienced the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire at a safe distance or lived through it relatively unharmed indeed often described it as a pleasant diversion from the quotidian routines (Yablon 217).¹²⁸

The allure of representations of the 1906 earthquake and fires was closely connected to feelings of nostalgia, which are also frequently cited as motivation for dark tourism to sites of death and disaster. Melancholic longings for an idealized past often emerged in the narratives of the 1906 disaster and sparked a new interest in representations of San Francisco, partly because the perishing of so many of the pre-earthquake depictions of the city in the fires reminded its residents of the fugaciousness of time and hence also life (cf. Genthe 90-93; James 222-23). With the city’s destruction, the pre-disaster illustrations were turned into *memento mori* and represented glimpses of a romanticized bygone San Francisco that many residents were yearning for in 1906.

This development was not unique to the 1906 calamity but, as Susanna Hoffman contends in her study on cultural change after disaster, occurs often in the course of catastrophes (309). Nostalgically transfigured versions of San Francisco appeared immediately after the fires subsided. Beginning only three days after the earthquake, for instance, long-term San Francisco resident Will Irwin published an extensive poem titled *The City That Was: A Requiem of Old San Francisco* in several installments in the New York *Sun*, which enjoyed

¹²⁸ In “On Some Mental Effects of the Earthquake,” William James, at the time a professor at Stanford University, underscored the mental thrill of the earthquake experience for the students at Stanford: “The emotion consisted wholly of glee and admiration; glee at the vividness which such an abstract idea or verbal term as ‘earthquake’ could put on when translated into sensible reality and verified concretely; [...] I felt no trace whatever of fear; it was pure delight and welcome” (211).

enormous popularity and was prolifically reprinted in the local press. Glorifying the “gay, careless, luxuriant and lovable” (46) city’s geographical setting, entrepreneurial spirit, ethnic diversity, cultural life, and aura radiating the “glamour of the romance” (25), the poem lamented the passing of the ‘old’ San Francisco.

Disaster sightseers, as Graham M.S. Dann and Robert B. Potter argue, often also yearn “for a past they can no longer find in their own social settings. Unable to tolerate their present alienated condition, and ever fearful of the future, they seek solace in days gone by” (qtd. in Yuill 89). In the ruinscape of 1906, omnipresent signs among the rubble such as telegraph poles, steel frames, streetcar tracks, and ads on billboards proclaimed modernity and reminded the spectators that the simple days of the old West were far gone. San Francisco’s dark tourists and the viewers of the 1906 disaster pictures thus frequently felt “[p]lagued by their own inventions” (qtd. in Yablon 201). According to scholars such as Dean MacCannell or Chris Rojek, modernization with its ever increasing degree of machinization, specialization, and, most importantly, depersonalization has inherently generated nostalgia for a simpler, less technologized and compartmentalized lifestyle. From the pure delight in destruction to feelings of nostalgia, the reasons for the attraction to visualizations of the 1906 disaster were highly diverse. In addition to satisfying the viewers’ appetite for spectacular sights, the visual representations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire nonetheless also performed a wealth of sundry cultural functions such as the reestablishment of orientation and the recovery of platial belonging.

By April 20th, 1906, a five-square-mile area right in the heart of San Francisco had been turned into a ruinscape. Memorable quotidian sights such as street signs, shop windows, or architectural landmarks were gone, and the streets looked alien and deformed. Besides, more than 250,000 San Franciscans had lost the privacy and familiarity of their homes and had to turn to make-shift mass encampments in the public squares and parks. If place is understood with Lawrence Buell as “space that is bounded and marked as humanly meaningful through personal attachment, social relations, and physiographic distinctiveness” (*Future* 145) and with David Jacobson as containing “notions of belonging, of one’s rightful place in the world, locating individuals and peoples geographically and historically and orienting them in the cosmos” (3), then the destruction of the physical environment, the profound alteration

of social life taking place within that space, and the perceived disruption of the very texture of their world made San Franciscans feel 'out of place.'



Fig. 35: Vividly colored postcard titled "The Burning Call Building, San Francisco, California: A Magnificent Spectacle of the Disaster of April 18-20, 1906." 1906. Author's Collection.

Since geographical, social, and cultural orientation are fundamental in the establishment of place attachment and a sense of belonging, the failure to orient oneself within a particular space leads to a feeling of alienation and uprootedness on an individual and collective level. In these contexts, the visualizations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire played a crucial role since they facilitated orientation, assisted the establishment of a sense of belonging, and offered ideological guidance. When it comes to the geographical imagination and conceptualizations of place, as Joan Schwartz and James Ryan argue in *Picturing Place* (2003), photography functions as a particularly “powerful ally” (1).

Elaborating on the concept of mental maps, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan states that an unfamiliar neighborhood—and that is what most San Franciscans faced after the calamity—is “at first a confusion of images; it is blurred space ‘out there’” (17). The disorientation felt in the aftermath of the 1906 disaster comes forward in numerous contemporary texts such as the following eyewitness report, which describes Los Angeles reporter Henry C. Carr’s encounter with survivors on the second day of the fires:

“There’s the City Hall,” [one of the survivors] said, tremulously, pointing to a large dome surmounting a pile of ruins and surrounded like some hellish island with vast stretches of smouldering ashes and twisted iron girders. The San Francisco man found a tottering, blackened pile of wall that he said was Mechanic’s Pavilion, and a sort of thin peak of brick that he said was the new Bell Theater. He would go over the town from the top of the hill and torture himself trying to locate San Francisco’s splendid landmarks in these acres of ash heaps. Down in the middle of the city I found two young men in a violent argument over the location of Market street in ashes. (74-75)

This excerpt, on the one hand, illustrates how deeply one’s sense of place depends on “the identification of significant localities, such as street corners and architectural landmarks within the neighborhood space” (Tuan 17-18), and, on the other hand, highlights the affective importance of belonging to a place. Through their profound engagement with the post-earthquake landscape and their ability to facilitate orientation, the popular and widely-used stereo views and photographic

postcards served not only as a base for new mental maps, but also had the potential to foster the establishment of place attachment and place identity.

Out of the plethora of motifs, a distinct type of ruin photograph, which showed a high visibility in stereograph and souvenir postcard series, distinctly emplaces the depicted views in geographical terms. These pictures display a section of the ruinscape that does not contain any specific, easily recognizable markers unmistakably revealing the location in one of San Francisco's neighborhoods (cf., e.g., fig. 36-38). Captions such as "Looking West from the Jewish Synagogue" (fig. 36) or street names inscribed in handwriting on postcards (cf., e.g., fig. 41) anchored the visuals in the Barthesian sense and placed the unfamiliar views in the familiar context of the city's geography. References to vision indeed occurred frequently. Out of the first 20 items in the popular Griffith & Griffith stereograph series about the 1906 disaster, for example, about half reference the process of "looking" in writing, and almost all of them supply geographical information, embedding the stereographs in local space (cf., e.g., the captions of fig. 36-38).

The intricate connection between geographical conceptualizations of space and vision comes to the fore not only in the allusion to the process of seeing in the pictures' captions but also in the presence of doppelgangers in the images, who—just as the visuals' beholders are supposed to—are enjoying the beauty of the ruins (cf., e.g., 36, 38). Stereograph viewing and the collection of photographs or postcards, all visual practices that encourage prolonged and repeated viewing experiences, were very popular at the time and acquainted viewers with the alien stretches of ruins, thereby fostering place attachment. For the beholders, popular iconic landmarks emerged out of these previously unfamiliar sites of destruction, which themselves became memorials of the earthquake and fires and created the basic framework for new mental maps. One such case in point was the front entry to the luxurious Towne mansion. With its elegant two white marble columns, the elaborate entrance, later called the Portals of the Past (fig. 49), became one of the most popular and well-known icons of the 1906 disaster. Geographical orientation and platial belonging were also addressed by a different kind of pictorial composition, which put former architectural landmarks such as churches, historical monuments, or public buildings at the center of the arrangement (cf., e.g., fig. 33, 54, 65).



Fig. 36-38: Selection of images from the Griffith & Griffith stereograph series, one of the most popular collections of visualizations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. All stereo views reference the sense of vision and embed the scenes in geographical terms: Cf. (from top to bottom): “Looking West from the Jewish Synagogue” (fig. 36), “View of Nob Hill, the Millionaire Residence District” (fig. 37), “Looking Northwest from Corner Ellis and Powell Streets” (fig. 38). Author’s collection.

Just as with the previously mentioned unspecific ruin pictures, the texts that accompanied the shots of the previous architectural icons neither directed the viewers' attention to the people portrayed nor referenced the actions depicted. Instead, they framed the pictures solely in terms of geographical location and the iconicity of San Francisco's architectural markers. The sight of the city's former splendid gems such as City Hall or the Palace Hotel in rubble pained most San Franciscans even though some interpreted the ruin fragments as signs of resilience and endurance against 'nature's attack.' The pictures did not only perpetuate the fame of previous architectural emblems such as the Ferry Building but also gave great prominence to novel icons such as Lotta's Fountain, which served as a meeting place for survivors in the immediate aftermath and up to today constitutes the centerpiece of the annual commemorative activities (cf. "Lotta Crabtree Fountain").

The familiarity of San Francisco's famous sights helped provide a stable grid to which the unfamiliar stretches of destruction could be attached to in order to anchor them. Captions as, for example, "View of Nob Hill, the Millionaire Residence District" (fig. 37) named a surviving reference point in regard to which the disaster scene could be localized. At the same time, the photographs updated people's mental maps with the novel appearances of the former iconic landmarks. At the time, lectures—the visual equivalent to today's television news—used photographs printed on lantern slides, which were illuminated and projected on a wall to illustrate talks. The lectures usually proceeded like a walk through the ruinscape, moving from icon to icon and relating background information and short earthquake and fire anecdotes of the particular sites. Since the architectural icons were mostly charged with affection, their fate in the disaster moved people very much, and the deformed ruins, especially City Hall and the Call Building (cf., e.g., fig. 33, 35, 54, 65), became favorite photographic subjects.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Recalling the early modern European composite woodcut prints that contrasted scenes before and after natural calamities (cf., e.g., fig. 7), some pamphlets such as *San Francisco and Vicinity* (1906) or A.L.A. Himmelwright's *San Francisco Earthquake and Fire* (1906) provided a synopsis of pictures 'before and after.' In contrast to today's re-photographing projects, however, they did not feature quasi-identical images with matching angles and cropping. The format of juxtaposing two (or three) different time-levels of similar motifs became more popular during the progress of the rebuilding.

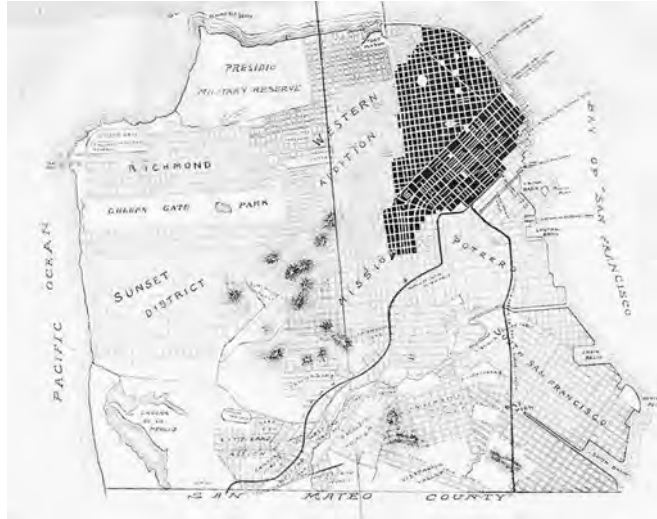


Fig. 39: Map included in Southern Pacific's pamphlet "San Francisco: The Imperishable." (BANC PIC F869.S3.93.R35). 1906. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Fig. 40: Map in *San Francisco and Vicinity, Before & After the Big Fire, April 18th, 19th and 20th, 1906* showing the burned area. (BANC PIC F869.S3 S74). 1906. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

The contemporaneous strong belief in photography's 'objective' representation of reality made the medium the ideal vehicle to vouch for the authenticity of the depicted scenes, delineating them from exaggerated sensationalist drawings. In this line of reasoning, photography carried similar connotations as cartography, which has also frequently been considered an 'unbiased' medium ideally suited to convey 'facts.' To the same extent that photographs and photographic practices were inscribed with the authority for truthful representation, maps and cartographic practices were credited with the power to render 'reality' reliably and scientifically (cf., e.g., Monmonier; Short, esp. 6-25). As a result, most photo books and pamphlets opened their visual narratives with maps indicating the extent of the destruction, which was meant to bestow the publications with an aura of 'objectivity.'

As with maps of earlier conflagrations in San Francisco, the size of the area marked as damaged, the selection of scale and angle, the cropping, and the coloring resulted in very different narratives of the severity of the disaster. Maps issued by San Francisco's business elite (cf., e.g., fig. 39) usually insinuated a much smaller damage than cartographic representations in sensationalist pamphlets (cf., e.g., fig. 40) or out-of-town instant histories. Since both kinds of maps constructed conflicting assessments of place, the booster maps a narrative of San Francisco as barely affected, and the sensationalist maps one of a sincerely destroyed city, they demonstrate how contested the framings of the 1906 disaster were at the time and how crucial maps were in the quest to appropriate particular earthquake and fire narratives.

The familiarization with place did not only occur during the viewing processes but also in the acts of production. Photographers and other artists took to the ruins, solely or in groups, to capture the compelling sights of the disasterscape. The infatuation with the icons of destruction continued into the rebuilding period and can be traced as late as the very end of the decade. The artistic engagements with the earthquake and fire ruins were an opportunity to assert agency and create coherent (visual) narratives out of the calamity. Being in charge of a camera or brush, selecting the motif, perspective, angle, and lighting, and finally arranging the pictures on the wall, in an album, or a pamphlet: all these

instances represented acts of decision making and taking control, which established meaning and order in times of chaos.¹³⁰

In the preface to *The Vanished Ruin Era* (1910), Louis J. Stellman describes his photographic pursuits in the ruinscape as helpful in the coping process:

[S]ome of us have striven to preserve this classic artistry of ruin which was unique as it was beautiful. It was a part of our stirring reconstructive life and it deserves to be depicted. It mellowed the horror of our desolation; it softened the tenure of our grief. It uplifted the spirit and succored the mind in depression, like an oasis of inspiration in the weary desert of our travail. [...] They are not alone those who know these things by heart, who looked upon these wondrous architectural fragments first as gravestones of a cherished recollection, but later as impressive monuments of new hope. (viii)

In somewhat lofty phrasing, the prefatory comments relate a shift in attitude. “First” the ruins resembled “gravestones,” but “later,” after intensive periods of picture taking and viewing, they signified “impressive monuments of new hope.” The photographic preservation of the ruins was thus part and parcel of this development, and Stellman ascribes the classical ruins (and/or the actual act of preservation) the ability to ameliorate the emotional state of desperation and grief and to restore hope, optimism, and confidence. All photographic acts constitute private instances of memorialization and consequently help to integrate events into coherent narratives. Drawing on the acclaimed ruins of ancient Greece and Rome, the photographers around Stellman found what Van Wyck Brooks called a ‘usable past’ in framing San Francisco’s destruction as a cultural and aesthetic enrichment of the city’s previously rather motley architecture and frontier roughness. This framing focuses on the positive side effects of the calamity, which might have also aided the coping process.

¹³⁰ Due to the sense of control the camera offers in crises, the use of image-making has been increasingly integrated in the fields of phototherapy, photo art therapy, and therapeutic photography. The act of organizing photographs into albums has thereby also been adopted as a therapeutic tool (Craig 22, 136; cf. also L. Berman).

sights by their names, added neighborhood designations, or even indicated their personal location at the time of the earthquake and fires in handwriting onto the visuals. Chas E. Ehrer from Los Angeles, for instance, had one of his photographs of the ruinscape printed as a postcard in order to send it to his wife back home (cf. fig. 41). In the photographic print, he marked California and Stockton Streets as well as Alcatraz Island and Telegraph Hill in order for his wife to be able to better localize the unfamiliar sight in San Francisco's cityscape. Through pictorial practices like this, the disturbing experience of the destruction of the city was ordered by the imposition of man-made categories onto the photographic representations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. In so doing, the continuity of time and place—despite the traumatic experience and the disruption of the familiar structures and processes—was affirmed.

The activities involved in the display of disaster visuals, especially in the creation of personal albums, that is the selection, clipping, and final arrangement of the items, additionally harbor a potential to generate order out of seemingly disruptive events and establish meaning from chaos. Many San Franciscans crafted elaborately decorated scrap books and photo albums, which featured diligently arranged compositions of earthquake and fire photographs, drawings, songs, poetry, article clippings, maps, and caricatures. At times, they also mixed these earthquake- and fire-related items with private family portraits. The popularity and extent of these activities suggest the affective impact of the 1906 Earthquake and Fire on the survivors' personal lives. The coherent narratives created in these scrap books and photo albums are therefore central in coming to terms with disastrous experiences and help reestablish one's sense of place and belonging (Rozario, "Making Progress" 28). Geographical orientation and platial belonging are only two out of the plethora of aspects that the visual culture of the 1906 disaster engaged with. Other visual representations negotiated political, economic, and ideological framings of the 1906 disaster, which were often inextricably linked to place identity and the geographical imagination.

5.3 The Framings of the 1906 Disaster in and beyond Picture Frames

The Conversion of the ‘Great Earthquake’ into the ‘Great Fire’

The main mission of this message from the Southern Pacific Company is, first, to echo throughout the land the note of courage, hope and confidence that has been sounded by San Francisco since the first hour of her disaster; second, that San Francisco is not destroyed, but fire-swept as other cities have been, and is not only in position to, but will protect herself absolutely against a recurrence; and third and most emphatically, that the destruction was due to fire and not to earthquake.

—From Southern Pacific, “San Francisco Imperishable” (1906)

The scope of the 1906 calamity had no precedent in San Francisco, yet the framing patterns that emerged in the course of the earthquake and fires and in the long process of rebuilding were very familiar. Even though one might think it would be hard to expurgate an entire minute of violent seismic shocks felt by several hundred thousand San Franciscans and the immediately ensuing panic, denial was one of the “general disposition[s] that almost amounted to concerted action for the purpose of suppressing all mention of that catastrophe [i.e. the earthquake]” (Hansen and Condon 107). Only hours after the temblor, California Governor George Pardee, who was visiting the East Coast at the time, already declared to the Massachusetts government—without having been to the still burning city himself—that “destruction was wrought by fire far more than by earthquake” (qtd. in Geschwind 21).

In opposition to earthquakes, fires constituted hazards that were not inherently tied to a particular natural disposition and could also be remedied relatively well through fire codes and a functioning network of fire companies. Furthermore, since there was a recent history of U.S.-American cities that had successfully recovered from conflagrations such as Chicago (1871), Boston (1872), and Baltimore (1904), San Francisco deliberately sought to join this tradition.¹³¹ Governor George C.

¹³¹ Chicago, which had ostentatiously celebrated its recovery in the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, was a particularly well-liked role model. Two days after the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, a Sunday editorial, for

Pardee's speech "I Wouldn't Live in ..." paradigmatically combined the denial of the earthquake with the naturalization of fire. In this oration, he contended: "Yes, San Francisco was burned, not shaken, down. But great fires in American cities are no new things. Chicago had a great fire but Chicago is, nevertheless, a great city. Boston also was visited by a fiery ordeal; so was Baltimore" ("I Wouldn't Live in ..." 1-2). In this manner, Pardee refuted seismic risks for the Bay Area and normalized the fire hazard as a quotidian and manageable occurrence in urban spaces.

In regard to San Francisco's own local history, the portrayal of the 1906 disaster as a fire was likewise a strategically clever one given that the earlier 'great' conflagrations were reminisced in the city's cultural memory as moments of heroic deeds, in which "the city was continually reviving and springing from its ashes a fairer and more substantial thing than before" through resilience and equanimity (Soulé, Gihon, and Nisbet 291). To draw upon the triumphant rise from mining town to metropolis despite—or as the *Annals of San Francisco* suggested "*in consequence of*" the fires (280; emphasis added)—was thus a rhetoric that most entrepreneurs, numerous editors, and countless private citizens basked in (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 231-34, 272-76; Geschwind ch. 1; Hansen and Condon 107-11).

A few days after the disaster, the Real Estate Board of San Francisco passed a resolution, which was published the next day in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and other Bay Area newspapers. It pledged "its members to speak hereafter of the disaster as 'the great fire' instead of 'the great earthquake'" (qtd. in Geschwind 21). Similarly, the Southern Pacific Company, another booster that had to fear for its stocks, future investments, and reputation besides the actual earthquake and fire damage, issued a circular to chambers of commerce nationwide to make clear that "the real calamity was undoubtedly the fire" (Horsburgh). Southern Pacific, which also owned the popular *Sunset Magazine*, set its

example, used the 1871 Chicago Fire to announce an even smoother comeback of the Bay City: "Hope and Industry cannot be burned or drowned. They are immortal because the world lives on them. The rebuilding of Chicago began in the winter when the temperature was below zero and the bricks were laid in hot mortar. Here Nature smiles on us; let us smile back and put our hands to the building" (qtd. in Southern Pacific Company, "San Francisco: The Imperishable" n. pag.).

public relations machine in motion and prolifically published statements and pamphlets such as “San Francisco Imperishable” and “San Francisco: The Imperishable,” intending to reach current and future investors all over the nation.



Fig. 42: Allegorical drawing depicting the ‘New San Francisco’ as a phoenix rising from the ashes of the destroyed old city. (CHS2015.1928). From the *Pacific Coast Magazine*. 1906. Courtesy of the California Historical Society.

Pictures played a prominent part in the strategic framing of the calamity as a fire only, and especially photographs were called upon as visual evidence in order to prove the insignificance of the earthquake. It is striking that a substantial part of the captions of pictures, drawings, and press illustrations refers to the disaster as the ‘great fire’ or ‘the conflagration’ and omits any reference to the earthquake. When the Emporium, California’s largest department store, opened the doors of its temporary business site shortly after the earthquake and fires, for example, it advertised the recovery with a souvenir postal card collection titled “San Francisco Fire Scenes: After the Disaster, April 18th, 1906.” Out of the eighteen pictures, seventeen reference the fire in their captions, but only two mention the earthquake. Postcards and photographic pamphlets, especially those printed by members and associates of San Francisco’s political and economic leaders, exhibit comparable tendencies.

The strategic framing of the 1906 disaster as a ‘great fire’ surfaces noticeably in an allegorical drawing that appeared in several local and national newspapers and picture pamphlets of the disaster (fig. 42). It illustrates San Francisco’s future by having a giant phoenix, visually composed of a sheer endless array of magnificent white buildings framed by a dark outline, land on the burning city. The evocation of the phoenix draws heavily upon the city’s early past since the mythic creature emerged as the central metaphor for the resilience of San Franciscans during the six great conflagrations (see ch. 4.1). With the appropriation of the established visual repertoire, a transfer of the connotations comes along as well. Fires are thus implicated in a specific narrative framework that, firstly, interprets conflagrations as minor challenges for the resilient and resourceful metropolis of the American West, and secondly, as moments of moral and aesthetic purification, which also brings about a rejuvenated and grander cityscape. The fact that Chicago, Charleston, and Baltimore flank San Francisco at a distance in the background in figure 42 comes forward as a crucial part of the composition: The city is put in line with those U.S. cities that had recently suffered from a major calamity themselves and that had all splendidly recovered not too long ago.¹³²

In order to erase even the slightest feeling of unease about earthquakes in the Bay Area that might have possibly survived the comprehensive denial of the damaging nature of the temblor, future dangers from comparable or even larger seismic tremors were also blatantly renounced by the booster community. Without providing any sources for their proclamations, the *Examiner* asserted that the temblor was “not to be repeated in a thousand years” (qtd. in Geschwind 22), and one of Southern Pacific’s pamphlets, “San Francisco: The Imperishable,” argued that “[t]he combination of circumstances that caused San Francisco’s plight was unique among world disasters” (n. pag.) and would therefore never recur again. The boosters also used seismological

¹³² A closer look at the picture reveals that the earthquake is not entirely omitted: Reminiscent of the early modern European and colonial American woodcut prints (cf., e.g., fig. 3, 5), San Francisco seems to be sinking into the ground and is surrounded by some small fissures in the earth’s surface. The fire, however, surfaces as the prominent motif, especially in the metaphor of the phoenix, and dominates the visual narrative, framing the 1906 disaster in analogous terms to the earlier great conflagrations.

experts to have their point of view vindicated. In “San Francisco Imperishable,” they stated that insignificant as the earthquake was “as a destructive factor in San Francisco’s catastrophe, [it] is, according to the best scientific authority, the most severe that will ever be felt in California” (n. pag.).

Referring to Professor Fusakichi Omori, a well-known Japanese specialist on seismology and the aforementioned “best scientific authority,” the booklet further made the following claims:

California will be free from severe quakes for a long time to come and in all probability *never* again know one as strong as the last. [...] [T]he recent disturbance is the *last* one in a chain of temblors extending along the Pacific coast from Alaska to South America, and may be considered as marking the *close* of a geological change. [...] Earthquakes have never been in knowledge of man twice destructive in the same locality. (n. pag.; emphasis added)

Announcements such as this did not only deny future earthquake risks, but also renounced a past filled with a variety of larger and smaller tremors. As the earthquake almanacs for the Bay Area had been mostly compiled by scholars, the rejection of future earthquake risks from the scientific community seems surprising and indicates how pervasive the unheeding attitude toward seismic hazards was even among local seismologists. In specific cases, such as the quotation above, there are also further contexts that put some of the predictions in perspective: Omori was part of a Japanese delegation that had been invited to San Francisco in early May 1906 to investigate the earthquake. During their stay in the city, the seismologists faced racial discrimination and were also physically assaulted. In his assessments of the delegation’s “overly cautious” (298) predictions, historian Philip Fradkin establishes a link between the severe racial discrimination and the ensuing anti-Japanese violence, stating that it may have influenced Omori, who perhaps “did not want to offend” or “wanted nothing more to do with the Americans” (298). The mistreatment of the Japanese delegation might thus have prevented a more thorough and critical examination of earthquake risk.

Furthermore, local scientific members also jumped on the bandwagon and voiced optimistic assessments of the Bay Area’s risks for earthquake recurrences. In April 1906, the *Call* featured an article

quoting President of Stanford University David Starr Jordan's confidence in the fact "that San Francisco and vicinity will be immune from severe seismic disturbances for many years to come" ("Jordan"). As had often been the case in previous tremors nationwide, the 1906 earthquake was portrayed as an exceptional one-time-only incident whose recurrence nobody had to fear since it presented an isolated occasion. These arguments were widely accepted in the Bay Area despite the general knowledge that only three decades before two major earthquakes had severely disturbed the routine of the city and countless smaller ones had perceptibly shaken the ground in the Bay Area. The singularizing of the seismic calamity of 1906 bore an especially dangerous potential since it implicitly rendered all future safety precautions redundant.

The boosters' framing of the events may have been popular beyond the wealthy elites since it fulfilled basic psychological needs by fostering a sense of security and by diminishing the projected risk of earthquake recurrences (cf. Erikson, *Everything* 240; Waldherr 17-18). Nevertheless, especially the sensationalist publications contributed assessments of the 1906 disaster that ran counter to the promotional versions. The majority of the instant histories and picture books intended for the mass market meant to involve the spectator emotionally through exaggerated renditions.¹³³ More often than not, fake and manipulated illustrations, among them also photographic ones (cf. fig. 59), catered to the disaster imaginary rather than to historical accuracy (cf., e.g.,

¹³³ The cornucopia of publications following the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire included so-called 'instant' publications, which were hurriedly put together and mostly concentrated on the horror (rather than the historical facts) of the events. Often, the authors were not familiar with the city, not to mention the incidents during the calamity, which resulted in false or exaggerated accounts such as the fall of the Cliff House into the ocean, the disappearance of entire carriages in huge crevasses, or the long-existing urban myth of cruel thieves robbing rings by cutting off the victims' fingers. Despite the wealth of sensationalist publications nationwide, the local newspaper reports, the prevalent form of mass communication, rather participated in what Arnold Meltsner called the "culture of suppression" (qtd. in Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 263). The further publications were removed from San Francisco, however, the less they participated in the aforementioned whitewashing of the earthquake and fires (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 263).

Everett; Wilson). Instead of downplaying the earthquake and the fires, the works dramatized the disaster in all its facets.

James Russel Wilson's 500-page instant 1906 history with its telling title *San Francisco's Horror of Earthquake and Fire: Terrible Devastation and Heart-Rendering Scenes, Immense Loss of Life and Hundreds of Millions of Property Destroyed, the Most Appalling Disaster of Modern Times* [...] epitomizes the sensationalist publications' take on the 1906 disaster.¹³⁴ On the cover, it establishes authenticity by promising that its content was "compiled from stories told by eye witnesses of these frightful scenes" and later proudly advertises its embellishment with "superb photographic views." Another publication, S. Levy's photo booklet *San Francisco, a City of Ruins: Dark Hours in the Queen City of the Pacific* (1906), similarly announces the "true and accurate description" of the destruction of San Francisco in its preface before it delivers a highly sensationalist narrative of the "severest earthquake that ever visited California" (n. pag.). What was even worse than the dramatizing language in the eyes of the city's entrepreneurs was that these publishers promoted photographs that singled out the worst damage and perpetuated innate fears about the trembling ground.

Levy's *San Francisco, a City in Ruins*, for example, portrays a striking assortment of photographs (cf., e.g., fig. 43, 44). The enormous crack in East Street and the buckling street car tracks in front of the main post office were without a doubt among the sites of the most severe mutilation by the seismic forces. In addition to the selection of these dramatic motifs, the visual framing of the damage further augments their sensationalist character and enhances their affective potential. In the upper photograph (fig. 43), it is particularly the close cropping and the low vantage point that direct the viewer's attention to the crevasse. Due to the camera's relative proximity to the ground, the crack appears much larger and deeper in proportion to its surrounding than it actually was. Recalling the famous woodcut of the New Madrid Earthquakes (fig. 12), the spectators are hence positioned precariously close to the chasm, which seems to start right at their feet.

¹³⁴ The full subtitle continues: *Containing a Vivid Description of This Overwhelming Calamity, Suddenness of the Blow, Great Numbers of Victims, Fall of Great Buildings, Thousands Driven from Their Homes; This Unparalleled Catastrophe Leaves San Francisco a Heap of Smouldering Ruins; Fierce Flames Sweep the Doomed City, Beautiful Buildings in Ashes.*



EFFECT OF THE EARTHQUAKE ON EAST STREET.



RESULT OF EARTHQUAKE on street and car tracks in front of Postoffice.

Fig. 43 and 44: Sensationalist disaster photographs from Levy's *San Francisco, a City of Ruins* showing the "Effect of the Earthquake on East Street" (fig. 43, above) and the "Result of Earthquake on Street and Car Tracks in Front of Postoffice" (fig. 44, below). (xF869.S3.93.S165: no. 10: effect-result). 1906. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Through their sensationalist compositions, photographs such as “Effect of the Earthquake on East Street” (fig. 43) and the “Result of Earthquake on Street and Car Tracks in front of Postoffice” (fig. 44) offered a chance for the beholders far away from San Francisco to vicariously participate in the horrifying disaster experience by imagining the power of the seismic forces suggested by the massive damage. In figure 43, the cart dangling on the edge of the crack—carefully positioned there by the photographer—evokes the epitomatic earthquake legend of people or even entire carriages being swallowed by the ground without a trace, adding to the spectacular staging of the scene. In the picture at the bottom (fig. 44), the low angle of the camera also visually enhances the height of the buckling street, and the inclusion of the figure—a man hidden to his waist behind the destruction—likewise functions to dramatize the impairment of the road. The portrayal of a disaster sightseer in figure 44 also offers a point of identification for the viewers, facilitating emotional access to the scene and enhancing the affective power of the photograph. The toppled wagon and the bent tracks together with the damaged lamp poles in the very back further supply a reference to the failure of technological inventions in the quest to subdue nature.

The two competing discourses—the boosters’ restrained version of a ‘great fire’ and the sensationalist publishers’ narrative of ‘unprecedented devastation’ by the ‘horror of earthquake and fire’—epitomized the immediate need to produce coherent narratives out of the disruptive disaster experience and embed it in already existing cultural patterns. With pictures as their centerpieces, both discourses participated in the negotiation of the interpretations of the calamity and vied for attention in the months after the disaster. The publishers of the embellished reports, many of which had been produced in the East, tried to authenticate their material by pointing to the inclusion of eyewitness reports and photographs as means to “present to the public the true picture of the California disaster” (Everett 12).

Since the sensationalist written and verbal accounts were considered to threaten San Francisco’s prosperity, the city’s economic and political leaders attacked their credibility openly. In the article “Lurid Books Libel the City: Pictures Exaggerate and Are Misleading to Outside World,” the *San Francisco Call* criticized the sensationalist publications

and identified them as “the city’s latest disaster.”¹³⁵ Southern Pacific commented in a similar manner on the “exaggerated and untrue reports” and remarked that the “earthquake with its mystery appealed to the imaginative and emotional, who in their excitement scarce knew the line between observation and imagination” (“San Francisco Imperishable” n. pag.). The preceding exploration of the visual representations highlights, on the one hand, the coexistence of very different framings of the 1906 disaster, and, on the other hand, the importance of visualizations for the efforts to appropriate and authenticate the particular narratives.

Dismissals of Risk and the Delight in the Ruinscape

When the enormity of the earthquake and the threat of future seismic activity were not outright denied, they were understated in the Bay Area in every single respect. The efforts ranged from the minimization of San Francisco’s destruction to the exaggeration of perils outside California. Southern Pacific readily participated in the downplaying of the earthquake and fires’ implications for the city by focusing on San Francisco’s bright future. In a letter to the Stockton Chamber of Commerce, James Horsburgh Jr., head of Southern Pacific, advised the organization to influence lecturers, who often used the halls owned by the local chambers of commerce or requested slides from them, all over the nation:

There will be a great many people giving lectures upon the fire and earthquake who, because of the interest attached thereto, will dwell upon the dramatic features of the situation. In so far as possible, I would suggest your organization attempting to reach every one of these lecturers and get them to make the story complete—that is, not only to

¹³⁵ The article further discredited the sensationalist publications in the following manner: “[T]he East is now suffering from a flood of flamboyant subscription books, all of which are disfigured by crude wash-drawings of scenes that never were seen and of happenings that never happened. [...] This, however, would not be known to the stranger whose eyes had never beheld the city. [...] It is safe to say there is no one in California who would seriously undertake to sell such books, and nobody would buy one unless to save it as a souvenir of the world’s ignorance and to show future generations that there was some sense of the humor of things left in Californians, even after the earthquake, fire and books of this type.”

represent the vivid details of the catastrophe itself, but to give over at *least the latter half* of the lecture to views and data showing how quickly and wonderfully San Francisco and California recovered from the effects, and how thoroughly and systematically they began with the work of reconstruction. (emphasis added)

Furthermore, Southern Pacific asked for cooperation in the efforts to convince the press of the need to highlight the following facts in their reporting: firstly, that tall buildings in residential and commercial districts had survived the earthquake unscathed; secondly, that only a “small area” of California was affected and “practically no damage was done” (Horsburgh); and thirdly, that San Francisco would be equipped with the latest water supply systems and be made fireproof.

The press willingly embraced this thinking and issued headlines such as “San Francisco Is to Teach the World Fireproofing: Rehabilitation of the City Will Show Benefit in the Catastrophe,” assuring the readership that the fire hazard would be taken care of wholeheartedly (cf. also “Burnham Urges Building of Model City”). The emphasis on the successful and exemplary recovery, together with the downplaying of the damage from the earthquake, shifted the interpretation of April 18, 1906, from a dire instance of death and destruction to an upbeat narrative of San Francisco’s immanent cultural, economic, and political rise. Maps and photographs played a crucial role in these arguments as well. Southern Pacific’s nationwide distributed pamphlet “San Francisco Imperishable” featured three double-page visual representations. The first was a city map of San Francisco’s greater proximity (fig. 39), which made use of cartography’s aura of objectivity, but nevertheless visually minimized the size of the burned district (see the dark black area in the upper northeast corner). The numerous cartographic elements (e.g. topographic symbols, street grid) supported the creation of the impression of impartiality and authenticity.

Although the delineation of the burned district roughly corresponds to the actual obliteration, the inclusion of the larger vicinity of the city in the image deceives the unknowing beholder into thinking that only a small part of a relatively large and equally developed urban area was affected. What this cropping does not indicate is the fact that the demolished section almost entirely comprised San Francisco’s financial, political, and administrative centers of operations. In opposition to the

inclined angle of most perspectival views in sensationalist maps (cf. fig. 40), the straight top down viewpoint additionally provides detachment and also minimizes the extent of the burnt area visually. Besides, the accompanying caption places the destruction at “one sixth”—rather than the actual three-fourths (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake 187*)—of the city, distorting the actual scope of the destruction as well. In this manner, the map and its verbal description both worked to support the aims of Southern Pacific’s booster strategies.

The other two visual representations in “San Francisco Imperishable” were two panoramic photographs of the city (fig. 45, 46). The upper one (fig. 45), resembling nineteenth-century bird’s eye views of the city, was taken at about ten in the morning from Nob Hill. Since the scene was captured after the most severe seismic shocks and before the fires had yet had the time to develop into full-fledged conflagrations, the photograph is meant to emerge as visual evidence for the negligibility of the earthquake damage, especially when viewed in comparison with the aerial photograph taken after the conflagration (fig. 46).

At first glance, the logic seems to add up. A second glance, however, complicates the comparison. With its distant and elevated view point, figure 45 is ideally suited to disguise the earthquake damage. On the one hand, it is extremely hard for laymen to identify the sometimes rather subtly manifesting seismic damage in an overview of the cityscape.¹³⁶ On the other hand, the eye of the beholder is also too far removed and partly hindered by the downwards tilting angle to be able to detect the more obvious phenomena such as buckled trolley tracks, structural damage to building frames, and heaps of debris resulting from downed chimneys, facades, or cornices. From this vantage point, it is also hardly possible for the spectator to spot sections of subsided ground or completely collapsed houses (such as the Valencia Hotel) between the rows of tall buildings.

¹³⁶ Using eyewitness accounts, experts’ analyses, and photographs, Stephen Tobriner creates a virtual tour of the fire district in *Bracing for Disaster* in order to evaluate the damage of the earthquake in relation to the destruction by fire. Tobriner also discusses the exact same view as in figure 45 in his reconstruction and employs his expertise to expose the wealth of seismic injuries insinuated in the photograph to the viewers. (For a comprehensive discussion of the seismic damage visible in this photograph, see Tobriner 116-32).



Fig. 45 and 46: Juxtaposition of two untitled panoramic photographs, one showing the city center right after the earthquake before the fires reached their full vigor (fig. 45, above) and another one putting a different stretch of the ruinscape after the fires on view (fig. 46, below). (xF869.S3.93.S1649: no. 11: Panoramic Photos). This pictorial composition is taken from Southern Pacific's "San Francisco Imperishable" (n. pag.). 1906. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Purportedly proving that the fire (and not the earthquake) razed the area to the ground, figure 46 is embedded in a similarly problematic context. The caption suggests that the lower scene was photographed on April 22, 1906, the last day of the fires. Yet, as the slightly curved picture plane and the high view point indicate, this photograph is of a very special kind and can consequently be traced very easily. With aerial photography having been an intricate and novel innovation at the time, the few practitioners were well-known, and their endeavors were avidly documented. Chicago photographer George R. Lawrence set out to take this shot with his giant, kite-born cameras called the "Captive Airship" not immediately after the fires but a good two weeks later in early May 1906. This explains why some of the houses seem to have been already

demolished and the debris to have been removed.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Lawrence was a commercial photographer who intended to cash in on the photograph craze and therefore chose the most dramatic scenes exclusively.¹³⁸ As most professional photographers of his time, Lawrence also habitually retouched his photographic plates and consequently very likely accentuated the impression of utter annihilation by hand (Baker, “San Francisco in Ruins”; “Lawrence Captive Airship”). The caption of figure 46 additionally pointed to the fact that the “substantial structures withstood both earthquake and fire” and thus highlighted San Francisco’s resilience. The juxtaposition of the two panoramas (fig. 45, 46) illustrates well how photographs were instrumentalized in the efforts to appropriate the narrative of the 1906 calamity in order to enforce one’s own agenda.

Another familiar way of containing the disaster of April 18, 1906, and of talking the city up was to emphasize the hazards outside of California. As with the earthquakes of 1865 and 1868, the local press, entrepreneurs, and politicians were quick to point out the various perils and adversities in the eastern part of the United States. Governor Pardee, who was a master of this rhetoric, conjured up images of the dark and dangerous American East in his speeches against which he then pitted the vision of the “glorious California sunshine” (“California” 2). A few weeks after the Great Earthquake and Fire of 1906, he declared:

I have lived in California all my life, and I know all about earthquakes and a little, from reading the papers, about cyclones, sunstrokes, floods, blizzards, lightning, storms and all those other death- and destruction-dealing things with which California is so unfamiliar, except as she reads in the newspapers of those whom they annually kill and the property

¹³⁷ Simon Baker, expert on George R. Lawrence’s aerial photography, describes the unusual perspective as a result of several innovations. Lawrence used huge cameras with plates of about 47 inches (ca. 1.2 m) width to capture an average view angle of about 130 degrees. Additionally, he used a curved film plane. While the streets in the foreground are actually straight, they appear to be curving in the print due to the use of a cylindrical plate (“Lawrence Captive Airship”). See also Baker, “San Francisco in Ruins.”

¹³⁸ According to Baker, Lawrence earned about \$15,000 with his aerial photographs of the destroyed San Francisco, with one print selling at around \$125 on average (“San Francisco in Ruins”).

they annually destroy. And, remembering these things, I'll take my chances with the earthquakes every time and all the time. [...] Spring-like winters make it a very joy to live; whose giant forests, beautiful lakes and lofty mountains have charms that are their very own; whose sea-coast, great valleys and foothills offer situations for even the most exacting—San Francisco, backed by California, will rise again. (“I Wouldn't Live in ...” 1, 3-4)

This kind of framing did not deny the earthquake or its impact but deliberately put the threat of seismicity in perspective to a series of other dreaded natural hazards. Thereby, San Francisco's stigma of being 'earthquake country' was relativized by turning the gaze to a wide array of places suffering from one or more different adversities themselves.

A similar phenomenon emerged in the “massive outpouring of printed words and photographic images” (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 263). On April 21, 1906, an article in the *San Francisco Call* used the ubiquity of disasters worldwide to eradicate the perceived uniqueness of the city's recent calamity. Evoking the trajectory of the *translatio imperii* and thus placing San Francisco in the best of company, it proposes that great empires and economic powers have time and again experienced disasters and come back strong:

Rome burned while Nero played antique ragtime on his fiddle, and Rome twenty centuries later is the center of the world's interest. In the time of Charles II London burned down to the mud, and London two and a third centuries later is the center of the Anglo-Saxon world. Chicago one October day thirty years ago breathed fire and seemed to die. [...] One hundred and sixty-one years ago Lisbon fell down in a half-minute. For two centuries and three score years Lisbon has stood like the hills of God. San Francisco is scorched to a cinder, but one of her banks, blown up, burned as an offering to fate, reaches into the locker of its unharmed resources and gives millions to succor the people! It is grand. (“The Best Is Coming”)

Articles like this removed the connotation of abnormality off San Francisco's calamity and integrated it into an all-encompassing succession of disasters world-wide. Entrepreneurs, editors, and politicians—more often than not coalescing in one person—also wove epic natural

disasters elsewhere into their statements, articles, and speeches, and eyewitnesses established references to them in a comparable manner in their reports (cf., e.g., Harper; Millard). In so doing, San Francisco's 1906 disaster was 'normalized' as only one single calamity in a lengthy and continuous series of catastrophes in all parts of the world and put in line with great cities that, at one time or another, had all been important centers of the world.



CHINATOWN

Dug from the Ruins, San Francisco
WONG SUN YUE
 897 SACRAMENTO STREET

Pompeii in America

The original refugee house is inclosed within a building. Filled with relics of the most scientific nature, the fruit of the earthquake and fire.

IT IS THE ONLY PLACE
 where tourists can see these interesting curios.
 Explained by

MRS. WONG SUN YUE
 Mrs. Howard Gould's Sister

WONG SUN YUE, 897 SACRAMENTO STREET
 Dug from the Ruins, San Francisco

Fig. 47: Advertisement for Ella May Clemmons and Wong Sun Yue's "Pompeii in America," an earthquake and fire museum in one of the original refugee houses in Chinatown. (MS OV 5050_001). Clipping from a scrapbook on the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. Ca. 1906. Courtesy of the California Historical Society.

Many of the illustrated instant disaster histories and picture pamphlets included entire catalogues of iconic historical disasters that had taken place outside California. James Russel Wilson's *San Francisco's Horror of Earthquake and Fire*, for example, devoted fifteen out of twenty-four chapters to the description of San Francisco's calamity of 1906. The remaining nine chapters amended the narrative by adding short histories of past disastrous earthquakes and volcano eruptions in

North America, South America, Europe, and New Zealand.¹³⁹ The excursions to legendary historical natural disasters worldwide, which perpetuated a global canon of disasters at the time, contained comprehensive earthquakes almanacs and also drawings of several of the described catastrophes (see, e.g., Wilson), yet they rarely included any mention of San Francisco's earlier tremors or fires. Since the short chapters on the calamities in foreign regions had not especially been written for that purpose, but were rather taken from different, already existing, sources, they were not interwoven with references to the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906. The illustrations in these publications nonetheless reverberated with those from San Francisco's recent calamity through their similar iconographies.

Especially when visualizations of San Francisco's ruinscape were involved, many texts frequently referenced ancient Greek and Roman disasters (cf., e.g., fig. 47, 48). The associations with previous eruptions of Mt. Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii might have been particularly invigorated by a heightened activity of Mt. Vesuvius in the months prior to the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, which made the local news in the city ("Grandeur of Vesuvius"; Hobbs). The inter pictorial links to classical Greek and Roman ruins also continued California's established tradition of promoting itself as what historian Kevin Starr termed the "American Mediterranean" (365). Arthur Inkersley, for instance, encouraged fellow photographers to "get out with [their] 'picture box' and record some of the wonderful sights of the modern Herculaneum" (200), Louis J. Stellman named the city "the modern Acropolis" (vii) in his 1910 *The Vanished Ruin Era: San Francisco's Classic Artistry of Ruin Depicted in Picture and Song*, and the caption of Anna Biggs's drawing of the City Hall ruins (cf. fig. 48) clarified that it did not portray "a section of the Roman Forum," implying that this might have been the first pictorial association.

¹³⁹ Richard Linthicum's *The Complete Story of San Francisco's Horror* contains twenty short chapters on the 1906 disaster and another fourteen on biblical earthquakes and disaster such as, for instance, the eruptions of Mt. Vesuvius (four chapters), the Great Lisbon Earthquake (1755), Japanese earthquakes and volcano eruptions, seismic calamities in Central and South America, and one chapter on "Our American Disasters," treating the Charleston Earthquake of 1886, the famous Galveston Flood (1900), and the Johnstown Flood (1889).



Fig. 48: Anna Biggs's drawing of the ruined City Hall from the June-July 1906 edition of *Sunset Magazine*. The caption explained the image as follows: "This is not a section of the Roman Forum but a corner of the ruins of the City Hall of San Francisco." (F850.S95: v.17: June- July 1906: 116-117). 1906. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

At the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, the attraction of real and imagined ruins in the United States had already flourished for at least one hundred years. During that time, ruins had "yielded pleasure through their historical associations, as objects that testify to the glories of a specific empire or civilization—and of empire and civilization in general" (Yablon 3). As in the second half of the nineteenth century, the evocation of the long-established and prospering 'high cultures' of Greece and Italy served a plethora of specific purposes: The emphasis on the similarities of the disaster experiences of San Francisco and sites such as Naples, Pompeii, or Athens, for example, underscored that cities were able to thrive culturally and

economically over the course of centuries in spite of natural calamities.¹⁴⁰ Besides, the juxtaposition was also often meant to transfer onto San Francisco's ruinscape the nineteenth-century enthrallment with visual representations of Italian and Greek ruins, which manifested itself so pronouncedly in works such as Thomas Cole's series *The Course of Empire* (1833-36), William James Stillman's *The Acropolis of Athens* (1870), and manifold lantern slides, stereographs, and guidebooks illustrating the Grand Tour.

In the aftermath of the 1906 calamity, scores of San Franciscans hoped that their city would experience disaster tourism equal to the steady streams of travelers visiting places such as Pompeii. In 1908, Ella May Clemmons together with her husband Wong Sun Yue, whom she had met while distributing food in the Chinese refugee camp near the Presidio in summer 1906, opened a museum on Sacramento Street, where they exhibited curiosities that survived the fire and sold postcards and other souvenirs (cf. fig. 47). Cashing in on Pompeii's legend, they used the slogan 'dug from the ruins'—falsely suggesting excavations similar to the ones at the foot of Mt. Vesuvius—and titled the ad, running in a travel guide to Chinatown, 'Pompeii in America.'¹⁴¹

It was impossible to walk in the ruinscape without encountering definite reminders that one was not meandering through a field of classical ruins. Streetcar tracks, electrical wires, telegraph poles, and billboards made no secret of the fact that these "day-old-ruins" (Yablon 20) had emerged almost overnight. Many photographers, however, did not miss any opportunity to frame their subjects aesthetically in accordance with ancient Italy's or Greece's pictorial patterns and went as far as to retouch the mementos of modernization out of their negatives (Cohen

¹⁴⁰ Italy has a comprehensive history of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. At the time, the most prominent disasters were the Pompeii Earthquake of AD 62 (cf. fig. 31), the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79, the 1570 Ferrara Earthquake, the 1693 Sicily Earthquake, the 1783 Calabria Earthquake, the 1857 Basilicata Earthquake, and the 1905 Calabria Earthquake (USGS, "Historic World Earthquakes: Italy").

¹⁴¹ The transcultural union of the two, formed in the immediate aftermath of the 1906 disaster, did not last long in San Francisco amidst the xenophobic atmosphere of the early years of the twentieth century. For more information on Ella May Clemmons and her relationship to Wong Sun Yue, see De Ford's *They Were San Franciscans* (262-80).

193). Most visual representations hence adhered to the nineteenth-century conventions of a romanticized portrayal of ruins. They tended to omit the sight of high-rise structures and modern construction materials, preferred stone, ideally marble, buildings and Greek Revival columns (cf., e.g., fig. 49), focused on symmetrical architectural fragments, exhibited a soft focus and lighting, and displayed the romantic motif a lonesome, pensive wanderer to provide a point of access and identification for the spectator. More often than not, these illustrations and photographs, as, for example, in Stellman's photo book (fig. 49) or in the June-July 1906 issue of *Sunset Magazine* (fig. 50), were accompanied by lyrics composed in lofty diction and classical rhyme and meter to evoke parallels to the aesthetic riches of the ancient literatures. The employment of personified allegories in the Greek and Roman tradition can be correspondingly read as an appropriation of elements of the classical iconography and rhetoric (cf., e.g., fig. 50).



Fig. 49: Louis J. Stellman's photograph of the former entrance to the Towne Mansion, which has become famous as the 'Portals of the Past.' (F869.S3.93.S8: 16-17). From Stellman's *The Vanished Ruin Era* (1910). Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Despite their rapid genesis, occasional coarseness, and modern character, San Francisco's ruins were rendered in similar terms as the remains of classical edifices as Louis J. Stellman's photograph of the so-called 'Portals of the Past' demonstrates (fig. 49). Having had a relatively short urban history of its own, San Francisco indulged in analogies to the classical 'high cultures' in word and image in order to appropriate their mythical reputation of being amongst the most long-established, culturally refined, aesthetically evolved, and morally reflective civilizations. This framing countered narratives of San Francisco's rough-and-tumble Wild West youth and replaced it with a redeemed and glorious maturity.

On top, it advocated the "Americanized version of the *translatio*" (Yablon 229), which envisioned the movement of civilization and progress westward from Athens and Rome via London and Paris to the American West. Framings like these transferred the imagined properties of ancient Italy and Greece (e.g. a refined culture, aesthetic grandeur, heroism, pageantry, and artistry) onto San Francisco and represented the city as an equally important political, cultural, and economic metropolis. This rhetoric furthermore continued San Francisco's tradition of asserting utmost confidence after the great fires and the earthquakes of the 1860s, claiming a distinct and unique capability of recovery due to the 'exceptional' qualities of its location and residents.

The use of these various frames to understate the 1906 disaster and its impact served—in the words of James Horsburgh, Jr.—“to bring forth prominently the sunshine that is to follow the storm.” The denial of the earthquake, the minimization of the overall destruction, the exaggeration of all out-of-state natural and man-made hazards, the normalization of calamities in the Bay Area through the emphasis on the seemingly endless chain of disasters world-wide, and the conscious evocation of analogies to the classical Greek and Italian ruinscapes all provided framings that—to varying degrees—mitigated damage to future financial investments in the city, fostered the psychological calm, and celebrated the city as a safe, productive, and culturally rich living environment.

Particularly the photographers who identified themselves as committed artists devoted to bringing the aesthetic “beauty” (Cohen 187) out of the ruined San Francisco that looked so “Pompeiiian in its desolation” (Inkersley 199) counteracted the horrifying experience of the disaster in

their visual representations and, with it, the profound debate about how to decrease San Francisco's vulnerability. It was the sensationalist pictures—photographs whose “sole object seemed to be to get as large an area of ruin as possible on each plate” (Cohen 187) and illustrations that focused on the failure of modern technologies—that exposed the earthquake risks in urban space. Thereby, they took delight in putting the fury of the earthquake and the failure of technological contrivances on display and also expressed the imagined qualities of the 1906 disaster (cf., e.g., fig. 43, 44, 59).

Visions of Resilience, Rise, and the Return to the Frontier

*People of Ruined City Take Heart: Courage Sublime
Rising Superior to Disaster, and Inspired by Spirit of '49,
They Determine to Build Anew.*

—*Headline of the Chicago Record-Herald, April 23, 1906*

As after previous calamities in the city, optimism and an unbroken confidence in the immanent rise of the city became noticeable amid widespread destruction and loss. The local press, political speeches, official telegrams, and life-writing documents did not hesitate to communicate the locals' deepest conviction that in no time San Francisco would become more splendid and grand than it had ever been. The headlines in the local newspapers ensured their recipients that San Francisco “will rise again in splendor” “superior to disaster” in “only a few weeks” with “big blocks [rising] from ruins,” fulfilling the “dream” of the “city beautiful.” The city would be “safe from fire,” the articles further contended, and “teach the world fireproofing” but at the same time also be the most aesthetically pleasing (“Will Rise Again”; “Big Blocks”; “Resurrection”; “People of the Ruined City”; “San Francisco Is to Teach”).

The narrative of San Francisco's resilience was a popular theme in visual culture and could be found in many illustrations of the 1906 disaster (cf., e.g., fig. 42, 50, 51, 53). In this context, numerous allegories were employed. Emulating classical iconographies, the city was often personified as a young goddess-like maiden who smiled confidently and reassuringly at the beholder. In some instances, an Uncle Sam figure expressed his sympathy and solidarity to the woman,

signifying national cohesion and a sense of togetherness. In the allegorical representations of San Francisco, its ethnic and economic diversity was visually excluded and instead subsumed under the characteristics of the politically and economically dominant members of the city. Drawing on the prevalent iconographic convention of engendering abstract concepts such as liberty, justice, or the nation as female (cf., e.g., Britannia and Marianne), the portrayal of San Francisco as a well-mannered and beautiful white 'lady' also served to counter possible fears of social disorder, which—as the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 demonstrated—were one of the major concerns of the American middle- and upper classes at the time.

Maynard Dixon's cover of the June-July 1906 edition of *Sunset Magazine* (fig. 50) presents an example of this kind of allegory: Above the burnt ruinscape and masses of small figures collectively engaged in the rebuilding of the city, a white goddess-like woman embodies the vision of San Francisco's future by embracing the magnificent new San Francisco. The brightness of the blue sky and her staunch gaze into the far distance fortify the assurance of the immanent recovery of the city. Her flowing hair, which seems to morph into gray smoke clouds, decidedly evokes the fire (and not the earthquake) and hence fuses the promotional disaster narratives of the 'great fire' with the optimistic vision of the inevitable and glorious rise of San Francisco.¹⁴²

Dixon's cover illustration also points to the close ties between the press and San Francisco's booster community. With its high nationwide circulation, *Sunset Magazine* functioned as a mouthpiece of its owners, Southern Pacific, and spread their interpretive framing well beyond California. Dixon, who would marry photographer Dorothea Lange in 1920, had also become thoroughly entangled with San Francisco's economic leaders and railroad tycoons due to his employment at several Bay Area-based newspapers and magazines such as William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner* during the preceding decade (Hagerty 29-87). Media outlets such as *Sunset Magazine* thus functioned as national amplifiers, augmenting the visibility of the optimistic framings of the calamity.

¹⁴² For the very similar black-and-white cover image of *Sunset Magazine*'s so-called 'Emergency Edition' of May 1906 (F850.S95: v.17: May 1906: cover), visit the Online Archive of California (OAC) at <<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/>>.



Fig. 50: Maynard Dixon's cover illustration of the June-July 1906 edition of *Sunset Magazine*. (F850.S95: v.17: June- July 1906: cover). The allegory portrays San Francisco's rise from disaster as a female Greek goddess lifting a magnificent white city from the burnt ruins. 1906. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

A similar kind of allegorical representation drew on the tradition of picturing California as its state animal, the grizzly bear *ursus californicus*, which from the time of the Californian Republic (June-July 1846) on had served to embody California's self-image of strength, vigor, and bravery. In many of the adaptations of this iconography, San Francisco

was portrayed as a strong and roaring grizzly with arrows (often inscribed with words such as fire, earthquake, or famine) stuck in the bear's back. Importantly, the arrows did not harm or bother the animal in the least. Accompanying text frequently intensified the visual narratives of hardiness by emphasizing San Franciscans' resilience verbally. One of these bear allegories (fig. 51), which had previously been employed by the California Insurance Company, was used as a postcard advertisement for the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exhibition. With its heading "undaunted," it underscored the intended message, i.e., that even the 1906 calamity had not been a 'real' challenge to San Francisco's growth and economic prosperity.

The basic rhetoric patterns of the narratives of confidence and resilience, which had been developed and reinforced in the six great fires and the earthquakes of the 1860s, provided a handy repertoire for the framing of the 1906 calamity and were therefore prolifically employed in the local news coverage and political documents. The texts tended to vindicate the drive of the survivors by emphasizing their determination to take action in order to rebuild San Francisco while the fires were still raging. This was followed by a chronological list of the heroic deeds that occurred during the three days of earthquake and fires. Finally, most narratives concluded with a vision of ultimate improvement of the city beyond the previous status quo. The following quote from Southern Pacific's "San Francisco: The Imperishable" provides a glimpse into this disaster rhetoric of resilience and rise:

Before the ashes had cooled, the citizens had organized into working committees for the building of a New San Francisco that was not only talked about, but was already under way. The spirit and grit of the Californians of the Argonaut days of '49 were shown in the calm courage with which the loss was met and the determination to up-build the new city, better and fairer than ever. (n. pag.)

As the reason for this deep belief in the 'resurrection,' Southern Pacific and similar press items identified the undaunted 'spirit of '49,' which allegedly combined courage, determination, endurance, ingenuity, and hard work (cf., e.g., "Big Blocks"; "People of the Ruined City"; "Resurrection"; "San Francisco Is to Teach"; "Will Rise Again"). The emphasis on the supposedly exceptional capabilities of San Franciscans

to cope with disaster further thwarted sensationalist narratives emphasizing the magnitude and horrifying nature of the disaster.



Fig. 51: “Undaunted.” Postcard advertisement for the Panama Pacific International Exhibition, which was held in San Francisco in 1915. The motif continues the iconography of allegorizing the disaster-ravaged San Francisco as a bear “undaunted” by attacking arrows, which developed in the aftermath of the 1906 calamity. Courtesy of the San Francisco Bay Area Post Card Club.

The absence of a functioning supply of water, gas, and electricity in the wake of the 1906 disaster meant a considerable change in the quotidian routine for most residents. The availability of food, water,

clothes, and shelter—often taken for granted at any other time in the city—moved up on the survivors’ agendas. For most San Franciscans, the 1906 calamity resulted in the replacement of the four brick or wooden walls of their homes with permeable tent canvas. Even those who still had a house had to cook on the streets due to the city-wide ban on indoor fires. The lack of public transport by street car further slowed down life in the burned district. Moreover, perils such as contagious diseases threatened the camps in public squares and parks. At night, the dark city additionally offered an unusual sight for most San Franciscans even though by 1906 the illumination of public spaces had not been introduced too long ago. This change in life style was perceived by most San Franciscans as travel back in time. Fancying, according to what Raymond Williams termed the ‘escalator’ effect (*Country* 9-12), that previous generations in the Bay Area had lived closer to nature, San Franciscans imagined the return to the Argonaut days. With this imagined return to a simpler, less complicated life, the rhetoric of the frontier came back as well.

In her report about “The Earthquake, the Fire, the Relief,” the nurse Margaret Mahoney, for example, stated: “We were not disheartened. We old Californians are the children of pioneer fathers and not afraid of hardship” (8). Congressman Julius Kahn described the time after the disaster as “a return to the days of the frontier—to the days when we had a primitive civilization on the shores of the Pacific” (6). This temporary move back to the past was considered a time of deprivation and lamented. Yet, it was at the same time also seen in a positive light since it supposedly meant the simplification of a more and more standardized and technologized life style and was thus perceived with a feeling of freedom, relief, and enjoyment (Yablon 196-206). In his speech, Kahn emphasized that San Franciscans “accepted all of these conditions cheerfully, hopefully, buoyantly” (6). This was the image that the Bay Area intended to send to the rest of the world.

The framing of the 1906 disaster as the “return to nature” (cf., e.g., fig. 52) also surfaced in the Bay Area in life writing documents such as letters, diaries, personal photographs, or eyewitness reports. As in previous earthquakes, most survivors used metaphors from the sphere of the natural environment to describe their recollections of what it was like when the earth started shaking on April 18, 1906. The most frequent point of comparison was the movement of water, which emerged as the

paradigmatic metaphor. Portrayals of the earthquake as “angry ocean,” “wavelike motion” or “short, choppy waves of the sea, crisscrossed by a tide as mighty as themselves,” causing the buildings to be “tossed like a ship at sea,” were widespread in eyewitness reports (Emma Burke; D. Cameron; J. R. Hand qtd. in Linthicum and White 123). Further figures of speech drew up analogies to wild animals such as the “buckling bronco” (Bacigalupi) or referred to moving buildings as “sway[ing] from south to north like a tall poplar in a storm” (Busch qtd. in Linthicum and White 130-31).



Fig. 52: Photograph of an unidentified refugee camp in San Francisco taken on May 22, 1906. (CHS2015.1917). Engraved onto the photographic plate is the date as well as the comment “A Return to Nature.” 1906. Courtesy of the California Historical Society.

What all this imagery had in common was that it enforced the binary opposition of nature and culture. All phenomena that seemed to disturb or threaten the urban order were accordingly associated with nature. This also pertained to the masses trying to flee the trembling city, which were often described as “flood” or “tide,” and the noises caused by the dynamiting of the fire breaks, which were frequently identified as “thunder” (cf., e.g., Carr qtd. in Linthicum and White 144; Morris ch. 1). Despite the ubiquity of nature in the Bay Area and the general

impossibility of clearly separating culture from the natural environment, a contrast was established between the wild, chaotic, and uncontrollable disposition of nature and the civilized, orderly, and foreseeable character of the urban space. Moreover, nature was perceived to be 'on the outside' trying to gain access into urban space. Many of the life writing documents accordingly personified nature as a hostile entity intending to attack the city and invade the epitomatic space of human accomplishment and order.

Even into the long aftermath, the disasterscape was often connoted with natural imagery. "When the sea of flames finally died down," San Francisco businessman Charles Kendrick wrote in his eyewitness report, "some of the burned-over areas smoldered for weeks, and the wilderness of ruins was beyond words—thousands of blocks of complete desolation." The calamity was thus framed as the presence of wild nature in the city and therefore as a discontinuation of the usual separation between 'culture' in urban space and 'nature' on its outside. This rupture also offered a window of opportunity to more generally reflect upon the relationship between nature and culture in the modern American city, which was usually viewed as nature being successfully subjugated by man through ever more advanced and carefully implemented technological means (Yablon 194). Especially the sensationalist photographs of bent streetcar tracks, crumbled architectural marvels, and bent telegraph poles seemed to increase the awareness that the intensifying reliance on technology simultaneously creates an enduring exposure to risks inherently contained within technological systems, as prominently argued by Ulrich Beck in *Risk Society* (1986) and Edward Tenner in *Why Things Bite Back* (1996).

In this context, rebuilding was a means of reclaiming the urban space that nature had earlier 'invaded' and of restoring order and control over the city again. San Francisco was indeed determined to regain charge and come back grander as before. The result, the rebuilt city, was therefore lavishly celebrated, first, in the 1909 Portola Festival and, later, in the Panama Pacific International Exhibition of 1915. The rebuilding of San Francisco, however, came along with high environmental costs and the depletion of a multitude of natural resources such as water, energy, steel, and lumber. Besides, the reconstruction took its toll on more than fifteen thousand horses, which were worked to

death in the ruins and whose death was celebrated as a sign of the city's will to recover (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 245-47).

The interpretation of the 'return to nature' as a 'return to the frontier,' as formulated, among others, by Congressman Julius Kahn and nurse Margaret Mahoney, also had further implications. The evocation of the frontier myth, the "essential American creation myth" (Steiner) and the "standard explanation of western and American exceptionalism" (Grossman 3), helped link San Francisco's idiosyncratic situation to a national ideological framework. Although specifically drawing on the American West, the frontier narrative relates an all-encompassing 'American' experience and explains the (supposed) uniqueness of the United States. According to the myth of the frontier, the ongoing immersion in the roughness and savagery along the continuously receding line between civilization and wilderness was not only responsible for a specifically "exuberant, restless, materialistic, [and] pragmatic people" but also for U.S.-American "democracy, nationalism, and individualism" (Steiner).

On top of the resilience, ingenuity, and endurance that San Franciscans as descendents of the Western pioneers already claimed to possess, the 1906 disaster was framed to have added another similarly toughening, identity-shaping, and ultimately triumphant experience. As a result, San Francisco's fate was not isolated but firmly tied into larger trajectories of American ideology. At a time when the frontier was already officially closed and natural disasters and the ensuing heterotopias supposedly took over the role of the frontier, San Franciscans were considered to not only overcome their disaster in pioneer manner but to do so successfully with multiple benefits from it. Yet, not all sources explicitly referred to 'America' as the imagined community of resilience and bravura, numerous sources regionalized the frontier spirit as typically Californian or, even more specifically, identified the "Undaunted Spirit" as uniquely San Franciscan ("Will Rise Again").¹⁴³

¹⁴³ When philosopher William James visited the destroyed parts of San Francisco, he was struck by the equanimity and the optimism among the survivors. In an essay about this experience, he wrote: "It is easy to glorify this as something characteristically American, or especially Californian. [...] But I like to think that what I write of is a normal and universal trait of human nature" (225).



Fig. 53: Stereograph titled “True Grit—Barber Painting Sign on Tent Stretched on Sidewalk of Former Place.” From the Griffith & Griffith Series. 1906. Author’s collection.

The visual culture of the 1906 calamity also evoked the frontier mythology and the pioneer spirit. Many of the items that had previously presented iconic elements of the pictorial repertoire of the frontier—such as the white canvas tents, horses, wagons, and groups of people sitting around small fires or eating outside while sitting on the ground—were now omnipresent in the city. Reinforced by the sight of two other frontier motifs, open space and a very ‘hostile’ and barren environment, this iconography resembled the pictorial tradition of pioneer times. “True Grit” (fig. 53), a stereograph which appeared, among others, in Griffith & Griffith’s disaster series, provides an excellent example to demonstrate visual culture’s potential to bring to mind the frontier myth.

“True Grit” shows a local barber in the process of re-erecting his former shop in a makeshift tent in the middle of a rubble-littered neighborhood. The fact that the debris had not yet been removed and that guards still patrolled the streets (one police officer standing right

next to the tent seems to be watching very interestedly) places the scene in the immediate aftermath only hours after the fires had been extinguished. As much as half the photograph is devoted to the rather dark, amorphous rubble in order to signify the destruction and immense obstacles that ‘nature’ has put in the way of everyday life and business. The incompleteness of the barber’s writing on the canvas tent—the last letter in the word “shaving” is not yet finished—provides immediacy and emphasizes that it is the prompt action of the barber that the beholder is supposed to focus on. The telegraph lines and the wooden beams, all rising from the left to the right, add a certain dynamic to the image and can be metaphorically read as signs of the imminent and undisputed rise from the debris. The white tent and the presence of horses together with the first part of the caption of the picture (“True Grit”) draw on the pictorial repertoire of the early settlers, thus evoking the often quoted pioneer spirit with all its connotations of resilience, ingenuity, hard-work, and courage.



Fig. 54: Stereograph titled “Refuge Camp Made of Scraps of Corrugated Sheet Iron Gathered from the Ruins.” Griffith & Griffith Series. 1906. Author’s collection.

Similar pictures such as “Refuge Camp” (fig. 54) also recall the pioneer spirit. Resembling images of the cowboy camps in the American West, two men, both with hats, sit amid the ‘wilderness of the ruins’ in front of a self-made shelter. While the desolate and bare surrounding of the men’s encampment evokes notions of a ‘hostile’ natural environment, the men’s bodily postures indicate equanimity rather than stress or tension, indicating that they feel comfortable in this ‘uncivilized’ space. Moreover, the refugee camp itself is, as the caption tells the viewer, ingeniously assembled from recycled materials demonstrating the adaptability of the pioneers of the disasterscape and their ability to transform the barren land into a promising place. In this line of interpretation, “Refuge Camp” celebrates the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire as a return to conditions of the frontier times and, simultaneously, as a revival of the pioneer spirit. Through the prominence of City Hall towering over the camp, the scene acquires a metonymic character, representing not only the attitude of two San Franciscans but of the entire city.



Fig. 55: “Fun Making by the Earthquake Refugees—A Temporary Home, San Francisco, Cal.” (LC-USZ62-57156). Photograph portraying “The House of Mirth” in Jefferson Square. 1906. Courtesy of the Digital Prints and Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

The often quoted pioneer spirit also came to the fore in the pictures of the refugee camps and street kitchens, which were both popular motifs of photographers and illustrators. Families often sent these scenes as photographic postcards to relatives outside the city to inform them

about the living conditions in the city. Instead of complaints or low spirits, the framing very often conveyed confidence.¹⁴⁴ The survivors in the city were so buoyant in the face of disaster as to resort to gallows humor. As if to honor Mark Twain, newspapers printed earthquake jokes, and the street kitchens featured amusing names, mostly mocking upper-class restaurants such as the Chat Noir or generating a comical effect with denominations like “Appetite Killery.” A street kitchen booth named “Camp Necessity,” for example, featured a funny menu written in chalk on the front doors. Among other quirky items, it offered “Fleas Eyes Raw,” “Flies Legs on Toast,” and “Rain Water Fritters with Umbrella Sauce.” A razed commercial lot displayed a sign announcing “We move because the elevator was out of order” before the company stated its new address in Oakland.

Out of the cornucopia of humorous motifs, “The House of Mirth” (fig. 55), a tent in Jefferson Square which had received its name from the eponymous, best-selling 1905 novel by Edith Wharton, constituted the most iconic humorous site by far. Signs such as “Ring the Bell for Landlady,” “Furnished Rooms with Running Water, Steam Heat, and Elevator,” and “No Peddlers” (which is not visible in fig. 55) endowed “The House of Mirth” with a notion of middle- and upper-class domesticity that collided as sharply with the living conditions in the refugee camp in Jefferson Square as Lily Bart, the protagonist of Wharton’s novel of manners, stood in contrast to the dominant nineteenth-century middle- and upper-class gender norms and conventions of domesticity in New York.

The use of humor suggests that San Franciscans made it an explicit point to emphasize that they did not let an earthquake and the fires get them down and that they tried to gain the best from the circumstances. In the spirit of the pioneers, they rather framed the experience in the refugee camps and in the streets as one more challenge to their adventurous life in the American West. In this fashion, they perpetuated the rhetoric that had developed in the second half of the nineteenth century to counter San Francisco’s vulnerability to earthquakes and

¹⁴⁴ Studies such as Rebecca Solnit’s *A Paradise Built in Hell* (2009) and Lawrence Vale and Thomas Campanella’s *The Resilient City* (2005) postulate—similar to William James’s statements—that to some extent optimism, altruism, and resilience can be regarded as universal disaster phenomena.

fires. The evocation of the pioneer spirit and the frontier past served to frame the 1906 disaster as a repetition of the sundry challenges that the ancestors of contemporaneous San Franciscans, the pioneers, had brilliantly coped with.

Mixed into the proud display of the resilient and bold California spirit were optimistic perspectives on the disaster. Even before the earthquake and fires, the city had discussed plans, among others one by Daniel Burnham, to improve San Francisco's layout and architecture according to the ideas of the City Beautiful Movement.¹⁴⁵ In this respect, the calamity was referred to as a "Golden Opportunity" enabling the design of an entirely new framework of parks, wide boulevards, and radiating avenues (cf., e.g., "Big Blocks"; "Burnham"). As after previous fires, the disaster was thought to have purged the city aesthetically of unsightly buildings, especially in the poorer neighborhoods, and to have thus facilitated the glorious rise of a 'new' and 'grander' city (cf., e.g., "Resurrection"; "Will Rise Again"). Newspapers and booklets published fanciful drawings of a new downtown in the days after the calamity, promising that the buildings would be finished soon. This declaration sent the property prices for the lots in the burnt district soaring, which was praised as the first indicator of the immanent rise (cf., e.g., "Resurrection"). Many of the illustrations exclusively featured high-rise buildings interspersed with neat and spacious park zones and hence put forward an imaginary, rather than a practical assessment, of the new city (cf., e.g., Harriman).

In regard to vice, the disaster of April 1906 was also seen as having silver linings since it was perceived to have purged the city morally: "Know you of any milder agency than earthquake and fire," asked John Leander Brown in a rather New England Puritan rhetoric his *Earthquake Blessings* (1906), "that could have wrought this marvel [the destruction of the Barbary Coast] in so brief a time?" (6). Photographs and drawings of the church services at St. Mary's Church showing the line of worshipers reaching back until the outside steps were often read in a likewise manner, despite the fact that religious framings of the calamity were generally rare. An often quoted maxim pointed to the paradox of

¹⁴⁵ For more information on the so-called Burnham Plan, which was never implemented due to financial reasons, see Robert W. Cherny's "City Commercial, City Beautiful, City Practical."

interpreting the calamity as God's wrath or punishment. Juxtaposing the survival of the whiskey warehouse A.P. Hotaling within the fire district to a number of completely burnt churches, an ad by Hotaling—using verses ascribed to Californian poet Charles K. Field—implied that the earthquake was definitely not a result of divine wrath:

If, as they say, God spanked the town
Because it was so frisky,
Why did he burn the churches down,
And save Hotaling's whiskey?

These lines, at the time often referred to in response to several priests' framing of the earthquake and fires as God's punishment for San Francisco's secular lifestyle, have become famous since then and can be found on a plaque near the entrance to the Hotaling Building on Jackson Square, which is today a historical San Francisco landmark (cf. also Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 168-70).

In 1906, the calamity was moreover considered to have brought forward the exceptional good in people. During the great conflagration, the fire-fighters emerged as heroes "struggling almost without rest, keeping up the nearly hopeless conflict until they fairly fell in their tracks from fatigue" (Morris ch. iv). A poster-size photo collage commemorating the "Heroes of the Great Calamity," for instance, featured a picture of the burning city and photographic portraits of 477 of the city's most prominent fire fighters and members of the police department arranged around it. A legend to both sides enabled the identification of every single portrait. In the process of rebuilding, the city's craftsmen were also presented in a heroic manner. Numerous postcard series or photograph captions referred to the workers as 'The Men Who Are Putting San Francisco together Again' or as 'Builders of New San Francisco,' and accompanying reports stressed the untiring efforts of brick masons, brick cleaners, carpenters, and the steel girder men in the rebuilding processes.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ In order to view "Heroes of the Great Calamity" (FN-34473), visit the Online Archive of California (OAC) at <<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/>> or see Hansen and Condon (132-33). The fact that there is only one woman among the "heroes" shows how closely the disaster heroism was connoted with masculinity. The

Bravery and indefatigable altruism were not only ascribed to individual groups like the fire fighters, soldiers, or craftsmen. The countless volunteers were also revered as heroes and praised for their courage and philanthropy in the untiring efforts to rescue fellow San Franciscans, their property, and the city itself. In *San Francisco's Horror of Earthquake and Fire*, James Russel Wilson wrote:

Amid death and destruction a splendid spirit of heroism was born among the fortunates who had escaped. They appeared from all directions—on foot, in automobiles, in cabs—doctors, rich men, poor men, strong men and frail men eager to do what they could to rescue the wounded and save the dead from being burned beyond recognition in the ruins. (60)

In a paradigmatic diction, this passage puts “death and destruction” next to the collective heroism of all (male) community members and frames the earthquake and fires as a moment of social unity and togetherness by pointing out the positive concomitant silver linings.¹⁴⁷

Expressions of solidarity and anecdotes of generous charity constituted focal points in many eyewitness reports and prevailed in the accounts of life in the refugee camps. Although the 1906 calamity had caused severe suffering for San Franciscans, the altruism in its aftermath nevertheless also partly restored “faith in humanity” and in “the [moral] progress of the human race” (Emma Burke). This very positive framing (together with the connotation of the disaster as ‘new’ beginning) might have accounted for rather unexpected uses of the visualizations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. One postcard displaying a panorama of the ruinscape, for instance, announced the birth of a family’s baby daughter; another showing a close-up of ruined buildings was sent to England as a birthday card. The portrayal of the 1906 disaster as a moment welding together the Bay Area was not only perpetuated in the immediate aftermath of the calamity but extended into the many weeks and month of reconstruction and rebuilding.

postcard collections mentioned above (e.g. image FN-32607) and similar items can also be found in the OAC.

¹⁴⁷ This quotation also demonstrates how strongly the disaster heroism was associated with masculinity despite the frequent involvement of women in the rescue efforts. It seems that the return to the frontier also brought with it a return to archetypal gender stereotypes.

With an estimated 250,000 residents without an inhabitable home and many more without access to food, water, and gas, San Franciscans depended heavily on relief organizations. Since the 1906 disaster took place when federal disaster relief was not yet fully developed, there were initially no established relief structures and hierarchies for San Francisco to rely on. Until the very first years of the twentieth century, the American Red Cross had originally been primarily concerned with providing service to war victims. With the rechartering of the American Red Cross in 1905, Congress enlarged this scope of duty considerably, and the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire was the first major American calamity during which the Red Cross served for the first time as the central organization for the national disaster response (Bumgarner 108). Local politicians, businessmen, and charity leaders worked closely with the American National Red Cross and other social work experts and soon founded the San Francisco Relief and Red Cross Funds (SFRRCF) as the heart piece of the organization of the relief efforts.¹⁴⁸

In the aftermath of the 1906 disaster, San Francisco faced two major challenges: firstly, to counteract general anxieties about anarchy and lawlessness that had tended to surface after previous major calamities such as, for example, the 1871 Great Chicago Fire and the 1886 Charleston Earthquake in the Bay Area; and secondly, to prove to the rest of the nation that it was able to professionally and efficiently handle disaster relief, including the accommodation and provisioning of several hundred thousand residents, while at the same time organizing the rebuilding. A failure in either one of the two areas would have severely endangered San Francisco's reputation and its appeal for out-of-state investments. Depictions of long bread lines such as "Breadline at St. Mary's Cathedral" (fig. 56) provided an apt repertoire to advance promotional framings and thwart potential fears about social unrest or the city's failure in bringing relief, which is why these pictures were often drawn upon in order to vindicate San Francisco's alleged victory over disorder and to showcase accomplishments in disaster management.

In the United States, images of bread lines had gained cultural capital particularly in connection to the impact of the economic recessions of the late nineteenth century on the industrialized cities of

¹⁴⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of the relief efforts, see Andrea Rees Davies's *Saving San Francisco* (2012).

the East Coast. Associated mostly with long-term charity projects such as Louis Fleischmann's New York "Bread Line" and not so much with natural disasters, bread lines signified order, control, and a democratic treatment in time of hunger and need. Despite the occasional criticism of philanthropic projects such as Fleischmann's "Bread Line" for fear of quelling the beneficiaries' will to work, the sight of long rows of men, women, and children enduringly waiting for provisions had moreover put forward a vision of patient and deserving individuals, removing possible fears of social unrest and aggression from the lines. Comparable interpretive framings were also very popular in the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire.¹⁴⁹



Fig. 56: Photograph by J.D. Givens titled "Breadline at St. Mary's Cathedral, 110 block of Van Ness Ave., Geary to Post." (CHS2015.1916). 1906. Courtesy of the California Historical Society.

¹⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of the different pictorial repertoires, stock motifs, and cultural functions of the bread lines of 1906, see Leikam, "Visualizing Hunger."

In a wide array of private and public texts, bread lines were seen to embody order and civilized behavior and therefore served as a welcome counter narrative to the sensationalist disaster reports, which emphasized the actual and imagined pandemonium and often related urban disaster legends featuring barbaric cruelty. The bread lines of 1906 were also regarded as proof for San Francisco's competence and effectiveness in handling the emergency situation and thus taken as a sure indicator of the future recovery and rise of the city. "The breadlines at the parks," contemporaries Richard Linthicum and Trumbull White remarked in 1906, "furnished striking instances of the absolute patience and fortitude that has marked the behavior of the people throughout their trying experience. There were no disorders when the hungry thousands were told to form a line and receive their bread and canned goods" (180). Many San Franciscans moreover considered the bread lines a corrective for social grievances such as the city's stratification along lines of class and ethnicity.

From personal diary entries to official government declarations to literary and historical accounts of the earthquake and fires, representations of the bread lines portrayed the relief stations as ideal social spaces, free of ethnic, social, and economic segregation. In his instant history *San Francisco Through Earthquake and Fire*, author Charles A. Keeler, who had been a long-time resident of Berkeley at the time, describes the bread lines in this fashion as idyllic places of unity and inclusion forged from disaster:

The brotherhood of man was not a misty ideal but a beautiful reality. Caste and creed were thrown to the winds. There were no rich and poor, no capitalists and laborers, no oppressed and oppressors. All extraneous things were gone, and the greatness of human hearts, meeting a common loss, facing a common peril, and buoyed up by a common hope, was sublime. Men and women who had lived in wealth and elegance stood in the bread-line with Chinese and negroes, with street-sweepers and paupers. (38)¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ The above cited quotation by Linthicum and White continues in an analogous manner, emphasizing the inclusiveness of the bread lines: "All were content to wait their turn. Silk-hatted men followed good naturedly behind Chinese and took their loaves from the same hand" (180).

Interestingly enough, “Barriers Burned” ends by emphasizing that the bread line friendships and the ensuing social cohesion ultimately benefit the city since all survivors join forces ever more effectively and combine their energies to rebuild San Francisco.

While most bread lines photographs indeed support disaster narratives of order and control through the depiction of straight and neatly arranged lines of waiting residents (cf., e.g., fig. 56), they do not back the framing of bread lines as places of social unity and inclusion since they hardly ever include Chinese Americans, African Americans, or the poor. What they show instead is a rather homogeneous crowd of ‘white’ middle-class San Franciscans, contradicting the narrative of an ethnically inclusive, classless post-disaster society. In conformity with these photographs, recent studies have pointed out the discriminatory practices and the biased character of the relief efforts. Philip Fradkin refers to the disaster relief and the treatment of the city’s minorities as “separate and unequal” (*Great Earthquake* 211), and Erica Y. Z. Pan states that “as soon as the immediate danger was over, racial discrimination resumed” (55).¹⁵¹ The racial and class-based discrimination notwithstanding, the bread lines remained associated with “earthquake love” (qtd. in Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 211), order, and unity in the prolonged aftermath of the calamity.

The appropriations of the bread lines as symbols of order, social cohesion, and harmony are crucial because most optimistic interpretive framings that emphasized the disaster’s silver linings have endured in the memorialization and still constitute a staunch part of the cultural memory as could be seen in the year 2006 during the commemorative ceremonies marking the 100th anniversary of the calamity. Due to their immense and lasting popularity, visual artifacts of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire have played an important part as frames suggesting a particular interpretation of the events of April 18. At times, visualizations were (ab)used to support boosterism and edit out psychological dangers (cf., e.g., fig. 42, 45, 46, 50). As a result of the medium’s aura of authenticity and objectivity, especially photographs were abused

¹⁵¹ For an in-depth discussion of the systematic discrimination based on, among others, ethnic, religious, gender-, and class-based grounds, see Davies (42-62); Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* (211-25, 289-304); Hansen and Condon (111-20); and Pan.

in attempts to guide the framing of the 1906 disaster (cf., e.g., fig. 45, 46, 53, 56). In their efforts to deny the inconvenient truth of the earthquake, the city's boosters involved photographic items in their rhetoric to give their arguments more validity. The same happened in regard to maps, which in their individual conceptualization always already contain an interpretation of the events (cf., e.g., fig. 39).

The fact that the visualizations promoted by the booster community collided so visibly with the photographs and maps used by the sensationalist press (cf., e.g., fig. 34, 40, 43, 44) also points out how contested the interpretation of the disaster was and how different discourses eagerly sought to (ab)use pictures for their distinctive purposes. The bread lines pictures provide apt examples demonstrating that, despite their obvious verbal framing as icons of earthquake solidarity, visuals have the potential to resist a distinct instrumentalization and to develop "lives of their own" (Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* 2). In the following, the framework of this analysis will be extended to an inter pictorial exploration of the visual representations of the 1906 disaster with a special emphasis on the pictures' gaps, absences, and invisibilities.

5.4 Re-Framing the Earthquake and Fire Pictures of 1906

Inter pictorial Resonances

The earthquake and fire visualizations of 1906 are embedded in the contemporary cultural and political developments of turn-of-the-century San Francisco, one of the up-and-coming cities on the Pacific coast, which had taken pride in its rough-and-tumble Western past and emphasized its resilience and pioneer spirit. Furthermore, they are entangled with the historical contexts of repeated destruction and ensuing economic threats in the Bay Area. From an inter pictorial perspective, these pictures are also emplaced in complex local, (trans-)national, and global iconographical frameworks and their related pictorial practices—including, for example, iconic European and colonial American disaster visuals and the connected conventions of displaying calamities. Since every individual picture is always part of these intricate iconographical systems, an opening up of the analysis to include the inter pictorial relationships reveals "the contexts and pre-

suppositions governing the visual rhetoric of specific pictures” through the performance of the “re-situating interpretive act” (Hebel, “‘American’ Pictures” 404) and thus enables a more comprehensive assessment of the cultural capital of the respective visual representation.

Interpictorial approaches scrutinize the “picture’s investment in the visual archive and collective memory” (Hebel, “‘American’ Pictures” 416), which ties interpictorial analyses closely to the field of memory studies. A comparison of the visual representations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire to previous disaster pictures further highlights the distinct ways in which the calamitous events of April 1906 were meaningfully incorporated into San Franciscans’ worldviews and daily routines. As every picture is not only part of numerous ‘visible’ iconographic relationships but also of a more comprehensive interplay between processes of vision, power, and knowledge, the questions of what is absent, excluded, or silenced and which pictorial conventions are so common and accepted that they actually appear ‘invisible’ are also crucial and will find their consideration in this section of *Framing Spaces in Motion*.



Fig. 57: Postcard titled “Refugees Watching the Burning City [from Lafayette Square]. April 18, 1906. San Francisco, California.” 1906. Author’s Collection.

What characterizes the bulk of visualizations of the 1906 calamity from an inter pictorial perspective is that most pictures were photographs or stereo views. While allegorical representations, paintings, drawings, and caricatures remained popular (cf., e.g., fig. 42, 50, 51) the increasing technological simplification and affordability of cameras and their equipment contributed considerably to photography's proliferation. The growing use of the camera in the processes of visualizing earthquakes and fires, which had already become more perceptible in the 1868 San Francisco Earthquake, the 1871 Great Chicago Fire, and the 1886 Charleston Earthquake, was thus continued. One of the results of this development was that the shift from the early modern woodcuts' emphasis on the moment of the impact of the seismic forces (and the raging of the flames in the case of fires) to the aftermath of the calamities was even more pronounced. Although there were some iconic photographs of the fires in the city (cf., e.g., fig. 35, 57), the bulk of the pictures depicted San Francisco's ruinscape in the aftermath of the disaster.

This means that in the visual culture of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire the disaster experiences—previously conveyed in the tradition of the early modern European broadsheets through embellished portrayals of toppling towers, billowing clouds, frantically running people, and alike—were much more subtly suggested through mere traces such as cracks in the pavement, breaks in the symmetry of the urban architecture, or in metonymically condensed images as, for instance, burnt trees. From these traces of violent destruction, the spectator could extrapolate the power of the natural forces and was enabled to conjecture what the direct experience of the earthquake and the fires must have been like. The idiosyncratic properties of stereo views made them the ideal match for the ruinscape. Through its plasticity and three-dimensional nature, stereography let the disaster scenes come to life by reinforcing the asymmetry of the damaged cityscape and enabled the viewer to actively engage in the visualization by allowing his gaze to meander back and forth between the ruin fragments.

The dominance of photographs and stereo views of the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire also resulted in a heightened self-referentiality to processes of vision. Whereas earlier illustrations had already referenced onlookers as they were contemplating the

destruction from disasters (cf., e.g., fig. 23, 24, 30), many photographs and stereographs from the 1906 calamity now displayed subjects who consciously posed in front of the camera (cf., e.g., fig. 38, 54, 58), shattering the beholder's illusion of being able to watch very personal disaster experiences from behind a 'fourth wall.' Although the inclusion of spectators in a picture can generally be read as an allusion to processes of vision, the subject's awareness of the camera adds an even stronger meta-comment on contemporary pictorial practices and the conventions of looking and being looked at.

By elevating the earthquake ruins to the status of aesthetic and coveted subjects, these pictures placed the damaged building fragments into the tradition of the 'beautiful ruins,' which had started with the Great Lisbon Earthquake (cf. fig. 8), and appropriated the conventions of picturing the classical Roman and Greek ruins for the architectural earthquake remains. Through their "awareness of *having-been-there*" (Barthes, "Rhetoric" 44), photographs of sightseers posing in front of the fires or ruins further served as visual evidence of having experienced the disaster site first-hand and thus became much sought-after souvenirs. Yet, not only the beholders acquired doppelgangers: By portraying cameramen at work, numerous pictures also put the production of visuals on view (cf., e.g., fig. 33). This heightened their self-referentiality and made the fascination with the technologies of vision as much part of the picture as the calamity's aftermath. What is even more important from an inter pictorial perspective was that the Romantic trope of the lonesome wanderer—meandering through a depopulated sublime wilderness in search of, in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "an original relation to the universe" (1) and transcendental revelations—was replaced by the photographic subject with its awareness of the camera and its complicity in the complex and entangled processes of the production of visual artifacts.

In spite of the presence of disaster tourists in these photographs, the earthquake and fire ruins were the actual protagonists, providing affective potential, salience, and newsworthiness to these pictures. As early as the founding years, Roger Birt contends, illustrations of San Francisco's architecture played a more prominent role than popular portraiture. Whereas portraits were of considerable value to the newly arrived settlers in the early decades of the city's history, "[n]o subject commanded as much attention as did San Francisco itself. There was an

international curiosity about this ‘city of gold’” (2). In this manner, the depictions of the disaster—whether boosterish, romanticized, or sensationalist—continued a long-standing and influential iconographical tradition of visualizing the urban architecture of the Bay Area. In the later decades of the nineteenth century, the interest in San Francisco was continued not only through city views but also through single architectural studies of famous landmarks, which were meant to be “microcosmically representative of the whole city” (Birt 38; cf. also Fardon).

In this pictorial tradition, single buildings such as the store ship Niantic or the Cliff House often functioned as metonymies, assuming significance beyond their own architecture for San Francisco as a whole. The Popper Building had not only been the most depicted edifice in the visual culture of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1865, but it also achieved lasting acclaim since it was turned into a metaphor for the entire temblor of October 8 (Twain, *Tales* 294-96). Just as the Railroad House (fig. 29) had emerged as the icon of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1868, numerous equally distinguished structures such as City Hall (fig. 33), the Call Building (fig. 35), or the Ferry Building came forward as epitomes for the fate of the entire city in 1906. Besides, the disaster also generated new architectural icons, which joined this inter pictorial network of architectural studies. Previously rather unheeded buildings and edifices were transformed into iconic sights of damage by the earthquake and fires and consequently gained (trans-)national prominence. After the 1906 disaster, the Portals of the Past (fig. 49) and Lotta’s Fountain, for instance, achieved unprecedented popularity as symbolic markers of the earthquake and fire experience.¹⁵² The commemoration of calamities in architectural sites of memory is a global phenomenon and puts (pictures of) San Francisco’s icons of the 1906 calamity in direct relationship to, among many other disaster memorials, (pictures of) the ruins of the Carmo Convent in Lisbon and the Chicago Water Tower.

¹⁵² The Portals of the Past, the of the former entrance to the Towne Mansion, which was removed to Lloyd Lake in Golden Gate Park in 1909, where it still constitutes one of city’s popular sights. Lotta’s Fountain also remains a much valued earthquake icon today.

The inter pictorial associations of the 1906 disaster visuals also extend to include San Francisco's history and cultural memory. Through the constant reminder that life once dwelled in building fragments, George Simmel argues, ruins create the "present form of a past life" (385) and can be seen as an instant memorialization of the past. In this line of reasoning, all 1906 earthquake and fire ruins could be read as embodiments of San Francisco's pre-disaster history. With their specific political, economic, and cultural connotations, the building wrecks symbolized the passing of a chapter in the city's past and were thus frequently viewed with nostalgia. A similarly affective reaction surfaced after the last of the six great fires in June 1851, when some residents responded with a wistful longing for the past to the realization that parts of the old town had been irrevocably razed by the flames. Since culturally productive and inter pictorially charged images tend to participate actively in what Astrid Böger calls the "nationaler Bildervorrat"/"the national pictorial archive" (106), especially the iconic visualizations of the 1906 disasterscape constitute "stepping-stone[s] into the visual archive" (Hebel, "'American' Pictures" 416). The pictures of the ruinscape hence emerged as part of the cultural memory remembering San Francisco's early past and carried an enormous affective potential.

It was not only the images of the ruinscape, but also the pictures of the fires that were closely tied to San Francisco's early history. After the jolts of the 1906 earthquake, more than 150 single fires raged for over three days in the city, creating a most impressive spectacle of color, smoke formations, smell, and sounds. But the fast-moving blazes also presented a great danger to life and property. Photographer H. D'Arcy Power admitted, "most of us were too deeply concerned in saving our families or property to give much heed to the greatest photographic opportunity of our lives" (158). Other photographers such as famed German American Arnold Genthe, however, acted differently and neglected their personal possessions in favor of capturing the disaster scenes.¹⁵³ As a result, the fires were a prominent motif of photographs

¹⁵³ In his eyewitness report, Genthe described his state of mind as driven by the urge to take pictures: "The one thought uppermost in my mind was not to bring some of my possessions to a place of safety but to make photographs of the scenes" (86). Genthe, who had all his family possessions brought from Germany

and postcards. In their composition, the pictures of the conflagration generally resembled the visualizations of the six great fires very closely. Similar to their predecessors, they often used a slightly elevated perspective and portrayed groups of spectators calmly watching the fires from one of San Francisco's hills amidst their scattered belongings (cf., e.g., fig. 23, 24, 57). Through this iconography, the 1906 fire pictures framed the conflagration as an experience that brought San Franciscans from all walks of life together and therefore as a moment of social cohesion.

Just as in the images of the six great conflagrations, the bystanders seemed rather spellbound by the flames, which underscored the sublime character of the sight of the burning city. Since the fires of the late 1840s and early 1850s were strongly connoted with social cohesion, resilience, and "indomitable perseverance" ("Fire of Yesterday" 2) as well as with positive connotations such as moral purification and architectural improvement, the reappropriation of this established pictorial iconography also has the potential to support the evocation of analogous disaster narratives. In this respect, the visual fire narratives of 1906 differed considerably from the representations of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 (cf., e.g., fig. 14), which emphasized the 'rush for lives' and the threat of social unrest in the modern city more pronouncedly, and went hand in hand with the verbal framings of the 1906 disaster that tended to highlight the aesthetic qualities of the ruinscape or downplay future risks by pointing out the silver linings.

Even though the repertoire of the representation of the fires of April 1906 stayed relatively consistent with depictions of earlier conflagrations in San Francisco, a new facet gained more salience. Photographs, stereographs, and drawings of the fires devoted more space and attention to the rescued belongings. Trunks, bedding, paintings, bird cages, and other curious objects that the owners decided to bring with them on their difficult journey through the smoke and heat across the earthquake-damaged streets appeared prominently placed in the fire visuals (cf., e.g., fig. 57). There were also close-ups of San Franciscans fleeing the fires and laboriously working to haul trunks or even entire carriages

to San Francisco in 1904, lost everything apart from his old Chinatown negatives to the fires (91).

through the streets.¹⁵⁴ The stress on property also had a staunch place in most eyewitness reports.

In what follows, Louise Wall describes her observations of the fate of the survivors during and right after the earthquake and fires, which were published in New York's *Century Magazine* in August 1906:

Day after day and all night long, without regular food, drink, rest, or respite from intense anxiety, thousands of families [...] dragged themselves from place to place in front of the flames. [...] In many cases families were walking and dragging their few rescued possessions away from the reach of the flames for four or five successive days and nights, going from one place of temporary shelter to another without the commonest necessities of life and without sleep.

Property and the efforts to protect it were not only stock motifs of life-writing documents from the 1906 calamity, they also replaced powerful older iconographies of signifying the disorder and suffering from natural disasters.

For a long time, the body language of pathos formulas (e.g. raised arms, open mouths, and running motions) had indicated the fear for one's life and the confusion of the break in one's worldview in earthquake woodcut prints and drawings (cf., e.g., fig. 3, 10, 11, 12). In the absence of these indices, the sight of heavy trunks and other types of unwieldy luggage in public places or of individuals hauling these bulky pieces with their last ounce of strength suggest to the viewer what the earthquake and fires of 1906 might have meant for San Franciscans. Together with the body language of the dragging, property thus came to stand in for the agonizing experience of the loss of the homes, the exhausting flight from the flames, and the financial injuries. With this shift from formulaic body language to an emphasis on private property 'out of place' in the disasterscape, the threat of natural disasters to one's life and world view was replaced by a focus on the economic damage.

Property also came forward as a crucial theme in the pictures of the safes in the ruinscape. Although most steel safes survived the fires, their owners had to wait for the heat to cool down completely to avoid the

¹⁵⁴ For examples (e.g. images 19060331 – 19060333), visit the Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco's online archive at <<http://www.sfmuseum.org/>>.

danger of spontaneous combustion. In some instances, owners opened their intact, yet still warm, safes only to see their money bills go up in flames (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake 96-98*), which is why sidewalk businesses sprang up that offered to guard the strong-boxes until they were ready to be opened up. Since almost the entire city, including the banks, held money in vaults on the streets, armed soldiers were also frequently present to deter thieves from looting. Pictures such as “Safes Being Guarded” (fig. 58) thus epitomize the importance that San Francisco placed on the protection of financial assets in order to guarantee the unobstructed functioning and recovery of the economy in the aftermath of the disaster.



Fig. 58: Stereograph No. 17 of the Griffith and Griffith Series titled “Safes Being Guarded.” It depicts a soldier watching over numerous still smoldering safes. 1906. Author’s collection.

In “Safes Being Guarded,” the setting, a ruin without a roof, which in itself resembles the shape of a vault, metonymically condenses the aftermath of the 1906 calamity into one image. The large pile of messily arranged vaults, which contrasts with the urban regularity of the ruin’s walls and the building fragments in the background, signifies the social and economic disorder and functions as an index of the force of the earthquake and the fires that had brought these sturdily built safes in disarray. Besides, the fact that safes, which are considered to be reliable and secure locations, had to be guarded by soldiers further puts the transformative power of the disaster on view. Most importantly, the protective posture of the soldier right in the center of the cluster of safes—deterring possible intruders (and the viewer’s gaze) from interfering with the valuables—metaphorically represents San Francisco’s determination to keep up the economic order by police and military power.

The stress on money and property in the 1906 iconography paralleled the continuing disenchantment of natural phenomena in the course of the nineteenth century and pointed to the increasing financial interest in natural disasters. From the early twentieth century on, disasters were gradually evaluated more on economic terms and classified according to the amount of monetary damage to the economy than before. Moreover, the visual representations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire affirmed urban space, which had become the exemplary place of economic, political, cultural, and technological progress in the United States (cf., e.g., Tenner), as the paradigmatic environment of earthquake visualizations. The increasing vulnerability of modern American cities to natural disaster-related and technological risks further made urban space *the* place of real and imagined ruinscapes in the twentieth century (Yablon 1-17).

Another inter pictorial trajectory of the 1906 earthquake and fire pictures unfolds in connection to the previously discussed visualization of ruins according to the conventions of displaying antique building remains. Numerous illustrations of the 1906 calamity singled out emblematic motifs such as round arches or neoclassical columns and then presented them as tightly cropped close-up views, decontextualizing them from their idiosyncratic historical and cultural embedding (cf., e.g., fig. 48, 49). By the turn of the century, visual representations portraying earthquake and fire ruins as doubles of classical Greek and

Roman building fragments had a history dating back to at least the sketches and drawings of the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755. This specific ruin iconography continues the long-standing European tradition of romanticized and idealized framings of disaster ruins, which connects the ruin images of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire to visualizations of earlier calamities such as, e.g., the Great Lisbon Earthquake and the 1871 Great Chicago Fire. Yet, the visual culture of the 1906 calamity also brought innovations to this tradition.

The increasing engagement of photography in the representation of disaster ruins, which had tentatively begun in Chicago in the aftermath of the great fire of 1871, was endorsed on a large scale in 1906. The camera, previously debated controversially as an appropriate means to preserve ruins in general and disaster ruins in particular (Yablon 192), joined the color palette and the pen as accepted tools for the aestheticization of San Francisco's ruins (cf. Stellman's 1910 *Vanished Ruin Era*). Whereas Chicagoans supposedly repressed images of the fire ruins to a certain extent, San Franciscans took great delight in acknowledging them (Miller, *American Apocalypse* 72; Yablon 193). Out of this excitement and a desire to utilize the novel 'objective' medium of photography to portray San Francisco's disasterscape, new innovative formats as, for instance, Frederic Eugene Ives's stereographic color photography (cf. Childs) and George R. Lawrence's aerial kite panoramas emerged, which joined the pictorial repertoire of earthquake visualizations.

With his kite train, Lawrence—who had hurried to San Francisco with his camera from Chicago—took the first aerial photographs of an urban ruinscape (cf. Baker, "Lawrence Captive Airship"; "San Francisco"). In many aspects akin to maps, these elevated panoramas of the earthquake ruins can be seen as a tentative beginning of a larger, powerful trend in the visualization of disasters. After the installation of satellites in the atmosphere, the information about extreme weather disasters has become progressively more based on a top-down perspective that indicates complete oversight and control of the natural phenomena through its detached, omniscient viewpoint and also provides a link to the increasing militarization of weather through satellite technology (Sturken, "Weather Media"). Since the introduction of Google Maps in January 2005, the news coverage of (natural) disasters has conventionally incorporated top-down aerial satellite

imagery such as close-ups of the destruction of the 2012 Haiti Earthquake or street view satellite photographs of Japan after the 2011 Tōhoku Earthquake as a staunch stock element of disaster reporting.

A different innovative pictorial approach to visualizing disaster ruins was the accentuation of their modern character. Streetcar tracks, telegraph poles, steel wires, raised sidewalks, gas mains, automobiles, and billboards provided plenty of modern motifs for amateur and professional cameramen. While the iconography of the classical ruin of the distant past emphasized symmetry, refinement, and mellow forms (cf., e.g., fig. 49), the iconography of the modern ruin embraced buckled streetcar tracks, snapped telegraph poles, and balls of deranged steel rope (cf., e.g., fig. 44). According to Philippe Hamon, the modern ruin—especially in an American context—is “far more ambiguous and far more difficult to interpret” (qtd. in Yablon 8-9) than the ancient ruins. This might partially explain the different responses to this iconography. Some people interpreted the ruins as nature’s revenge against its exploitation or as displays of humanity’s erroneous belief in its superiority over nature. A more widespread framing of this visual tradition read confidence and resilience into the uprising building fragments that supposedly affirmed technology as means of conquering the natural environment and achieving progress and thereby joined in with the boosters’ disaster rhetorics.

Not surprisingly, there were exceptions to these pictorial trends and continuations of earlier iconographies of visualizing disasters. Despite the move toward the depiction of the aftermath and the rise of a more restrained portrayal of disorder and destruction, sensationalist representations maintained the focus on the moment of the impact and expressed the earthquake experience in all its immediacy and dynamic movement. Just like the woodcut prints of the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake (cf., e.g., fig. 4, 5, 6) or the line drawings of the 1811/12 New Madrid Earthquakes (cf., e.g., fig. 12), these pictures put the earthquake imaginary with the trembling ground and the swaying and bursting buildings forcefully on view. What was different from previous earthquake scenes, however, was the use of photography as a medium and the manipulation of its technological means to achieve the expression of the imagined earthquake experiences (cf., e.g., fig. 59).



Fig. 59: Fake disaster visual titled "Photograph Showing the Terrible Effects of the Earthquake and Fire in One of the Principal Streets in the Stricken City." By cutting off bits from the original plate (figure 60) and attaching additional pieces onto it, the pre-disaster scene of California Street was transformed into a visualization of the moment of the impact of the earthquake with buildings bursting, debris accumulating on the pavement, and smoke clouds rising from the ruins. From James Russel Wilson's *San Francisco's Horror of Earthquake and Fire* printed in Philadelphia in 1906.



Fig. 60: "California Street, from Kearney St. Before the Fire." Original photographic model for figure 59. The correspondence of the two photographs (fig. 59 and fig. 60) can, among others, be determined by the congruent view point and the matching positions of the passersby and the street cars. From *San Francisco and Vicinity, Before and After the Big Fire, April 18th, 19th and 20th, 1906*, published in Los Angeles in 1906.

In spite of photography's reputation as an "automatic recording device" (Marien 74) and the belief in its objective representation of the world, the retouching and manipulation of photographic plates or prints had been well-established and enjoyed great popularity in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century (cf. Fine-man).¹⁵⁵ In summer 1906, photographers appropriated their medium's aura of "*having-been-there*" (Barthes, "Rhetoric" 44) in order to lend their fake disaster narratives more authenticity and credibility. Since the trickery was apparently more obvious to the local residents and the general effort of the city was to downplay rather than exaggerate the damage, manipulated disaster scenes tended to appear more often in publications issued outside of California (cf. fig. 59).¹⁵⁶

"Photograph Showing the Terrible Effects of the Earthquake and Fire" (fig. 59), a full-page illustration in a sensationalist publication with the telling title *San Francisco's Horror of Earthquake and Fire: Terrible Devastation and Heart-Rending Scenes* (1906), turns out, at second glance, to be a profoundly manipulated version of a pre-disaster photograph of California Street (fig. 60).¹⁵⁷ The forged clouds of smoke, flames, and falling building parts visualize the imagined thrust of the natural forces and express the perceived disorder, violence, and chaos. Especially the collapsing towers of St. Grace Church (on the left) and Old St. Mary's Church (on the right) reverberate with earlier dramatic depictions of crumbling man-made structures, epitomizing God's wrath

¹⁵⁵ In her cultural history of *Photography* (2006), Mary Warner Marien repeatedly offers examples to show that photography has merely been a "flexible basis for picture-making" (Balduz qtd. in Marien 58), which has included all forms of manipulation right from its very start (cf. also Price 71-72). The insertion and removal of objects and persons has been a core standard since the development of the medium. In July 1906, San Francisco's local photo magazine *Camera Craft*, for example, ran a special on the "Amateur and His Trouble," explaining the artificial insertion of figures and the retouching of negatives for non-professional photographers (264).

¹⁵⁶ For further examples of fake disaster photographs, see James Russel Wilson's *San Francisco's Horror of Earthquake and Fire*. See also Baker, "Lawrence Captive Airship"; Cohen 193; Tobriner 290n13).

¹⁵⁷ The recycling of pre-disaster scenes recalls the early modern European "stamp method" and the pictorial practice of adding destruction onto intact city views (cf. ch. 3.1).

or nature's 'invasion' of the city (cf., e.g., fig. 3, 5, 10). The salient difference from earlier illustrations of the earthquake's very moment of impact, however, is the depiction of the passersby in the street, who do not exhibit the least agitation.

The resulting juxtaposition of the violent large-scale destruction with the seemingly unaffected bystanders evokes the city's open display of serenity in the face of disaster (cf., e.g., fig. 29, 54, 55). At the same time, the appropriation of photography for the expression of the earthquake imaginary (cf., e.g., fig. 59) can be understood as an indicator of the contemporaneous infatuation with the medium and, by extension, also more generally with technological progress. These fictitious photographs nevertheless revived elements of the age-old emblematic repertoire of visualizing earthquakes and imparted them with the potential to carry out important cultural work by pointing to the inherent dangers and increasing vulnerability of the modern American city, the paradigmatic place of technological progress.

The intertextual analysis of the 1906 earthquake and fire pictures opens a wide reference framework, extending from (dis)continuations of previous transnational pictorial conventions to distinct innovations in motifs and iconographic traditions, localized historical contexts, and ideological framings of previous calamities in the Bay Area. Despite its idiosyncrasies, the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire exhibits close ties to disasters in other parts of the United States, especially to the 1871 Great Chicago Fire. Parallels can be found in the proliferation of photography as an aesthetic device to engage with the ruinscape (cf. fig. 17), the romanticized framing of the modern ruins as classical Greek and Roman ruins (cf. fig. 16), the surfacing of urban legends in out-of-state instant publications (cf. fig. 15), highly exaggerated sensationalist visualizations (cf. fig. 14), discursive reflections on man's ability to control 'nature' in the city, and the immediate and self-assured emphasis on the certain recovery. While the visualizations of the Great Chicago Fire (cf., e.g., fig. 14, 15) are marked by grave concerns about the social urban order, this apprehension is less pronounced in the visualizations of the 1906 disaster, which was at least partly the result of San Francisco's booster community and their concerted campaigns to counter these fears and promote optimistic disaster framings.

With Chicago's complete recovery in the late nineteenth century, San Francisco had a model for how to stage its rise from disaster. Both

cities' ultimate recovery was celebrated by similar festivities of great ideological importance: the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) in San Francisco.¹⁵⁸ The advertisements for these exhibitions incorporated illustrations of the destroyed cities and thus directly established a narrative of the glorious rise from the ruins to a shining metropolis of (inter-)national cultural, political, and economic importance (cf., e.g., fig. 51). It is striking that today these two calamities—even a little more so than comparable catastrophes such as the Charleston Earthquake of 1886, the Galveston Storm of 1900, or the Johnstown Flood of 1889—occupy core positions in the cultural disaster memory of the United States as paradigmatic disaster stories that epitomize the potential of resilience, growth, and progress in the face of calamity (cf. Rozario, *Culture* 9-20; Smith, Introduction). The ostentatious celebrations on the occasion of the two expositions played a crucial role in the enduring cultural visibility of these two disasters.

In the decades after the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, some elements of its pictorial repertoire resurfaced in different contexts. The bread lines, for example, re-emerged as powerful icons during the Great Depression, when they signified the “anguish that defined the economic cataclysm of the Twenties and the Thirties” (Cosgrove) and advocated for social reform by putting the plight of the patient and deserving poor on view. Taken years before she joined the Farm Security Administration's photo project, Dorothea Lange's first and most famous street photograph “White Angel Breadline, San Francisco” (1932), which shows a tightly cropped close-up of unemployed workers waiting in line at the White Angel soup kitchen, came to “plead the

¹⁵⁸ In the negotiations to bring the PPIE 1915 home, San Francisco presented itself as the ‘imperial city’ and posited its central significance to the nation's future. Arguing for San Francisco as the only possible site of the PPIE, the contemporaneous President of the University of California, Berkeley, Benjamin Wheeler, for instance, stated that the celebration of the opening of the Panama Canal, which he described as the moment when the “history of the human races passes to its last and final phase” “must be celebrated at a place where it has significance, where the races meet, where the arena, be it mart or battlefield, is prepared and fixed, where the look is straight out westward, not inverted or askance, but straight out westward, toward the duty which awaits this nation” (qtd. in Smith, “Urban Disorder” 88).

economic case of the impoverished” (Goggans 17). Margaret Bourke-White’s famous photograph of the Ohio River Flood of 1937, which depicts a bread line in front of a billboard that ironically postulates the United States’ position as having the “World’s Highest Standard of Living” (1937), is another case in point of the persisting affective power behind the bread line iconology. The inter pictorial excursion into the times of the Great Depression further exposes the optimistic framings of the bread lines in 1906 as a temporally and spatially contingent phenomenon that did not persist on a nationwide scale into the twentieth century.¹⁵⁹

Looking back at the visualizations of the 1906 calamity from the twenty-first century, another inter pictorial link protrudes quite strongly. The often similar iconography of the two World Wars and numerous other sad human atrocities connects the ruin pictures of the 1906 disasterscape with later dark chapters of human history. This association of destroyed buildings and military conflicts has precursors in earlier calamities such as the Great Charleston Earthquake of 1886, when earthquake wrecks had recalled the devastation caused by the Civil War battles in the area. Today, the sight of photographs of the ruinscape of 1906 recalls vast bombed-out urban landscapes such as those of Berlin, Dresden, or even Hiroshima, which are also typically depicted in black-and-white images. Despite the multitude of different political, historical, and cultural contexts and the absence of any involvement of ‘natural’ forces such as earthquakes or fires, the urban war ruins bear visual resemblances and, together with the natural disaster ruins, attest to the power of photography to memorialize historical events and inscribe them into the cultural memory.

While every illustration—photograph or other—only captures one moment, it is at the same time woven into a much more complex sequence of historical and cultural narratives. Susan Moeller describes this phenomenon in regard to the photograph as provoking “a tension in us—not only about the precise moment that the image depicts but also

¹⁵⁹ While the discursive framings and the specific iconographies of the bread lines differ considerably, the bread line pictures of 1906 and the Great Depression are nevertheless closely related. Dorothea Lange, who published one of the first and also one of the most powerful bread line scenes, had been a student of Arnold Genthe and hence must have been utterly familiar with his visualizations of the 1906 bread lines in the early 1930s.

about all moments that led up to that instant and about all moments that will follow” (qtd. in Zelizer 2). To fully assess the visual narratives of the 1906 calamity, the times beyond what Henri Cartier-Bresson calls the “decisive moment” and Alfred Eisenstaedt identifies as the “story-telling moment” need to be examined. Besides, some pictures develop their ‘own lives,’ resisting the framing that their producers firmly intended, and join forces with quite different, opposing framings. The next section will search for silences and gaps in the visual narratives in order to include the moments before and after the captured instants so as to re-frame the dominant disaster narratives by the pictures’ absences and resistances.

Absences, Silences, and Gaps in the Frames of the 1906 Disaster

The engagement with the repertoire of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire would not be complete without asking what remains unseen. Invisibility is not only the result of the omission of events and contexts but it is also rooted in the configuration of the scopic regime and the historically and culturally contingent modalities of seeing, which produce visual absences through their particularities and selectivity (Schulz 123). Moreover, it is important to look for gaps and silences in the visual narratives in order to see where pictures have the power to resist their appropriations and consequently expose hidden or non-visible contexts in their representation of a particular historical moment. Through the combination of verbal and visual (con)texts in this section, the complex and dynamic interplays of the image/text function as “aperture or cleavage in representation, [as] a place where history might slip through the cracks” (Mitchell, *Picture Theory* 104) and therefore add complexity to the interpretations of the 1906 disaster visualizations.

The most striking absence from the visualizations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire are images of injured or dead bodies. Whereas research by Gladys Hansen has revealed that the death toll of the 1906 calamity amounted at least to three thousand—and possibly up to “five to six thousand” (qtd. in Mosher)—fatalities in San Francisco and its vicinity, there are only a handful of photographs and other visuals available that display dead or severely wounded victims of the earthquake or fire. The scarcity of representations of death clashes with

the numerous passages in written life-writing documents that refer to the frequent sight of dead persons and mention several locations such as, for instance, City Hall or Mechanics' Pavilion that were turned into temporary morgues during the course of the three days of the fires. Photographers thus had ample opportunity to photograph the dead in the street or in the morgues. This means that while the bodies were actually 'visible,' they were not as readily included into the visual narratives of the 1906 disaster.

Whether photographers did not picture corpses at all or whether the visual representations of death were restricted in their circulation cannot be said with certainty. What can be stated with assurance, however, is that these visuals were by and large absent from mass-produced series of disaster pictures and the press coverage and are in turn now missing from the archives. Despite the fact that there is no historical information on the contemporaneous rhetorical framings of (the absence of) dead bodies in most visual representations, a few reflections on the dearth of pictures of death will nevertheless erudite the implications of this phenomenon. The prevalent cultural attitude toward death and dying in the early-twentieth-century United States serves as a good starting point. Most Americans showed an ambiguous position toward death, avoiding encounters with death or the dying in some situations but engaging closely with them in others (Stannard xiv). In 1906, the sight of corpses, directly or in mediated form, was not a new phenomenon in San Francisco and well before that the photographic craze had already firmly embraced the dead as subject: Post-mortem photography had flourished well into the early twentieth century, and picture books of the Civil War by photographers such as Mathew Brady and Alexander Gardner, to name but two, had put death in the focus of their staging of the war narratives (cf. Laderman 144-54).

While the sight of corpses in private and public spaces belonged to every-day life, these presentations strongly adhered to specific cultural practices and were only possible in certain limited contexts such as battlefields, museums, morgues, or family homes. With the rise of science, the increasing demystification of life, and the loss of the dead body's "symbolic potency" (Thornton 434) in the post-bellum era, elaborate funeral rites and mourning practices aimed to reclaim the body with symbolic meaning. At the same time, death itself was rendered more and more invisible, for instance, through the portrayal of the dead

as merely sleeping a deep slumber. David E. Stannard explains the mixture of a general avoidance of death and dying in everyday-life with the sporadic and elaborate ostentations of the dead in specific settings as deriving from the onset of modernity: “Each is a necessary, and yet by itself inadequate, response to a world in which religion has lost much of its power to explain, and to a society in which the death of an individual touches deeply only a small handful of intimates” (xiv-xv).



Fig. 61: Untitled photograph by Arnold Genthe displaying the burnt corpse of a looter at the intersection of Post Street and Grant Avenue. (LC-G403-0240-B). 1906. Courtesy of the Digital Prints and Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

The absence of dead bodies from the visual representations of the 1906 disaster has its roots in various intersecting aspects. Firstly, the numerous collapsing buildings hid bodily remains from view, and the high temperature and the long duration of the conflagration likely burnt up numerous corpses. Besides, the disasterscape with its littered streets, disfigured houses, and urban anonymity might not have been considered a dignified environment for the visual memorialization of the dead. Unlike the corpses in funeral homes, the dead bodies in the streets were not staged to look life-like and dignified but were rather deformed and

exhibited odd postures. Moreover, the lack of decorative funeral rites was strongly connoted with the lower classes and therefore deemed an insufficient manner of displaying the dead in public (Thornton 435).

What additionally might have prevented artists from picturing anonymous corpses was the phenomenon of death having become “something of an acute embarrassment to modern man” (Stannard iv). A worldview that increasingly replaced religion and explained phenomena in scientific and technological terms together with the inability to bestow a larger meaning onto death pointed to a gap in the modern way of life. On top of that, the failure to contain the seismic forces and the fires, even with the technology at hand, also added a connotation of humiliation to the sights of earthquake and fire victims for some disaster tourists, which could have discouraged photographers from taking pictures, too.

Only one specific framing seemed to have allowed for the depiction of dead bodies amid the rubble in the ruinscape and that was allegedly criminal behavior such as looting. According to eyewitness reports, the army and police forces shot several looters, some of whom they placed prominently visible in the middle of the streets as a cautionary tale (cf., e.g., Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 140-41; Hansen and Condon 76). Most pictures showing corpses accordingly put the death of supposed burglars (and not mere victims of the earthquake and the fire) on view, which had apparently forfeited their right to privacy and respect by having tried to exploit the adversity to their advantage. No longer part of the affective community of San Franciscans, looters were thus subject to a different treatment. One of the few photographs revealing a corpse was taken by renowned professional photographer Arnold Genthe.

His scene (fig. 61) displays a body burnt beyond recognition lying at the intersection of Post Street and Grant Avenue amid tall ragged pieces of ruins, debris, and deformed telegraph wires. Despite the lack of a direct reference to criminal behavior, most contemporaneous viewers, who tended to be familiar with at least one of the numerous looting stories, would have likely recognized the dead body as a supposed robber.¹⁶⁰ According to the records of the police department, the man

¹⁶⁰ As some other of Genthe's pictures of San Francisco's 1906 ruinscape, his photograph of the burnt body at the intersection of Post Street and Grant Avenue (fig. 61) does not bear a title, which might indicate that Genthe originally did not

had tried to rob a jewelry store nearby (Hansen and Condon 76). The known few other photographs of the same scene and a very small number of comparable images in sensational publications directly identified the dead as criminals (cf. Wilson 150).

These pictures satisfy the craving for spectacles, which ties them closely to previous visualizations of the disaster imaginary (cf., e.g., fig. 15, 18). At the same time, they can also be read as vindications of San Francisco's effective management of the situation and its determination to uphold the social order if necessary by violently eliminating potential unlawful behavior. In either case, death as depicted in these visuals was not an expression of mourning or the pious commemoration of the fate of so many during the 1906 calamity, but the dramatization of the disaster imaginary and a testimonial of how far San Francisco was willing to go to enforce the social order. Looting hence presented the framing necessary for enabling the inclusion of dead bodies into the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire visuals.

The preceding elaborations on and assumptions about the lack of visualizations of death in the streets of San Francisco's ruinscape are, however, complicated by the availability of photographs and stereographs of corpses from other natural calamities. In the wake of the 1900 Galveston Hurricane, for example, photographs depicting the retrieval of the dead from the debris and their burial at sea were published in newspapers and photograph and stereograph series (cf., e.g., Bixel and Turner 49-56). With estimates of at least 6,000 victims, the death toll after the Storm of 1900 on Galveston Island was higher than the one in San Francisco (Bixel and Turner ix). Yet, it seems unlikely that this is the single reason for the difference in the display of dead bodies. It might rather have been the case that—despite all the (morbid) fascination with the spectacles of earthquake and fires—pictures of injured persons and corpses in the ruinscape did not fit with the prevalent boosterish rhetoric and the optimistic framings of the disaster, predicting the immediate rise of the 'New San Francisco.'

intend to distribute this image widely. It is often identified as "Charred Corpse of a Victim of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire," a phrasing that does not explicitly mention the looting as context. Genthe does not relate the encounter with the corpse in his memoir *As I Remember* (1936), in which he discusses a few other disaster scenes (cf., e.g., fig. 68) that he had photographed.

The absence of visual representations of the death and the dying of the 'innocent' victims of the earthquake and fires hence strongly reverberates with individual efforts to suppress the worst chapters of the disaster experience and with the collective endeavors of the city's boosters to deny the extent of the calamity on the city. In this context, it is noteworthy to add that a thorough investigation of the comprehensive number of victims seemed to have been avoided as well. In 1907, the official death toll voiced by the U.S. Army Relief Operations amounted to only 322 fatalities. In 1972, a reassessment of the report more than doubled the number to 700. Since 1980, Gladys Hansen, curator of the Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, has updated the figures through meticulous research and arrived at a final estimation of up to 6,000 (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 189-91; Mosher; USGS, "Casualties").¹⁶¹ The long-lasting lack of efforts to dedicate time and energy to the recovery of the exact number of fatalities and the absence of bodies in visual representations of the 1906 disaster may thus be differing expressions of one and the same phenomenon.

When analyzing absences and invisibilities in the visual culture of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, the previously discussed bread line pictures come to mind. By putting the plight of the survivors on view, they had the potential to resist the prevalent interpretations of the earthquake and fires as blessings in disguise. In many cases, however, the powerful rhetorical framing of the bread lines as social equalizer let the beholders 'see' what they were told about the disaster and thus rendered some of the depicted circumstances invisible; other problematic contexts were left out of the pictures entirely. Among these aspects was the uniformity of the bread lines in terms of race and class and with it the absence of the intercultural contact and conflict that abound in the aftermath of the earthquake and the fires. Instead of showing ethnic, socio-economic, and religious diversity, the bread line pictures depict a rather homogeneous group of mostly white middle-class men and women. Taking a closer look at the individuals in line, one generally notices the absence of ethnic minorities and the poor in bread line visualizations (cf., e.g., fig. 56). This observation by and large also applies to the bulk of the 1906 disaster pictures.

¹⁶¹ In his discussion of the number of fatalities, Philip Fradkin comes up with an estimate of about 3,000 to 5,000 casualties (*Great Earthquake* 191).

At the turn of the century, San Francisco was “a city of foreigners” (Davies 11) with one-third of all its residents born abroad. The ethnic composition of San Francisco in 1906 amounted to about 95 percent “white” residents (mostly from Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia, and Italy), a little less than four percent “Asians or Pacific Islanders,” and less than one percent “blacks” (U.S. Census Bureau, “100th Anniversary”). The joint hostility toward the Chinese and Japanese immigrants, among other factors, united the “white” residents even across class-boundaries.¹⁶² While the racial discrimination of African Americans, as historian Douglas Henry Daniels writes, “was still disturbing,” it was “mild compared to anti-Chinese sentiments” or the treatment of African Americans in the American South (qtd. in Cherny and Issel 17). Philip Fradkin assesses the racial prejudices the Japanese Americans had to face in San Francisco as even worse than the Chinese American experience (*Great Earthquake* 296). It is particularly the cultural interaction with the ‘lower five percent,’ many of whom had lived right in the center of the destroyed area previous to the earthquake and fires, that is by and large missing in the visual narratives of the 1906 calamity.

Unlike other neighborhoods which were home to ethnic minorities, Chinatown was completely destroyed. ‘Little China,’ as it had often been referred to, had been a prominent photographic subject in pre-earthquake days and it remained a much-demanded motif in the disaster visuals, often as a backdrop for the production of spectacular disaster scenes. In this context, Chinese Americans were sometimes part of the visual culture of the 1906 disaster, albeit mostly only one at a time and then in carefully staged and highly formulaic poses that expressed the predominantly white photographers’ framing of the disaster (cf., e.g., fig. 62, 63). While pictures of the charred remnants of Chinatown thus abound, they did not thematize problematic contexts such as why this particular space was razed in the first place or how its residents were treated in the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire.

¹⁶² Especially the “worker solidarity, the foundation of San Francisco’s strong labor presence, was built on racial hostility” (Davies 15). California’s Workingmen’s Trade and Labor Union, which encompassed about one-third of all workers in the city, for instance, “congealed by using racial explanations for class conflict and economic crisis” (Ethington qtd. in Davies 15).



Fig. 62: Photograph titled “The Heart of Chinatown” published by the Detroit Publishing Company. (LC-D4-19246). 1906. Courtesy of the Digital Prints and Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.



Fig. 63: Arnold Genthe’s “On the Ruins (April 1906), Chinatown, San Francisco,” which is sometimes also referred to as “End of Old Chinatown” or “Last of Old Chinatown, San Francisco.” (LC-G403- 0003-A). 1906. Courtesy of the Digital Prints and Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

Chinatown,” Andrea Davies elucidates, “did not burn by natural causes. Dynamite, mixed with strategic decisions to save the city’s elite, leveled the largest Chinese settlement on the West coast” (25). Robbed of their familiar and protective vicinity in the city, San Francisco’s Chinese Americans were further prone to attacks on an individual as well as a collective level.¹⁶³ Calls demanding the removal of the Chinese American neighborhood out of the city center became louder and louder. Chinatown, previously home to more than twenty-five thousand Chinese Americans in the prime location of the financial downtown, had long been a nuisance to the financial and political elite. Therefore, the demand to relocate the Chinese Americans to Hunters Point, a remote site outside the city in the very south of the Bay, was vehemently supported by San Francisco politicians and influential business men (Choy 12-13).

The Chinatown photographs, mostly taken by well-off white photographers, participate in these discourses. The photograph “The Heart of Chinatown” (fig. 62), for example, portrays Chinatown as an annihilated space that had been razed from San Francisco’s city map. While other pictures showed mostly white San Franciscans elsewhere reappropriating the ruinscape (cf., e.g., 53, 54), Chinatown comes forward as readily available urban space waiting to be claimed. The sight of a lone Chinese figure deserting the neighborhood, which functions as a visual *pars pro toto* for all residents of Chinatown, evokes the notion of the end of Chinatown. Similar photographs even explicitly title comparable motifs as “End of Old Chinatown” (fig. 63) and identify pictures of refugee camps at or beyond the city limits as “New Chinatown.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ While some hundreds of the estimated 25,000 Chinese Americans stayed after the earthquake, the majority left the city. Wealthier merchant families returned to their homeland right away, and many of the impoverished moved to nearby cities such as Oakland, Los Angeles, and San Jose (Davies 25; Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 289).

¹⁶⁴ Arnold Genthe’s “On the Ruins”/“End of Old Chinatown” (fig. 63) might well be interpreted as a comment on the desire to end Chinatown’s physical presence in the heart of the city. The Chinese American figure, standing slightly stooped amid the utterly destroyed and deserted ruins of Chinatown, appears to be nostalgically looking over the vast extent of the disasterscape and remembering the heyday of the lively pre-disaster Chinatown. Despite its wistful atmosphere, the photographic narrative insinuates that “Little China” is

Images such as these expose the affective distance that most San Franciscans felt toward what Frank Norris in his “The Third Circle” once called the “little bit of China dug out and transplanted” into the United States (15) and express a general concord with the relocation plans. Yet, the permanent removal of the Chinese Americans’ living quarters outside of the city that was insinuated by these photographs did not come to pass. The threat of the leading Chinese American merchants to remove their businesses to Portland, Seattle, or Tacoma, the potential of severe monetary losses for the city, and federal governmental opposition (resulting from China’s intervention and pressure on the United States) finally stopped this petition. Despite this success, the residents of Chinatown were nevertheless exposed to harsh racial discrimination and violence (Davies 25-30, 44-45, 93-96; Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 289-96; Hansen and Condon 111-15; Pan).

While the fires were still burning, the physical space of Chinatown was appropriated by the city authorities and the military. Instead of designating a separate disaster zone to the previous home of the Chinese San Franciscans, the area was divided up and incorporated into the two adjacent neighborhood districts ‘Nob Hill’ and the ‘Western Addition.’ Within these zones, the military, which controlled access to the ruin-scape, let Chinese Americans return to search for their belongings only much later than white residents. In addition, the soldiers did not prevent thieves from stealing as strictly and systematically as outside of Chinatown, which, as a result, encouraged “wholesale looting” in the ruined Chinese American district (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 292). Later, all legal cases trying to indict supposed looters, including many soldiers, did so in vain and were all dismissed, replicating pre-disaster social hierarchies and perpetuating metaphorical racial fault lines in San Francisco (Pan 51-61; cf. also Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 292-96).

San Francisco’s efforts to tighten the grip on the “city within the city” (Pan 3) and to push ethnic minorities further outside of the dominant ‘white’ urban center also manifested in endeavors to exclude these groups from the public sphere. In October 1906, the school board passed

destroyed and gone, a thing of the past, and there are no indications of a revival or the resurrection of the Old Chinatown. Whether the various titles of figure 63 were all devised by Genthe himself or added later by a publisher or archivist is not known.

an act to establish Oriental Public Schools on the outskirts of San Francisco to segregate the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese American students from the rest of the student body, which caused international political tensions with Japan. Japanese politicians openly expressed their feeling of “deepest offense” to the American ambassador (qtd. in Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 301), and a potential war was mentioned in Japanese and American newspapers. Fearing military and financial trouble in the Pacific, Theodore Roosevelt intervened to exempt Japanese students—but not the Chinese or the Korean ones—from this segregation, appeased the Japanese government, and dispatched the Great White Fleet toward San Francisco (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 35-36, 289-96; Hansen, “1800 and 1808”; Hansen and Condon 111-15; Pan 51-60).

In innumerable instances, the Chinese and, to an even larger extent, also the Japanese had to endure additional harsh discrimination. For example, while both Asian governments contributed greatly to the relief efforts, no Chinese or Japanese American organization was listed as recipient for the charity, and it is assumed that the money actually went somewhere else. The personal experiences in the aftermath of the calamity also proved hurtful for San Francisco’s ethnic minorities. Not only did the city authorities comply with the wishes of the ‘white’ refugees to single ethnic groups out into separate camps, they also relocated these encampments further outside the city several times. Both inside and outside the camps, many members of ethnic minorities suffered extensively from violence and discrimination, which caused many to leave San Francisco for good. Even the Japanese delegation of seismologists under the leadership of Dr. Fusakichi Omori, who had been asked by the city to research the earthquake, repeatedly suffered severe assaults (Davies 25-30, 44-45, 93-96; Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 289-96; Hansen and Condon 111-15).

Xenophobia and the lack of appreciation of cultural diversity also voiced itself in the city’s initial failure to collect and archive personal or official documents beyond U.S. Census data from San Francisco’s ethnic groups. This also applied to the city’s small African American population. Having been a “minority within a minority within a minority,” as Philip Fradkin explains in an interview on the Earthquake and Fire Centennial in 2006, their experience of the 1906 disaster is the

least documented (Fradkin, "Feeling Effects").¹⁶⁵ Members of ethnic groups are thus largely absent from the bulk of visual representations of the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. Moreover, few of the names of the photographers and publishers of disaster scenes indicate an ethnic background; neither are there any eyewitness accounts or instant histories mentioning Chinese, Japanese, or African American photographers or artists. The absences mentioned above pertain to only a small part of the overall struggles San Francisco's ethnic minorities had to face in the course of the long aftermath of the calamity (cf. Davies 45, 93-96; Fradkin, "Feeling Effects"; Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 210-26, 289-304; Pan 42-51). Yet, they underline that, despite the cornucopia of disaster motifs, the viewer needs to be highly alert to the pictures' silences and omissions.

Other gaps, which are closely related to the invisibility of the discrimination of ethnic minorities and intercultural conflicts in the pictorial disaster narratives, appear in regard to representations of poverty. The careful study of 1906 disaster photographs points to cultural and legal practices that helped recreate and, in some cases, even amplified class-based inequities in San Francisco. This so-called 'creative destruction' is not unique to the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906 but, as Kevin Rozario explicated in his *Culture of Calamity*, has a long history in North America and could also be frequently observed in more recent catastrophes such as 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina (cf., e.g., Klein; Negra).

The bread line photographs, for example, which were framed as 'rank levelers,' disguise economic inequality, discrimination, and prejudice; a variety of other motifs also bring invisibilities and absences to the fore. In this context, the verbal frames such as the captions play a crucial role since they already interpret the scenes, preventing the viewer from engaging in more complex and critical readings. Reverberating strongly with the discussions of the terminology of the "looting" vs. the

¹⁶⁵ One of the very few texts relating the African American disaster experience is Arnold Genthe's untitled photograph of a crowd of onlookers watching the fires from a distance. On the left side, the picture includes several well-dressed African Americans, partly seated on chairs in the street, beholding the spectacle of the flames and the billowing smoke. In order to see Genthe's photograph (LC-USZ62-58812), visit the Digital Prints and Photograph Collection of the Library of Congress at <<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>>.

“finding” of goods in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (cf., e.g., Ralli), the study of the visual representations of San Franciscans rummaging the ruins of 1906 can open a similar area exposing hidden instances of class-based discrimination.



Fig. 64: Photograph titled “San Francisco Earthquake of 1906: Digging for Souvenirs.” Taken by the War Department in April 1906. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration/Wikimedia Commons.

The removal of any kind of property from the ruins was considered looting and therefore constituted a crime. Despite the mayor’s order to incriminate *all* looters, the rule, however, was only enforced with lower-class ‘searchers’ or ethnic minorities retrieving items from the rubble (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 63-69, 292). In the first weeks of the aftermath, the power structures that were upheld by the authorities enabled the affluent to return to their position in society faster and more easily and thus deepened economic inequalities. This phenomenon can be traced in several disaster motifs. A variety of stereographs and postcards shows the “search” for “treasures,” “trinkets” or “souvenirs.” With (sub)titles such as “Digging for Souvenirs” (fig. 64), “Searching for Trinkets in the Ruins of the Once Magnificent Crocker Home,” or without direct reference in the caption to the depicted action at all (fig. 65),

pictures of looting middle- or upper-class San Franciscans presented the act of stealing as a harmless past-time or an adventurous treasure hunt.¹⁶⁶

In “San Francisco Earthquake of 1906: Digging for Souvenirs” (fig. 64), a crowd of men can be seen in the ruins. The suits and hats indicate their middle- or even upper-class status, and one person in the center even seems to wear a uniform. Their gazes are turned toward the rubble; some are even squatting on the ground, picking through the debris by hand. As the taking away of goods from the ruinscape was considered unlawful, this photograph consequently shows looters. Yet, the caption clarifies that these San Franciscans are merely “Digging for Souvenirs.” The strategic uses of the verbs ‘seeking’ or ‘digging’ (instead of ‘looting’) and the nouns ‘treasures’ or ‘souvenirs’ (evoking heroic adventures and travels) provide a euphemistic framing of the illegal appropriation of goods by suggesting that the men depicted simply engage in a harmless search for disaster keepsakes. “San Francisco Earthquake of 1906” is exceptional in its display of a predominantly male crowd of looters. Many other pictures such as “Looking East from Corner Ellis and Jones” (fig. 65) depict middle- and upper-class women (and children) as equally involved in the act of ‘hunting for souvenirs.’

The majority of the lootings by middle- or upper-class adults did not take place in the former mansions of the commercial elite—as the caption of “Searching for Trinkets in the Ruins of the Once Magnificent Crocker Home” might insinuate, but in the lower-class neighborhoods. As mentioned previously, the “wholesale looting” by “thousands” was especially prominent in Chinatown, where, among many others, the wife of Governor Pardee, for example, illegally obtained two Chinese statuettes as souvenirs (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 293). The stolen items comprised basic articles such as food, bedding, and dishes to very valuable objects (Davies 44-45). More often than not, the souvenirs were then sold to disaster tourists on the streets. There are numerous

¹⁶⁶ In order to view “Searching for Trinkets in the Ruins of the Once Magnificent Crocker Home” (BANC PIC 1989.018:42--STER), visit the Online Archive of California (OAC) at <<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/>>. For similar examples, see, e.g., BANC PIC 1989.018:54—STER at the OAC or “Souvenir Hunters” (19060576) in the Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco’s online archive at <<http://www.sfmuseum.org/>>.

photographs that show makeshift shops putting large amounts of “Souvenirs and Relicts from Chinatown” on sale.¹⁶⁷

In the days and weeks after the earthquake, reports that soldiers from the U.S. Army had participated in the lootings proliferated, and some storeowners (unsuccessfully) sought compensation directly from the commander of the army’s Pacific division, Major General Adolphus W. Greely (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 167; “Looting Claims”).¹⁶⁸ Despite several attempts by the Chinese and lower-class San Franciscans to sue the perpetrators, the courts did not press charges and excused the plunderers’ behavior as “merely sightseeing” (qtd. in Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 293). Not referencing the illegal retrieval of goods from the ruinscape at all in its caption, “Looking East from Corner Ellis and Jones” (fig. 65) provides a good example of how the class background determined the non-visibility of the unlawful appropriation of property and how the seemingly apparent looting remains ‘hidden’ by directing the viewer’s attention to the geographical setting in general, and the Call Building in particular.

At the same time as visualizations of well-off white San Franciscans looting were neutralized as ‘normal,’ imaginary written accounts of plundering—usually published in the sensationalist instant histories or picture books—featured ‘ghouls’ as thieves (e.g. W.E. Alexander; Smyth 78-80; Wilson 61, 237). Connoting savagery and the desecration of corpses, this particular term assigns a status outside of ‘normative’ society and its moral values to looters. In 1906, the stock scenes of the disaster imaginary were powered by a condensation of middle-class “human fear and dread of upheaval” with the “undeniable yearning” for spectacles of disaster (Kasson qtd. in Smith, “Urban Disorder” 93). Epitomizing the disruption of the social order in the modern technological American city through the collapse of class-based and ethnic hierarchies, the sensationalist representations of looting scenes portrayed the perpetrators as usually poverty-stricken “cruel, grimacing Asians or a cross between African Americans and Italians” (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 80). This juxtaposition is telling: Whereas prosperous white

¹⁶⁷ See, e.g., “One Year After: Souvenirs of Chinatown” (Fc917.9461 D7 Vol. 3:45a) in the Online Archive of California (OAC).

¹⁶⁸ A rare photograph of soldiers rummaging through shoe boxes on Market Street, titled “U.S. Army Troops Looting Shoes During Fire” (BANC PIC 19xx.112:096; OAC), seems to vindicate these claims.

plunderers were not identified as criminals, the looters in the disaster imaginary tended to exclusively come from the economic, societal, and ethnic margins. The visualizations of members of the middle and upper class foraging the ruins hence complicate the sensationalist looting narratives and forcefully advocate for a more complex approach to the economic inequalities and racial discrimination contained in the narratives of the 1906 disaster.

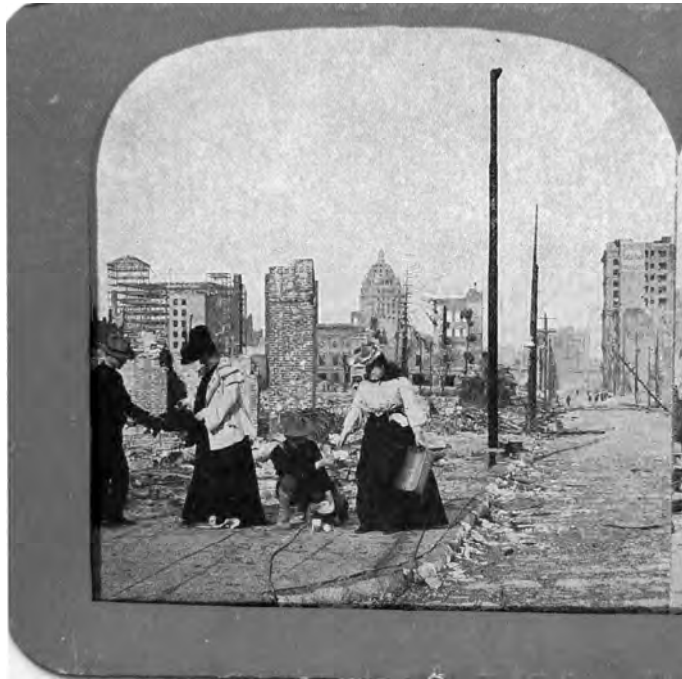


Fig. 65: Detail from a stereograph titled “Looking East from Corner Ellis and Jones—Tall Building the San Francisco Call.” The caption does not reference the looting that occurs in the foreground. 1906. No. 10 of the Griffith & Griffith series. Author’s collection.

The economic injustices of the relief procedures form one such conflict-ridden domain that had long been concealed by the rhetoric of San Francisco’s successful rise from the ashes and that has only recently been reevaluated in Andrea Rees Davies’s *Saving San Francisco: Relief and Recovery After the 1906 Disaster* (2012). As previously suggested

in the discussion of the framings of the bread line pictures as icons of equality and “earthquake love” (qtd. in Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 211), what remains absent from the visualizations of the relief efforts are the economic inequalities and the discriminatory structures of the disaster relief. While the images of the earthquake and fire survivors waiting for provisions were often seen as social equalizers and embodiments of democracy due to the allegedly equal treatment of all people, independent of ethnic, socio-economic, religious, or gender-based backgrounds, this is not what happened in the bread lines and during the related relief endeavors.

Despite avowals of the Relief Committee that “[n]o distinction was made in furnishing relief on account of the color, race, or religion of any individual” and that “Chinese, Japanese and Negroes were cared for without any discrimination” (qtd. in Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 211), Margaret Mahoney termed the arrival of the Red Cross and other organized charities from Boston, Chicago, and New York the “saddest chapter in the history of [San Francisco’s] disaster” (5). At the heart of the policies of the San Francisco Relief and Red Cross Funds (SFRRCF), which materialized out of the fusion of the local Relief Committee and the national charities in early summer 1906, there was the declared intent to restore the economic pre-disaster status with all its inbuilt structural inequities according to factors such as class, ethnicity, and gender. Fearing that a relief too generous would create “dependency and its corollary, moral depravity,” the previous socio-economic divisions were enforced rather than ‘equalized’ as most bread line narratives assumed (Davies 54; cf. also 42-62).

In order to prove one’s need for assistance, San Franciscans had to interview with the SFRRCF to lay out their previous monetary situation and sketch out their professional and private plans for the future. In the case of approval, the applicants and their families were then awarded financial and material funds for these endeavors. Yet, members from distinct economic backgrounds had very different chances of being awarded relief: Poor and working-class residents had to hope for approval in the interviews with the SFRRCF, which was not always granted and, according to Davies, definitely not generously calculated, especially when the applicants seemed to diverge, in whatever manner, from the normative ‘white’ middle- or upper-class standard. In spite of numerous public declarations assuring the application of objective

criteria, the relief workers often lapsed back to the nineteenth-century philosophy of the 'deserving poor' and based the validation of financial means on subjective moral assessments instead of providing equal help for the disaster recovery (Davies 42-62).

Relief distribution in the bread lines, as Margaret Mahoney avowed, similarly increased the hardship of the destitute:

Being in the habit of dealing with paupers [the staff members of the national charities] undertook to pauperize a self-respecting community. Hoard was the keynote of their system, hoard supplies, hoard money, humiliate and insult the people so as to drive them from the bread lines.
(6)

Whereas the poverty-stricken had to endure humiliation and insults in order to receive assistance, wealthy San Franciscans faced different *modi operandi*. Relief officials diverged from the Associated Charities' investigation practices when members of the middle or higher class were concerned. When "higher financial awards than the average rehabilitation grantee" were at stake, officials opened confidential cases, which were not only conducted in privacy, away from the exposure in public places, and at the sole discretion of a 'peer reviewer,' but they were also seven times more likely to succeed (Davies 60). All in all, the relief efforts turned out as "blind to the needs of the poor and minorities" (Fradkin, *Great Earthquake* 205) and reified, in many cases also worsened, the economic inequalities that had already existed before the 1906 disaster (Davies 40, 54).

Class also played a crucial role in the visual culture of the 1906 calamity and its archiving. Not everybody possessed a camera and, what might have been more important, leisure time to venture into the disasterscape to take pictures. Archives initially focused predominantly on press photographs and commercial earthquake and fire pictures, which is why the bulk of 1906 pictures generally does not provide an inside perspective on the disaster experience of San Francisco's minorities. Since it was mainly eyewitness reports of (male) white, middle- or upper-class residents or famous celebrities (cf., e.g., Enrico Caruso, Arnold Genthe, Jack London) that were of interest in the first few decades after the earthquake, the written accounts of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire show analogous absences. The selective

focus on the absence of class-based discrimination and inequality in most 1906 visuals, which reveals only a small part of the overall economic injustices committed in the course of the disaster, nevertheless exposes the necessity to explore pictorial silences in order to get to a more critical and nuanced reading of how class-related issues are implicated in the visual culture of the 1906 calamity.



Fig. 66: Tinted stereograph titled “Emergency Camp and Costume of San Francisco’s Young Ladies Who Lost Everything in the Disaster” depicting a young woman in men’s attire amid make-shift tents in one of the refugee camps. 1906. Author’s Collection.

Similar blind spots emerge in the representations of gender in the disaster pictures. The San Francisco Earthquake and Fire offered a cornucopia of motifs for the staging of (hyper)masculinity and male agency in the four square miles of deformed ruins and heaps of rubble: The portrayals of the fire-fighters, soldiers, police, and (male) citizen volunteers as heroes emphasized their bodily strength, authority, and iron determination (cf., e.g., fig. 58). Resilient business men and hard-working construction workers also played a decisive role in the visual

narratives of the rise from the ashes (cf., e.g., 53). Women, on the other hand, often remained relatively passive bystanders (cf., e.g., fig. 38), or were shown in the process of performing household chores.¹⁶⁹ Yet, attention to rare sights, gaps, and invisibilities in the pictorial narratives helps to arrive at a more complex and multi-layered assessment of the gendered experience of the 1906 disaster and demonstrates that gender norms were also contested and unsettled.

In numerous instances, the earthquake and fire illustrations reproduced the social gender norms rather than represented the actual disaster experience. A seemingly trivial, yet telling, example in this context is the depiction of clothing. Three quarters of the city had just been destroyed, and one third of the residents had only had a short time (some none) to prepare for their dislocation. Various eyewitness reports from different San Francisco neighborhoods relate stories about scantily dressed or naked residents fleeing the collapsing buildings, indicating that the shortage of suitable attire—especially for women—must have been prevalent.¹⁷⁰ Yet, only very few illustrations such as “Emergency Camp” (fig. 66) show survivors who do not appear to be appropriately dressed according to the conventions of their time, but rather wear the men’s attire distributed by the army. This blind spot matters, firstly, because it renders an important part of the disaster experience invisible: The flight from the fires was long and tedious, and in many cases the few pieces of clothing that the survivors wore on their bodies during their initial escape remained the only clothes they would wear for a while. In the first days after the calamity, weather conditions worsened and the lack of a proper wardrobe caused severe suffering in the makeshift accommodations and tent camps.

More importantly, the invisibility of unconventional outfits also matters since clothes—from the size and shape of the hats to the form and color of the shoes—were an important indicator for the wearer’s

¹⁶⁹ One of the most popular motifs in this regard was the image of young women cooking together in small, yet homely decorated, make-shift street kitchens. For examples, see, e.g., “Miss Voy’s Kitchen” (FN-34798) or “Hoffman Café” (F869.S3.S24794 Vol. 1:062a) at the OAC <<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/>>.

¹⁷⁰ The verso of “Emergency Camp” (fig. 66), for example, describes how “almost naked guests” fled from the Palace Hotel and mentions that “[f]or many days after the catastrophe many well educated ladies could be seen in the parks, dressed in overalls and striped sweaters, or in other coarse masculine garb.”

socio-economic standing and simultaneously imbued with class-specific gender norms and moral connotations. The violation of this relatively strict system of cultural signification hence resulted in societal disorder. The text on the verso of “Emergency Camp” (fig. 66) accordingly explains that the photographer had difficulties in finding and persuading a young woman to consent to having her picture taken. Girls or young ladies in coarse work wear or military apparel upset the traditional gender norms of the time and were thus rendered largely invisible. In “Emergency Camp,” the young lady in men’s clothes is staged as a spectacle precisely because of her dress and its irreconcilability with contemporaneous gender conventions. The real-and-imagined societal disorder at the same time created a nexus for powerful gender solidarity and empathy. Many Californian women thus engaged in unofficial disaster relief outside the established infrastructures, which not only successfully alleviated the tenuous situation of many female refugees, but also worked to at least temporarily allow (mostly middle-class) women a “newfound agency” (Davies 111). While women—particularly when unmarried or divorced—were often discriminated against in the relief efforts beyond average, the disaster also opened up “disastrous opportunities” for female empowerment (Davies 63; cf. also 42-63).

Feeling that the disaster was “an opportunity to show the kindness we must all feel toward other women” (Bishop qtd. in Davies 64), many female Californians like Stanford student Beryl Bishop expressed their solidarity through many hours of work dedicated to alleviating the plight of the women in the Bay Area. Especially the women’s clubs sewed dresses and baked to provide the necessary means to contribute to the recovery. When the SFRRCF loosened its relief cooperation with the women’s clubs, many of the middle-class members went directly to the refugee camps to offer lessons in housekeeping or to provide moral support and encouragement. Although these pursuits were often related to conventionally female chores and thus seemed to enforce the gendered ‘separation of spheres,’ Andrea Davies explicates, these women gained valuable experiences in the public sphere and acquired empirical knowledge about political processes. Through their “politicized domesticity,” they engaged in relief politics and, albeit temporarily, brought “gender ideology to the political forefront in the recovering city” (Davies 111).



Fig. 67: Detail from J.D. Givens's "Breadline at St. Mary's Cathedral, 110 Block of Van Ness Ave., Geary to Post" (cf. also fig. 56). (CHS2015.1916). 1906. Courtesy of the California Historical Society.

A return to the bread line photographs offers another point of departure to delve into invisibilities and silences in the visual representation of women in the aftermath of the 1906 disaster. While J.D. Givens's "Breadline at St. Mary's Cathedral" (figure 56, 67) still depicts a considerably high percentage of men waiting to receive food, bread lines evolved into predominantly female spaces over the weeks since further along in the city's recovery men were mandatorily ordered to participate in the rebuilding of San Francisco (Davies 42-62). As motifs for the camera, however, the shorter lines of waiting women were not as popular as the initial mixed-gender bread lines, which is why these images do not feature large in the visual culture of the 1906 disaster. The myth of the bread lines as calm and orderly spaces, in which every single person patiently waited their turn and endured their fate with composure and stamina, nevertheless persisted. What is thus missing from the bread line illustrations, as previously already suggested in the discussion of the dominant framings of the bread line images, is their potential for social conflict.

In the nearly all-female bread lines, particularly poor and working-class women transcended the assigned gender role of docilely waiting

for whatever little amount of food, mostly of low quality, was given to them by inciting a series of rebellious acts. The Flour Riot, the biggest unrest, was started in July 1906, when women—outraged at the long waiting time and the faulty food distribution policies of the SFRRCF—stormed a warehouse, hit a male guard, and retrieved two thousand pounds of flour. A male photographer who happened to be at the scene was prevented by the women from taking pictures, which shows that the female rioters did not only have power over their situation, but were also in control of thwarting efforts to create visual evidence of their actions—which could have possibly hurt their goals by widely disseminating their violent transgression of the social gender norms or even led to their arrests (“Mob” 14). The protests found support in the refugee camps and sparked the establishment of the United Refugees, which emphatically advocated the refugees’ interests (Davies 63-84). Despite their seeming impression of tranquility and peacefulness, the bread lines are hence tied in with severe social inequality, the transgression of gender norms in public space, and the empowerment of women.

Female agency in relief politics has to be seen against the backdrop of the strong affirmations of conventional gender stereotypes mentioned earlier. Eyewitness reports and sensational publications in particular perpetuated stereotyped gender representations such as, for instance, that of men as stoically calm during and heroically active and effective after the earthquake and that of women as hysterically crying during the tremors and focused on domestic chores in the aftermath of the 1906 calamity. The actual accomplishments of women in the relief and the recovery of San Francisco were nonetheless sporadically noted and publicly acknowledged. In this manner, an article in the *Los Angeles Express* from April 20, 1906, praised the performance of San Francisco’s women during the first few days of the disaster:

Just a word of San Francisco’s womanhood. If ever her worth was proved it has been proved here. The women of San Francisco did not flee, they would not flee. Had the men turned craven they would have mocked them. Their courage was inspiring. Many a brave man who wanted to fight the fight for his city, strengthened with the thought that those whom he loved were beyond danger, discovered this. The women were at their posts. They are still there. They have showed that they, too, have the blood of the pioneers. (“Tribute to Womanhood”)

In this as in other items, the framing of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire as a return to frontier times was specifically tailored to include women. Contrary to the nineteenth-century cult of ‘true womanhood,’ which charged “women with the preservation of the middle-class home as a refuge of emotional nurture and spiritual virtue safe from the aggressive, competitive, and masculine realm of commerce and politics” (Sanchez-Eppler), typically male-connoted traits such as courage, grit, and endurance were assigned to women and their contributions to San Francisco’s rise from the ashes, especially those in the public sphere, duly recognized.

Female agency was also visible in the advancement of women into the hitherto predominantly male sphere of professional and art photography. Numerous skilled pioneer women photographers in the American West such as Eliza W. Withington and Elizabeth Fleischmann notwithstanding (cf. Palmquist, “Pioneer Women”), photography and stereography were still masculine professions and pastimes at the turn of the century, especially when they involved the solitary roaming of what contemporary Charles Kendrick described as a “wilderness of ruins” and “thousand blocks of complete desolation.” Yet, some ‘Kodak girls’ such as Edith Irvine upset the gender conventions and toured the ruins by themselves, taking delight in the plethora of aesthetic motifs and recording their individual disaster experience with the camera (cf. “About”; Cohen).¹⁷¹

The closing of some of the visual gaps and silences, the exposure of invisibilities, and the exploration of inter pictorial frameworks re-frame the 1906 disaster pictures and complicate their predominant contemporaneous readings. This re-situating is important since iconic pictures and

¹⁷¹ In April 1906, twenty-two-year-old Edith Irvine from a well-to-do family in Calaveras County challenged prevalent gender conventions by venturing into San Francisco’s disasterscape by herself to take photographs with her high-quality equipment. In so doing, Irvine, who would never marry, seemed to push the boundaries even more by using a discarded baby buggy—the paradigmatic symbol of motherhood and thus of one of the most prevalent normative gender stereotypes—in order to haul her bulky photographic apparatus through the destroyed city and take part in a predominantly male pictorial practice. In order to view her disaster photographs and read more about her life, visit the Edith Irvine Collection at the Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library at <<http://lib.byu.edu/collections/edith-irvine-collection/>>.

their motifs often serve as “technologies of memory” (cf. (Sturken, *Tangled Memories* 12), which transmit a certain reading of a historical event into cultural memory and hence determine how it is remembered. In this process, problematic contexts such as the discriminatory nature of the relief or the bread line riots tend to give way to more convenient and ultimately more monolithic disaster narratives. A look at the Russell Sage Foundation’s comprehensive assessment of the relief efforts, titled *San Francisco Relief Survey: The Organization and Methods of Relief Used After the Earthquake and Fire of April 18, 1906* (1913), demonstrates how quickly, only seven years after the actual earthquake and fires, the more challenging contexts had disappeared from the official disaster narratives.¹⁷²

The *San Francisco Relief Survey* illustrates its findings with almost 100 photographs from the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. In the section on the “Distribution of Food,” it features two bread line pictures, the first one J.D. Givens’s “Breadline at St. Mary’s Cathedral” (figure 56, 67) and another one showing an extensive line, including many women and children, guarded by soldiers (36b). The two captions proclaim that “[a]ll classes joined the bread line,” while “[s]oldiers gave aid and protection” (36b). The accompanying text vindicates this white-washed narrative by stating that in the bread lines, “rich and poor, Italian, German, Swedish, Chinese, and native fared alike. The only question was one of need” (36a), perpetuating the boosters’ rhetoric on the national level. All in all, the *San Francisco Relief Survey* commends the “distinguished services” of the Red Cross and the Associated Charities and the “splendid part” of the United States Army (vii)—a statement that many of San Francisco’s minorities would have disagreed with in 1906.

Since, up to this day, iconic visuals play a decisive role in the memorialization of the 1906 disaster, the re-framing of the visual culture of 1906 is an indispensable task. In this context, the study of the history of disaster framings in the Bay Area and the appropriation of

¹⁷² The Russell Sage Foundation, one of the oldest and most established research foundations in the field of the social sciences, assembled six independent studies, among others by the Red Cross and the American Association of Societies for Organizing Charity, in order to provide an account of the entire relief proceedings that was also intended to serve as a model for future disasters (vii-x).

(trans-)national pictorial conventions as well as the establishment of idiosyncratic visual protocols of framing calamities is equally necessary to arrive at a more complete assessment of the events of April 18 and their long aftermath. In addition, this approach also yields a multi-faceted insight into American ideological beliefs in general and San Francisco's self-understanding in particular.

The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire was not the first natural disaster to be captured by pens, brushes, and cameras, yet, it was the first calamity that was so extensively visualized in the United States (*Camera Craft* 12.4/5; Cohen; Yablon 192). The degree of its commodification as spectacle anticipates the notion of disaster as a forceful, albeit short-lived, fascinating and simultaneously terrifying moment of rupture in the regular normality of 'real' life—a trend that intensified over the course of the twentieth into the early twenty-first century and that has been especially prominent in the media landscape. This conceptualization eliminates a different and ultimately more expedient apprehension of disaster that Rob Nixon calls 'slow violence,' which foregrounds the often unnoticed injustices and adversities that occur "gradually and out of sight" and that are "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, [their] calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (2). Since images of disaster still constitute an integral part of this spectacularization of disaster in the twenty-first century, it is ever more important to pay attention to their affective power, the manifold cultural functions they have performed in historical calamities, and their potential to serve as frames enforcing, but also contesting, dominant disaster discourses.

The previous inquiry into the involvement of images in the framings of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire and the analyses of selected pictures in regard to their potential to 'answer back' have revealed that visuals, including photographs, did not provide, as some scholars claim, objective documents unbiasedly conveying the calamity. Contrary to what Philip Fradkin claims in *The Great Earthquake*, i.e. that "[o]nly the massive photographic record [...] came close to documenting the catastrophe in an accurate manner" and that "the photographers, except for a few soft-focus pictorialists, had not yet learned how to manipulate images" (264), photographs and other visuals played a vital role in the strategic framings of the disaster and the purposeful manipulations of its interpretations and did not remain impartial. They

rather took part in multiple, partly contradictory, earthquake narratives and performed a plethora of cultural functions; at times opening up readings to the critical viewer that expose the invisibilities and social and political injustices that were often glossed over in the dominant disaster discourses (cf., e.g., fig. 56, 58, 63, 65). Besides, visual disaster narratives are of utmost significance since these images possess a tremendous affective potential, which is not unique to the 1906 disaster, however, but, as the first two main chapters of *Framing Spaces in Motion* (ch. 3 and 4) have demonstrated, applies to all iconic images of disasters that have reverberated with key concerns of their times.

The visuals of 1906, especially the pictures of the ruinscape (cf., e.g., fig. 36-38), familiarized San Franciscans with the novel sight of their cityscape and thus updated their mental maps and facilitated orientation in the urban space. In addition, the numerous visual representations of long-established and novel architectural icons such as the City Hall, the Call Building, or the Portals of the Past (cf., e.g., fig. 33, 35, 49) fostered topophilia, the emotional attachment to the city, and the strong pride in the beloved 'Metropolis of the Pacific.' The shared viewing of stereographs, photo books, and lantern slides and the time-intensive collection of postcards, souvenir photographs, and newspaper clippings moreover supported the reliving and the reenactment of the catastrophe, which, according to scholars such as Marita Sturken, enhanced the coping process for the survivors (*Tangled Memories* 12-17).

Numerous photographs and illustrations, many from out-of-town publishers (cf., e.g., fig. 40, 59), visually dramatized the earthquake and fires and vividly exaggerated the damage, cashing in on the widespread 'dark' magnetism of disasters in their sensationalist publications. Other visual representations of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire such as maps (cf., e.g., fig. 39), magazine covers (cf., e.g., fig. 50), or images in promotional publications (cf., e.g., fig. 45, 46, 51) were harshly manipulated and strategically abused as visual frames supporting boosterish discourses about the non-existence of the earthquake, the minimization of the disaster's damage, and repetitive avowals about the city's grit, resilience, and imminent and successful comeback. The numerous instances in which visualizations of the earthquake and the conflagration were instrumentalized or manipulated as frames indicate just how much was perceived to be at stake in embedding the seismic

threat meaningfully into worldviews without endangering personal safety and communal economic prosperity.

As the analysis of the (re)framings of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire has shown, the disaster pictures were never limited to the depiction of the actual calamity but negotiated a much wider and more comprehensive range of political, economic, and cultural concerns and thereby perpetuated, but also contested, idiosyncratically American ideologies and carried on regional traditions such as that of depicting California as the 'American Mediterranean' (Starr 365). The pictures of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire accordingly took part in various different, often competing, ideological discourses and interpretations of earthquakes and provided materialized intersections enabling the "complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality" (Mitchell, *Picture Theory* 16) in its manifold historical and inter pictorial contexts to coalesce into one space. Thereby, they were always inextricably infused with frames from various other media and the presuppositions the viewers brought to the pictures. Despite the partly strong circumtextual frames, the 1906 disaster pictures—some much more than others—nevertheless had the potential to challenge the dominant 'tales of disaster.'