

# Double-take: Seeing Moana-Oceanic Cold War Nuclear Testing Radioactive Residue in Julian Charrière's Photographs

Fiona Amundsen  
AUT University  
[Bio](#)



## Keywords

nuclear imperialism, nuclear weapons testing, mushroom cloud, photographic materiality, material witnessing

## How to Cite

Amundsen, Fiona. 2023. "Double-Take: Seeing Moana-Oceanic Cold War Nuclear Testing Radioactive Residue in Julian Charrière's Photographs". *Membrana – Journal of Photography, Theory and Visual Culture* 8 (2):pp-pp. <https://doi.org/10.47659/mj-v8n2id145>.

More Citation Formats ▾



## Abstract

To photographically and filmically represent ionizing radiation, from the detonation of nuclear weapons, is a notoriously difficult process. Radiation has no tangible visibility; it literally defies vision. Despite this difficulty, photography and film held significant roles within the Cold War Nuclear Arms Race. Participating states used images to control public perception of nuclear weaponry and the military industrial complexes that supported their development. The most ubiquitous of these images is the sublime mushroom cloud. This article consciously resists this type of spectacular photographic imagery and questions how to ethically witness and represent, specifically, United States nuclear weapons testing across unceded parts of Moana-Oceania. Focusing on artist Julian Charrière's photographic artworks from his series *First Light* (2016), I explore his methods of using photographic emulsion to materially record the remnants of ionising radiation that continues to impact this region's people, oceans and lands as a result of the U.S. testing programme dubbed Operation Crossroads. There is a focus on how the physical matter of an image capturing device is able to materially witness, and thereby "see", external events. Methodologically framed via artist and theorist Susan Schuppli's conception of material witnessing, I argue for forms of politicised witnessing that move beyond visibility; instead, quantifiable evidence of the nuclear is physically embedded in the image.

## References

- Azoulay, Ariella. 2008. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Baer, Ulrich. 2002. *Spectral Evidence: The Photographing of Trauma*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Carpenter, Ele. 2016. "Radiation as Hyperobject." In *The Nuclear Culture Source Book*, edited by Ele Carpenter, 161–164. London: Black Dog Press.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. 2011. "Heliotropes: Solar Ecologies and Pacific Radiations." In *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, 235–253. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2008. *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Ferguson, Frances. 1984. "The Nuclear Sublime." *Diacritics* 14 (2). Nuclear Criticism: 4–10. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/464754>.
- Goodwin, Hannah. 2021. "Atomic Tests: Experimental Filmmaking in the Nuclear Era." *Journal of Film and Video* 73 (2): 11–25. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/795013>.
- Jurkonytė, Ilona. 2023. "Bomb Archive: The Marshall Islands as Cold War Film Set." *Global Storytelling: Journal of Digital and Moving Images* 2(2): 5: 57–85. <https://doi.org/10.3998/gj.2536>.
- Hales, Peter B. 1991. "The Atomic Sublime." *American Studies* 32 (1): 5–31. <https://journals.ku.edu/amsj/article/view/2890/2849>.
- Hamilton, Kevin and Ned O’Gorman. 2018. *Lookout America! The Secret Hollywood Studio at the Heart of the Cold War*. Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press.
- Hariman, Robert and John Louis Lucaites. 2012a. "The Iconic Image of the Mushroom Cloud and the Cold War Nuclear Optic." In *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*, edited by Geoffrey Batchen, Mick Gidley, Nancy K Miller and Jay Prosser, 135–146. London: Reaktion Books.
- Hariman, Robert and John Louis Lucaites. 2012b. "Seeing the Bomb, Imaging the Future: Allegorical Vision in the Post-Cold War Nuclear Optic." <https://oic.uqam.ca/publications/article/seeing-the-bomb-imagining-the-future-allegorical-vision-in-the-post-cold-war-nuclear-optic>.
- Keju-Johnson, Darlene. 2003. "For the Good of Mankind." *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 2 (1), Article 59: 309–314. <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1443&context=sjsj>.
- Lipset, David. 2016. "Review of Nuclear Savage: The Islands of Secret Project 4.1." *The Contemporary Pacific* 28 (1): 270–273. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2016.0009>.
- Mecklin, John. 2023. "A time of unprecedented danger: It is 90 seconds to midnight." <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>.
- Miles, Rufus E. 1985. "Hiroshima: The Strange Myth of Half a Million American Lives Saved." *International Security* 10 (2): 121–40. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538830>.
- National Research Council (US) Committee on the Biological Effects of Ionizing Radiation (BEIR V). 1990. *Health Effects of Exposure to Low Levels of Ionizing Radiation*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US). <https://doi.org/10.17226/1224>.
- O’Brian, John. 2015a. "Nuclear Flowers of Hell" in *Camera Atomica: Photographing the Nuclear World*, edited by John O’Brian, 76–105. London, Black Dog Press.
- O’Brian, John. 2015b. "Introduction: Through a Radioactive Lens." In *Camera Atomica: Photographing the Nuclear World*, edited by John O’Brian, 10–19. London: Black Dog Press.
- Samman, Nadim. 2016. "Unnatural History." *Galerie Tschudi*. <https://julian-charriere.net/projects/exhibition-first-light>.
- Shevchenko, Vladimir. 1986. *Chernobyl: Chronicle of Difficult Weeks*. VHS Video, 72 mins. Glasnost Film Festival; video 4.
- Schuppli, Susan. 2020. *Material Witness: Media, Forensics, Evidence*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Sherriff, Lucy. 2023. "Endless fallout: the Pacific idyll still facing nuclear blight 77 years on." *The Guardian*, August 25, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/25/endless-fallout-marshall-islands-pacific-idyll-still-facing-nuclear-blight-77-years-on>.
- Streitberger, Alexander, and Hilde van Gelder. 2010. "Photo-filmic Images in Contemporary Visual Culture." *Philosophy Of Photography*, no. 1: 48–53.
- Yamada, Seiji and Matthew Akiyama. 2014. "'For the good of mankind': The legacy of nuclear testing in Micronesia." *Social Medicine: Health for All* 8 (12): 83–92. <https://www.socialmedicine.info/index.php/socialmedicine/article/view/682>.

## Keywords



## Access Options

Article Access: 18,00 EUR

Journal Access: 87,00 EUR

One-month Access: 36,00 EUR

Yearly Access: 56,00 EUR

[Check all Access Options](#)

## Usefull Links

[Membrana Institute](#)  
[Fotografija Magazine](#)  
[Membrana Review](#)

## Subscription

[Login to access subscriber-only resources.](#)

[Subscribe to Newsletter](#)

© 2024 Membrana - All Rights Are Reserved

[PRIVACY POLICY](#) ~ [TERMS OF SERVICE](#) ~ [EDITORIAL & PUBLISHING POLICY](#) ~ [COPYRIGHT INFORMATION](#)

MEMBRANA  
INSTITUTE  
FOR  
CULTURAL  
RESEARCH