SURFACE TO SURFACE:
WAR, IMAGE & THE SENSES IN THE SCREENIC ERA

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Dedication

To my beloved wife, Annie, a brilliant editor who read it all. And to my dog, Patton, who never gave a crap about any of this.

Abstract

The very concept of a "medium" has been called into question by emergent technologies that convert all media phenomena into digital quanta. In this context, the dissertation investigates the entanglement of war and media technologies across photographic, cinematic, televisual, textual, and digital interfaces from the 1960s to the present.

From the early "camera bombs" used in the Vietnam War to the recent Gorgon Stare drone program, visual technologies have served to both document and implement acts of war. At the same time, artists, filmmakers, and writers have sought ways to reframe and disrupt these militarized screens. I describe these imbricated screenworlds as *screenic,* wherein complex technological, social, and corporeal operations are transformed into a surface of perceivable events. I develop the notion of the screenic as a phenomenological and ecological concept for thinking *about* and *through* the convergent and divergent interfaces of war. Extracting from the iconic photographs of the Vietnam War, CNN's orgiastic televisual spectacle of the Gulf War, and the Abu Ghraib photographs that both pictured and perpetrated torture, each chapter focuses on literary and visual objects that elucidate the use of screens as both a weapon and a record of war. Through close readings of various texts including the digital flows of artist Wafaa Bilal's "Shoot an Iraqi" web-performance, the digital epistemologies of Errol Morris's documentary *Standard Operating Procedure,* and the more durable analogue substrates of Larry Burrows' Vietnam War photographs, I seek a critical phenomenology of the surface at the juncture of human sensoria and technological media.

Many media theorists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have identified in emergent technologies both the potential for new social formations and the perils of new kinds of catastrophe. Expanding upon this discourse – a discourse haunted by the interpenetration of war and media technologies – I argue that these bodily and social concerns are screenic problems situated in an expanding nexus of interfaces from television to hand-held devices.

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Interfaces of War: Media Aesthetics, Media Ecologies, and the Screenic

> *I like to think*
> *(it has to be!)*
> *of a cybernetic ecolog*y
> where we are free of our labors
> and joined back to nature,
> returned to our mammal brothers and sisters,
> and all watched over
> by machines of loving grace.   - Richard Brautigan[1]
>
> So cyberspace is real.   - Barack Obama

The Screenic

The two epigraphs above, from Richard Brautigan in 1967 and Barack Obama in

2009, both come from texts that engage human-machine interaction in the rhetoric of

technological utopianism while also relaying a darker subtext. The speaker in Brautigan's

poem may have been earnest in the halcyon days of cybernetic-ecological wish-making

of the 1960s and 70s. But heard skeptically here in the twenty-first century, he sounds

like someone already "all watched over." His optimistic dreams of reunion with nature

and freedom from labor seem like the coerced enthusiasm of someone already living

under totalitarian machine rule, where "loving grace" is the necessary the doublespeak of

a surveilled subject. President Obama's claim that "cyberspace is real," however, comes

in the more measured and modernist rhetoric about the promise and peril of new

technologies. They are the words of a Commander-in-Chief who has overseen a dramatic

expansion of the use of military aerial drones – machines that literalize the concept of

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[1] Recently, the filmmaker Adam Curtis made a brilliant, if not problematic, documentary film series for BBC2, *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace* (2011), which he titled after Brautigan's poem. In it he explores the ways in which humanity is colonized by machines. He casts a wide net covering Ayn Rand's philosophy and its connections to Silicon Valley titans, the machine fantasy that informs ecological science, and the machine fantasy that that structures global politics.

being "all watched over." They are also the words of the "Internet President" who was

elected twice in large part by his ability to harness social media and big data. In the

"cyberspace is real" speech (from which the epigraph is taken) he seems to ventriloquize

the French disaster theorist Paul Virilio when he talks of the paradoxical promise and

peril of Internet technologies. "It's the great irony of our Information Age –," the

President says, "the very technologies that empower us to create and to build also

empower those who would disrupt and destroy" (Obama). In this speech the President

uses the promise of technology to emphasize the attendant perils that legitimize new

government programs of cybersecurity, cyberweaponry, cyberwar, and more specifically

in this instance, a new cabinet-level office led by a Cybersecurity Czar. Obama argues

that the United States' digital infrastructure needs to be treated as a strategic national

asset.[2] In other words, due to a technologically perilous world, the United States itself

needs to be an arbiter of peril via weaponized networks. This May 2009 speech lands in

the historical vicinity of the public hacktivism that would come in the following years

including the Wikileaks diplomatic cable releases, the LulzSec and Anonymous hacks

and distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, as well as the emerging public

revelations about complex cyberweapons like Stuxnet, Conficker, and Flame, which were

all funded, created, and/or deployed by the United States government.

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[2] Obama is not the first president to call for heightened cybersecurity and protection of the digital infrastructure. In 1998, Bill Clinton recognized this is Presidential Directive 63 and in February 2003 George W. Bush released a National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace (NSSC). Under Obama, however, cybersecurity has become more of a presidential priority than ever before.

It may be that the President was giving a war speech disguised as a technology speech, but he is right, cyberspace is real.[3] It is this fact (which Virilio and Obama, for different reasons, seem to agree is "philosophically vertiginous" and which Brautigan insists "has to be!") that opens my own investigation of the screen in the context of war and war in the context of the screen (Virilio, *Desert* 45). Situated dialectically somewhere in between Brautigan's cybernetic dreams and Obama's perilous realities, this dissertation is an attempt to grapple with recent entanglements of war and media technologies and the resulting media-aesthetic and techno-ecological ramifications of those entanglements in theory, photography, literature, and art. The endeavor here is to elucidate the making and unmaking of the world on screens in the context of war.

A fundamental issue facing current media studies is the very concept of a "medium." As media objects shift from *things* that are somewhere (i.e. light emulsions imprinted on stock) into *nothing* that is everywhere (i.e. the intangible flow of digits in the ether), once distinct boundaries between media have eroded. Media objects that were once pieces of the world and continuous with the world are now discrete pieces of code, discontinuous with the world, digitally stored, and episodically articulated via graphic

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[3] The statement "cyberspace is real" is not particularly epiphanic. Though the idea of the 'virtual' has been often lazily conceptualized in opposition to the idea of the 'real,' especially in discourse around digitality and cyberspace, the current modes of telepresence, tele-action, and tele-existence that have been integrated not only into the dominant modes of war-making, but into everyday living, provide a common-sense indication that no such strict opposition exists. For revisions and recoveries of the concept of the virtual see Vivian Sobchack (*The Address of the Eye* and *Carnal Thoughts*), Anne Friedberg *(The Virtual Window)*, Pierre Lévy (*Becoming Virtual*), and David Rodowick (*The Virtual Life of Film*). All of these scholars seek to liberate the concept of the virtual from a strictly digital environment. For example Anne Friedberg makes the following useful definition in *The Virtual Window*: "Once the term 'virtual' is free from its enforced association with the 'digital,' it can more accurately operate as a marker of an ontological, not a media-specific, property" […] For the purposes of this study, then, the term 'virtual' serves to distinguish between any representation or appearance (whether optically, technologically, or artisanally produced) that appears 'functionally or effectively *but not formally*' of the same materiality as what it represents" (11).

and haptic interfaces. Simultaneously, as network technologies, robotics, and algorithmic

software agencies become increasingly integrated into the practices of everyday life, the

boundaries between humans and technologies have also eroded, raising questions about

what some theorists refer to as the posthuman condition.[4]

In the context of recent wars, this dissertation critically engages these

technological and theoretical transformations, which are rapidly resituating all forms of

media and social practices. It explores the ways in which the apparent matterlessness of

emergent media forms do, in fact, matter. The digital turn introduces profound changes to

the imbricated aesthetic conditions and means by which the world appears to us, from the

internet of information to the internet of things, from ambient intelligences to

commodified social networks, from iPhone images to networked drone surveillance, from

Call of Duty simulations to the Wikileaks Apache helicopter footage.[5] How do we make

sense of the problem of perception and all the sensory faculties that underpin perception?

What is the meaning of experience, perception, sensation, and subjectivity under these

emerging media conditions? Media aesthetics – the conditions of technologically-

mediated perception – and media specificity – the idea that these perceptions change as a

media alters – are fundamental problems within media studies. And given that media

aesthetics are the phenomenological representation of complex, interconnected,

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[4] See the excellent anthology edited by Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) as well as N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995).

[5] For a fascinating set of essays and artworks that deal with lives of objects and internets of things, see Paola Antonelli's *Talk To Me: Design and Communication Between People and Objects,* the catalog for the 2011 exhibit of the same name at The Museum of Modern Art.

networked sensory environments, the media-aesthetic problem is simultaneously a

phenomenological *and* techno-ecological problem.

My exploration of the screenic conditions of American wars in Vietnam and the

Persian Gulf aims to elucidate these co-constitutive elements of media aesthetics: the

phenomenological and the ecological. The following chapters delve into various

iterations of the representational regime of war as it has been developed and deployed by

the United States military apparatus from the War in Vietnam to the present. In particular,

I trace the emergence of the screen as both the literal and figurative site for both waging

and witnessing war, unfolding moments that anticipate or implement what I call screenic

modes of perception. The neologistic concept of the screenic is developed here in a

somewhat Deleuzian spirit – resonant with more familiar media terms such as

informatics, filmic, haptic, and, of course, machinic – to connote the assemblages of

social, bodily, and technological systems that mediate war.[6] The concept of the screenic –

as both noun and adjective – refers not only to the particular screens of film, video,

television, and computational media but also encompasses the sites of contact and

overlap – the interfaces – between bodies, things, and images across photographic,

cinematic, televisual, and digital representations of war. Beyond the technological

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[6] In particular I'm drawing from the broad systems theory put forth in the fifth chapter Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus*, "Nomadology: the War Machine," which develops a concept of the nomadic war machine and its incorporation into and "striation" by the state. This concept gets at the ecological and phenomenological assemblages of human and machine in war that I intend the concept of the screenic to invoke in the more delimited context of screen media. "The notion of a machinic phylum," writes Manuel De Landa, calling forth Deleuze and Guattari in *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, "blurs the distinction between organic and non-organic life […] both human and robot bodies would ultimately be related to a common phylogenetic line: the machinic phylum" (De Landa 7). Elsewhere, in a more strictly digital context, Anna Munster says that "considering the digital as machinic, then, means that we think about technology as part of an ensemble that differentially combines the capacities and functions of its matter-flows in relation to the other elements in that assemblage […] These other modes include, and indeed foreground, the relatively unexplored terrain of embodied digital experience" (16).

interfaces of war, this screenic mode of inquiry also looks to the sensory and bodily

surfaces of war including the spectators, combatants, and the dead, disarticulated, and

detained bodies of war. Each subsequent chapter charts a constellation of war images, art

objects, and literary narratives that elucidate the ways screenic phenomena serve as both

a weapon (through surveillance, targeting, and tele-control) and a record (through

documentary, journalism, and art) of war's destructive power.

   The screenic, then, is a concept for thinking about, in, and through screens.

Despite my indebtedness to the many 'theories of the virtual' that emerged in the 1980s

and 1990s in the work of Paul Virilio, Jean Baudrillard, and many others, this project

does not purport to offer a new thesis on the spectacularization or virtualization of war.

Rather I am interested in theorizing the distributed entanglement of electronic signals,

materials, and human sensoria at and across the interfaces of war.[7]

   To begin as I have, with talk of ambient technologies and algorithmic software

agencies, situates this project in the middle of the emerging transdisciplinary and

microhistorical discourse on digital aesthetics. But I could just as well have framed this

project around a more "old-fashioned" object: the photograph. Whether through Eddie

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[7] Friedrich Kittler famously opens *Gramophone Film, Typewriter* by declaring that "media determine our situation" (xxxix). Kittler's outright technological determinism here is perhaps a little troublesome, but his inversion of Marshall McLuhan's famous maxim usefully changes the terms of this discourse from a humanist one to a post-humanist one. For Kittler, technology is not "the extensions of man" as McLuhan would have it. Rather, man is the extension of technology. In other words, one does not "understand media;" one understands *in* media. This decentering of the human can also be seen, for instance, in Manuel De Landa's figure of the robot historian in *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* in which he imagines a post-humanist future in which the history of technology is told by technology itself. My attempt here to sketch the screenic ecologies of war is indebted to this shift in perspective, which flattens the interrelations of human-machine interaction and thus challenges the Enlightenment understandings of intelligence, life, and agency that inform the utopic global village-ism of McLuhanesque media theorizing. Kittler words, from an interview with John Armitage: "The development of the internet has more to do with human beings becoming a reflection of their technologies … after all, it is we who adapt to the machine. The machine does not adapt to us" (Armitage, "From Discourse Networks" 35-36).

Adams' iconic photograph from the War in Vietnam, Michal Rovner's distorted

photographs of Gulf War television coverage, or the Abu Ghraib photographs

themselves, each of the following chapters takes the photograph – particularly its

technological transformations and its convergence with other media – as the critical

portal into an investigation of the screenic. The surface of the photograph is a receptive

surface on which to locate the transformations of what Lev Manovich called the "Western

screen-based representational apparatus" (104). The photograph – particularly war

photographs – are, of course, part of the "representational apparatus" Manovich refers to,

but they can also provide a picture of that apparatus. However, before previewing the

ways each chapter looks at how photographs screen and are screened within media

ecologies of war, I first want to trace out a brief history of screenic theorizing.

Portholes, Windows, Screens

Reading through the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s multiple entries for *screen*, one

encounters a number of often contradictory definitions. In the verb form *to screen* means

to secure from attack, to shield, to protect; but also to hide from view, to conceal, to

mask. To screen is also to sift, to filter, to select, to separate; but, additionally, to show, to

present or to project (onto a surface). The screen shields, filters, and presents. It is a

surface that receives images or luminously emanates them – it withholds and allows,

conceals and reveals.[8]

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[8] We can locate this dialectical tension between protective opacity and exposed translucency, among other places, at the turn of the last century in Sigmund Freud's 1899 essay "Screen Memories." In it, he describes the psychoanalytic phenomena he calls "screen memory" in which a seemingly insignificant or fantastical childhood memory acts as a cover for other repressed memories. Screen memories, he argues,

The screen, then, as the site of screening and as a condition of our perception, is a phenomenologically bifurcated space where perception intersects multiple temporalities and spatialities in a tenuous encounter (that is represented, simulated, interacted, tele-presented, etc) with other worlds that are yet this world (i.e., screenworlds). In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau, pondering the perceptual experience of riding a train, invokes the porthole of Jules Verne's *Nautilus,* which, like the train's windowpane, serves as the "transparent caesura between the fluctuating feelings of the observer and the moving about of an oceanic reality" (112). Verne and de Certeau are both conjuring screenic experiences, an essentially phenomenological interaction between the embodied senses and the screen/world it perceives. For de Certeau, the porthole and train window are "at once incarcerational and navigational"; we are separated from and moving through the world via an interface that "combines dreams with technology" (113). The porthole today is screenic, and, more than a passive transparent layer between us and the oceanic depths, this screenic environment becomes the world, not just a window onto it.

De Certeau is not the alone in using the window as a figure of the screenic. In "The World As Interface," for example, curator and theorist Peter Weibel extends de Certeau's porthole into the screenic era: "The media are providing the technology for the extension of dimensions of here and now. The promise is the fulfillment of a yearning for the eternity of now" (346). This yearning for now, he says, is no longer "a limited,

act as a cover to protect the subject from repressed trauma or desire. The screen memory can have little or no correspondence to external reality and thus, his concept takes on the characteristics of medium wherein a fantasy is projected over a trauma. In other words, screen memories are, like all screens, sites of mediation.

localized experience, but rather a simultaneous, non-local, universal experience" (346).

Borrowing from the field of endophysics – "a science that explores what a system looks

like when the observer becomes part of this system" – he calls for an "endoapproach" to

electronics that understands the world as an interface and, resonant with de Certeau, sees

the "comprehension of the world" as "an interface problem" (341, 346-347). Likewise, in

What Do Pictures Want, the art historian WJT Mitchell takes a sweeping view of

interface history that begins with the window: "From the grillwork of Islamic ornament

to the stained glass windows of medieval Europe, to the show windows and arcades of

modern shopping and fláneurie, to the Windows of the Microsoft user interface, the

window is anything but a transparent, self-evident, or unmediated entity" (Pictures Want

214). Lev Manovich, too, in *The Language of New Media*, observes, "if computers have

become a common presence in our culture only in the last decade, the screen, on the other

hand, has been used to present visual information for centuries – from Renaissance

painting to twentieth-century cinema" (94). Later, in the same chapter, Manovich turns to

the French semiotician Roland Barthes for a broader metaphorical understanding of the

screen. Manovich attempts to further unravel the relationship between "the space of the

viewer" and "the space of representation" by exploring the relationship between the

screen and the body of the viewer. He turns to Barthes' essay "Diderot, Brecht,

Eisenstein." "For Barthes," he writes, "the screen becomes an all-encompassing concept

that covers the functioning of even non-visual representation (literature), although he

does make an appeal to a particular visual model of linear perspective" (104). Manovich

reads this screenic concept at work in the following passage by Barthes: "The scene, the

picture, the shot, the cut-out rectangle, here we have the very *condition* that allows us to conceive theatre, painting, cinema, literature, all those arts, that is, other than music and which could be call *dioptric arts"* (*Image/Music/Text* 70).

The late Anne Friedberg, in her brilliant book, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*, also takes up the window as a screenic metaphor of her investigation of the perspectival paradigms that shape contemporary screenic encounters. She traces a logic of visuality that has its roots in Cartesian space and Leon Battista Alberti's single-point perspective, continues through the age of mechanical reproduction, and reemerges in the command line terminal of MS-DOS and its reconfiguration as the desktop GUI of Microsoft Windows.[9] Along the way, she develops the window as powerful metaphor for elucidating the screenic. Like the film theorist Vivian Sobchack, she approaches the screen through the metaphors of window, frame, and mirror, all while expanding the concept of virtuality. In doing so, she finds a kind of language for the post-cinematic visuality of the twenty-first century.

In between the chapters of *The Virtual Window,* Friedberg inserts vignettes, which she calls "Lenses.*"* In "Lens IV: Virilio's Screen" she turns to Paul Virilio – the philosopher of speed – in order to more fully elaborate the screen itself as a metaphorical object. She captures something here about Virilio and his mode of theorizing (which I develop further in the second chapter) that is important to how I am framing this project.

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[9] Friedberg traces the mixed metaphor that Windows introduced. On the one hand, it was the window through which the user and the machine could interact. On the other hand, a whole other metaphor, the desktop (files, folders, documents, etc.), created another kind of virtual logic for this interaction.

An aside: the names of Microsoft products consistently seem to speak to the media zeitgeist. When I began this project they had just come out with the Kinect, which so perfectly combines human kinesis and technological connections. Recently, they've released their tablet, which is simply called Surface.

"If Virilio does not theorize the technological differences between film, television, and the computer," she writes, "it is because, for him, the screen remains in a *metaphoric register*, a virtual surface that overrides any specificities of its media formation" [emphasis mine] (183). Before Henry Jenkins attached the term "convergence" to thinking about the interrelations and merging of various media forms, Virilio, in both content and form, was moving fluidly between war machines and cinema machines, between photographs and munitions, between painting and film, in a phenomenological approach to media flows that took the screen as its primary metaphor. Indeed, his writing on the shared genealogy of military and mass media technologies leaps from medium to medium and from military complex to cinema multiplex without holding sacred the notion media specificity. He has been criticized for this impressionistic writing, yet this fluidity is the point he is trying to make. Unlike the modernist and materialist media theories of the earlier twentieth century (embodied most completely in the work of Walter Benjamin), which emphasized the radical potential of an emerging *apparatus* of delivery, Virilio's "discourse of dematerialization and disappearance" emphasizes the site of *display* (184). He casts the screen as the site of "the passage from something material to something that is not" (*Live* 116). For Virilio, the focus shifts from modes of conveyance to sites of appearance and the screen is the metaphor that illuminates this emerging logic of perception.

Even in this brief sketch of the figures of window and screen, one can see two kinds of tendencies emerge in the discourse about screens: the ecological and the phenomenological. The screen is the site where complex self-regulating systems *appear*

to embodied, sensory human experience. In other words, the screen is the intersection of ecological and phenomenological concerns. For Weibel, the interface is the primary site of this intersection. "The boundaries of the world are the boundaries of our interface," he says. "We do not interact with the world—only with the interface to world" (343). In *What Do Pictures Want?*, the figure of the window leads Mitchell into an exploration of systems theory and the cybernetic ecology theories of the 1960s and 1970s. Manovich, via Barthes, dwells on the dialectical tension between screen space and viewing space, between the 'face' of a networked techno-ecology and its interface with human perception. This tension is a reiteration of de Certeau's recognition of the *separated-from-and-moving-through-ness* of the screenic. That same tension pervades all of Virilio (a student of the phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty), and that tension seeps into *The Virtual Window* as well. How do we negotiate the embodied experience of screenic phenomena, especially when (to cite Virilio once more) the flickering image on the screen comes to dominate "'the thing' of which it was, until now, only the 'image'"? (*Desert* 57).

As I have attempted to highlight above, I situate the concept of the screenic, in the tradition of screen theorizing that Friedberg has described as being concerned with "the changes in scale, time, space, and consciousness produced by technological enhancements to human vision" (4). It is a tradition that, even when it has a primarily materialist set of concerns, often finds itself turning toward ecological and phenomenological modes of inquiry.[10] I want to continue to highlight some of the work

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[10] The list of theorists in this tradition includes Friedberg, Weibel, Sobchack, Mitchell, Manovich, Benjamin, and Barthes along with Aristotle, Karl Marx, Siegfried Kracauer, Raymond Williams, Marshall

in this tradition to further situate the screen and my approach to it, particularly where phenomenologies and ecologies emerge both implicitly and explicitly in relation to theorizing the screenic.

Early in her book, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura Marks writes, "By staying close to the surface of an event, I hope to trace a connection between the event's material history, the event itself, me, and you" (xi). Throughout this dissertation, I too, attempt to stay "close to the surface" of events with the same hope. This hoped for connection is phenomenological through and through. In the most basic sense, phenomenology is concerned with what appears in lived, sensory experience. Moreover, it is concerned with the space of that experience. In other words, under phenomenology, space is first and foremost that which is experienced. "Space is limited to the world of sensible experience," writes Virilio in *The Art of the Motor*, "and beyond that there is no longer any space worthy of the name" (141). For Marks, who is attempting to theorize haptic technological encounters, and for Virilio, who endeavors to conceptualize speed as the phenomena par excellence of the information age, the screen is a primary space-as-experience.

Like Virilio and other phenomenological theorists, Marks has been criticized for engaging in "impressionistic" criticism (read: phenomenological criticism). Much of the introduction to *Touch* is a defense of her methodology. "I dislike the term [impressionistic]," she writes, "because it implies that impressions will eventually give way to a coherent and removed critical structure." Rather, Marks turns to a

McLuhan, Guy Debord, Gilles Deleuze, Lewis Mumford, Nicholas Negroponte, Donna Haraway, Susan Buck-Morss, Judith Butler, David Rodowick, Katherine Hayles, Anna Munster, Matthew Fuller, and Rita Raley to name a few others. A proper literature review of this tradition would be another project altogether.

phenomenological approach to create a flow between sensuous closeness and symbolic

distance (xiii). Similarly, the film theorist Vivian Sobchack sees phenomenological

criticism as the best approach to theorizing the entanglement of social, material, and

technological entanglements of the screen. She argues in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment*

and Moving Image Culture that "the co-constitutive, reversible, and dynamic relations

between objective material technologies and embodied human subjects invite a

phenomenological investigation" (139). She defines this approach as not "merely

subjective" but rather as "focused on the *relations between* the subjective and objective

aspects of material, social, and personal existence" and sees these relations as

"constitutive of the meaning and value of the phenomena under investigation" (139-140).

In other words, she is concerned with investigating the spatial and temporal structures

that are co-constituted by human subjects and material objects. She calls this "existential

phenomenology," which she differentiates from Edmund Husserl's transcendental

phenomenology by focusing on the embodied nature of human consciousness – what she

calls the "material premise of sense and signification" (140). Like Marks, Sobchack

endeavors to approach the screen through a kind of materialist phenomenology.

The phenomenological approach is both a curse and a necessity. As W.J.T.

Mitchell observes, "We not only think *about* media, we think *in* them, which is why they

give us the headache endemic to recursive thinking" (215). Our critical position in the

face of the screen is always phenomenological because the object of our thought is also

the space of our thinking. We cannot separate from an embodied screenic experience of

the world. As media theorist Anna Munster argues in *Materializing New Media:*

Embodiment in Information Aesthetics, "New media are not simply changing older media forms, they are altering the conceptual taxonomies and paradigms for thinking about them" (24). Echoing Marks and Sobchack, she argues that "in order to think productively beyond the closed space of the Cartesian *cogito* and the reductive cyberfantasy of flesh-machine fusion, we need a way to conceive of the relay of connections and disjunctions that is set off between the sensate and code in engagements with digital technologies" (9). This conjunction of sensate and code, in other words, is the meeting of a fundamentally phenomenological experience with a technological ecology.

To recapitulate the terms: 1) ecology is a concept that describes complex, interconnected, coded systems; 2) phenomenology is a concept that describes the sensate encounter with those systems; and 3) the screenic is the concept that describes the intersection of the other two. So, even as media theorizing drifts necessarily into phenomenological realms, it also encounters ecological ones. They are different gradients of the same questions: how do we talk about complex networks of human and non-human agencies? How do we talk about the lives of objects? How do we describe the assemblages, convergences, and shifting boundaries that make up these constellated human-machine networks? Phenomenology and ecology are the imbricated terms used to think about large, complex networks and the posthuman condition at the site of embodied experience. This project, therefore, is about the embodied, sensory experience of the interfaced world, or, said another way, it is about the phenomenology of media ecology. And if phenomenology is a loaded term, ecology is overloaded. I am not going to disentangle the sordid histories of ecological thought here. Matthew Fuller has already

done this in his marvelous book *Media Ecologies*. Why use such a troubled concept? Because, says Fuller (and he is right), "it is one of the most expressive [words] language currently has to indicate the massive and dynamic interrelation of processes and objects, beings and things, patterns and matter" (2). He traces the life of the ecological concept through various iterations: its application in corporate environments, where it is used to naturalize the "dimensions of class composition and command in a workforce"; as a way of promoting a media environmentalism of the kind Neil Postman calls for in the tradition of Marshall McLuhan; as "some of the most interesting parts of literary studies in recent decades" found in the work of N. Katherine Hayles, Friedrich Kittler, and Joseph Taibbi (4); and, lastly, as a mode of rhizomatic philosophy as developed by Felix Guattari, his collaborator Gilles Deleuze, as well as Manuel De Landa. It is this last ecological endeavor that Fuller finds most promising for the kind of inventive rigor demanded of "life among media" because "the stakes [Guattari] assigns to media are rightly perceived as being profoundly political or ethico-aesthetic at all scales" (5). Moreover, it is Guattari and company that lend the kind of poetics that Fuller wants a concept of ecology to contain. "All objects have a poetics," Fuller writes, echoing with my own working definition of the screenic, "they make the world and take part in it, and at the same time, synthesize, block or make possible other worlds" (1-2).

I have attempted to show here how theorizing contemporary media aesthetics requires a concept of a phenomenological ecology; I have named that concept the screenic. In many ways this is not a new endeavor and or a new concept. We find it in the work of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, for example. What follows here is in a

way a reiteration of their concerns in the light of new surfaces. This project, like theirs, is

concerned with the consensual realities that are produced when social relations are

translated into a surface experience. In the introduction to his 1995 translation of

Siegfried Kracauer's *The Mass Ornament,* Thomas Levin argues that Kracauer's Weimar

essays attempted to develop "a critical phenomenology of the surface," which is exactly

what I've tried to outline here. Instead of the Tiller Girls and other mass spectacles of

interwar Germany, I am focusing on a more recent "cult of distractions" (what Friedberg

would have called a "cult of surfaces") in the context of recent American wars, which,

like the picture palaces of Kracauer's Berlin, features its own "elegant surface splendor"

(Kracauer 323, Friedberg 168). Likewise, as David Rodowick observes in *The Virtual*

Life of Film, Benjamin didn't ask "Is film art?," but rather "Has film changed the concept

of art?" (131). The networked and fluid screens of this moment merely beg us to do the

same. Like Kracauer, Walter Benjamin (whose influence here is monumental) also

sought to elucidate the overlap of art, technology, and everyday life in the decades

leading up to fascism. He too saw in mass media (film in particular) the possibility for the

screen experience to produce promising new social relations as well as the threat of new

ways to aestheticize and anaestheticize social relations. In "The Work of Art in the Age

of Mechanical Reproduction," he identifies a connection between changing modes of

perceptions, changes in media, and their connection to war. He saw in mechanically

reproduced art a radical change. The 'original' was no longer an authentic, auratic object.

The destruction of aura was for him filled with liberatory potential because it signaled the

destruction of the oppressive ideologies empowered by aura. This emancipation of art

signaled the potential emancipation of masses. Essentially, "The Work of Art" essay puts forth a liberatory media theology at the same time that it foretells a potential and looming disaster – a disaster that would later cause post-war theorists like Virilio and Kittler to see disaster and war looming everywhere in media.

This project focuses on aesthetics because, as Benjamin saw, politics have been aestheticized – have become screenic. I share with Benjamin a tendency toward the theological. I also ascribe to a belief, as Benjamin did, in the liberatory potential of our media (as social practice). However, largely because of Benjamin, I do not maintain his messianic hope that such liberation will come to pass. Rather, for me, this potential always remains potential. In other words, insofar as this dissertation examines the potentially liberatory screenic practices of various artists, it does so only to the extent that they momentarily point to a liberatory potentiality. As I demonstrate throughout the following chapters, the screenic regimes of war can only be temporarily disrupted by a minor glitch, a bit of static. There are only fleeting portholes of critical reflection to be glimpsed. Still, in the spirit of Benjamin, this dissertation seek the discernible interrelations between disparate objects – to collect diffuse bits and pose them not as Benjamin did, a potentially liberatory mode of delivery, but as a phenomenological mode of encountering the world, screenically.

Slides & Accidents: Pictures of a Screenic Ecology

As a way to anchor the phenomenological and ecological concepts I just outlined and to begin a preview of the chapters that follow, I want to look at two somewhat disparate events – a friendly-fire accident and a single PowerPoint slide – that help to

picture the concept of the screenic in the context of war. The former, a friendly-fire accident, took place without much media attention in Northern Iraq in 1994. Two United States F-15 fighters shot down two United States Blackhawk helicopters killing all twenty-six people aboard the helicopters in one of the worst friendly-fire incidents in military history. Six years later at the International Conference of the System Safety Society, Nancy Leveson, professor of aeronautics and astronautics at MIT, used the accident as a case to demonstrate her new systems model of accidents.
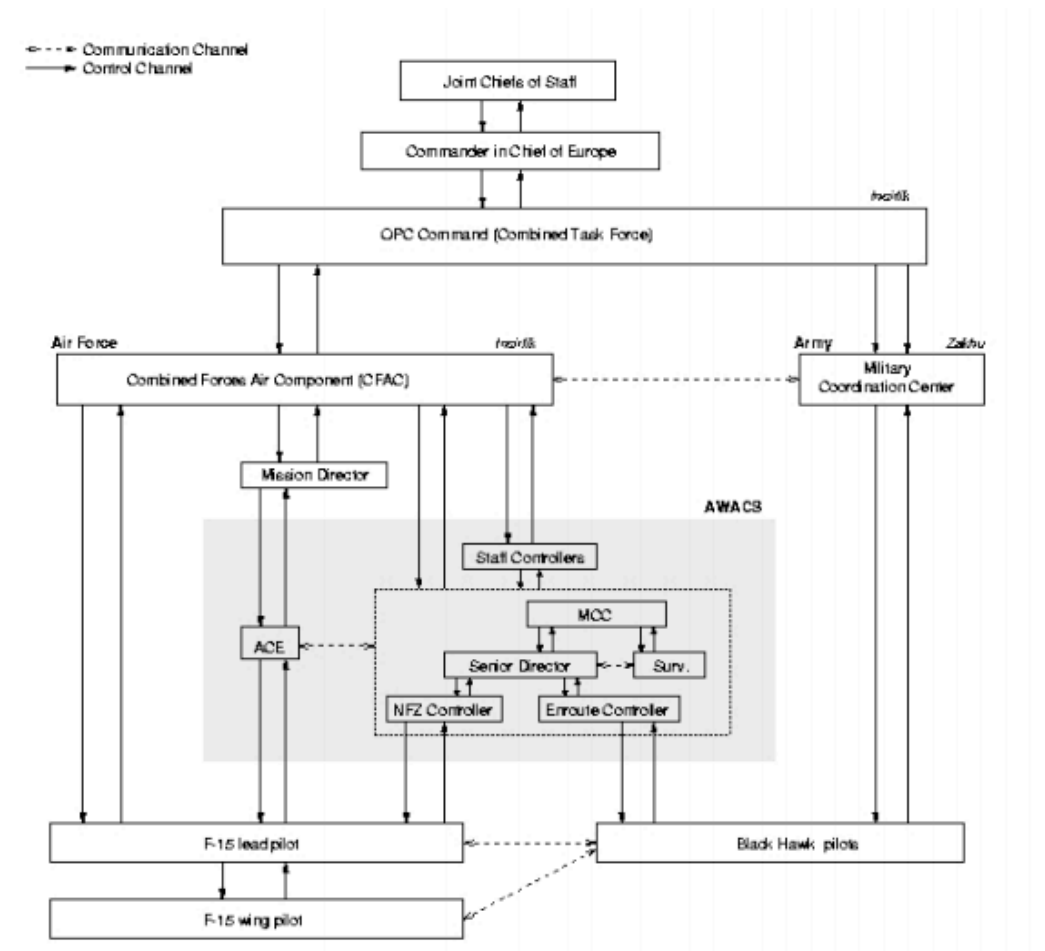
Figure 1 – Hierarchical Control Structure

Figure 1. Figure from "Analysis of a Friendly Fire Accident Using a Systems Model of Accidents." © Nancy Leveson

The latter, a PowerPoint slide, first appeared in Kabul, Afghanistan in the summer of 2009 during a presentation to General Stanley McChrystal (a year before Matt Taibbi's fateful *Rolling Stone* interview, in which McChrystal's criticism of President Obama forced the General into early retirement). The slide depicts a baffling yet beautiful flowchart that was meant to represent the complexity of American military strategy in Afghanistan. It is an undulating color-coded collection of arcs and arrows that illustrates the entanglements of various Afghan communities ("human terrains"), institutions, coalitions, feelings, beliefs, infrastructures, tactics, strategies and oppositions into an indecipherable web of interrelations. "When we understand that slide," General McChrystal reportedly said, "we'll have won the war."
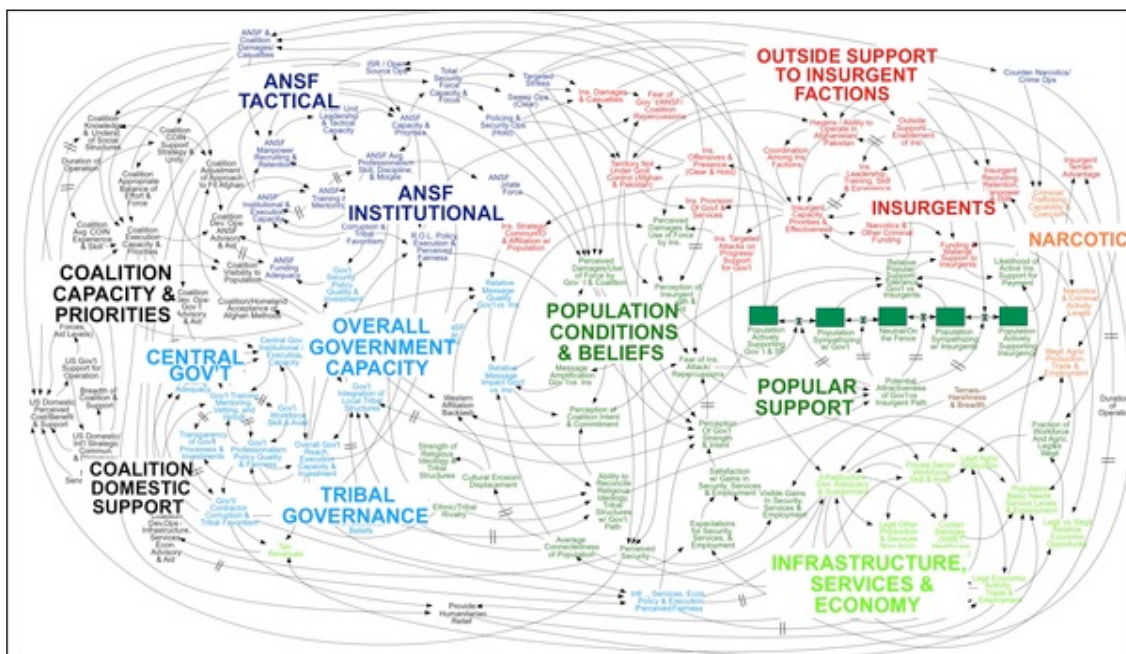
Figure 2. The McChrystal PowerPoint Slide. © PA Knowledge Limited, 2009.

By spring of the following year, it had become a popular symbol in the columns of the New York *Times, The Guardian*, and elsewhere of the failures of the War on Terror. It became a visual joke, both of military strategy in Afghanistan and of the PowerPoint-ization of military command under McChrystal, David Petreaus, and the rest of a new generation of military leaders who regularly used PowerPoint presentations to render complex strategy into an illusively simplified sequence of slides.

The friendly-fire accident and Leveson's analysis of it sparked my initial inquiry into the concept of the screenic. While immersed in Paul Virilio's work on the imbrication of war and media technologies in *War and Cinema* and *Desert Screen*, I stumbled on Leveson's analysis, which attempts to disentangle the human and machine failures that led to the accident. According to Leveson's paper, "Analysis of a Friendly Fire Accident using a Systems Model of Accidents," during a fighter sweep to "sanitize" the NFZ (no-fly zone) in Northern Iraq during Operation Provide Comfort, "the lead F-15 picked up hits on its instruments indicating that it was getting radar returns from a low and slow-flying aircraft" (2). The F-15s contacted the unknown aircraft using their "air-to-air interrogator" to query the IFF (Identify Friend or Foe) code. The scope showed that the unknown targets returned no IFF signature. "The F-15 then executed a visual identification pass to confirm that the target was hostile. [The lead pilot] pulled out his 'goody book' with aircraft pictures in it, checked the silhouettes, and identified the helicopters as Hinds, a type of Russian helicopter flown by Iraqis." He armed his missiles, checked IFF response once more and fired. The wingman followed suit – destroying both Blackhawks.

What is remarkable about this accident – and what Virilio finds remarkable about all militarized screens – is that the accident was not an event with a singular place of occurrence, but rather it was a distributed event. It occurred within a complex network of technological and human-sensory perception. It was an accident of representations and simulations – a screen accident of signal confusion, misread blips, and systemic glitches – that was inextricably tied to the physical destruction of these lives and these machines. This is exactly what Virilio means when he sees the screen as the site of "the passage from something material to something that is not" (*Live* 116). "It's extraordinary!," he says in *Desert Screen*, "that the remote image of an object should have an effect on the object itself is a very important event in the history of the image" (45). It is a situation in which the virtual enacts the actual. Even though this fantasy has become the stuff of everyday life in the drone era of warfare, this shift from the screen's pastness (cinema) to what Manovich has called the screen's "infinite present" still seems "extraordinary" (99).

Like Leveson's analysis, which attempts to reveal the human-machine ecologies that enable friendly-fire accidents (and other military events), the equally extraordinary McChrystal slide also attempts to render complex systems of imbricated human and technological terrains. The slide not only epitomizes the PowerPoint-ization of military leadership (already borrowed from American corporate culture), but it also reveals a parallel anthropologization of battlespace. Here we have social relations, military tactics, technologies, and all strata of institutions – a mess of seemingly incommensurable and often tenuous relationships – held together by flowing arrows. The arrows are so hopeful, even in their overwhelming crisscrossed paths, because they reduce impossible power

differentials and human factors into neat reconciliatory paths. It is a visual facepalm – a brilliant picture of the unconscious colonial buffoonery of United States military social science in Afghanistan.

I use these two illustrations not only to picture the ecological and phenomenological characteristics of the screenic, but also in part to answer the question 'why war?' War is and has been a computational effort and effect. It is brought about through logistics, strategy, and navigation, through moving and combining people and things at the right times and into the right spaces. These computational tasks, which were once calculated by human computers, are now heavily outsourced to machine computers. This assemblage of human, machine, and material is the war machine; and war is the spectacular output of this machine.

Many of our everyday technological systems from the Internet to the computer interface to the mouse have their genesis in military research and development and were often first deployed in military contexts.[11] Yet I remain skeptical of any essentialist claims that say media technologies are, by nature, always already militarized. Any technology has potential military use and many technologies have genealogical ties to the military, but that does not mean they are inherently militarized in every possible application of them (and emerging domestic drone applications will play this out). Still, most major technological shifts in optics, screens, interwebs, and social networks are, if not developed and implemented by the military, adopted by them for weaponized and militarized purposes. Clearly, this project shares Virilio's and Kittler's obsession with war

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[11] For a brief overview of the military history of the computer screen see Manovich, 94-103.

machines, which, for them, stands contra to McLuhan's global village. While I am not committed to their shared view of media technologies as inseparable from war, I do find that questions of war are increasingly questions of media. I divert from them when they claim the inverse as well. I do not agree that questions of media are always questions of war.

<p style="text-align: center;">•   •   •</p>

The first chapter, "Photographs & Other Tombs of the Unknown: The Proto-Screenic Bodies of the War in Vietnam," looks at several representations of the Vietnam War as proto-screenic images, that, while still rooted in media specificity, reveal ways media are already enmeshed within each other. Using documentary filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of the 'superfilm,' I put into conversation a number of physical surfaces that form the connective tissue between machine, body, and image in wartime. In particular, this chapter focuses on the desire to mythologize both the photographs and the photographers of the Vietnam War. Among the surfaces I attend is Larry Burrows' photographs, which ruminate on the damages of war by entangling cameras, weapons, and bodies of war; the comparative visions of Eddie Adams photograph of the assassination of a Viet Cong prisoner and Chris Burdens photo documentation of himself shooting a pistol at a commercial airline; Michael Herr's poetic, fetishistic approach to the photographs and photographers of war in his memoir Dispatches; and, lastly, the literal and cinematic tombs of war – Maya Lin's polished granite chevron, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the headstones of Sergio Leone's Sad Hill Cemetery. Throughout the chapter I use the work of Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Jacques

Lacan to unravel the co-constitutive desires of photography and death. I argue that these physical surfaces hold within them not only positions toward and memories of war that are literally bound to a material substrate, but also expressions of a fluid, screenic quality that, despite their material fixity, overlap and echo each other.

The second chapter, "Desert Screens & Desert(ed) Bodies: Traversing the Gulf, 1991" focuses on the first large-scale screenic war: the Persian Gulf War. Beginning with one of General Norman Schwarzkopf's multimedia press-briefings, this chapter investigates the pictorial processes through which war bodies both appeared and disappeared on the screens of the Gulf War. Through a comparative reading of Paul Virilio's *Desert Screen* and Jean Baudrillard's *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* as well as the more corporeal considerations of Judith Butler's "Contingent Foundations" and Steven Connor's *The Book of Skin*, I look at how various images interrelate the screen and the skin. These images include Schwarzkopf's television briefing itself; artist Michal Rovner's *Decoy* series of reprocessed Polaroid pictures of Gulf War television coverage, which highlight the bodies appearing on television as well as the ones that watch television; the carbonized flesh of the victims of the Basra Road massacre captured by photojournalist Ken Jarecke; the organ-level view of bullets piercing bodies in David O. Russell's film *Three Kings* (1999); and the vulgar, vulnerable body of the male soldier recalled in Anthony Swofford's memoir *Jarhead*. I contend that these images express a troubled relation to an emerging war image that not only represents war, but also enacts it.

In the third chapter, "Picture Torture: Abu Ghraib & the Frames of Digital Photography," I focus on the reemergence of the photograph at Abu Ghraib prison. Whereas the Vietnam War photographs of the first chapter served as an analog and iconic index of war, at Abu Ghraib they were digital entities, differing in many ways from their analog predecessors, yet photographs all the same. This chapter explores this transformation of the photograph from a piece of the world, continuous with it, into a piece of code, discontinuous with the world, digitally stored, and screenically articulated. To explore this screenic turn in photography, I draw on Errol Morris's documentary, *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), Judith Butler's critical engagement with Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*, and Iraqi-born artist Wafaa Bilal's performance piece, *Domestic Tension*, in which internet chat room visitors could remotely control a paintball gun in Bilal's apartment, aiming and shooting at Bilal as they wished. Morris's film addresses the consequences of photographic digitality and experiments with the digital photograph as a new kind of filmic object, Butler revisits Sontag's changing perspective on the uses and abuses of photography in the context of Abu Ghraib, and Bilal invites us to consider the linkages between violence, humiliation, and our viewing practices. Through these instances, I elucidate various forms of reenactment – the digital reenactment of the analog photograph, the filmic torture reenactments in Morris's documentary, the restaging of the act of torture as a tableau for the camera in Abu Ghraib prison, and the reenactment of these humiliations in Bilal's apartment. I argue that reenactment is symptomatic of the screenic era, where images are no longer merely the evidence of what-has-been, but risk being tacit co-perpetrators of it.

In a brief coda, "No Human Occupant: Toward Autonomous Tactical Weapons and Anonymous Tactical Media," I sketch the future of the screenic in the context of proliferating drone strikes as well as recent hacks and other media interventions. The coda speculates on the future of media theorizing. As continuing advances in machine intelligence and robotics shape the current and future mediascapes of war, new forms of experience and perception, both digital and analog, affect how we watch, wage, and resist war. The interpenetration of humans and machines raises important questions about the relations between organic and non-organic life forms, about the nature of perception and experience, and about the extensions and limits of human perception – questions that belong not only to the discourses of technology, robotics, and media studies, but increasingly, I argue, to the core of the humanities. This dissertation examines the screens that enact destruction, the screens that record it, and the screens that re-imagine it in order to map the ways that the interfaces of war integrate and disintegrate the human sensorium. Each chapter rethinks the representational conditions that shape the relationship between technological media (the screen) and corporeal media (the human sensorium). The aim is to elucidate the emerging screenic modes of visibility and disappearance that shape the representation of war within an increasingly consolidated media ecology.

CHAPTER 1
Photographs & Other Tombs of the Unknown: The Proto-Screenic Bodies of the War in Vietnam

The Superfilm

On 6 June 1944, Robert Capa, one of the inventors of twentieth-century war photojournalism as we know it, boarded one of E Company's landing crafts and joined the American troops headed for Normandy Beach. He was photographing the D-Day invasion for *Life* magazine. Of all the photographs he took on that day only ten distorted photographs remain in existence. Most of his photographs were accidentally destroyed by a darkroom technician back in London. Unlike his photographs, Capa did survive the deadly invasion. Twenty years later, however, in May 1954, he was killed by a landmine in the prelude to another war, this time in Southeast Asia. His final rolls of film consisted of decidedly mundane images of men walking through a field. The photographs are noteworthy only because of the proximity to their taker's death. According to some accounts, the darkroom technician that destroyed those earlier D-Day photographs was a young Larry Burrows, who would go on to become one of the most mythologized photographers of the Vietnam War. He, like Capa, was also killed in Southeast Asia in a helicopter crash in 1971 along with other photographers.

On the surface, this chapter is about the death of photographers, but more to the point, it is about the death (and life) of photographs and *in* photographs. It is about the wounded American romance with the Vietnam War's photographic record – not so much the taking of photographs, but being taken by them.

The Vietnam War (or the American War as it is known in Vietnam) has the tendency, often through the work of pictures, of persisting symbolically in the American national psyche as a monumental event. There appears to be a kind of narcissistic pleasure that Americans sometimes take in being haunted by the War in Vietnam. Part of the pleasure and part of the haunting dwells in the physical surfaces and substrates that retain remnants of the war, whether it be the American names inscribed on The Wall or the heroic sadness of soldiers and the suffering bodies of Vietnamese "others" made iconic by the photojournalistic practices that shaped the aesthetic and ideological conditions of perception of the Vietnam War era. This futile woundedness takes shape in the fetishized substrates of photographs and monuments, surfaces that are able to mean so much because on their own they don't really mean anything in particular. It is not only the lives of these surfaces, but the lives (and deaths) of their creators, like Larry Burrows, that get interpellated into this mythologizing machine. This collection of surface and substrate helps comprise what filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha identified as the ongoing "superfilm" of the War in Vietnam: not any single literal film, but a set of screenic and narrative practices that fuel the beloved woundedness.

Toward the end of Trinh's documentary *Sur Name Viet, Given Name Nam,* as the sounds of helicopters play in the background and photographs of Vietnamese women and children flash on the screen, she theorizes the entanglement of the war and its mediated image in a voiceover paraphrasing of Baudrillard:

> War is a succession of special effects. The war became film before it was shot. Cinema has remained a vast machine of special effects. If the war is the continuation of politics by other means, then media images are the continuation of war by other means. Immersed in the machinery, part of the special effect, no

critical distance. Nothing separates the Vietnam War and the superfilm that was made, and continues to be made, about it. It is said that if the Americans lost the other, they won this one.

Trinh's documentary is an attempt to oppose the very superfilm she describes, a superfilm that continues to superimpose itself on the present through all modes of spectacle, monument, and memory. *Sur Name Viet* achieves its oppositional stance by disrupting Western expectations of documentary film viewing and, in particular, the latent and persistent colonial fantasy that, through the filmed testimony of native informants, one can (cinematically) come to "know" an-Other as ethnographic object (in this case both Vietnam and woman). As Paula Rabinowitz observed in *They Must Be Represented,* the title *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* creates a "neat equation of gender and national identity," an equation that the film quickly complicates and upends through asynchronous sound, elaborate mise-en-scene, dialectical archival images, and layers of translation and reenactment of interview transcripts originally conducted in Vietnamese later translated to French then to English and performed by Vietnamese-born American women (199). Through these techniques, the film intentionally and effectively "fails" to meet the expectations of the Western documentary gaze.

This chapter, through occasional encounters with Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida, collects and examines various pieces of the superfilm and its oppositions, including the work of Burrows, Eddie Adams, Chris Burden, Michael Herr, Maya Lin, and even Sergio Leone. I argue that the monumental surfaces of these images, sculptures, and tombs, while still rooted in analogue media specificity, reveal ways media are already enmeshed within each other. These physical

surfaces and texts form the connective tissue between machine, body, and image in

wartime: the photochemical surfaces of Larry Burrows' photographs, which ruminate on

the damages of war by entangling the cameras, weapons, and bodies of war; the

mythology of the photographer, himself, as it emerged after Burrow's death in Laos;

Eddie Adams' iconic photograph of the moment of death; Michael Herr's poetic,

fetisthistic approach to the photographs and photographers of war in his memoir

Dispatches; and the tombs, memorials and sculptures upon which memory is engraved –

Maya Lin's polished granite chevron etched with the names of American dead, the Tomb

of the Unknown Soldier, and the fictional grave-markers of Sergio Leone's Sad Hill

Cemetery. I argue that these physical surfaces hold within them not only positions toward

and memories of war that are literally bound to a material substrate, but they also hold

expressions of a fluid, screenic quality that, despite their material fixity, overlap and echo

one another.

The Death of the Photograph(er): Larry Burrows' "One Ride with Yankee Papa 13"

Photographs are monuments to death – always an act of return, troubled duration,

and obsession, always, as Barthes would say, *what has been*.[12] Barthes encounters what

he calls "the flat Death" of the photograph as he wrestles with the memory of his dead

mother while looking at a photograph of her as a young girl.[13] He is unable to "get to the

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[12] Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980) 133; *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 85.
   Camera Lucida, the English translation of *La chambre claire*, was published shortly after Barthes' tragic death. Where relevant I will include citations for both the original and the translation.
[13] Barthes, *La chambre claire* 145; *Camera Lucida* 92. Part II *La chambre claire* focuses on the "Winter Garden Photograph" (1898), an image of Barthes' mother, Henriette, as a young girl. She died in 1977 and much of Barthes 'notes on photography' are about death and mourning in respect to his mother.

heart of it, to transform it." The "only way [he] can transform the Photograph is into refuse: either the drawer or the wastebasket."

At the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, the 'remnants' on display are of two species: images and munitions. From the museum proper, if one walks through the garden of rusting war machines – carcasses of tanks, planes, and helicopters, piles of artillery – one enters a shed devoted to war photography. On display are the recognizable and iconic pictures of the Vietnam War era – the naked, girl fleeing napalm attack, the execution of a Viet Cong prisoner, the aftermath of the My Lai Massacre.[14] The room honors those photographers killed in action, listing their names and touting their "noble" vocation and sacrifice. At the entrance hangs a photograph of a camera that had been penetrated by a bullet; an image in which two primary technologies of war (the camera and the gun) meet each other. [15] Western visitors to the museum, myself included, commonly take pictures of these pictures? What is the appeal? Does it fascinate me because it promises to hand over to me some otherwise invisible moment that, by luck and skill and magic, was captured in light, emulsified, and made reproducible? Or does it simply celebrate the fact the viewer remains alive, 'here now' instead of stuck in the *having-been-there* of the photograph?

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[14] Respectively, AP photographer Huynh Cong "Nick" Ut's Pulitzer prize-winning photograph of Kim Phuc; AP photographer Eddie Adams' picture of police chief General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing Vietcong prisoner Nguyen Van Lem; and U.S. Army photographer Ronald L. Haeberle's images of the My Lai aftermath in 1968.

[15] No information about the camera was provided at the War Remnants Museum, but the image also appears on the back cover of Horst Faas and Tim Page, eds. *Requiem: By the Photographers Who Died in Vietnam and Indochina* (New York: Random House, 1997). The caption reads: "the camera of Taizo Ichinose, 1996. The bullet-pierced camera that the Japanese photographer used in Vietnam is now preserved as part of a family shrine in Kyushu, Japan."

War photographs are difficult documents. Their seductive aura – what Susan

Sontag called their "challenging beauty" – exposes their often incommensurate artistic

and documentary ambitions (*Regarding* 75). Photography's power to fascinate stems

from the truth-value it claims for itself. "Photographs furnish evidence," Sontag argued.

"In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates…In another…it justifies"

(*Photography* 5). Despite photography's evidential mandate and its apparent "certificate

of presence," photographs are highly mutable and can be mobilized to articulate any

number of ideological and political aims (Barthes, *Camera* 87).[16] A photograph's

meaning depends completely on the modes of its production, dissemination, and the all-

important caption. The photograph demands that we bear witness to war, but with

uncertainty as to whether, by looking, we are protesting or collaborating. The scene of

war photography always trades in what Sontag described as the "shady commerce

between art and truth" (*Photography* 6). War photographs create a haunted fascination in

the viewer because they, themselves, are haunted by their tenuous relationship to war – a

peculiar economy of shooting.

This economy emerges in Larry Burrows' well-known photo essay, "One Ride

with Yankee Papa 13," which first appeared in the April 16, 1965 issue of *Life*

magazine.[17] In it, Burrows accompanies the crew of the UH-34 helicopter YP13 on a

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[16] Barthes, *La chambre claire* 135. (Throughout this section, when relevant, I will also provide footnoted citation for the original French text).

[17] Larry Burrows, "One Ride with Yankee Papa 13," *Life* (16 April 1965: 24 – 34C).
Larry Burrows (1926-1971), a British-born photographer, began working at *Life*'s London office in 1942, during the blitz, as a photo lab assistant. He went to Vietnam in 1962 and became the signature photographer of the Vietnam War. See photographic retrospectives of Vietnam War including David Halberstam, introduction, *Vietnam*, by Larry Burrows (New York: Knopf, 2002) and Horst Faas and Tim Page, eds. *Requiem: By the Photographers Who Died in Vietnam and Indochina* (New York: Random House, 1997).

harrowing airlift mission outside of Da Nang, South Vietnam. The images of the 21-year-old crew chief Marine Lance Corporal James Farley and his men as they encounter the horrific violence and death of that day are awful – and irresistible.

On its surface, this photo essay contains a predictable visual and textual narrative logic depicting how young American men are broken by war. "All is Shipshape" early in the essay where we see the jocular war boys, Farley and his gunner, Hoilien, goofing around Da Nang's markets while on liberty. The next day, just before the mission commences, Farley dons his flight helmet with the heroic innocence of a 1950s 'all-American' high school football portrait. The mission: insert ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops into a strike zone 20 miles out of Da Nang. The narrative warns us that these Marines, who, just the day before, were in such "high spirits," are now "caught up in the business of war, on a trip from which they'd return much older." On the following page the bullets begin to fly as we learn that this is no "milk run." The landing zone is 'hot.' YP13's sister ship, YP3, goes down. Farley and his crew set down next to the damaged helicopter and try to help. Under heavy fire, Burrows follows Farley as he tries to rescue the pilot. "Should I try to find another foothold alongside Farley and help him lift the pilot out?" Burrows wonders. Farley decides that the pilot is dead and returns to his own ship, having already rescued the badly wounded co-pilot, 1st Lt. James Magel, and gunner, Sgt. Billie Owens. (The pilot, it turns out, was still alive and was rescued by another helicopter). Farley and Hoilien tend to the wounded, but Magel dies on the bay floor of the UH-34. In one photograph Farley stands over the Magel's bloodstained body with a look of intense desperation and shock. Here *Life* editors altered

the picture to hide the face of death. In the original image, one of Magel's glazed-over eyes 'looks' at the camera. As it appeared in *Life*, his flight vest covers his face.

The final pages depict Farley's response to the traumatic events. The final image shows Farley in a supply shack where he collapses in anguish onto wooden crates. The jovial Marine from a few pages back is now crushed under the weight of what he had witnessed. This final image, in many ways, marked the transfer of that weight onto an American public who, in 1965, still thought that the burden of the war was light.

Death, in this photo-narrative, is the transformative event taking Farley from boyhood to manhood. Photographic death is the memory and monument of this transformation. When life "slips away" under the watchful lens of the camera, the headline informs us it is "Not for a Long, Long Time Forgotten." One could read so many things from this photo-narrative: the construction of the somber yet heroic masculinity of war; the perversity that attends viewing death and injury; the invasive voyeurism of sharing in Farley's private anguish (to which Burrows himself had reservation, saying, "And so often I wonder whether it is my right to capitalize as I feel, so often, on the grief of others"); how photography purports to provide evidence as it simultaneously capitalizes on its ability to aestheticize violence; how photography frames memory under the regime of an endlessly reproducible instant that should have otherwise passed un-captured like so many other instants; or how photographic death is softened by editorial choices in the interest of 'good taste' (Faas 98). [18]

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[18] Cited in Horst Faas and Tim Page, eds. *Requiem: By the Photographers Who Died in Vietnam and Indochina* (New York: Random House, 1997) 98. Originally spoken by Burrows on the BBC film *Beautiful Beautiful* (1969).

All these aspects could be expanded upon, but I want to take up another thread. Read in another way, this photo essay is a meditation on shooting. The problem of shooting – always a preoccupation of the camera at war – takes precedence in Burrows' work. Rather than look at those images that literally depict death, I want to instead return to an image that appears earlier in the photo essay. I do this in part because the explicit images of violence and death can be sadly routine and their auratic power is depleted by our own habituation to depictions of wartime death. The image appearing narratively before everything falls apart may have more to tell us about the symbolic and material propinquities of the camera and the gun.

In one shot, Burrows mounts a motorized Nikon with a 21mm lens on the end of Farley's M-60 machine gun, positioning it to face back toward the helicopter. Burrows operates the camera from remote control. Swiveling with the gun barrel as Farley shoots the M-60 at the Viet Cong, Burrows' camera shoots back at Farley. It contains no 'graphic' elements of violent death – no blood and no corpses. However, it does 'point' (so to speak) toward photographic death and the spectator's precarious encounter with its alterity.

Figure 3. One Ride With Yankee Papa 13. © Larry Burrows. Licensed through Getty Images.

The *punctum* of this photograph – if we venture into Barthesian territory –

involves Burrows himself, the photographer. It could be the fingers we see on the upper

right-hand side of the frame. Or it could be the contraption of the shot (Burrows' own

inventive gadgetry). It involves the invisible presence of the photographer – of Burrows

himself. Although unseen, we know he is concealed somewhere in the frame, hiding.

This concealed presence is not just any photographic ghost; it is the author himself. The

caption informs us that he conceals himself behind Farley in the cramped bay of the UH-

34 leaving the viewer to plumb the dark spaces of the photograph for a peek at Burrows.

That Burrows is concealed in his own photograph – that, in essence, he is on the wrong

side of the camera – upsets the symbolic order of the photograph. It destabilizes Barthes'

triadic structure of photography – the Operator (Burrows) conceals himself in the

Spectrum (Farley and scene), leaving the Spectator (us) seemingly alone on the other side

of the apparatus (9-10).[19]

Barthes defined the photographic *punctum* as that accident of the photograph that

"pricks" or "wounds" the viewer; that aspect which, according to Barthes, is "poignant to

me" (27).[20] It could be a missing shoe, a bandaged finger, or a pearl necklace. Barthes

contrasts the *punctum* with the *studium*, which, he says, "is of the order of *liking,* not of

loving" (27). The *studium* "mobilizes a half desire" (27) The *studium* is an encounter with

the intentions of the Operator; the *punctum* is an accident of the photograph. In this photo

– taken by remote control – intention and accident collude. The shot is both intricately set

up and wholly contingent on the mechanism. Here, the *punctum* closely follows the

studium. Yes, we encounter the intentions of the Operator (the *studium*), but we also

encounter the Operator as photographic object, or at least his concealed presence (for me,

the *punctum*).

One wonders if Barthes foresaw the double entendre that appears in the English

translation of *Camera Lucida*. He continuously describes the *punctum* as the 'prick' of

the image – that which 'pricks' the viewer.[21] If we consider the more vulgar colloquial

use of this word, we find a supplemental aspect of the photographic desire. Looking at

images of injury, anguish, and death fosters a desire that is not only maddening, but also

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[19] Barthes, *La chambre claire* 22 - 24.

[20] The full discussion of *punctum* and *stadium* is found in Barthes, *La chambre claire* 47-96; *Camera Lucida* 25-60.

[21] "Pricks me" appears first as a translation of "*me point*" (*La chambre claire* 49) and later in quotation marks as the translation of Barthes' word-play, "*me 'poindre'*" (*poindre*: to burgeon; to bud) (79). The word (*une*) *piqûre* (49) is translated as "sting" but also means "bite" and "prick."

perverse. As Sontag noted, we want our photographers to be "spies in the house of love and death" (*Regarding* 55). In these images the *punctum* is what 'arouses' our desire, even our love, of that which should not be desired or loved – war, injury, death. Photographic death carries this perversely erotic quality, (not far removed from the pornographic 'death' – the money shot). The image can doubly 'prick' the viewer. The viewer is both wounded and fucked in the seductive economy of the photograph. This desire takes on both feminine and masculine symbolic currency: the prick as that which penetrates, and the prick as the wound itself. We might even consider how this economy is reciprocal – just what kind of 'pricking' is perpetrated by the spectator back toward the image?

This wounding and wounded spectatorial subjectivity leads us back to the question of shooting – that homology between the camera and the gun. The gadgetry behind this shot is not simply a whimsical coincidence of shooting. Rather, it brings into sharp focus the material and semiotic propinquity war photography has with the war machine itself. In this image the precarious intimacy of the camera and the gun is fully exposed. Burrows' camera is only three inches from the muzzle (after 11 missions the lens shook loose and fell to its own 'death'). More than just physical proximity, this set-up points to other intimacies of the camera and the gun. The war camera always has had an affinity for the gun. The gun is, after all, a key player in the Spectrum on offer to the camera. In a way, the camera has always wanted to shoot and the gun has always wanted to see. They are mechanical relatives. They both *take* at the level of the instant. They share a vocabulary. They trade in apertures and gauges. The image pines after the

certainty of the bullet, and the bullet wants the duration of the image. Burrows' desire to put the camera with the gun is no accident or trick. His images exemplify the opto-centric fetishism endemic to both war and image. Their cooperation, albeit tentative, traps the spectator within a mode of perception, more so, an epistemology, wholly invested in shooting. In other words, it structures a way of seeing that is always aiming.

Burrows' images foreshadow what we saw only fleetingly in the Persian Gulf War. There in the Gulf, the guns could finally see for themselves. The weapons themselves did the reporting. The spectator's knowing-through and being-toward the image was unified with his knowing- and being-toward war. In the Gulf, images were munitions and munitions were cameras. The televisual madness and the electromagnetic orgy of images and weaponry created a regime of *always already* militarized perception. The question is whether Burrows' camera, in its *attachment* to the gun, foretells what was to come or resists it. The weapons that shoot both images and munitions outward, at the enemy 'Other,' structure seeing as *always already* targeting – an act of aiming. Burrows' camera, however, is always looking back at the shooter. What is the significance of this shooting-back-at? How does it speak to the *always already* aiming and armed gaze on offer? Burrows' 'trick' perspective on shooting asks these questions of our visual practices. Burrows' images, like all war images, challenge the interpretive subjectivity of the viewer and risk co-option into the war machine – a machine that, in its will to militarize perception and to monopolize vision, constantly threatens to turn the camera into an implement of war and images into munitions. The question becomes: How do we see without shooting?

The economy of shooting – an economy of death – extends beyond the photograph. These confluences between the camera and the gun, images and munitions, extend to the photographers themselves. In addition to his photographs, Burrows himself became a kind of icon. As part of the ideological work of war photographs, the war photographer himself is also mythologized. In the introduction to *Larry Burrows: Compassionate Photographer*, Ralph Graves's gushingly praises Burrows like a character from *The Manchurian Candidate:* "I do not think it is demeaning to any other photographer in the world for me to say that Larry Burrows was the single bravest and most dedicated war photographer I know of." He goes on to write, "Despite the risks he took to get his pictures, he was no hell-for-leather, gung-ho photographer. He was a deeply compassionate and thoughtful man, always conscious that he was working on the rim of tragedy." Martha Rosler, in her 1981 talk titled "The 'Look' of War Photography" takes Graves to task. She argues that the enduring myth of compassion that Graves sustains is an insidious element that is meant to elide the fact that war photography and the war photographer represent a troubling "ideological stance to the third world." In this case, Burrows represents the kind of condescending compassion that the West still reserves for the Global South, wherein the word compassion is code for having a vague emotional experience that validates our own privilege – a kind of satisfying feeling-bad about the suffering of others. Caroline Brothers echoes Rosler's sentiment when she says of the war photograph that "The evidence it provides, like all images of injury and death, has little to do with its particular contents, or with any notion of photographic truth; it

bears witness instead to *the ideological currents which produced it and the collective imagination it inflected and to which it contributed"* (emphasis mine) (185).

Upon returning from the Yankee Papa mission the squadron commander awarded Burrows his airmen's wings for courage under fire. In 1971, along with other legendary photographers Henri Huet, Kent Potter, and Keizaburo Shimamoto, Burrows was shot down while flying over Laos in a helicopter (Faas 268-271). They all died; left to mythmaking.

As spectators, though, we always survive photographic death. That is the perverse 'prick' of our photographic desire. Looking at the *what-has-been* of the photograph reifies our status as the *what-is*. What a strange relief. After all this shooting we are the only ones left. And we are left looking. In a sense, we are left shooting. This is the catastrophe of the photograph.

The Inscrutable Immutable, or Roland Barthes & "The Photographic Paradox"

Photographs owe their existence to a reality that once took place before a camera lens and a kernel of this reality persists in the photograph – "the referent adheres" (Barthes, *Camera* 6). Therefore, photographs depend on language to frame them, tame them, and to render them legible, which is to say, for all that is held in the photograph, more is withheld. By "withheld," I am not necessarily referring, spatially, to all that exists outside the frame of the photograph, or, temporally, to everything that happens before and after the photograph is taken. I am not referring to what has been cropped out, but rather to what crop up. I speak of that which evades us but remains there, in the photograph, nonetheless. This simultaneity of the assimilable and the unassimilable in the

photograph plays between the sayable and seeable, the verbal and visual, the visible and invisible and the nameable and un-nameable that we encounter in face of the photograph. Given the photograph's bond with contingency, photography cannot signify except by assuming a mask. For Barthes, (riffing on Marshall McLuhan's famous maxim?), "the mask is the meaning" (*Camera* 34).

This is, in part, what Barthes calls the "photographic paradox": "the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the 'art', or the treatment, or the 'writing', or the rhetoric, of the photograph)" ("Message" 19). The "message without a code" is the denoted message – "the scene itself, the literal reality" (17). The "analogical plenitude" of the denoted message is so great that, in one sense, the photograph is unreadable. The attempt to read the photograph, then, is a move to a "second-order message" – the connoted message, which is always incomplete and can only "signify something different to what is shown" (17).

I align the notion of capture with the procedures of connotation. Capture goes beyond the mechanism of the camera to include all the levels at which the photograph is produced. What remains beyond this apparatus of capture is of the denoted order. To the extent that the photograph captures something, it can be put toward knowledge; to the extent that an "intractable reality" persists in the photograph, it remains mystical and mythical in its denoted message (*Camera* 119). To the extent that we are able to possess – to take hold of – a photographic object, we enact the connoted order; to the extent that the photograph object possesses us, we encounter the denoted message. Capture is a form

of mastery; evasion is the sign of loss. The denotative order is the raw record; the connotative order stabilizes it into an archive-able record.

Thus photography represents a mode of perception that simultaneously captures what would otherwise escape our view and, yet, escapes our capture, which is to say that it emulsifies and reifies a fleeting instant (that which would have otherwise escaped our view were it not for the work of the camera) and yet its indelible link to that past instant, to the that-has-been – the presence of the contingent past – remains unrepresentable. Photographs need language and yet are so resistant to it.

This is what makes photographs a dumbfounding thing to talk about. They are representations bound to their referent. Like Barthes, Susan Sontag notes this apparition of the real: photographs "do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it" (Photography 4). Photographs are both a record of the event and a piece of the event. This characteristic is the very thing thought to be "under threat" with the rise of digital photography. However, whether digital or analog, this process of capture goes beyond the camera's mechanism; it includes all of the discursive apparatus we bring to bear on the photograph. All the cultural and symbolic associations that the photograph awakens in the spectator, all the intentions of the photographer, and all the captions that are deployed to further capture the image, help to render it knowable, assimilable, and consumable. The caption shores up the excess in the photograph; it supplements the photograph with language in order to render it legible. Yet an excess remains – that extension of the real, that which remains unnamable, that 'prick,' that thing that continues to wound, scratch, and cut the beholder.

The contingency of the photograph – the capturing of what would otherwise escape and the escaping of what is captured – as Mary Ann Doane observes, is both "threat and lure" and conjures in the spectator both "fascination and anxiety" (144). This fascination and anxiety stems from the presence of absence in the photograph – the reality that was once present remains as a death mask in the photograph. Sontag describes it as both "a pseudo-presence and a token of absence" (*Photography* 16).

Of course, to even talk of the denoted order of the photograph is always already of the connoted order. The denotative does not exist as such; it persists. Or as W.J.T. Mitchell puts it, "what we take it to represent is never free from what we take it to mean" (*Picture Theory* 284). This is to say that the two orders of the photographic message can be differentiated through language, but not disentangled.

Michael Herr perceives this photographic paradox amid all the other paradoxes of the Vietnam War. In *Dispatches*, he recounts his experience as a reporter in a war he refers to as the "Inscrutable Immutable" (56). As he reflects on the violence and death he has witnessed in Vietnam, he recalls his childhood encounter with war photographs in *Life*: "You know how it is, you want to look and you don't want to look…Even when the picture was sharp and cleanly defined, something wasn't clear at all, something repressed that monitored the images and withheld their essential information" (18). Like the war itself, these photographs of violence appear to Herr as the Inscrutable Immutable – that tinge of the real. Sontag, too, in her reflections on the photography of violence and the violence of photography notes the tinge: "There is the satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching" (*Regarding* 41).

The violence of photography rests in the photographic paradox and the paradoxical reactions it engenders. It arises out of the contingency of the photograph. One kind of violence proceeds from capture, a kind of targeting that renders the photographic object legible – that which enables the satisfactions of not flinching. The other kind of violence arises out of the unknown of the photograph, the unassimilable, the inscrutable, and the unnamable, which invites the pleasures of flinching. The former is the violence that the photograph invites the beholder to perpetrate: its enabling of our desire to possess, to be captivated, and to be shocked. The latter is the violence the photograph perpetrates on the viewer – its capacity to wound.

Violence lurks on all sides of photography – in taking the photograph, in looking at the photograph, and in loving the photograph. This is true of any photograph. What amplifies the danger of violence for Herr and Sontag is that not only are they encountering the violence of pictures, they are also looking at pictures of violence. These types of photographs layer violence upon violence, shifting and blurring figurative and literal violence.

Shooting Shooting: Eddie Adams & Chris Burden in the Moment of Capture

On February 1, 1968, Nguyen Ngoc shot Nguyen Van Lam in the head, point blank. And, on January 5, 1973, Chris Burden shot at a Boeing 747 commercial jetliner as it flew overhead.

These moments might have passed unnoticed, except they were photographed.

Figure 4. Execution of a Vietcong Prisoner. © Eddie Adams / Associated Press

747
January 5, 1973

At about 8 a.m. at a beach near the Los Angeles International
Airport, I fired several shots with a pistol at a Boeing 747.

Figure 5. 747. © Chris Burden. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

On the previous page: Eddie Adams' iconic, Pulitzer prize-winning photograph depicting the Republic of Vietnam police chief General Nguyen Ngoc executing Nguyen Van Lam, a Vietcong prisoner on the streets of Saigon during the Tet Offensive.

On this page: Chris Burden's 747, the photographic record of his performance art piece. The caption reads: "LAX, January 5, 1973. Los Angeles, California. At about 8am at a beach near the Los Angeles International Airport, I fired several shots with a pistol at a Boeing 747."

Adams' photograph immediately grabs hold of you. It induces a captive viewer. It raises a morbid curiosity because we see in it the very boundary between the living and the dead rendered brutally and beautifully. The image causes us to flinch and even to find the flinching pleasurable. There is another flinch, too: the flinch of guilt. The I-need-to-look-at-this is policed by the I-should-not-look-at-this. The scene is too perverse and exploitative and yet too irresistible. Sontag observes of this image that "one can gaze at these faces for a long time and not come to the end of the mystery, and the indecency, of such co-spectatorship" (60). Another layer of guilt arises out of the aesthetic pleasure we might derive from the photograph. The photograph may awaken our outrage or our revulsion to war and violence, but the photograph itself does not protest the scene. It records it, embraces it.

This picture is iconic in part because it can be mobilized again and again to speak to the atrocities of war. It is also specific insofar as it is linked to a particular war – the Vietnam War. It seems to both embody the contradictions of that war and all war in one glance. The Inscrutable Immutable on display. Perhaps it even embodies all the tumult of 1968 or all the sins of colonial imperialism. It depends on how far we want it to connote.

Burden's photograph, even more so, opens itself up to all kinds of connotations. His photograph is not horrifying like Adams', but rather subtly terrifying. It looks like a movie poster for a 1970s political thriller – like a still from *Three Days of the Condor* or *The Parallax View*. That could be Warren Beatty there, in a desperate battle with the clandestine powers that be – one man against the system. Without the caption, though, I

might have assumed he was pointing a finger, not a gun, at the airplane, perhaps celebrating the wonders of aviation. Look! There it is!

But the idea that he is shooting at the plane is where the image derives its provocation. The chance of catastrophe lurks in the image. Its matter-of-fact caption only creates more questions. Is he close enough to actually hit the plane? Or is it too far away? Is this a picture of criminal/artistic aggression? Or an expression of futility in face of the machine? The image is ripe for associations. In 1973: a commentary on the nightmare of the Vietnam War. Now: 9/11's terrifying airplanes.

Adams' photograph bears witness to violence whereas Burden's photograph suggests violence. Both enable a kind of violence of perception, but they do so in different ways and to different ends. Their relation to violence varies because their relation to contingency varies, which is to say their connotative procedures (their methods of capture) differ greatly. Adams' photograph records a chance encounter with a violent event – the execution of a prisoner. Burden's photograph records a moment of performance that *suggests* a kind of violence – shooting at an airplane. In Adams' photograph the violence is immediate, immanent, nearly palpable. The violence in Burden's photograph, however, lurks as a threatening potentiality, a possibility – it could be catastrophic.

Not only do the two photographs document different kinds of events, they do so under opposing auspices. Adams' photo reaches us under the guise of journalism and its guarantees: accuracy, newsworthiness, and objectivity. We look upon the horrific brutality because the photograph purports to say something, to represent something,

about war – it reports. Burden's photograph comes to us as an artistic statement. The photograph itself, in fact, is not the art piece, but rather a piece of the art. The art object is Burden's act of shooting at the 747 – the photograph stands as proof of the act. Adams' photograph asks us to engage the scene; Burden's photograph asks us to engage the artist.

Their many differences aside, these photographs share the trait of double shooting: the camera shooting at the shooting gun. The camera invites comparison with the gun and the image invites comparison with the bullet. In most contexts the comparison is strictly metaphorical and tends to hyperbolize the violence of photography. After all, while both technologies shoot, only one has the capacity to kill, which leads Sontag to conclude that "the ominous metaphor seems to be all bluff" (Photography 14). Despite the bluff, though, even she continues to invoke the camera/gun metaphor. "[A]t the farthest reaches of the metaphor," she argues, the camera can "assassinate" (13) and that insofar as photography is a means of symbolic possession, shooting a camera is a kind of "soft murder" (15). She maintains a distinction between the symbolic violence of photography and the real violence of the gun, but implies through her metaphors that the barrier between them is not absolute. Sontag's weaponization of the camera is not specifically linked to guns, however, but to any weapon of aggression. Referring to Diane Arbus's own camera/weapon fantasy, for example, Sontag declares that "to understand the camera as a weapon of aggression, implies there will be casualties" (39). This implication of casualties turns her thoughts toward the scene of war. She observes that "[o]nly war photography combines voyeurism and danger." This combination is linked to both symbolic and real violence, the violence of voyeurism and the violence of warfare.

The photographs of Adams and Burden have gun fantasies. In each photograph the gun speaks to the camera and the camera speaks to gun. This is a conversation between two apparatuses of capture. The camera lens takes in order to leave (a record, an index) and the bullet leaves the gun in order to take (life, limb). The former is a technology of introception and the latter is one of projection. Between the two is the exchange of symbolic and real violence. The power of Adams' and Burden's pictures derives in part from their proximity to this other kind of shooting. Whenever the shutter and the bullet coincide, the resultant photograph assumes a special status. Adams' photograph, in particular, achieves iconic status because the camera executes time in the very same instant that the General executes Lam. The photograph's mode of operation is to capture the elusive and singular moment – a slice of time – and render it permanently fixed and static. What makes Adam's photograph special is that it captures two singularities that elude human perception: a speeding bullet and the moment of human death.

Bullets do not actually appear to our eyes in either Adams' or Burden's photograph, but we assume they are there. In Burden's photo we assume it because the caption tells us that he is shooting at the 747, in Adams' photo we see its effects – the index of the bullet in Lam's body. Because the camera is in the business of capturing contingency, it is not surprising that it has a fascination with the bullet. A whole genre of photography is devoted to capturing the elusive bullet. In 1887, Ernst Mach first captured the bullet in a shadowgraph. In 1964, Harold Edgerton captured a bullet traversing through an apple using his stroboscopic method of photography. Like Eadweard

Muybridge's chronophotographic studies of motion, Mach and Edgerton made it possible to see what the naked eye could not. These kinds of photographs purport to advance scientific knowledge about movement, aerodynamics, and not least, about photographic technologies. They render the imperceptible world legible in light and thus on some level master the contingency bound to the bullet. In targeting that which targets, they anesthetize and aestheticize the bullet. They render the shock waves of a bullet more absorbable by paralyzing them in a photographic image for scientific study and aesthetic enjoyment.

The shock waves in Adams' photograph are a source of fascination too, but not like those in Mach and Edgerton. Here the bullet is not traversing empty space in a laboratory, or piercing an inanimate object like an apple. Rather, it is piercing human flesh in the political space of war with the aim of taking life. His photograph stands among other iconic photographs that capture the bullet's deathblow, most notably Robert Capa's "Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death, Cerro Muriano, Sept 5, 1936" a.k.a. the Falling Soldier, which was widely distributed during and after the Spanish Civil War, or the photograph depicting the assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby in 1963. In these photographs we see the effect of the bullet. We read the bullet in the contortions of the body it penetrates. These photographs take us to the limits of representability. For this reason they are iconic. What they capture captures us. They capture the ultimate event (death) under violent circumstances and thus mobilize both the spectator's revulsion to violence and fascination with it, and therefore, they alert the spectator to his/her own violence – the violence that attends the looking at these

photographs – the violence of seeing the ultimate event as an aesthetic object. The cruelty

being perpetrated in the elsewhere of the photograph is tempered by the future-anterior

cruelty of voyeuristically spying on what-will-have-been, taking it in as an aesthetic

pleasure. The photograph makes the throes of death seem like a brutal, still ballet.

The powerful simultaneity between the shutter of the camera snapping and the

shudder of the body dying achieves iconic status only if it really happened. For many

years controversy surrounded Capa's Falling Soldier because there was evidence that it

was staged. Photographic detectives enlarged and enhanced and compared and looked

and looked for the proof of its occurrence. Why? Because without the real death event the

photograph is just another photograph. In fact, it is worse because it deflates the

credibility that we like photographs to have. Such tricks – such stagings and doctorings –

"utilize the special credibility of the photograph," Barthes observes, "in order to pass off

as merely denoted a message which is in reality heavily connoted" ("Message" 21).

Especially in depictions of death, we want to imagine we encounter the thing itself – pure

denotation. To stage death violates the most basic illusion of the photograph. Such

stagings are particularly disconcerting because they utilize the photograph's own special

relation to death.

Mary Ann Doane, in a discussion of Thomas Edison's "execution films," wonders

if perhaps death functions as a kind of cinematic Ur-event because it appears as the zero

degree of meaning, its evacuation.[22] With death we are suddenly confronted with pure

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[22] Although Doane is addressing cinema here, in speaking of contingency, she is also addressing the photographic base of cinema. See also Chris Kamerbeek's brilliant reading of Thomas A. Edison's 1903 film "Executing of an Elephant" in his dissertation "The Ghost and the Corpse: Figuring the Mind/Brain Complex at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," (U of Minnesota, 2010).

event, pure contingency, what ought to be inaccessible to representation (hence the

various social and legal bans against direct, nonfictional filming of death) (164).[23]

In an apparatus bound to contingency, pure contingency (death) is the big catch.

Barthes sees death at the heart of every photograph. For him every photographed subject

is haunted by the he-is-going-to-die (96). Even if we know the subject to still be alive or

to be already dead in historical time, Barthes argues, in photographic time, the subject of

the photograph is perpetually going-to-die. Barthes posits that "every photograph is this

catastrophe," but the photograph he uses to illustrate the point is, interestingly, linked to

execution:

> In 1895, young Lewis Payne tried to assassinate Secretary of State W. H. Seward. Alexander Gardner photographed him in his cell, where he was waiting to be hanged […] I read with horror an anterior future of which death is at stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose […], the photograph tells me death in the future (96).

Execution photographs like Eddie Adams' photo collapse the space between he-

is-going-to-die and he-is-already-dead into a single view, thus showing us the essence of

photography in the essence of human finitude.

For theorists like Paul Virilio and Friedrich Kittler cameras do execute. The

relation between the camera and gun, for them, is not just a metaphor. Both of them see a

deep level of cooperation and collusion between photographic image and warfare.[24] In

the context of war, the difference in shooting a camera and shooting a gun is less

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[23] It is interesting to note that there is NBC TV news footage of both the execution of Nguyen Van Lam and of the assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald. While the still photographs remain iconic, the moving footage remains culturally taboo.

[24] Virilio and Kittler focus almost entirely on film and cinema, but, like Doane, maintain the photograph as the base element. Virilio, moreover, shifts freely between all kinds of images and image-machines.

discernable because, insofar as it is part of the war machine, the camera is an instrument

of surveillance, reconnaissance, and sighting. Cameras function to locate targets in space

and time, and this serves well the weapons that do the same. In these instances images are

just one weapon among many, which leads Virilio to posit that, in war, "the function of

the weapon is the function of the eye" (3).[25] As more cameras get placed on more

weapons, Virilio argues that "[t]he projectile's image and the images' projectile" begin to

"form a single composite" (83). So to observe that "[t]he industrial production of

repeating guns and automatic weapons was thus followed by the innovation of repeating

images" (Virilio 4), or that "[t]he history of the movie camera […] coincides with the

history of automatic weapons" – that "the transport of pictures only repeats the transport

of bullets" (Kittler 124), is not simply to observe a historical coincidence, but to observe

the logic of a militarized mode of perception. Whereas Kittler and Virilio warn of this

mode of perception, Ernst Jünger – the preeminent connoisseur of war as aesthetic

experience – celebrates the fact that "it is the same intelligence, whose weapons of

annihilation can locate the enemy to the exact second and meter that labors to preserve

the great historical event in fine detail" ("War" 24). For him, the camera "eye registers

just as well a bullet in midair or the moment in which a man is torn apart by an

explosion" ("Photography" 208).

However, there is a difference between cameras that do the work of war and those

that document war, even if that difference is blurred. Adams' camera is not helping to fire

the gun, it is not sighting for the gun, but rather, it is citing the violence of it. The

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[25] This has never been truer than in the recent drone era. See essays by Virilio, Harun Farocki, and others in the excellent collection *Serious Games: War/Media/Art* (Hatje Cantz, 2011). See also Farocki's 2011 installation at MoMA, *Images of War (at a Distance)*.

violence implicit in the act of taking a picture stems from the fact that it does not partake in the violence it captures – it stems from its non-intervention in the scene, from its cold detachment. Its violence is that it stands apart, voyeuristically, and thus tacitly agrees to the violence being perpetrated. When preying on violence, the camera always says "yes" to it.

Still, Adams feels that his camera has killed. He regrets the saying yes of his camera. For him the idea that the camera is a predatory weapon is very real. In 2001, he eulogized General Loan in *TIME*. To Adams, the General was a war hero whose life was destroyed by the Pulitzer winning photograph: "The general killed the Viet Cong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapons in the world. People believe them; but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths".[26]

With his camera, Adams exploited a target of opportunity. For Samuel Weber this is the crucial similarity between seeing-machines and killing-machines. They are technologies designed to overcome distance and assimilate alterity (Weber 6). Weber sees the new technologies of seeing and shooting as couched in a lineage of the West's optocentric episteme. He reads the concept of the target-as-knowledge from Odysseus' bow to Freud's drives to Rumsfeld's 'singular strikes.' Targeting, Weber argues, is "a means of overcoming spatial and temporal dislocation, especially with respect to human finitude" (12). Because 'target' is both a noun and a verb, "the goal is designated by the same word as the attempt to reach it" (viii) – it is both object and desire. A targeting

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[26] *Time*, 24 June 2001. It is interesting, too, that even in 2001, Adams refuses to see the victim. To Adams, Lam is still "the Viet Cong" – an enemy other, an anonymous target of the camera and the gun.

mode of perception always takes place at a safe and privileged distance – one that seeks

to conquer and master. It aims to capture. For Virilio, this is the essence of the camera,

which cultivates an always-already targeting perception. Benjamin, too, noted this

tendency at work in the technology of the camera: "Everyday the urge grows stronger to

get hold of an object at close range in an image" ("Work of Art" 105). This urge to get-

hold-of, for Weber, is imbued with violence: "the act of targeting is an act of violence

even before any shot is fired. It is this act of violence that registers as 'guilt' – which

consists in the denial of indebtedness to an alterity without which nothing could be

identified, no aim taken, no target hit" (105).

This is the violence that structures taking and looking at photographs. In taking

and looking at pictures we are not always shooting, but we always aim.

Triggers of Desire: The Lacan Can & the Tuché of the Photograph

Of all the innumerable switches, buttons, and triggers that activate the

technologies of modernity, that activate the fascination and anxiety that attend these

technologies, and that activate a targeting mode of perception, Walter Benjamin argues

that "the 'snapping' of the photographer has had the greatest consequences." "A touch of

the finger," he says, "now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The

camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were" ("Motifs" 174-175).

To Barthes' ears, this snapping is soothing. "For me," he says, "the

Photographer's organ is not his eye (which terrifies me) but his finger: what is linked to

the trigger of the lens, to the metallic shifting of the plates (when the camera still had

such things)" (15).[27] Barthes is drawn to the trigger of the camera, and moreover to the

finger of its operator, because it, more than the eye, marks the fixing, the capture of the

event and thus most closely connects him to what he is seeking in the photograph – death.

In other words, the photographer's finger triggers his photographic desire (premised on

loss, separation, absence, and the link to the unknown of death). His obsession with the

finger carries over into the photograph itself. A photograph, as index, is a kind of finger –

it points – it says "this (has been)." For Barthes, the photograph is "neither image nor

reality," but rather "a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch" (87);

meanwhile, the photograph's reality continues to touch him. This touch of the photograph

is not the violence it engenders in the spectator – not the violence of targeting or of

assimilating violence as aesthetic pleasure – but a violence that it enacts on the spectator.

Sontag argues, "To possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to reexperience

the unreality and remoteness of the real (*Photography* 164)." This touch, this spark, is an

encounter with that remoteness (that is nonetheless present in the indexical essence of the

photograph). This raises the "irrepressible feeling that the photographic process is

something magical," as Sontag puts it (*Photography* 155). Or what Benjamin calls the

"magical value" within the photograph that compels the viewer "to seek the tiny spark of

accident, the here and now" ("Short" 202). This spark of magic stems from the fact that

"everything is given" in a photograph, which is why Barthes "must" address "an intense

immobility" (an Inscrutable Immutability?) in the photograph that is "linked to a detail

(to a detonator), an explosion makes a little star on the pane […] of the photograph" (49).

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[27] It is worth noting that on most digital cameras users have the option of turning on a mechanical 'clicking' sound effect. As a sort of ghost of the camera's mechanical past, it assures the user that the camera is still taking pictures.

The fact that he must address this leads him down a different path than the one he travailed in "The Photographic Message."

In "The Photographic Message," Barthes, the semiotician, classified the photographic message as pure denotation, which left him no option, semiotically speaking, except to deal only with its connoted message, since its denoted message stands outside of the sayable. The specter of the denoted message, the codeless message, haunts his ability to address the photograph. He feels the "pressure of the unspeakable that wants to be spoken" (*Camera* 19). So when he returns to the scene of photography in Camera Lucida he does so not under the guise of a semiotician, but under the guise of an autobiographical I/eye – a subjective spectator looking at photographs. Although Camera Lucida has many critics precisely because it fails to place the photograph within a semiotic system, it does what semiotics cannot: it abides the denoted message. Barthes cannot speak it directly, but the subjective I/eye allows him to say how it speaks to him. Moreover, his autobiographical I/eye can say how it affects him – how it wounds him.

He does this by moving away from connoted and denoted messages, and enlists instead concepts discussed earlier in this chapter: the *studium* and *punctum*. The *studium* is linked to all the connotative messages of the photograph. The *punctum* is the detail that opens up to the unspeakable of denoted message. In one of his photographic encounters – Duane Michals' portrait of Andy Warhol hiding his face behind both hands – Barthes identifies the *punctum* in Warhol's fingernails. The photograph seems to literally scratch him: "I have no desire to comment intellectually on this game of hide-and-seek (which belongs to the *Studium*); since for me, Warhol hides nothing; he offers his hands to read,

quite openly; and the *punctum* is not the gesture but the slightly repellent substance of those spatulate nails, at once soft and hard-edged" (45).

On a Lacanian register, the *punctum* is tychic – in other words, it is the touch (Tuché) of the real, where the real glimpses us. It locates the gaze in the object, not the observer. It places the observer in the picture. We do not trap the picture, the picture traps us. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan tries to explain this by looking focusing on a detail in a painting by Holbein:

> In [this] picture I showed you at once […] the singular object floating in the foreground, which is there to be looked at, in order to catch, I would almost say, to catch in its trap, the observer, that is to say, us. It is, in short, an obvious way […] of showing us that, as subjects, we are literally called into the picture, and represented here as caught (92).

It is hardly obvious, but it introduces to the desires we project on pictures the demands the picture has on us. It is the things in the world that look at us. For Lacan the gaze is not the purview of the subject, but rather we are gazed at by things. And this is where he locates the unassimilable, codeless message. "In our relation to things," he posits, "in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from state to state and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze" (73).

Lacan's notion of the gaze unveils a radical absence and disrupts any notion of self-presence. He does not gaze upon the object; the object gazes at him. He attempts to illustrate this point by telling the story of a time when he was on fishing boat with a simple man named Petit-Jean: "Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the

waves. It was a small can, a sardine can […]. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me – You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!" (95).

Petit-Jean finds this humorous, but Lacan does not:

[I]f what Petit-Jean said to me […] had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically (95).

Lacan feels "out of place" in the picture because he cannot look at the picture from where it looks at him (95). There is something of this split and fractured looking – this Lacan can – in Barthes' punctum. When the punctum – which is like a shiny can floating in the photograph – suddenly reaches Barthes and not only does he "animate it," but "it animates" him (20). "[T]he photographed body touches me with its own rays," he feels. For Barthes, "the pose" is "what founds the nature of Photography" (78), but this is not the pose of the subject being photographed, or the technique of the photographer – it is not the pose in front of the camera, but rather how the photograph poses the spectator.

Throughout his reflections on photography, Barthes is looking for his mother. Every photographic punctum – every prick – becomes her loss, her death. It is this loss and this desiring lack that wounds him. It is his mother, but also the Mother – the primal scene of loss and separation from the real. It is not surprising, then, that Barthes perceives, "[a] sort of umbilical cord" that "links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze" (81).

Even though every photograph represents this loss for Barthes, there is one photograph he takes particular personal interest in: what he calls the Winter Garden

photograph. It is a picture of his mother, Henriette, as a young girl, and it is this image,

out of all the photographs of her, where he recognizes her – her reality and her absence.

Barthes withholds this picture from us. He does not show it to us because its meaning is

private to him, it would mean nothing to us. In its place he puts a photograph by Nadar,

which is cryptically labeled "The Artist's Mother (or Wife)."[28] In doing so, Barthes

eludes us and creates uncertainty. The mother that eludes him must also elude us. And so

he deliberately toys with the connotative message by misquoting and miscaptioning the

picture that stands in for the picture of his mother. In many ways this deliberate game on

Barthes' plays on us hearkens to the well-known puzzle-picture, "My Wife and My

Mother-in-Law."

Figure 6. My Wife and My Mother-in-Law

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[28] W.J.T. Mitchell notes that "the photograph was taken by Paul Nadar, the artist's son, and is of his mother, Nadar's wife" (305).

W.J.T. Mitchell calls these kinds of picture-puzzles "multistable images" (48). He argues that they "function as reflections on the basic nature of pictures, places where pictorial representation displays itself for inspection rather than effacing itself in the service of transparent representation of something else" (48). Images like this are not about what we see, but how we see. In "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law" we can see a young woman turned in profile looking away from us or we can see an elderly woman's downtrodden visage. On a more abstract level we also see a third figure: the wife-mother-in-law. Barthes' reflections on photography aim at this multistability. This is not the aiming discussed in the previous section – not the assimilation of alterity implied in targeting – but a kind of surrender. He abides the intractable parts of the photograph and, of course, he fails because there is no language for it. He can only perceive it as loss – his mother's death and his own I-am-going-to-die. This is the photograph's defiant tuché.

Picturing Picturing: Metapictures and Doubletakes

On the other side of the tuché of the photograph is the cliché of the photograph. In French, cliché signifies both the photographic negative and an overused, meaningless phrase. In other words, it is both the site of exposure and overexposure. If the tuché is a wounding poignancy, the cliché is a callous disinterest. Seeing photographs is already seeing at a distance (in both space and time) so the move from being voyeuristically interested – even compassionately interested – to being disinterested, unmoved, detached, and anesthetized is a small step. And the fact that the "ante keeps getting raised" (*Photography* 19) on images of violence lessens their ability to mean anything.

This is just one reason for Barthes to declare, "Yes, indeed: the Photograph is dangerous" (*Camera* 28). And photographs are dangerous for so many other reasons: they prick and wound, they exploit scenes of suffering, they target and assimilate alterity, they are a kind of death, they can render acts violence a kind of aesthetic fantasy. They are dangerous, too, because by capturing the visible world in a neat slice of space and time, they expand what can be found aesthetically pleasing – they can make cruelty a kind of beauty and death a kind of sublime spectacle.

This danger – this lurking violence – bleeds through the photograph and on to us. Michael Herr observed that Dana Stone – the famous war photographer – "never got anything on film that he didn't get on himself" (253). On another level, whatever he got on film also gets on those who view his images. Stone knew the photographic propensity to aestheticize violence so he called his pictures 'snaps' as part of an ethic not to let it be beautiful or art (196). They are beautiful anyway.

The perverse voyeurism endemic to photography turns both the photographer and the spectator into peeping toms. It leaves war photographer Larry Burrows feeling "like such bastard" (Herr 227). Diane Arbus says, "when I first did it I felt perverse" (Photography 13). This quasi-sexual guilt arises in the spectator, too, whose privileged gaze allows him/her to look upon the scene of cruelty and feel, as E.L. Doctorow said, "undifferentiated emotions of longing and dissatisfaction" (71).[29]

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[29] From E.L. Doctorow's novel *The Book of Daniel* (New York: Random House, 2007): "Images […] are essentially instruments of torture exploding through the individual's calloused capacity to feel powerful undifferentiated emotions full of longing and dissatisfaction and monumentality. They serve no social purpose."

This apparition of violence – somewhere between symbolic and real violence – is not just the purview of war photography. Even Atget's Paris street scenes seem to Benjamin like a crime scene ("Short History" 215). For Benjamin the violence concealed within the technologically reproducible image has the potential to allow us to "experience [our] own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure." Like Doctorow's views in the epigraph above, Benjamin has a distaste for the potential monumentality photographs produce. Do photographs serve a social purpose? Of course. They are important to the work of remembering and reminding, but they never do this work alone because photographs do not mean, they show. Benjamin certainly wanted photographs to serve a social purpose, moreover a political purpose. He admits that, in the wrong hands, photographs will only aestheticize the world. He sees promise in captions – in how we render the photograph, not how the photograph renders the world:

> The camera will become smaller and smaller and more prepared to grasp fleeting, secret images whose shock will bring the mechanism of association in the viewer to a complete halt. At this point captions must begin to function, captions which understand the photography which turns all the relations of life into literature, and without which all photographic construction must remain bound in coincidences. ("Short History" 214)

Captions, though, cannot stop a photograph like Adams' from loving cruelty and engendering a loving cruelty in the viewer. It cannot kill the denoted message. Even if it is captioned and packaged for antiwar purposes, even if it awakens moral outrage, it still seduces. At the end of *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag wonders if there is "an antidote to the perennial seductiveness of war" and the picturing of war (122). "Could one be mobilized actively to oppose war by an image (or group of images)?" She is, in essence, asking this of photography: Is there an antidote to the seductiveness of violence

in the photograph? And, can an image be mobilized to oppose the violence of

photography?

Of course we will continue to look at pictures of violence and picture taking will

always carry some tinge of violence. But perhaps the potential images that Sontag seeks

arise out of the realm of what W.J.T. Mitchell calls "metapictures" – pictures about

pictures (*Picture Theory* 35). More specifically, here, we might think about the potential

of metaphotos. The photograph that Sontag suggests might mobilize an active opposition

is Jeff Wall's 1992 photograph titled "Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After an Ambush of a

Red Army Patrol near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986)." It is giant Cibachrome

transparency backlit and mounted in a lightbox depicts gruesome bodies that have been

reanimated – the dead of war talking and playing – and even teasing each other with their

own guts. The scene is completely staged, but it carries the semblance of credibility of a

war photograph – it is photorealistic. Additionally the caption is loaded with details and

specificities of place and time. It has the aura of a newspaper caption. It alerts us to

photography-ness of photography and subverts our photographic expectations.

Figure 7. Oswald Rocks the Mic

Subversive metapictures do not always have to come from the world of art. In the pre-internet-meme photo remix "Oswald Rocks the Mike" we see a different kind of metapicture. Instead of staging a photographic scene, this image revises an iconic photograph and forces us to confront photography's slipperiness in spite of its seductive aura. Both "Dead Troops" and "Oswald" depict a kind of irreverence that is both humorous and dead serious. In doing so, they point a finger at the irreverence that attends our looking.

Metapictures might have an ability to disrupt the flow of violence that accompanies the targeting and triggering of photography. If metapictures elicit self-

reference, Mitchell argues, "it has as much to do with the self of the observer as with the metapicture itself" (48).

These two examples hardly begin to draw out the potential of an antidote to photographic violence. But the potential lies in the fact that they do not ask us to see; they ask us to see ourselves, seeing.

The Wall, The Tomb of the Unknowns, and Sad Hill Cemetery

> The unconscious is the chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied lie: it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be refound; most often it has already been written elsewhere. Namely in monuments…
> – Jacque Lacan (*Ecrits* 50)

This chapter began with Trinh T Minh-ha's critique of the ongoing "superfilm" of the Vietnam War, which she (and we) might define as an apparatus of mythologization comprised of literal films, but also photographs, monuments, stories, and other technologies that transform nationalist projects into surface spectacles. Here, in the final sections of this chapter, I want to locate the work of that superfilm onto another set of screens of war: tombs and names. In this epilogue to this chapter I visit three graves – The Wall, The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and Sergio Leone's Sad Hill Cemetery – in order to once more examine the screenic superfilm of the Vietnam War, this time through the work of another kind screen: names and naming.

When the dust and debris from the cannonball settles in Sergio Leone's quintessential spaghetti western, *The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly*, Tuco (Eli Wallach) conveniently finds himself in Sad Hill Cemetery. It's as if the cemetery did not exist

before it entered the frame, as if the camera itself engendered Sad Hill. This field of death

is the destination the whole film has moved toward. Somewhere in its Arlington-like

expanse of graves and markers, amidst the remains of Confederate soldiers, amidst all the

expended life that has fueled the Confederate war machine, there lies buried $200,000

worth of war profits in the form of gold coins. It is this treasure that Tuco, 'The Ugly,'

has come to claim. Implausibly, out of the innumerable graves, Tuco must find the name

Arch Stanton because (as far as Tuco knows) Stanton's grave marks the buried treasure.

To the crescendoing cadence of Ennio Morricone's "The Ecstasy of Gold," Tuco and the

camera dizzyingly pan the cemetery for the proper name that marks the profitable claim.

The wheeling view accelerates until the graves become an indecipherable blur and then it

suddenly stops on the grave of Arch Stanton. This is the prelude to the iconic three-way

showdown that will reveal the treasure. It is the beginning of the end: a moment we will

return to later, after we have visited other graves. [30]

In 1972, six years after the release of *The Good, The Bad & The Ugly*, a pilot was

shot down over South Vietnam. In 1984, his still-unidentified remains, labeled X-26,

were interred at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery amidst all

the laurels and adornments of a state ceremony, including a speech from President

Reagan. This was the only 'unknown' soldier of the Vietnam War and the official

ceremony of interment presumably sought to bring some measure of cathartic resolve to a

controversial war. Fourteen years later, in 1998, because mitochondrial DNA tests had

positively identified this only 'unknown' American soldier of the War in Vietnam, the

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[30] Leone allegedly consulted Matthew Brady's Civil War photographs (many of which, of course, were themselves staged) in order to accurately stage the Civil War in this film. See Lang Thompson and Jeff Stafford's *Turner Classic Movies* film article "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly."

now-known remains of Michael J. Blassie were disinterred from the Tomb of the

Unknowns. Across the Potomac River on the Capitol Mall, the symbol next to Blassie's

name (already etched alongside 58,000 other names on the Wall of the Vietnam Veterans

Memorial) was changed from 'Missing in Action' to 'Killed in Action.' Blassie became

the only soldier to straddle the Potomac in this way: an anonymous corpse entombed

under white marble and a proper name engraved into a black granite chevron – the only

to be amongst both the nameless remains and the remaining names.

Following the name and the remains of Blassie, then, becomes a way to unfold the

symbolic economy of nameless bodies and bodiless names at work in the

commemoration of the dead, particularly the dead of war. In the broadest sense, every

burial, every interment, every en-cryption is the re-articulation – the recoding – of the

first burial, the primordial violence that preceded it, and the order – the life – that follows

from it. In a classically anthropological sense, the tomb or grave is constitutive of culture

and language; it engenders the social. To name death and to bury its remains is to

ritualize and sublimate death to the continuation of life. The gravesite, as the concealed

presence of death – a presence made of absence – reproduces the process of production; it

puts death to work for life. "Culture always develops as a *tomb*" (83), argues René

Girard. "The tomb is nothing but the first human monument to be raised over the

surrogate victim, the first most elemental and fundamental matrix of meaning. There is

no culture without a tomb and no tomb without a culture; in the end the tomb is the first

and only cultural symbol." In this paradoxical foundational moment that Girard

describes, the tomb guarantees life at the very moment it marks and conceals the end of life; it commemorates its own cover-up.

With Blassie, we begin to see how names and bodies are placed in a system of substitution that points, not only to the foundation of life in general, but to the life of the nation particularly. Blassie-the-corpse and Blassie-the-name are substances and abstractions that are made to monumentalize, memorialize, ritualize, commemorate, consecrate, and dedicate death-as-sacrifice in order to both cover up and commemorate the generative violence at the heart of life, and thus preserve and maintain the grand narrative – the mythos – of the state. The life spent by the war machine is recouped into a symbolic economy in which the material past is taken up into the epic past where it stands as the guarantee of an unfolding national destiny.

The story of Blassie points to a contradiction within the national project of memorializing the dead. One the one hand, a national commitment to identifying, reclaiming, and honoring those who die in service of the country insists that X-26 be known – that he be properly identified with a proper name, Michael J. Blassie. On the other hand, the desire to make X-26 stand for national sacrifice outside of any particular war in the historical past, but rather within in the timelessness of the nation's heroic past, insists that X-26 remain unknown – that his 'proper' name be Unknown Soldier.

Across the Potomac River lies another memorial, The Wall, with Michael J Blassie's name engraved in black granite alongside 58,000 other names of the American dead and missing from Vietnam. Assumedly, the cross once next to his name signifying

the uncertainty of his whereabouts has since been superimposed by a diamond indicating that with certainty he is dead, his remains have been found.

Blassie is the only fallen soldier to have straddled the Potomac in this way, etched in black granite as an individual with his proper name, and etched in white marble as every- or any- man under the banner of 'Unknown.' Perhaps the debacle around Blassie's remains indicates the technological and scientific impossibility of an Unknown Soldier. That mode of memorializing war dead may have come to an end.

This section performs a comparative reading of the semiotic and symbolic functions of three memorials, The Wall, The Tomb of the Unknowns, and Sad Hill Cemetery. All of these 'tombs' invest in the Name, within this economy of death, as the guarantor of the nation's future through its past. Furthermore, the Name serves as the avatar of an inter- and intrasubjective encounter with death outside of any particular war or national project. In other words, these tombs, through the semiotic and symbolic functions of naming and sacrifice, rejuvenate certain modes of knowing and modes of sacrifice that are simultaneously particular to a nationalist subjectivity and generic to human subjectivity as it is ordered around a being-toward-death. The former partakes in a nationalist project of mythmaking and memory-making; the latter calls forth the foundational violence out of which culture emerges.

The Monument and the Wound

The Tomb of the Unknowns and The Wall represent two varied ways of memorializing the dead of war. The most obvious differences reside in their physical appearance. The Tomb of the Unknowns is white marble, box-shaped, above ground,

situated within the National Cemetery, and has no names (save 'Unknown') on it. The

Wall is a black granite chevron, below ground, situated outside the National Cemetery,

and has 58,000 names on it. Furthermore, the Tomb is an actual tomb and The Wall is

merely tomb-like. Both are sacred sites situated in relation to other powerful symbols of

nation and sacrifice along the Potomac. The Tomb's place within the National Cemetery

grants it state sanction. Its white marble blends with the surrounding architecture. It

functions as part of the state apparatus. Operating in the name of the state, its rituals are

solemn and official (the changing of the guards, the laying of the wreath). The Wall,

while situated on the National Mall, was created out of private funds. An informal group

of volunteers serve as its disciples, and, like the Marines at The Tomb, they maintain a

24-hour watch over the memorial. It bears little resemblance to the surrounding phallic

memorials and has been referred to in more vaginal language as a gash and a wound.

Where ritual at The Tomb is controlled around a unified message, ritual at The Wall is

multi-faceted and heteroglottic in its messages (the placing of personal objects at the

Wall, the space for emotional expression, physical interaction with the memorial). Where

The Tomb communicates a heroic ideology of patriotism, The Wall's significance

remains more mutable and directed toward sorrow and pity over heroic patriotism.

These memorials motivate and are motivated by different modes of

commemoration. Although both clearly center around the commemoration of sacrifice,

the manner in which each links that sacrifice to a national cause differs. The Tomb asks

us to honor the sacrifice by accepting it; the Wall asks us to honor it by questioning it.

John Bodnar, in *Remaking America*, argues, perhaps too neatly, that two cultural

discourses fight for control over a memorial's meaning in what he calls "the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions." For Bodnar, the "official" discourse belongs to national and cultural leaders, and the "vernacular" discourse belongs to what might be best summarized as 'the people.' Bodnar's formulation helps explain how the experience of these memorials, in relation to both personal and nationalist projects, vary.

The "official" discourse, or what others have called "the administrative version," of commemorating the dead of war tends to emphasize sacrifice in terms of bringing the past into the present as myth in order to guarantee the future of the nation (Haines 6). In other words, the dead return from where they never came (the heroic past) as insurance for the righteousness of the national project. I do not want to suggest that these warring discourses attach themselves neatly to the two memorials in question (i.e. The Tomb is to "official" as The Wall is to "vernacular"). Both can be ensnared in the official message: 'these memorials symbolize past and present sacrifices to remind us of the continuing necessity of sacrifice and vigilance for the preservation of freedom and future of this nation, etc.' And both can be read into the vernacular as well. However, The Tomb more readily accepts the structuring force of official discourse while The Wall has much of its genesis in the vernacular.

The Tomb opens itself to the official discourse partially because of its official look and placement, but also because the name Unknown is a kind of 'blank' name on which to write the unifying national message. In "The Most Important Monument," Ingersoll and Nickell, note that not only do Tombs of the Unknown exist in almost every Western nation, but that this particular Tomb of the Unknowns is located in a natural

landscape that, imbued with historical significance and intentional lay-out, "emerges as a heroic cultural diorama perceived to exist in the heroic simultaneity of patriotic time and space" (201). The Unknowns are situated in relation to other dead, both known and unknown, thus acknowledging sacrifice in terms of a "known and unfolding destiny of freedom liberty, and democracy" (201). Under that Name that is Not a Name, the Unknown lose their place in history, and enter into the national mythos as the sacrificial guarantors of that "unfolding destiny" (203).

The Wall, on the other hand, resists the official discourse. Where The Tomb stands as a monument to nationalist ideology, The Wall appears as a wound – a black gash in the earth. Where The Tomb's empty name, Unknown, can be filled with a nationalist message through the official discourse, The Wall's 58,000 names already lend it fullness. Its national message comes through other routes. Rather than as a monument, the Wall reads more like an itemized receipt of national debt; not the debt paid in heroic timelessness that guarantees the future, but the debt paid in historic time that calls into question that future. The only attempt to link the Vietnam Memorial to the "heroic diorama" along the Potomac comes from Frederick Hart's Three Soldiers – the realist sculpture added as a compromise for groups who argued that The Wall was unpatriotic and shameful – but Hart's Soldiers never have attained any real status as part of the memorial's commemorating power.

Of course, much what gives The Wall its power stems from the war it commemorates. Maya Lin wanted the memorial to be an 'apolitical' commemoration of a war so mired in political friction and moral ambiguity. The national divisiveness

stemming from the war already reduced the possibility of the memory of the war being part of the heroic national story. Even so, resistors to Lin's design called for a more patriotic and heroic memorial. These detractors called it too feminine, too shameful, too black, and too buried, among other things. While the memorial perhaps cannot shed politics completely, it is often viewed as therapeutic place, as a site of healing. The detractors were right insofar as the memorial is different from the surrounding white, phallic marble in Washington. As Catherine Howett notes, the therapeutic potential born out of Lin's elements of design emphasizes "individual deaths, not deaths in a cause" (7). The official discourse of the national "cause" does not have a ready inroad for gaining discursive control of the memorial. The 58,000 names at The Wall, despite their exhaustive specificity, create more ambiguity than the Unknowns. Again, because of the history to which it is tied, The Wall "implies some terrible questions" without offering an answer (Griswold 711). Through this ambiguity, The Wall is literally more accessible and interactive. You can walk along it, touch it, see yourself in its polished granite sheen. The reflective capacity of the memorial, both as a literal mirror and a place of questioning, brings viewers into a relationship with death. The viewer's reflection appears among the names of the dead forcing the viewer to read him- or herself into the text and, as Howett argues, "actively participate in the cultural memory of Vietnam even as the memory is produced" (9). "Each visitor," Haines writes, "must bring his or her *own* meaning to bear upon the names in granite, and each must see his or her *own* reflection – the self – among the dead" (6).

Furthermore, the names themselves, while etched in stone, are transportable. The rubbings done at The Wall give visitors a piece of The Wall, a name as an indexical token that carries with it The Wall's aura. This relationship to death, both public and private, arises out of a signifying process generated out of the name and the sacrifice that I will explore more fully in the following sections.

The Wall's funding, design, and visitor-ship give preference to a vernacular discursive power emphasizing the personal and private – the therapeutic – intentions of The Wall, but does not exclude it from being incorporated by a national mythos. As Haines argues, the memorial signifies, in general, a sense of loss for the dead, but also a "sense of reincorporation of the survivors" (4). The woundedness that The Wall represents creates a sense of gratitude to the dead and thus restores some sense of national unity. The ambiguity of the Vietnam War itself and The Wall's ability to cater to polyvalent interpretations of its meaning effectively naturalizes the Vietnam experience. As Griswold argues, "The [Wall] makes the loss of these individuals a matter of national concern." (709).

In The Name of the Name

This mechanism of sacrifice, which displaces violence onto the symbolic the very moment the symbolic is founded in that act of sacrifice, creates what Kristeva might call a thetic moment in which the signifying process guarantees itself – signs for itself – in order to institute itself. In keeping with one of the threads of this essay – the nationalistic power of the tomb – I want to link the founding institution of sacrifice discussed in the last section with the founding institution of nationhood. In particular, I want to explore

the name game operating within that sacred and founding document, the Declaration of Independence. This foundational naming process is continually replayed at the tombs.

Derrida, in "Declarations of Independence," posits that the Declaration of Independence is a performative utterance posing as a constitutive utterance. In this founding moment, as Derrida famously put it, "the signature invents the signer" (10). Like the founding sacrificial moment, the founding national moment theologizes its process, invoking the Name as guarantor of the Law. That instituting force is the name of the Father (here, both God and phallus); the best proper name to guarantee the institution being enacted. In a chain of metaphoric substitution posing as metonymic continuity, "Jefferson 'represents the 'representatives' of the people in whose name they speak, the people themselves authorizing themselves and authorizing their representation (in addition to the rectitude of their intentions) in the name of the laws of nature which inscribe themselves in the name of God, judge and creator" (12). In other words, the draftsman, Jefferson, represents the intentions of representatives who represent the intentions of the 'good People' that comprise the 'nation,' and those 'good People', whose goodness of intention is in turn guaranteed in the name of God, 'sign' the document that institutes (declares) the nation, without which there are no 'good People' to sign. Like the sacrificial mechanism at work in the foundation of culture, this founding moment displaces its 'lie' into the sacred and symbolic order at the very moment that order is instituted. The Name, in an "act of concealment," elides the rupture and commemorates its own cover-up.

These founding moments of sacrifice and naming that institute knowledge and subjectivity are restaged and repeated at the tombs. At the Tomb of the Unknowns, within its Name that is Not a Name (and therefore any name) we find the signature of the best proper name:

<div align="center">

HERE RESTS IN

HONORED GLORY

AN AMERICAN

SOLDIER

KNOWN BUT TO GOD

</div>

Here God, that "other subjectivity" (11) that came to sign the document, continues to sign. The Unknown *stands for* sacrifice in our name, for our name. The Unknown, with God there to sign for our good intentions, re-declares and reinstitutes the 'good People' in whose name this nation's existence is guaranteed. The Wall, too, with its many names, brings us into a relationship with the dead, as representatives, that re-sign the founding document. Despite the differences in the two memorials' modes of commemoration the simultaneous encounter with sacrifice and death brings us back into relation with the founding violence (death-self) and the founding document (nation-self)

Sad Hill, Again for the First Time

We do not arrive at Sad Hill to theorize film, but rather to allow film to theorize. Specifically, to see how film, and particularly this film, commemorates and en-crypts the generative, foundational, mythmaking power of the gravesite and, simultaneously, how it goes about de-crypting that commemorating power. In a sense, this paper is an attempt to

consider not only how this film pictures the tomb, but also to see the film itself as a tomb. *The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly* as a myth of a myth is a kind of empty tomb – the return of the Western from whence it never came. In 1966, before the American public fully realized what was happening in Vietnam, all the way from Italy, through the deserts of Spain and against the backdrop of the Civil War, the iconic Western comes bounding into America to give the Law of the West back to Hollywood.

Before the film brings Tuco to Sad Hill, earlier in the story, a driverless wagon filled with dead and dying Confederate soldiers recklessly traverses the desert right into the path of Blondie and Tuco. One of the soldiers, Bill Carson, in his final moments of life, imparts the secret location of a hidden treasure. He breaks the knowledge in half, telling Tuco which cemetery to go to and telling The Man With No Name (Blondie) which grave to seek. This broken knowledge – this *tessera* – binds Blondie and Tuco, the Good and the Ugly, in mutual dependence, insuring that any violence that might erupt over their shared desire for the gold is deferred until they arrive at Sad Hill.

By the time Tuco comes to Sad Hill, he thinks he has re-bonded the *tessera*. He thinks that Blondie has relinquished his half of the secret by revealing to Tuco the name Arch Stanton. As Tuco digs at Arch's grave, Blondie materializes, inexplicably, preceded by his shadow. The 'Bad' Angel Eyes arrives shortly after from that same mythic nowhere beyond the frame.

Throughout the film, all three men stumble into both sides of the Civil War. All around them the foundational and constitutive myth of the nation is being threatened. The 'good People' that 'signed' the founding document four score and seven ago, are at war

with each other. But The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly have not come 'to dedicate – to consecrate – to hallow' the dead at Sad Hill or any other dead and dying of this war. They are dedicated to the gold, not the reconstitution of the nation through the dedication of the dead. When Blondie uncovers Arch Stanton's grave we do not find treasure; we find the corpse of Arch Stanton, to which Blondie responds, "There's nothing there." This moment of de-cryption evacuates the gravesite of its symbolic power and lays bare the remains of death. 'Blondie,' who is now the sole keeper of the treasure-knowledge, now moves to restage the moment of mimetic desire. He says he will write the name of the treasure-grave on a stone. Whoever survives gets the stone and thus gets the gold.

Sad Hill transforms into a Greek amphitheater filled with an audience of the dead. The drama is staged as a triangular stand-off. The desire for the Other's desire takes the symbolic from of a stone and the promise of its inscription, but it is a stone that signifies nothing, a stone that (unbeknownst to Tuco and Angel Eyes) Blondie has left blank. Either all three men will shoot each other, effectively resulting in suicide. Or, two of them will gang up on the other one, effectively sacrificing one to ensure the survival of the others. 'Blondie,' though, has rigged the whole production. He has secretly unloaded Tuco's gun, making the showdown only between himself, The Good, and his monstrous double, The Bad. The protracted scene breaks down the men into their constitutive parts through an over-the-top, escalating sequence of close-up inserts timed to Morricone's score: faces, guns, fingers, eyes, guns, fingers, crotches, gazes, glances, twitches, squints.

The sum of all these looks and gestures does not add up to suspense so much as it adds up to pure style. The tempo increases, the frame closes in and then,

anticlimactically, Blondie dispatches with Angel Eyes, casually shooting him into a waiting grave. Blondie and Tuco – the Good and the Ugly – become the possessors (the stewards?) of the signifying treasure instituted only through the violent elimination of the third man – the Bad.

The tomb where the gold lies, it turns out, has no name, only "Unknown" marks it. Arch Stanton, that proper name, was the *arche* stand-in. The 'real' treasure is guaranteed only by The Man with No Name under The Name that is Not a Name. Tuco, the one who digs, tries illiterately to speak the name on the grave marker – "unk, unk" – but cannot, and so he decides that is no kind of name. Like the "nothing" that was Arch Stanton's un-incorporable corpse, "Unknown" remains inscrutable and ineffable. Of course, "Unknown" is a name of sorts. "Unknown" encompasses any name, every name. Hidden under the Unknown, the gold becomes Lacan's "signifying treasure." The gold is special; it embodies both abstraction and substance. Like the empty name under which it is buried, it can stand for any and every other thing, but it also maintains its own intrinsic value, its value as gold. For Blondie and Tuco, it is valuable unto itself most clearly, but concealed within it is the value of all the spent life buried around it.

In this way, the filmic American West, already an empty allegory of national myth, employs empty names to restage the substitutive and constitutive foundational moment of mimetic desire and sacrifice. This restaged foundational moment evacuates the tombs of their commemorating power and goes, instead, for the gold.

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If Michael J. Blassie signals the technological impossibility of being an Unknown Soldier and if Arch Stanton exposes the lie at the heart of mythologizing the dead of war, together they speak to the correlation between the modes of knowing and the modes of sacrifice incorporated under the banner of nationalism and residing in the unconscious. In the current era of indefinite detainment of and infinite war against "known unknowns" and "unknown unknowns" (to quote Donald Rumsfeld's epistemological thesis for the post-911 world), in which "the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence," do Blassie and Stanton, whose bodies became "nothing" and whose names became myth, help to de-crypt these emerging ever more abstracted modes of concealment?

I titled this chapter "Photographs and Other Tombs of the Unknown" because of all that is buried in the surface of things – in photographs, in monuments, and in names – or, to be more precise, because of all that we desire to bury in them. In a sense, all these surfaces, from Burrows to Blassie, are tombs of the unknown. Photochemical stock and polished granite don't tell us anything except what we would have them say. The treasure isn't there. They are screens of war, not so much because of what they display, but what they hide; not because of what is seen in them, but what is projected onto them. In the next chapter, I turn to the overwhelming spectacle of the Gulf War, whose screenic ecology generates some of the same myths, this time by covering over the physical surfaces of war with a fast and fleeting televisual deluge.

CHAPTER 2
Desert Screens & Desert(ed) Bodies: Traversing the Gulf, 1991

> In the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin. – Marshall McLuhan[31]

> Technology is our uniform. – Ernst Jünger[32]

> War stripped of its passions, its phantasms, its finery, its veils, its violence, its images; war stripped bare by its technicians even, and then reclothed by them with all the artifices of electronics, as though with a second skin. – Jean Baudrillard[33]

Media Ecologies of the "Luckiest Man": Borders and Gulfs

On January 30th, 1991, the late General Norman Schwarzkopf gave a long, now infamous press conference on the progress of American military operations in Iraq.[34] After talking his way through a number of charts, graphs, and maps detailing sorties flown, targets struck, and other operational statistics, he turned his attention to a television-set in the briefing room and began playing video montages culled from targeting-screen footage of bombing missions. After showing various targets demolished by precision bomb strikes in the first two video clips, Schwarzkopf perks up for the third clip, in which we are shown, through the crosshairs of a cockpit targeting screen, a car

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[31] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 47.

[32] Ernst Jünger, "Photography and the 'Second Consciousness': An Excerpt from On Pain," 1934. Trans. Joel Agee. *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989) 207.

[33] Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, 1991, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 64.

[34] My account of this press conference comes from CNN's coverage of the press conference (30 January 1991), which I viewed at the Vanderbilt Television Archive. ABC's coverage can be viewed in a YouTube series titled "1990-91 Gulf War briefing General Norman Schwarzkopf." For a report on the press conference see for example Edward Cody, "Allies Claim to Bomb Iraqi Targets at Will; U.S. Commander Says Opponents Not Giving Up," *The Washington Post* 31 Jan. 1991: A1.

crossing a bridge. The car reaches the other side just as the missile strikes and the bridge

explodes. The transcript reads:

> SCHWARZKOPF: "I am now going to show you a picture of the luckiest man in Iraq on this particular day…"

> [Members of the press chuckle as the video footage begins].

> SCHWARZKOPF: "Keep your eye on the crosshairs. Right there! Look it here! Right through the crosshairs!"

> [More laughter]

> SCHWARZKOPF: "And now, in his rear view mirror…"

> [On screen the bridge explodes just missing the car as it continues driving to the other side; the briefing room erupts in laughter]

> SCHWARZKOPF: "Stop the tape."

Figure 8. Schwarzkopf Press Briefing.
Youtube / ABC News.

The "luckiest man" press conference encapsulates what the 1991 Persian Gulf War looked like on the television screen. So many aspects of it are emblematic of the televisual illusion of the Gulf War: Schwarzkopf's swagger, his boyish eagerness to show-and-tell, what media theorist Susan Buck-Morss accurately describes as his "chauvinistic good humor," the chuckling press corps, the casual disregard for human loss, the pretensions of U.S. military supremacy, the rhetoric of righteous cause, and the self-congratulatory fantasies of heroic success (247). The briefing captures many of the key objections critics had of the mediation of the Gulf War: that the television coverage of the war created the illusion of a surgical, sanitized, bodiless war fought by machines; that it emphasized the destruction of the built environment and de-emphasized the loss of life; that the pictures of the war were so disjointed from the realities on the ground that the screen functioned as more of a wall than a window between the spectating public and the happenings on the ground. Indeed, the Schwarzkopf briefing shows all the ways in which television coverage of the war engaged in covering up and covering over the bodies of war, sanitizing it for mass consumption.

The briefing is among the many typical moments during the one thousand hours of Gulf War television coverage that, as John Taylor outlines in *Body Horror*, fetishized the machines and hid the bodies (163). The pleasures taken in the footage – Schwarzkopf's giddiness and the press corps' giggles – seem to celebrate a grossly inverse relationship between the glut of images and the scarcity of meaningful information and the correlating inversion between the thousands of people killed and the absence of those deaths from the visual record of the war. The briefing shows the ways in

which the Gulf came to represent more than a contested geopolitical region. It represented a negative space – a gulf – between optical reality and electromagnetic hyperreality; a gulf between the American war machine and the Arab other it manufactured for itself; a gulf between machines and bodies; between the screen and the senses; between the dead and the living; between the violent realities of war and their phantasmatic appearance on the screen; between images and flesh. In Schwarzkopf's press briefing we glimpse these many gulfs of the war, especially the distance established in the layering of screens upon screens and cameras upon cameras – what Jean Baudrillard called "the reality gulf" of the Gulf War.[35] The "luckiest man" traverses the surface of the bridge to the lens surface of the infrared targeting camera through the crosshairs of the cockpit targeting screen to Schwarzkopf's television screen into the ABC's live-feed cameras and disperses into living room television sets, and, throughout, it permeates the surface of human sensoria. We glimpse the overwhelming artificiality and pervasive sense of unreality that most cultural theorists of the Gulf War found so absurd and horrifying as they watched the war unfold.

In part, this prevailing sense of absurdity emerged out of the strange juxtaposition of materiality and immateriality in the Gulf. On one hand, the Gulf War represented one of the most massive military deployments of people and materials in history and, on the other hand, it represented the most fleetingly imagistic war ever. It was billed as the "Mother of All Battles" and yet it ended after one thousand hours of overwhelming and

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[35] See Jean Baudrillard's essay "The Reality Gulf" (1997).

lopsided use of military force.[36] It was a conflict, Paul Virilio argues, "that paradoxically

eluded everyone due to the lack of territorial scale matched by the immediacy of its

presentation in the media" (*Desert* 1). It seemed that everything, even for many soldiers

and journalists on the ground, was immediately distant or distantly immediate, which is

to say visually immediate and physically distant. Everything happened *elsewhere*, *right*

now.

Many rich analyses of the nature of the spectacle emerged out of these

juxtapositions and paradoxes of the Gulf War.[37] One predominant tendency among many

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[36] Translated from a speech delivered by Saddam Hussein Broadcast on Baghdad state radio, 17
January 1991.

[37] Media criticism of the Gulf War, though encompassing a wide range of positions, tactics, and
aims can, perhaps crudely, be characterized as exploring various combinations of three strains of inquiry:
questions about *the realities and virtualities of the image*, questions about *the technologies of the image*,
and questions about *the politics of the image*. Foremost among the 'realities and virtualities' theorists is
Jean Baudrillard (*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), who
argued, predictably, that the Gulf War was simulation *par excellence* and that we are beholden to the
simulation as the only available object of criticism because it veils us from any concept or experience of a
"reality" beyond it. Paul Virilio (*Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light*. New York: Continuum, 2002)
most directly engages the "technologies of the image" line of criticism with his phenomenological
approach to changing technological influences on human perception and experience of war. The third strain
of critics, who engage the politics of the image, often do so in opposition to the first two kinds of inquiry.
Most polemically and forcefully, Christopher Norris (*Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals &
The Gulf War*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), takes on Baudrillard's theorization of
the Gulf War as an opportunity to indict postmodern theory in general. Norris accuses Baudrillard of
intellectual charlatanism for his refusal to see the political and material realities operating beyond the
propagandistic spectacle of the Gulf War. Susan Buck-Morss's (*Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The
Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002)) critique of James Der Derian
(*Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed, and War* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992)) highlights disagreements
between Der Derian's Virilio-styled technological analysis and her own materialist/political approach to the
mediation of the war. She argues that Der Derian overdetermines the effects of technology on the
perception of war.

Later in this chapter I elaborate further on the work of Baudrillard, Virilio, and Judith Butler
("Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" *Critical Encounters:
Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing*, ed. Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch (New
Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1995)). My characterization here of critical approaches to the Gulf War stems
from these theorists as well as the others listed below. By no means exhaustive, the following list represents
often-cited works that provide an overview of the array of positions toward and arguments about the
mediation of the Gulf War: *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, ed. Susan Jeffords and
Lauren Rabinovitz (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994); Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*
(Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Kevin Robins and Les Levidow "The Eye of the Storm," *Screen* 32.2
(Autumn 1991): 324-328; *Postmodern After-Images: A Reader in Film, Television, and Video*, ed. Peter

critical theorists was to make the Gulf War exceptional – to see its mediascapes as indicative of new and changing modes of warfare, spectacle, and perception. To these theorists, the spectacle on television seemed to confirm the portents of the cybernetic theories of the 1980s. Modern war it seemed had become, as Donna Haraway once described, a "cyborg orgy" (8). Other critics, in contrast, downplayed the media-technological exceptionalism of the Gulf War. Instead, they viewed it as yet another iteration of age-old propaganda techniques that manufacture public consent through the creation of digestible narratives and plotlines with conveniently simple moral ends. For these theorists, the propaganda of the Gulf War was nothing new; it was merely newly adorned in high-tech modes of propagation.

Despite varying positions and tactics, the critical approaches to the war, whether ceding to the triumph of the illusion, cautioning against the uses and abuses of technology, or embarking on a Chomskyan effort to cut through the false consciousness and misinformation of the Gulf War, all, at some point, confront the intractable paradox at the heart of the Gulf War and its spectacle: the historical and material realities of the Gulf War can be neither entirely reduced to its spectacle nor entirely extricated from it. Faced with the philosophical dilemmas couched within the spectacle of a massive American military deployment that yet effortlessly floats and flickers, dreamlike, within the modest confines of the television screen, critics seemed dumbstruck by the prosthetic

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Brooker and Will Brooker, (London; New York: Arnold, 1997); Elaine Scarry. "Watching and Authorizing the Gulf War." *Media Spectacles*. ed. Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge) 57-73; John Taylor, *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe, and War* (New York: New York UP, 1998); Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester University Press, 1998); *Triumph Of The Image: The Media's War In The Persian Gulf, A Global Perspective*, ed. Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert Schiller (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

sensation of watching war unfold as a manufactured television event. Given this

unbearable lightness of watching, most critics struggled with a perspective of war that

confounds the nature of what is 'real' in war by maintaining an impossibly mediated

distance. In the televisual montage of map-like aerial and orbital views, sub-optical and

non-optical seeing machines provided estranging thermal, infrared, and other

electromagnetic images. The images appeared green, grainy, and rasterized. Those

'unnatural' images, combined with slick graphics and military B-roll assembled under a

regime of military censorship and self-censoring journalists, produced a seemingly

premeditated, manufactured television event – an event running parallel to, yet

incongruous with, "actual" events. Yet, despite the seeming incongruities, the images

were also, paradoxically, inseparable from the events. The screens through which we

watched the war were the same screens through which it was waged. Schwarzkopf's

briefing typifies the inseparability of the television from the mechanisms of destruction.

In a dramatic reorganization of perception, mass destruction and mass communication

became indelibly linked at the speed of light, creating an audience that watches the war

on the same screens through which it is waged. Our view of the "luckiest man" originates

from the same screen that the weapons system used to create the circumstances of his

"luck."

In his introduction to the "War" issue of *PMLA*, Srinivas Aravamudan refers to

this entanglement of weapons and images as "cameralistics" (1510).[38] Though he is

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[38] Aravamdan's neologism – which suggests a merging of the camera with the militarized
vocabulary of logistics and ballistics – seems to play off the "logistics of perception" that Virilio explores
in his prescient book *War and Cinema* (1984), in which he charts how camera technologies transformed the
modern battlefield from a theatre of warring objects into a cinema of warring pictures.

referring to more recent drone missions over Afghanistan and Pakistan, the term is just as apt in describing the events in Schwarzkopf's briefing room. The proliferation of "cameralistics" is part of the dramatically changing meaning of war in which, Aravamudan argues, "killing machines and human lifeworlds increasingly imbricate each other" (1512). This increasing entanglement of machine and human lifeworlds make up one of the central concerns permeating the theorization of the Gulf War. In *Desert Screen*, Paul Virilio, responding to what he saw as the unchecked dangers of Schwarzkopfian cameralistics, reiterates Susan Sontag's prescient call in 1977 for the creation of an "ecology of images" by concluding his analysis of the Gulf War with his own appeal for the creation of a "media ecology" (Sontag, *On Photography* 180; Virilio, *Desert* 43). To some extent, most critical theorists of the Gulf War, whether implicitly or explicitly, wish for or anticipate an ecology of media – a way to address the assemblages and interrelations of images, machines, and people within the military-industrial-media complex. While the aim of this chapter is not to put forth a systematic ecology of media, it does seek ways to address the Gulf War *ecologically* or more precisely to explore how different photographic, filmic, and literary images address *ecologically* the interpenetrations of imageworlds and lifeworlds of the Gulf War.

The medial gulfs we might perceive within the multilayered screens and cameralistics of Schwarzkopf's "luckiest man" are so many borders in what was ostensibly a border war. Among the many borders of the Gulf War, the colonially-drawn border between Iraq and Kuwait, upon which the Americans justified their use of force, was only one. Other technological and electronic borders both striated and enmeshed the

geopolitical, screenic, and corporeal territories of war, serving as liminal spaces of connection and disconnection between events-as-they-occurred and events-as-they-appeared. "The relation between organism and machine has been a border war," Haraway observed in 1985 (8). Now it had become a gulf war. This chapter addresses these contestable borders between the technologies and bodies of war by illuminating two particular borders: the skin and the screen. I am interested in how photographic, cinematic, and literary images and imaginings of the Gulf War attempt to negotiate the sometimes incommensurable, sometimes interpenetrable borders between bodies and machines, between place and displacement, and between the subjects and objects of war. The borders and gulfs of the Gulf War function as zones of both incommensurability and propinquity within the media-ecosystems of the war machine. They serve as sites of demarcation and division, on the one hand, and sites of imbrication and interrelation on the other. Given that these borders – the screen and the skin in particular – are at once the boundaries that map the terrains of war *and* the (inter)faces of complex assemblages and relations, the approach to the mediation of the Gulf War in this chapter is, in addition to being ecological, also cartographic. That is, this chapter maps, or rather seeks out the ways that images themselves map the multifaceted borders of the Gulf War from its landscapes to its bodyscapes to its mediascapes, and, furthermore, considers how these images theorize the autopoeitic interrelations – the ecologies – of matter-flows and data-flows that comprise the war machine. In brief, this chapter looks to images of the screen and the skin to explore how screens render the flesh of war and how skin renders the screens of war in their co-capacity as sites of obstruction and sites of transgression.

If Schwarzkopf shows us the sterile, bodiless screen-image that dominated the public spectacle of the war, this chapter in contrast, looks to images contaminated by flesh. In the next section, I turn to Judith Butler and Paul Virilio's reflections on the experience of image-events of the war in order to more fully sketch the modes through which lifeworlds and imageworlds imbricate each other, particularly through images that enact themselves upon the world. Then, through the lens of Steven O'Connor's *The Book of Skin*, I argue that these modes of interpenetration can be mapped onto and read through various interrelated figurations of the skin and the screen within the images of the Gulf War. Finally I trace these figurations of the skin and the screen through a collection of photographic, cinematic, and literary images of the Gulf War including Michal Rovner's reprocessed Polaroid pictures of live television events and Ken Jarecke's visceral war photographs of the carbonized flesh that littered the Basra Road; the bleached Ektochromatic vision of the Gulf War in the film *Three Kings*, where cameras follow bullets into bodies and organs; and, lastly, Anthony Swofford's memoir *Jarhead*, which constructs a vulgar and vulnerable masculine body of war. The aim of this chapter is to reconsider the fleshly surfaces of war that were elided on the targeting and television screens that dominated the war spectacle in order to elucidate the ecological relationships that shape the interactions between the bodies and machines of war. The skin and the screen are the relational surfaces upon which we can read the intersections of the actual and virtual, the visible and invisible, historical time and technologically compressed time, place and displacement, location and dislocation, materiality and immateriality. They open up ways to localize and imagine the relation between the human and the

technological that is pertinent not only to the pre-digital, video moment of the "luckiest man," but to the broader questions arising in the realms of media convergence, digital embodiment, and digital visual culture. In light of Schwarzkopf's "luckiest man," I turn in this chapter to more peripheral images and imaginings of the Gulf War in order to illuminate the medial borders of the Gulf War and to theorize the modes through which the technologies of war enmesh bodies and machines in reflexive relations.

As I have suggested, the methods at work here are controlled by two entangled metaphors: the cartographic and the ecological. Both help to envision the surfaces of a war that was dominated by distant, controlling screens. The cartographic view identifies the borders between media, technologies, and humans; the ecological view explores the interrelations between those borders. To attempt to address the complex autopoeitic assemblages of human, technological, and mediatic systems that comprise the war machine, is, in itself, to occupy a borderland – and a gulf. That is, we are engulfed by those systems. Despite the map-like views that dominated the Gulf War spectacle, our critical position cannot achieve such an objective, total view of medial relations lest we overlook a basic fact of technologically mediated perception: we are always already inscribed within media and that no theory of media ever rises above media. In the Gulf War, as is always the case, W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us, "we not only think *about* media, we think *in* them" (*Images Want* 215).[39] In other words, the map, in this case,

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[39] Throughout this section I rely on Mitchell to help frame my approach to the mediation of the Gulf War because amid the proliferating theoretical approaches to media in the digital age he presents a cogent perspective on the interrelations of technological media and human sensoria that works well in the context of the Gulf War. In both *Picture Theory* and *What Do Pictures Want?* Mitchell frames his approach to pictures and the technologies of picture-making as things that we not only address as objects of study,

encompasses the cartographer; the ecosystem includes the ecologist. Our critical position,

therefore, as Virilio and Butler will reveal, is situated within the ecology we seek to

elucidate. Thus, in contrast to Marshall McLuhan's famously ambitious intention to

"understand media," I would like to think instead, as Mitchell has suggested, about the

ways we "address" media and, in turn, about the ways that media "address" or "call out"

to us (207). The approach I take to the Gulf War images addressed in this chapter

borrows from the foundation of Laura Marks' haptic approach to visuality, which seeks

to "derive theory from the objects themselves rather than impose theory on objects" (xiv).

Or as Mitchell would frame it, to illuminate not only theories of pictures, but also

pictures of theory.[40] If we were to revisit the film theorist Stanley Cavell's famous

question about the nature of the relationship between technological and human-sensory

surfaces – *"What does the silver screen screen?"* – and revise it for the multitude of

screens in the Gulf War, what would we ask?[41] *What do all these screens screen?* Like

Cavell's silver screen, which "screens the world" from him, the screens of the Gulf War

perhaps screen the world *from* me. But they also screen the world *to* me and, moreover,

they *are* the world to me. This interpenetration of lifeworlds and imageworlds is the

foundation for the overlapping epistemological, ontological and visual crises of the Gulf

War.

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but that also address us. This shifting agency between subject and object – between addresser and addressee – suggests the kind of ecological relationships I am trying to explore in the mediation of the Gulf War.

[40] Throughout *Picture Theory* Mitchell plays off of the verb and noun forms of the word "picture" so that the picturing of theory and the theorizing of pictures become an entangled enterprise.

[41] "What does the silver screen screen? It screens me from the world it holds – that is, makes me invisible. And it screens that world from me – that is, screens its existence from me" (Cavell 24).

Given our immersed position, how do we begin to address autopoeitic systems that we can only observe from within? One particularly fruitful method Mitchell proposes for addressing the totality of media is to revisit the potential of systems theory – a theory rooted in ecology – which, he argues, provides useful ways to think through and about complex adaptive systems.[42] Media are both transmitters and habitats – both systems and environments – or as Mitchell describes, the things "*through which* messages are transmitted" and the things "*in which* forms and images appear" (208). Systems theory, with its dialectical approach to the relationships between marked space (system) and unmarked space (environment), accommodates the ability of media to operate as both systems and environments. In the context of the Gulf War, in which the spectacle itself was comprised of images and narratives that extolled the technologically advanced systems of the American war machine, systems theory becomes a fruitful way to ecologically conceive of the entanglements of image, machine, and flesh. As the 'luckiest man' reveals, the screens of the Gulf War functioned as both transmitters and habitats, simultaneously serving as the modes *through which* war was waged and the sites *in which* the war appeared. Systems theory, then, provides a basic framework for addressing the mediation of the Gulf War ecologically because it accounts for the dual capacities of the skin and the screen to serve as both the transmitters and the habitats of war.

One way to begin to explore a systems-theory view of media in the context of the Gulf War is to look to where natural habitats and medial habitats converged in the Gulf –

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[42] Though systems theory has been applied across a number of disciplines from natural ecology to business management to sociology, in *What Do Pictures Want?* Mitchell seems particularly interested systems theory's roots in the cybernetic theories of the 1960s and 1970s, namely the work of Ervin Laszlo.

to begin an ecology of images, in other words, with images of ecology.[43] The image of

the oil-soaked seabird, in particular, (which became a recurring visual trope in the

human-interest stories on the evening news during the war) came to embody the overlap

between physical lifeworlds and more mediatic ones. The oil-soaked bird has become a

symbol not only of the ecological crises that occurred in the natural habitats along the

Gulf coast, but also a symbol of a looming crisis within a media ecology. This bird – the

appearance of a creature helplessly drenched in a kind of inscrutable, viscous coating –

has become a Gulf War meme that finds expression not only in Jean Baudrillard's

comparison of those "sticky and unintelligible" birds to our own sticky and unintelligible

encounter with the war spectacle (32), but also, as we will see, in the interference created

by Michal Rovner's photographic manipulations, in the carbonized flesh depicted in Ken

Jarecke's photograph, in *Three Kings* when Troy Barlow is force fed oil during an

interrogation as a symbolic act of America's global consumption, and when Anthony

Swofford tries to make sense of the war through what he calls the "rather gooey" flow of

information (152). The oil-soaked birds on the nightly news represented not only a far-

away ecological disaster; they also embodied a kind of media coating that renders the

viewer just as helplessly immobilized. The debilitating gooey-ness that affects the birds

and the spectators alike is a surface problem. It is a second surface – a stubborn coating,

an interfering second skin. In essence, this chapter is about a surface problem – a

stubborn stickiness that interferes with sensorial and spectatorial capacities of the skin

and the screen, respectively. Like the seabird, the epigraphs that began this chapter –

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[43] For an exploration of the ecology of images and the images of ecology that focuses specifically on the images of oil-soaked birds during the Gulf War, see Andrew Ross, "The Ecology of Images," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 91.1 (Winter 1992): 215-238.

from Marshall McLuhan, the global villager; from Ernst Jünger, the fascist aesthete; and from Jean Baudrillard the pomo philosopher – suggest varied entanglements of technology and flesh. They offer up three configurations of machine-as-flesh or, perhaps, flesh-as-machine – mankind as skin, the uniform as skin, screen as skin – that touch on longstanding anxieties and dreams about the threats and promises of the technologization of the body and the corporealization of technology – the body extended, the body protected, the body penetrated, the body compromised, the body colonized, the body abandoned. The body, in other words, screened. Schwarzkopf's "luckiest man," too, serves as a kind of epigraph – one that, on its surface, elides these entanglements and hoists technology triumphantly over the "luckiest man" through a casual and unacknowledged distance. If Schwarzkopf showed us how to destroy a bridge, the images studied in this chapter, in contrast, attempt to build bridges, however tenuous, between the watchers and the watched, between the those who target and those targeted, and between the interconnected surfaces of humans and machines.

Screen & Skin: Relational Surfaces of War

As I argued in the previous section, an uneasiness permeates most theorists' encounters with the spectacle of the Gulf War. This uneasiness is tied an encounter with images that, more than representing war, help to enact it. The novelist David Foster Wallace once observed that the television viewing experience in general presents to the critical viewer all kinds of "existeniovoyeuristic conundra" (27). In her essay, "Contingent Foundations," Judith Butler delves into the conundra particular to Gulf War television coverage, which is made even more "existeniovoyeuristic" by its cameralistics.

In particular, she unravels a peculiar image-event in which she witnesses a "smart bomb" hitting its target via the bomb's onboard camera:

> Throughout the war, we witnessed and participated in the conflation of the television screen and the lens of the bomber pilot. In this sense, the visual record of this war is not a *reflection* on the war, but the enactment of its phantasmatic structure, indeed, part of the very means by which it is socially constituted and maintained as war.

The "smart" bomb camera, she argues,

> effectively constitut[es] the television screen and its viewer as the extended apparatus of the bomb itself … The smart bomb screen is, of course, destroyed in the moment that it enacts its destruction, which is to say that this is a recording of a thoroughly destructive act which can never record that destructiveness, indeed, which affects the phantasmatic distinction between the hit and its consequences. (221-222)

By distinguishing image-as-reflection from image-as-enactment, Butler highlights the "existeniovoyeuristic" – or what Paul Virilio more plainly called the "philosophically vertiginous" – conditions of perception during the Gulf War (*Desert* 45). For her, the conflation of the smart bomb camera and the television screen correlates with a conflation of the act of bombing and the act of viewing – a kind of potentially destructive spectatorship. The screen creates a sense of connection and conflation with the events of war as it simultaneously ensures Butler's disconnection and alienation from those same destructive events. The image becomes an event in itself, removed from yet part of events happening far away, right now. She suggests that, despite watching passively, she is drawn into participation in some way, at least in the sense that she passively watches a destructive act that, through its destructive power, erases its own destructiveness. Through her passivity she becomes tacitly conflated with the war machine because, while she cannot act, the image is enacting the destruction before her eyes – a state of what

Elaine Scarry called "fascinated immobility" (61). Butler occupies a temporal and visual

immediacy (she shares a duration and a perspective with the bomb itself) and a spatial

distance (she is safe at home in front of the television). For her, like many other theorists,

the spectacle of war had never appeared so immediate and ubiquitous and, paradoxically,

so distant and disconnected. There was little reciprocity between what happened on the

ground and what happened on the screen, yet the two worlds interpenetrated each other.

Timothy Druckery, in his introduction to *Electronic Culture*, argues, via Martin

Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture," that we might consider "the image not only

as a signifier, but rather as an event" (25). The destructive spectatorship Butler

experiences while sharing the perspective the smart bomb (the same camera that shows

the event also enables the event) lends concreteness to Druckery's abstract consideration.

The image, more than signifying an event, is itself an event, or at least inextricable from

the event – enacting the event – thus blurring any boundaries between image and event.

Yet, in another sense, the two events are quite distinguishable by distance, one happening

peacefully in the living room, the other happening violently in the desert.

Paul Virilio finds this blurring of screenic worlds and the physical worlds

extraordinary. Like Butler, he is disturbed by images that do not merely reflect

destruction but rather enact it. In *Desert Screen*, he turns to the emblematic machines of

the Gulf War – the F-117 stealth fighters –, which, by design, literally do not *reflect* (light

and electromagnetic signals). For Virilio, the F-117 physicalizes the enmeshing of the

real and hyperreal, where "the image dominates the thing" (111). It is the signature

machine of the Gulf War precisely because it has no signature on radar and thermal

screens; it is a representationally invisible object. It was designed just as much for the screenic world as for the physical world – it is bound to both the laws of electromagnetic representation and the laws of physics. As he observes, the aircraft's "form is linked not only to the requirements of movement in space but also to the requirements of its remote representation" (45). He concludes that this condition, in which "the remote image of an object has an effect on the object itself," is "a very important event in the history of the image" (45). Virilio and Butler both address images, or are addressed by images, that blur the borders between the realities and virtualities of war – between the watching of war and the enacting of war.

The stealth fighter's taking-place in the world is linked to its not-taking-place on the screen; the taking-place of the smart bomb in the world is linked to its taking-up a different, screenic place in the living room. Given these varieties of taking and not taking place, it is worth revisiting the contentious title of Baudrillard's Gulf War commentary *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place (Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu)*. Despite the obvious arguments against a literal reading of the title ("Of course it took place!"), the title and the subsequent claims of the book raise interesting questions about what it means, in screenic terms, to "take place." More than signifying "to happen" or "not to happen," to ask whether the Gulf War "took place" is to question the modes of occupying space and time in the material world against the modes of occupying space and time in the simultaneously occurring screenic world. For Baudrillard, the only course of inquiry is to question the reality (or unreality) of the spectacle itself because any notion of a reality beyond the simulacra of the television is rendered inaccessible by those very same

processes of simulation. But what "takes place" on television in Butler's living room or aboard Virilio's F-117 are both instances of a taking-place that paradoxically does not take place – the smart bomb explodes, but not in her living room, and the stealth jet appears in the sky, but not on the screen. What Baudrillard only suggests, Virilio and Butler confront more directly: the paradoxical inter-actions of materiality and immateriality that "take place" in the gulf between *being present there now*, in the Gulf, and *being represented here now*, on the screen. For Virilio, this mutually assured enactment of the world on the screen and the screen on the world is "true tele-action" – "the establishing of the interactivity of the partners in war: those actually making war, and those watching it *at the same time as their counterparts*" (*Desert* 56). "The remote interaction of a being at once absent and acting (teleactive)," he writes elsewhere, "redefines the very notion of *being there*," and, I would add, redefines the notion of *taking place* (*Sky* 131). Where Baudrillard might argue that we were cut off from any reality of the war beyond the simulations on the screen, Virilio would insist that events on the screen "loom up" into events in reality (*Sky* 131). Despite Baudrillard's provocative title, it is not simply a question of whether the Gulf War did or did not "take place," but a question of the possibility of "taking place" at the intersection of the world and the screen. The concept of "taking place" is loaded. It carries with it the sense of happening (as an event), substituting for (taking the place of, in *lieu* of), and, in a colonial sense, conquering territory and people (literally *taking* the place). What kind of place, then – what kind of *milieu* – is the screen? What "takes place" there? What does it "take the place of"? What place does it (over)take? Both Butler and Virilio convincingly argue,

perhaps with more nuance than Baudrillard, that the screen does not merely "take the

place of" (substitute itself for) the world. Rather, the screen is part of the world,

interacting with and enacting what "takes place" in the world. Its relationship with the

world (of the Gulf War) is one of continuity (metonym) not substitution (metaphor).

Furthermore, the screen also "*takes* place" in the colonial sense – it overtakes the events

of optical reality. It usurps the present, actual taking-place of the world in favor of a

distant technologically mediated taking-place.

<div align="center">•   •   •</div>

However bodiless the screens of the Gulf War appeared, the screens of war are

inextricable from the bodies of war. They assemble, arrange, filter and expose the bodies

occupying both sides of the screen, putting the lucky and the unlucky, the spectator and

the spectacle, the one targeting and the targeted into relations that are neither entirely

based in the material world nor entirely based in the virtualities of the screenic world. In

the ensemble of image-flows, data-flows, and matter-flows that comprised the Gulf War,

the screen and the skin serve as two mediating membranes – two interfaces – within that

assemblage of war. They are two surfaces of war capable of being both porous and

impermeable, both intelligible and inscrutable. They are surfaces of war upon which we

read the interpenetration of the material world and virtual world – what N. Katherine

Hayles describes as the "the entanglement of signal and materiality" (Druckery 15), or

what Virilio calls the sites of "passage from something material to something that is not'"

(Friedberg 184). The screen and the skin are two boundaries that adjoin the many terrains

of war and organize the perception of war by mapping the relations between materiality

and immaterality, mobility and stasis, reality and virtuality, subject and object, human

and machine, self and other, life and death, desire and destruction. They are the surfaces

of complex assemblages of human, geographic, and technologic interrelations couched

within the war machine. The screen and the skin are sites of protection from and exposure

to the war machine. They are engaged in the dual-function of damming up and flowing

forth, of sealing-off and seeping-out.

In *The Book of Skin*, a cultural history of skin, Bruce Connor unfolds the links

between the medial functions of the screen and the skin, arguing that they both serve as

membranes of passage and obstruction: "if the skin is a screen and a filter, it is also the

medium of passage and exchange, with the attendant possibility of violent reversal or

rupture" (65). He characterizes the human senses as "milieux, or midplaces where inside

and outside meet and meld" and concludes that "the skin is the global integral of these

local area networks, the milieu of these milieux" (Connor 27). If, for Connor, the skin is

the midplace of midplaces – an integral borderland – the screen, he argues, serves a

similar function "as a separating membrane, screening out unwanted stimulus and

marking the point of defining interface between the user and his or her object" – a

function which "yield[s] to a much more complex interimplication of the user and the

used" (68). For Connor, the skin is a screen and the screen is a skin. Both skin and screen

function as boundaries that mediate media and mediate each other. The interpenetration

of these two surfaces, of course, has a history of inducing anxiety about human and

technological limits. One need only turn to popular cinema for expressions of this

anxiety. As countless critics have pointed out, films like *Alien* and *Videodrome* explicitly

explore these liminal anxieties, where the flesh is both comprised of and penetrated by inorganic and extra-organic life. These films explore a condition in which, as Connor argues, "the skin is no longer primarily a membrane of separation, but a medium of connection or greatly intensified semiotic permeability, of codes, signs, images, forms, desires" (Connor 66). These anxieties of the flesh are present in the imagination of the Gulf War as well. Instead of *Videodrome's* technologically integrated flesh – a hybrid substrate, both video and flesh – the anxiety represented by the Gulf War spectacle is the disappearance of any substrate altogether (whether fleshy, geographical, or photochemical) leaving in its absence a seemingly immaterial, impermanent, and frenetic image-event dispersed across and held episodically in the light of screens. Instead of Max Renn's cry in *Videodrome* – "Long live the new flesh!" – an equally sinister image condition emerges from the Gulf, not of a horrifyingly integrated "new flesh," but a terrifyingly disconnected fleshlessness – not a medium of connection but a ubiquitous disconnection that is yet visually immediate and present.

So why seek the flesh within the fleshless Gulf War spectacle? In part to re-articulate and re-member the disarticulated and dismembered bodies of war, but also because the cybernetic fantasies of warfare that were played out in the Gulf, paradoxically, spawn new fleshly, analogue experiences and forms. Michal Rovner's photographs of televisual images, reprocessed to the point of inscrutability, Jarecke's detailed photodocumentation of the carbonized flesh of Basra Road bombing victims, David O. Russell's bile-spilling scenes of bullet-punctured organs, or Swofford's bodily exposure to the natural and unnatural elements in the Iraqi desert: they all imagine and

reenvision embodied experiences and forms in the light of (in all senses), and sometimes

in despite of, the hegemonic screens of war. If the war machine builds itself out of

hardware, software, and bioware – innovations in the hardware and software also entail

innovations in the bioware (the human components). The machines of war not only give

rise to new forms of embodiment and embodied experiences – those of the screenic,

consisting of the photographic, cinematic, and literary reimaginings of the body – but

they also create new kinds weaponized and victimized bodies – screened as such and also

masked via the screen. The photographic, cinematic, and literary images discussed in the

following sections work to reclaim the bodies that were elided on the screens of the Gulf

War spectacle. They look to bodies as surfaces upon which the Gulf War does, in fact,

"take place."

Decoy & Decay: The Photographs of Michal Rovner and Ken Jarecke

Here are two photographs depicting Gulf War bodies.

The first, *Decoy #1 (Man One)*, an abstract figure of a man with raised arms, is a

photograph from artist Michal Rovner's (Israeli, b. 1957) *Decoy* series, which is

comprised of Polaroid photographs of television images that are then re-photographed,

enlarged, and re-colored.[44]

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[44] During the Gulf War, Rovner used a Polaroid camera to take photographs of television news reports as she watched the coverage from her apartment in Manhattan. She then enlarged and colorized the photographs, which rendered the subjects as abstract figures often appearing blurred and shadowy in strange landscapes.
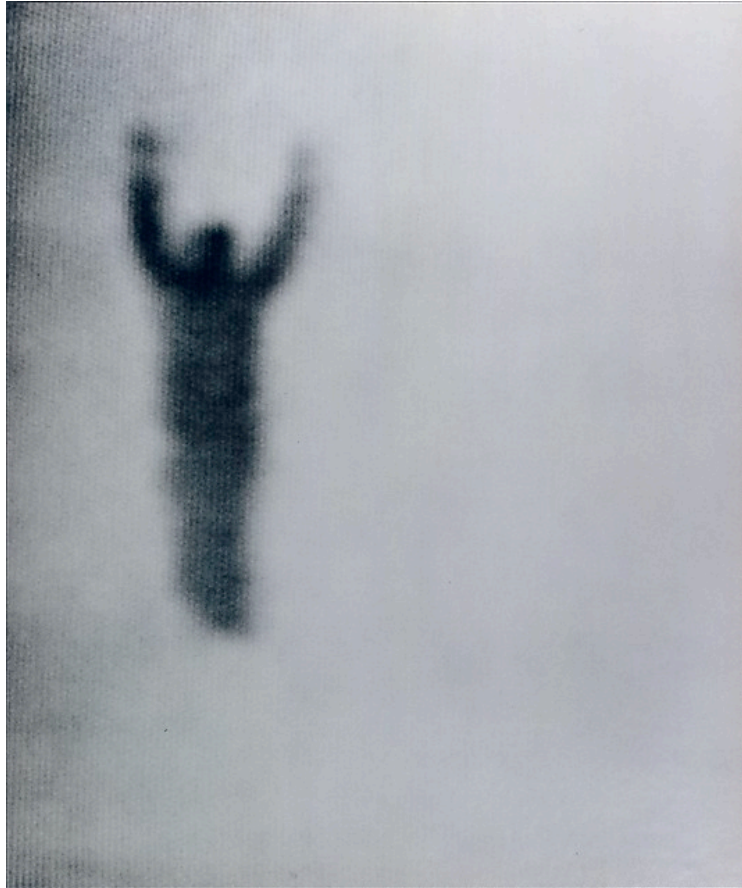
Figure 9. Decoy #1 (Man One). © 2013 Michal Rovner.
Courtesy Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The second photograph, taken by photojournalist Ken Jarecke in the wake of the

"Highway of Death" massacre along the road to Basra, which the *Observer* later

captioned as "The Real Face of War" when it published the image on 3 March, 1991,

captures the carbonized remains of an Iraqi man seen through the blown out windshield

of the jeep in which he was retreating from Kuwait when American A-10s

indiscriminately firebombed the 1000 vehicle caravan on 27 February, 1991.

Figure 10. Highway of Death. ©Kenneth Jarecke. Courtesy of the photographer.

Few iconic photographs emerged from the Gulf War. One method of sanitizing

war is to avoid the intractable existence of photographs in favor of more quick and

ephemeral images. The spectacle of the Gulf War was a brief and assimilable collective

fantasy comprised of fleeting televisual images that displaced the possibility of a lasting

collective memory and pacified the threat of contingency. Photography, in contrast,

retains in its surface both a potential foundation for collective memory and a haven for

contingency. The Gulf War, like the campaigns in the Falklands, Grenada, and Panama,

as John Taylor demonstrates in *Body Horror*, centered around "making heroic bodies

appear while emphasizing the clash of machines" (177). In the effort to avoid "Vietnam

Syndrome," the Gulf War became an exercise in image regulation and control.[45] As the previous chapter attests, the cultural memory of the Vietnam War is stained in part by the disarticulated and dead bodies that persist in photographs: the naked, napalmed girl, the street-side execution of a Viet Cong man, the My Lai massacre, the wounded soldiers and civilians, and the body bags. The cultural memory of the Gulf War, in contrast, is a predominantly stainless collection of aerial images, maps, and machines inserted into a narrative of unambiguous military triumph.

In a war that systematically overlooked and obscured the bodies of war, save for the "heroic" bodies of soldiers, Rovner's decoy man and Jarecke's carbonized man, alternatively, introduce two distinct ways of witnessing the bodily surfaces of the Gulf War: one that foregrounds the interference of media and one that attempts to circumvent it.[46] Rovner's artistic creation upends our expectations of traditional war photography while Jarecke's documentary record relies on those expectations.[47] Both photographs raise similar questions about the taking-place of the Gulf War that permeates the theories of Butler, Virilio, and Baudrillard discussed in the last section. In particular, they explore the interactions between the skin and the screen as two of the primary surfaces upon which war 'takes place' and introduce themselves as a third surface: the photograph. They reimagine, photographically, the body as surface.

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[45] See Michelle Kendrick's "Kicking the Vietnam Syndrome: CNN's and CBS's Video Narratives of the Persian Gulf War" in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, edited by Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994).

[46] See John Taylor, *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe and War* (New York: New York UP, 1998) for an excellent analysis of the kinds of bodies that are hidden and revealed in war photography.

[47] In general, war photographs are expected to provide a sense of authentic presence, documentary evidence, aesthetic humility, and a brutal, un-tampered-with visual record. Though many war photographs technically fail to meet these criteria, the successful ones at least *appear* to meet them. Rovner's photograph undoes these expectations and Jarecke appears to meet them.

Rovner, sitting in her New York apartment, taking Polaroid snapshots of Gulf

War news coverage on her television, creates an indeterminate image that echoes and

even amplifies the indeterminacies of the screen images she captures. The distant,

fleeting television image, already rendering the body through layers of screens, becomes,

through her photographic manipulations, even more reprocessed, retouched, and

reframed. Her photograph depicts a bodily figure even more inscrutable and abstract than

the one that first appeared on television. Jarecke's iconic and controversial photograph, in

contrast, belongs to a more traditional kind of war photography. It documents in graphic

detail the destruction, death, and chaos of war as written on immolated flesh and metal.

Operating outside the official press pool, Jarecke provides a picture of the body that

stands in stark contrast to the disembodied spectacle exemplified by the Schwarzkopf

press briefing that began this chapter. Operating out of her apartment in New York,

Rovner creates a parodic vision, in which bodies don't stand in contrast to, but rather in

exaggerated imitation of the disembodied spectacle of the Gulf War.

What are the differences between Rovner's photographic stills of 'virtual' events

on television and Jarecke's photograph of the aftermath of the 'actual' events of the Basra

Road Massacre? How does each photograph place (or displace) the body? Or, in more

Barthesian terms, how do they *pose* decoy man and carbonized man?[48] And how do they

pose us in relation to them? How do they pose the body in war? How does Gulf War pose

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[48] Roland Barthes argues, "what founds the nature of Photography is the pose" (*Camera Lucida* 78). He meditates on how one poses for photographs and, at the same time, how one is posed by the photograph. This arresting quality of the photograph is, for Barthes, one of its key separations from cinema. Photography poses and cinema passes. Here it is worth quoting an excerpt from a long, yet elegant sentence in *Camera Lucida*: "in the Photograph something *has posed* in front of the tiny hole and has remain there forever (that is my feeling); but in cinema, something *has passed* in front of this same tine hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images: it is a different phenomenology, and therefore a different art which begins here, though derived from the first one" (78).

the body to Rovner and Jarecke? How, in other words, do these photographs enter the

economy of posing, composing, and decomposing bodies of war? This section explores

the ways in which Rovner's decoy man and Jarecke's carbonized man pose the bodies of

war to us (as photographs) and pose us toward the bodies of war (as spectators). Rovner's

and Jarecke's photographs place the body and place us in relation to the body through

different photographic negotiations of location and dislocation, composition and

decomposition, and manipulation and documentation. In doing so, decoy man and

carbonized man introduce a different picture of the Gulf War that troubles the cavalier

spectatorship surrounding Schwarzkopf's luckiest man.

If, as Virilio has argued, we were all "*a hostage of the televisual interface*" during

the Gulf War, Rovner's decoy man, arms raised in surrender, encapsulates that condition

in a single photograph (*Desert* 21). Her photograph appears on the cover of Barrett

Watten's prose poem *Bad History*, a text that intermingles the events of the Gulf War and

the L.A. riots within the consciousness of the narrator. The poem opens with an

unacknowledged reference to Rovner's image:

> A bad event happened to me, and now I understand it occurred only there and
> then. But it was the continuous, circling treadmill of its displacement for a very
> long time, brought to a single image – obscured, interfered with, reprocessed at a
> third remove over remote-control channels of communicative links – that got me
> to say this. (9-10)

Watten has argued elsewhere, in a review of the *Decoy Series*, that Rovner's work

begins with the premise that "where unthinkable events are concerned, interference is as

much a form of knowledge as clarity would be" (*Artweek* 14). The knowledge embodied

by Rovner's decoy man is not the knowledge of facts – not the statistics and numbers of a

Schwarzkopf press briefing. Rather, decoy man presents the obstructed view itself as a kind of knowledge of war, as a way of seeing how we see war. In *Bad History*, Watten seems to borrow that premise for his approach to the over-mediated events of the early 1990s. If, as Watten suggests, Rovner's photograph captures the "treadmill of … displacement" that permeated the television cycle of the Gulf War, that displacement – that dislocation – starts with the artist's own predicament on that treadmill. Even more acutely than Judith Butler beholding the smart bomb in her living room, Rovner felt dislocated by the television (Rovner 34). The war threatened the security of Rovner's family in Israel. She found herself relaying real-time reports from CNN to her parents in Israel from her apartment in New York. Her spectatorship – one of temporal immediacy and spatial distance – was both fascinated and anxious, both amazed and devastated by the alienating prosthesis of the technologically mediated spectacle.

Rovner engages the fascination and anxiety that attended the spectacle of the Gulf War by parodying its images. Rovner's *Decoy* photographs comment on the televisual decoys that occupied the 24-hour news cycle during the Gulf War. By reprocessing and reframing the televisual image, she adds layers of interference to an already interfered image. The result is an image that exaggerates and thus foregrounds the pervasive sense of disconnection between images and their purported referents already at work in the televisual images of the Gulf War. Decoy man does not convey anything in particular; rather he surrenders to a vague vision of war. Like the televisual image that is at its core, it does not furnish a picture of war, only a picture of a picture of war. Rovner caricaturizes the dominant image of the Gulf War and thus calls attention to it not merely

as a false impression, but as a decoy luring us toward a spectatorial trap. Unlike

traditional war photography, which, as in the case of Jarecke's photograph, seems so

present at the scene, whose power comes from the being-there of the photographer,

Rovner's images are photographs of photographs of television screens. This removed,

layered, and distorted view echoes the immediacy-at-remove that was the Gulf War on

television. Decoy man calls to mind Laura Marks' comments on the haptic quality of

undefined images:

> An image that is grainy, indistinct, or dispersed over the surface of the screen
> invites a haptic look, or a look that uses the eye like and organ of touch […]
> Because it does not rely on the recognition of figures, haptic looking permits
> identification with (among other things) loss, in the decay and partialness of the
> image. (105)

In this sense, Rovner's decoy is also about decay – not the bodily decay of Jarecke's

carbonized man so much as the decay that haunts all technologically reproducible

images.

If Rovner's decoy man conveys a sense of dislocation, Jarecke's carbonized man

is grounded in a sense of location. Jarecke was among a number of photojournalists

operating outside the bounds of the official press pool who captured the aftermath.[49]The

many photographs taken of the "Highway of Death" received very little media attention

save for Jarecke's, which was published in both England and France in the days

following the massacre. It has become perhaps the most iconic photograph of the Gulf

War. The antiwar group *Refuse and Resist*, as part of a protest funded in part by Kurt

Vonnegut, projected it on the side of U.N. headquarters and onto the walls of CBS, ABC,

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[49] See also photojournalist Peter Turnley's superb and devastating photographs of the same
massacre in *The Unseen Gulf War*, which can be found at digitaljournalist.org.

and NBC in New York (Briemberg 350). Tony McGrath, picture editor at *The Observer*,

defended his editorial choice to be the first to publish what he describes as "not an easy

picture":

> It's the first picture of any serious description of death in the war. The function of the picture is to say, war is disgusting, humiliating, and degrading, and diminishes everybody … There were 1400 vehicles in that convoy, and every picture transmitted until that one came, two days after the event, was of debris, bits of equipment. No human involvement at all…it could have been a scrapyard … So many of the pictures we've seen from this war have been frivolous, some rather macho – preening and strutting. But this was altogether different. It was a terribly difficult picture to take, because you're so close to voyeurism, but I think it worked. ("Publishing" 4)

Jarecke's photograph does, as McGrath worries, present to us the risk of mere

voyeurism, but it also provides a record of a kind of bodily disarticulation that was absent

from the Gulf War spectacle and, as McGrath points out, absent even from other pictures

of the "Highway of Death" that came across the transom. The bombs dropped along the

highway became an unnecessary and terrifying kind of camera whose flash captured

bodies, stilled them, and cooked them. That Jarecke in turn captured the aftermath may

be a kind of voyeurism, but certainly not any worse than the sanitized spectacle that

sought to elide the aftermath. Where the Gulf War on television called for casual glances,

Jarecke's carbonized man demands a sustained look. It pictures the body, not the

machine. Its view is not from some impenetrable altitude; it is on the ground. It has

propinquity to the flesh and to death. The surface of the photograph is the emulsified

index of this carbonized flesh; the flesh, in turn, is the index of the bombs.

• • •

Rovner's and Jarecke's photographs envision the modes (and are among the modes) through which the bodies of war are composed and decomposed. Both photographs hold in common inscrutable flesh. From different perspectives and toward differing effects, they both picture unrecognizable bodily surfaces. Like the image of the oil-soaked seabirds, Rovner creates and Jarecke documents "sticky and unintelligible" bodily surfaces. Jarecke's photograph tries to remove the coating and reveal the "reality" of war beyond the screen – to show the body. Rovner, on the other hand, illuminates the coating itself. The inscrutability of Rovner's photograph results from the screen, while Jarecke's results from the skin. Rovner's decoy man is blurred first by the distancing perspective of the screen, then by her own manipulations. The unreadability of Jarecke's carbonized man, in contrast, results not from the distancing view of the screen but from an intimate photographic view of immolated flesh. Rovner's photographs render the body inscrutable while Jarecke photographs inscrutable bodies.

In Rovner's image we experience the lure of the decoy and in Jarecke's, the allure of the decay. Rovner's decoy draws us toward danger – it represents a vague and permanent threat – while Jarecke's documentation of decay details the destruction. The former's image of potential violence conveys a kind of terror while the latter's image of the effects of violence conveys a kind of horror. The blurry fabric-like texture of Rovner's decoy calls us to decipher the various threads of interference while the harsh wax-like disfigurations of Jarecke's decay draw us into a study of its intractable detail.

As Rovner intentionally obscures and Jarecke faithfully preserves the world before the lens, they not only elucidate the compositions and decompositions of the bodily surfaces of war, they also relay two distinct senses place in relation to the screens of the Gulf War.

The photographic apparatus takes an instant of past time, frames it, preserves it, and carries it into the present. The photograph is the record of what "takes place" in front of its lens. To "take" a picture, then, is to capture what "takes place" in an instant in front of the camera and grant it a more durable existence that "takes the place of" the moment in the world that created it. Photographs, both analog and digital, owe their existence to the having-been-there of the camera and to the taking-place of the world before the lens.[50]

Both Rovner's photo-manipulation and Jarecke's photo-realism rely on this photographic capacity to automatically and faithfully document the reality in front of its lens – to map one piece of the visible world onto another whether or not that piece of the world is a moment on television or a corpse in the desert.[51] Rovner exploits and Jarecke preserves this photographic capacity.

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[50] A note on indexicality: Analog photographs, because they are concrete and continuous with the world seem, perhaps, (given their indexical ties to the world) more reliable, more direct, and more auratic. Digital photographs, on the other hand, seem, perhaps, less tangible, less reliable, and more prone to manipulation because they lack such indexical links to the world. They are discrete from and discontinuous with the world. But, as I hope to demonstrate through the Abu Ghraib photographs in the next chapter, the power of photographs, whether digital or analog, are derived not from the extent of their indexicality, but, I argue, from the having-been-there of the camera – what Barthes deemed the photograph's "certificate of presence" (87). Whether emanations of light from the world are imprinted on a photosensitive substrate or translated into data by a charge-coupled device, the basic fact of the having-been-there of the camera is arguably the most important factor in shaping the unique representational power of the photograph.

[51] I am borrowing language from Timothy Binkley's illuminating essay, "Refiguring Culture," on the material and operational differences between analog and digital media forms. "Consider photography as a function which maps one piece of the visible universe onto another" (Binkley 111).

Like all photographs, they present an intractable reality; "the referent" as Roland

Barthes would say, "adheres" (5-6). This basic photographic fact permeates both

photographs: their *having-been-there* (whether elsewhere, in front of the television

screen, or there, along the road to Basra). However, where Jarecke's photograph

documents what has "taken place," Rovner documents what has not, at least literally,

"taken place," but instead, captures that which flickers and floats episodically on the

television screen – that which "takes place" *elsewhere*. If Jarecke's photograph is the

record of *having-been-there*, Rovner's is the record of *having-been-elsewhere*. For

Rovner, a sense of dislocation stemming from screen image pervades her photograph.

Jarecke's photograph, however, conveys a sense of location – a sense of being there – in

spite of and in opposition to the dislocating power of the screen. It is through their

respective relationships to *elsewhereness* and *thereness* and that Rovner dislocates and

Jarecke locates the bodies of the Gulf War.

Whether "there" or "elsewhere" – whether located or dislocated – both

photographs oppose the *here-now* of the televisual perspective by imposing what Barthes

described as a "funereal immobility" on the frenetic images of the Gulf War (Barthes 5-

6). Rovner's photographs bring a funereal immobility to the glut and flow of the

television screen – they literally immobilize the images on television. Jarecke captures

the already funereal, already immobile scene of carbonized flesh along the Basra road.

But what they capture and how they capture it differs. Rovner captures a passing

televisual image – already a mediated image. Her photograph is an image of an image.

The adhering referent is a referent of a referent. Its link to the world has already been

framed, edited, and manipulated before Rovner ever snapped a Polaroid. Decoy man is born of the world of images; carbonized man births an image of world.

Rovner's referent – decoy man – perseveres in the photograph (despite Rovner's and the television's interference) as a vague body whose form nonetheless dominates the photograph like a terrifying blotch. The referent in Jarecke's photograph – carbonized man – adheres seemingly unobstructed and unmeddled with (save for the intervention of framing, filters, f-stops, and film speeds). Where decoy man struggles to emerge from the fog of copy-loss, carbonized man appears as a direct transaction between the camera and the world negotiated by light. In an act of creative destruction, Rovner, through her photographic interventions, decomposes the decoy man. Jarecke, by contrast, provides the record of an act of destructive creation. He composes a photograph of a decomposed world.

Rover's *Decoy Series* reminds us that all photographic images, in a sense, are decoys and that they all, in a sense, also represent the decay of the *pastness* they carry with them in their ephemeral surface. They hold what Mary Ann Doane in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* argues is the "threat and lure" – the decoyness – of contingency that generates in the viewer the "fascination and anxiety" that attends looking at them. Rovner's manipulated photographs announce themselves as decoys and so, paradoxically, they don't work as decoys. Rather, her images are about decay – the decay inherent in technologically mediated perception. In the case of the Jarecke photograph, however, where we are faced with a blunt picture of brutality and death (the ultimate contingency), the fascination and anxiety of contingency is foregrounded. The

conditions of its production are concealed in the unconscious of the image and it presents

itself as the world it captured, making it a perfect decoy. The viewer confronts the dual

pleasure (both of fascination and anxiety) of beholding such a gruesome and final

spectacle intractably present in the photograph. "There is the satisfaction of being able to

look at the image without flinching," Sontag once reminded us. And "there is the pleasure

of flinching" (41). Carbonized man – a photographic decoy – encourages both the

satisfaction of not flinching and the pleasures of flinching. Ironically, Rovner's decoy is

an image of decay and Jarecke's decay is a decoy image.

'Infected Pockets of Bile': Piercing the Body in *Three Kings*

If Rovner and Jarecke show how war is imprinted on the surface of the body, the film

Three Kings shows how war penetrates the body. From the very first line of *Three Kings* – "Are

we shooting people or what?" – the film foregrounds the act of shooting – both film and bullets –

and in doing so brings a self-conscious and critical view to the distant and sanitized perspectives

that dominated the mediation of the Gulf War. The film opens not with the aerial and orbital

view that characterized Gulf War coverage; rather, it begins on the ground. Before the first

image illuminates the screen we hear the sound of boots in the sand. The war has just ended, the

movie has just begun and Troy Barlow (Mark Wahlberg) stops running as he spots an Iraqi man

atop a distant sand berm. He looks over his shoulder back at the other soldiers, back toward the

film crew, and back at us, asking,

"Are we shooting people or what?"

Off screen, another soldier bounces the question right back to Barlow: "Are we

shooting?"

"I don't know," Troy impatiently snaps back, "that's what I'm asking!"

The camera pans quickly across a bleached out desert landscape and zooms in on two more soldiers nonchalantly milling about – one trying to help the other get a piece of sand out of his eye. Everyone on the patrol is preoccupied – either negotiating stray specks of sand or reluctantly sharing chewing gum. An air of indifference meets Barlow's question. The camera pans back to him and then peers down the sights of his gun. Through the sights we see an Iraqi man waving a white flag in one hand and gripping an AK-47 in the other. Barlow fires a single shot that whizzes across distance landing with a thud into the neck of the Iraqi. The previous indifference of the other soldiers turns to excitement. They all rush over to the berm where the Iraqi bleeds to death.

"I didn't think I'd get to see anyone shot over here," one of them exclaims.

Someone snaps a photograph, Barlow averts his eyes. The opening credits roll.

Barlow/Wahlberg seems to simultaneously ask if the war is over ("are we shooting people or what?") and if the film has begun ("are we shooting, people, or what?"). They are ground soldiers who didn't get to do any shooting in an air-dominated war; they are actors who have begun shooting a movie. The initial shot is the initial shot. From the first scene onward, in almost every moment of shooting, the film concentrates on singular bullets and singular durations, as if to remind the viewer that we are indeed shooting.

Three Kings is a farce that is part moral coming-of-age story and part caper. Just days after the official ceasefire, four American soldiers – Archie Gates (George Clooney), Troy Barlow (Mark Wahlberg), Chief Elgin (Ice Cube), and Conrad Vig (Spike Jonze) – plot to steal

millions of dollars worth of stolen Kuwaiti gold hidden in Saddam's bunkers using a map they found hidden on an Iraqi POW. In the midst of their thievery they bear witness to Saddam's brutal suppression of the Kurdish rebellion. This awakens their moral outrage – both at Saddam's brutality and the U.S. government's broken promises to the Kurds. The four soldiers decide that in addition to stealing the gold they will help the Kurdish rebels reach safety across the Iranian border.

Three Kings is among only a handful of big-budget films (including *Jarhead* and *Courage Under Fire*) to be set in the context of the Gulf War. Like *Courage Under Fire* (the *Rashomon* remake in which certain events that took place in the Gulf War must be reassembled from the unreliable narrative fragments of various eye witnesses), *Three Kings* also takes place after the war has ended. A similar untimeliness also permeates the film *Jarhead* (which is based on the eponymous memoir discussed in the next section). It takes place during, but away from the action of the Gulf War. The Gulf War is over before the Marines in *Jarhead* know what has happened. It's as if Gulf War films cannot find grounding in the evanescence of the Gulf War's televisual spectacle and must instead seek a setting away from or after the action.[52] What Virilio called "the tyranny of real time" prevailed in the Gulf. Film seems to find purchase only outside the purview of such a tyrant. Thus *Three Kings* conveys a sense of being out of time: the war is over, it's too late.

Before the film begins the following message to the audience appears: "The makers of Three Kings used visual distortion and unusual colors in some scenes of this

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[52] The made-for-TV HBO film *Live from Bagdad* is an exception as it takes place in the milieu of the 24-hour news cycle of the Gulf War.

film. They intentionally used these unconventional techniques to enhance the emotional intensity of the story line." Shot on hypersensitive Ektachrome stock and developed through a bleach-bypass process, the Gulf of *Three Kings* appears in high-contrast clarity with bright colors and washed-out whites. Where Schwarzkopf's Gulf was comprised of the green-toned, grainy, and rasterized images that inspired Michal Rovner's photographs, *Three Kings* pictures the Gulf in gritty hypercolored crispness. It stylizes the Gulf in a way that isn't "derealized" like the targeting screen, but rather over-realized.

As the four soldiers drive toward Karballah to steal the gold, they pass the time by shooting Nerf footballs out of the air. Shooting the footballs seems to satisfy their desire to shoot since they never got the opportunity to shoot during the war. Gates, the war-weary special-forces veteran, realizing that the rest of the men don't harbor the self-control and maturity that the heist requires, pulls the humvee over to the side of the road for a little pep talk. Trying to temper their unbridled and ignorant lust for violence, Gates walks them over to a carbonized corpse buried in the sand. He reminds the men that "we dropped a lot of bombs out here." As he points to the corpse, he seems to suggest an answer to the film's opening question: it appears that we are in fact shooting people. The camera shows the corpse's face frozen in agony and then cuts to the charred severed hand beside it. Both of these shots quote directly from two photographs by Peter Turnley, a photographer who, like Jarecke, captured the devastation of the "Highway of Death."

The jocular mood among the men turns more somber. Their encounter with the roadside corpses signals the beginning of a moral awakening for the soldiers, who wished they'd seen action, but ended up watching the war on CNN like everyone else. Gates

hopes that the corpse will make the other men see the war differently from the slick

spectacle that currently structures their knowledge of the war. The immolated corpse

signals the beginning of their emergence from the Plato's cave of the Gulf War – but at

the expense of the carbonized other in the sand, who can no longer speak.

Vig's initial disgust at the sight of the corpse disperses quickly and he once more

bemoans the fact that he has not seen any action. He enthusiastically exaggerates the memory of

Barlow's shot at the opening of the film. The film flashes back to the first scene only this time, in

Vig's version, the Iraqi man's head pops off and flies into the air in a fountain of blood. Vig

cherishes this memory cinematically as the only proof that he has in fact been to war. "It was

badass!," he recalls. Gates continues his attempts to temper Vig's raw desire to shoot by

lecturing the men on the physiological effects of gunshots on the human body. Here the film

doesn't just imagine the bodies that were absent from the television. As if trying to undo the

impossible distance of the television images of the war, the camera follows the bullet into the

body. It answers the aerial view with an organ-level view. Gates points an imaginary finger gun

at Barlow and fires. The camera follows the imaginary bullet into Barlow's gut and then cuts to

an interior view of the body that shows a bullet slicing through organs as bile fills the cavity. The

imaginary sequence ends with a reversal. The imaginary bullet retreats out of the body and back

to Gates' imaginary gun. Gates reminds the soldiers and the filmmakers: "No unnecessary

shots."

Figure 11. *Three Kings.* © 1999 Warner Brothers Entertainment, Inc.

The bullet and camera that enter the body in this scene is not computer generated. Rather the filmmakers borrowed technology developed at UCLA Medical School that records the insides of cadavers to study how the body reacts to different traumas like gunshots. The cadaver is shot by an actual bullet penetrating actual organs. Shot at a high frame rate, the camera captures the bullet's path.

Three Kings in general, and the cadaver scene in particular, remind the viewer that it was not the technological conditions of "virtualization" that made the spectacle of the Gulf War appear so false and empty. *Three Kings*, like the television coverage and targeting screens, is also in the business of virtualizing the war. Instead of grainy aerial views it uses gut-level views. Instead of colorless images, it utilizes an Ektachromatic palette that could only be an effect of film, not of any "natural" mode of vision. Both the war spectacle and the film spectacle reach beyond any kind of ocular reality – in the former the body disappears in the distance of the image; in the latter the image enters the body. The difference between the televisually mediated vision of the Gulf War and *Three Kings*' cinematic reenvisioning of it is not the virtualizing

forces of technology, but rather the extent to which they project and reflect the body as a surface

of war.

The Body as Screen: Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead*

Christopher Norris, in *Uncritical Theory*, his polemic against Baudrillard, identifies

a common theme among the first-hand accounts of the Gulf War:

> the curious sense of not really having experienced these events at all, but having
> witnessed them only at a distant remove where 'reality' could scarcely get into
> conflict with the steady stream of images, war-game scenarios, media liaison
> exercises, and so forth. (122)

Norris, in this case, seems to be in support of Baudrillard, not against him, for he

suggests that, even for soldiers and reporters on the ground, the Gulf War did not seem to

"take place." The soldiers in Three Kings depict this sense of disconnection. At one point

Vig says, "The only action we saw was on CNN." This sense of disconnection also

pervades Anthony Swofford's Gulf War memoir Jarhead. For him, the surface of the war

isn't the television screens of Schwarzkopf's briefing room or of Judith Butler's and

Michal Rovner's living rooms. The surface of the war is Swofford's body, there, in the

Gulf. Yet despite his physical presence in the desert, his thereness, he remains,

paradoxically, dislocated. He doesn't seem to be in a war so much as on the margins of it.

The war does not "take place" for Swofford, at least not in the mother-of-all-battles way

that he and his fellow Marine's both desire and dread. He is close to the war, yet it

remains distant.

As the subtitle announces, *Jarhead* is "a Marine's chronicle of the Gulf War and

other battles" and Swofford builds this chronicle out of an inventory of bodily fluids

(sweat, shit, piss, semen, blood, both withheld and spilled), of sand (blown around, dug into, and trudged through), of profanity, and of intermingled moments of boredom, anguish, joviality, rage, loneliness, and self-mutiny (2). Like Tim O'Brien's Vietnam in *The Things They Carried*, where soldiers' experiences were defined by the stuff they humped and the terrain they traversed, Swofford's Gulf War is mediated not by illuminated screens, but screened through the material minutiae and residua of everyday life in the desert. From the beginning of the book, we come to know Swofford as a hypermasculine "I" that is constructed out of the activities of his eyes and his body. This "I" aims to penetrate others and attempts (but ultimately fails) to stave off the penetrations of others. Swofford's chronicle of the Gulf War is constructed out of a particular way of seeing and embodying the war, a particular way of being an embodied eye/I of war. He becomes a kind of screen that shields and projects itself in the desert Gulf. He screens the Gulf War, not in the far-off modes of Schwarzkopf's briefing-room TVs, but in an ocular, physical reality on the ground where war is mediated by even the sand itself. As the narrative moves through the screenings of Vietnam War films to the homoerotic rituals of the Marine Corps to the harsh environments of the desert to an encounter with the carbonized corpse of his enemy, Swofford's experience in the Gulf is tied to his body, the sensorium that mediates it. If Jarhead is meant to recount the poverty of Swofford's spirit, that poverty begins in a vulgar and vulnerable body of war, what Elaine Scarry called the "incontestable reality of the body" (Swofford 3, Scarry 130). His body – and, more precisely, his body-ego – constitute a desiring-machine that both serves

and resists the larger war machine that consumes it.[53] A hyper-masculine yet vulnerable

body that desires to penetrate surfaces – to fuck and kill – and obsessively shields itself

from those same penetrations. Like Klaus Theweleit's Freikorps men in Male Fantasies,

the desire of Swofford's Marines is structured by the threat of penetration: to avoid

spilling over (bleeding, dying, getting fucked, exposing their vulnerability) they dam

themselves up with both physical and psychic levies as they aim to spill others.[54]

Through a vulgar and profane performance of masculinity they code themselves as

impenetrable. They display themselves as shielded surfaces – as screens. "Through

profanity and disgrace," Swofford argues, the Marine communicates "the truth of his

being" (52).

From the start, Swofford's world is structured by a sexually aggressive, violent way

of seeing. His eyes and those of his fellow Marine scout/snipers aim to penetrate and to

conceal behind their aggressive gaze any hint of vulnerability and fear. To gear up for the

coming war (which they imagine will be epic), the men watch Vietnam War movies

including Platoon and Apocalypse Now. They bask in the "magic brutality" of the films

(5). War cinema serves as a kind of pornography that prepares the men for their first war

experience – their "real First Fuck" (7). The war movies, as Swofford observes, are a way

for them to "get off on the various visions of carnage and violence and deceit, the raping

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[53] The body-ego perhaps more accurately denotes the interpenetration of the psychical and corporeal experiences of war that Swofford represents in *Jarhead* – an embodied inner experience of war. Moreover, I find the screenic qualities of Freud's concept of the body-ego apt in the context of Swofford. Freud says that the body-ego is the projection of a surface. "The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body" (Freud 20).

[54] The militarized masculinity that Swofford depicts in *Jarhead* echoes the fascist construction of masculinity that Theweleit so brilliantly and devastatingly captures in his psychoanalytic account of the formation of the fascist psyche in *Male Fantasies*. See in particular the chapter "Male Bodies and the 'White Terror'" (143-270).

and killing and pillaging" in preparation for their own entrance into war (6). Here, even before their deployment, Swofford constructs a voyeuristic, cinematic way of seeing that finds pleasure in war. As Stacey Peebles observes in "Lines of Sight," her exploration of the illicit visual pleasure that marks Swofford's memoir, the Vietnam war films (in spite of their often anti-war message) allow Swofford to "visually penetrate the spectacle on-screen and take pleasure in its offerings without being vulnerable himself" (1665). Swofford is an eye/I that desires to inflict a violent line of sight on the world in order to avoid being inflicted upon.

As a scout/sniper Swofford considers himself the "eyes" of the battalion commander (190). His job is to hide and watch and perhaps kill – he is an unseen seer, a lethal voyeur. Like the voyeuristic pleasure he takes from watching "war porn," the ideal wartime situation for a sniper such as Swofford is one in which he can penetrate the world and avoid discovery. The scope of his purview is the scope of his weapon.

He is an obsessed eye. He fantasizes about the "pink mist" of blood and brains that signals a successful kill shot or "medulla shot" (70). He mythologizes an enemy he's had no contact with into a worthy adversary. He regales himself with sniper legends of bullets that go through the scope and into the eyeballs of enemy snipers. He is haunted by nightmares of getting shot in his own eye and seeing through that missing eye the bullethole in the eyeglasses he wore as a boy. He mythologizes himself as "Death from Afar." Swofford's entangled pleasure and fear stem from the fantasies of dreams and films and are intensified by the machinery of war (namely guns). Like the Freikorps men, Swofford desires to unify his body with the war machine – "to move beyond himself,

bulletlike, toward an object that he penetrates" (Theweleit 179). The unknown, unseen enemy becomes that object. He is fascinated by his rifle's potential to do what he cannot: "discharge and still remain whole" (179).

But all his heroic fears and all his masculine performances are rendered impotent by a war machine that doesn't need him. When the moment comes for him to finally exercise the precise artistry of "one shot/one kill" an unnecessarily blunt airstrike is called in to take out the two men that were his target. Instead of the neat lethality of his eye and rifle, the messy work of bombs from the sky does the job. Thus, even though Swofford was in the war and part of it, he is left to conclude that he has "remained a spectator" (231). He is just an eye.

He is also just a grunt. His body is a grunt body that must bear the brunt of the harsh world it occupies. In contrast to the sanitized aerial views that dominated the spectacle of the Gulf War, Swofford occupies a dirtier world that is on the ground and in the ground. He must undertake the Sisyphean task of digging into the sand. His digging is perpetual as the sand he removes falls back into the hole. Furthermore, his digging is without purpose as it has no strategic value in a war being waged from on high. There is "no getting out of the land…the desert is in us, " he realizes (15). For Swofford, the material reality of the sand becomes the medium of the Gulf War that is more tangible but no less obfuscating than the images flickering by on television back home: "the shipped sand means you must move that sand again, as though through this thankless action you might know each particle personally, as though because you now actually live inside it, you must care about this most unstable material or medium that will make futile

all effort or endeavor" (177). The media ecology in which he operates is comprised of his literal surroundings.

The vulgarity and vulnerability of this hypermasculine grunt body is most clearly defined in the book's "Field Fuck" scene. Swofford and the other Marines in his unit are ordered to play a game of football in their MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) suits and gas masks as a spectacle for reporters (21). The MOPP suit, which is designed to protect soldiers in the event of a biological attack, is a second skin – one that, for the news cameras, shows off their impenetrability, their immunity to deadly attack (if they can play football in 110-degree heat in these suits, imagine all the killing they can do in them). But the reality is that the suits are defective, torn, broken, and compromised. This game of football, for the soldiers playing it, only reminds them of how vulnerable they are. "I'm fucking dead already," one of them yells trying to use his faulty hydration system (20). The MOPP suits – like the oil-soaked birds – are a coating of interference. They create a sense of dissonance among the soldiers. While showcasing their impenetrability to the news media, they are only further reminded of their vulnerability. Feeling that their situation is fucked, Swofford and the other men begin trying to fuck their way out of it. The football game disintegrates into chaos until all of them take turns at simulating the rape of scapegoat victim they've chosen from among themselves. This is what he terms the "Field Fuck:" a performance of penetration – a simulated gang bang – that functions as a way to compensate for all the ways they could be penetrated. "The exhilaration isn't sexual," Swofford insists, "it's communal" (21). He then embarks on a two-page litany of all the things they are fucking through the Field Fuck, which includes

but is not limited to George Bush, CNN, all the world's televisions, unfaithful wives, peaceniks, Communists, their own fear and boredom, and all the hometown girls they wanted but never had.

This performance of both aggression and vulnerability embodies Swofford's experience of war a never "takes place." The Marines have trained him to see the world through a sexualized and militarized gaze – a damaging concoction of sexuality and violence in which Swofford must objectify his enemy from a voyeuristic distance. The kind of gaze laid bare at Abu Ghraib during the Iraq War, where cameras became implements of torture in a sanctioned program of total humiliation. This intoxicating blend of sexuality and violence begins to unravel for Swofford, and from this unraveling, Swofford draws his authority to speak. As Peebles rightly observes, "Swofford claims his right to speak on the basis of … erosion of agency rather than its development" (1667). The "enemy," for Swofford, is an object of his imagination built constructed from films, dreams, training, and propaganda – an object to be eliminated. This object, too, begins to unravel when he encounters the corpses of firebombed Iraqi soldiers. Ironically, his first "real" encounter with the objectified "enemy" as objects – as corpses. One corpse sits in a jeep immolated and carbonized exactly like the massacred body along the Basra Road in Jarecke's photograph. Swofford describes his communion with the carnage:

> We stop for a water break. A few feet behind me a bombed jeep sits on the road. A corpse is at the wheel, sitting erect, looking serious, seeming almost to squint at the devastation, the corpse's face not unlike our faces – what has happened? ... Men are gathered dead around what must have been their morning or evening fire. This is disturbing, not knowing what meal they were eating. I am looking at an exhibit in a war museum. But there are no curators, no docents, no benefactors with their names chiseled into marble…The man to my right has no head. To my left, the man's head is between his legs, and his arms hang at his sides like the

burnt flags of defeated countries… It would be silly to speak, but I'd like to. I want to ask the dead men their names and identification numbers and tell them this will soon end. They must have questions for me. But the distance between the living and the dead is too immense to breach. I could bend at the waist, close my eyes, and try to join these men in their tight dead circle, but I am not yet one of them. I must not close my eyes…I feel as though I've entered the mirage. The dead Iraqis are poor company, but the presence of so much death reminds me that I'm alive, whatever awaits me to the north. (222-224)

Of course, it is too late to speak. Swofford has stumbled into one of Jarecke's photographs – a museum of death, as he suggests, impossible to curate or comment on, permanently what-has-been. The carbonized bodies are the only material remainder of what was previously, to him, only an intangible enemy. Unlike Butler's experience of the smart bomb view from on high, which troubled her because it was an omnivoyant, alienating erasure of the other, Swofford encounters the ineffable and unspeakable inscribed on the flesh of the other.

For Swofford, the screens of the Gulf War were corporeal and immediate; the screens of war were the skin he was in and the skin on which the effects of war were written. His was an embodied war that was nowhere to be found in Schwarzkopf's briefing room, where the highly visible General in fatigues, on television, standing in front of a television, hosted the first heavily televised war. In that briefing room, all of the black and blank screens of the Gulf War – the black oil, black smoke, and blackened flesh – were superimposed by a shining spectacle that was emceed by a commander whose name literally translates as "Black Head." For the charred corpses in Jarecke's photograph and in Swofford's war, the irony is too much. They became invisible screens in a six-week blitzkrieg in which the most powerful military in the world, according the Schwarzkopf's obituary in the New York *Times*, "overwhelmed a country with a gross

national product equivalent to North Dakota's," and in which, "Iraq's bridges, dams and

power plants had been all but obliterated and tens of thousands of its troops killed

(compared with a few hundred allied casualties)."

It's absurdly good television, though.

CHAPTER 3
Picture Torture: Abu Ghraib and the Frames of Digital Photography

No one can commit photography alone.   – Marshal McLuhan

I know it looks bad.   – Sabrina Harman

INTERVIEWER: The Interrotron? Did you make up the name?
ERROL MORRIS: No, it was named by my wife…She liked the name
because it combined two important concepts – terror and interview.

Framing the Photograph

If anything was exceptional about the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib, it was

not the abuses themselves, it was that they were photographed. In fact, as more and more

evidence has surfaced about how the administrations of George W Bush and Barack

Obama have respectively engineered and suppressed the knowledge of a global regime of

torture and detainment, we are reminded how easily torture can become standard

operating procedure. The practice of torture is rarely a state of exception; rather, it is a

calculated expression of state power. And contrary to ideals and values professed in its

name, the neo-liberal democratic state is not immune to such expressions of power.

Although the apparatus of detainment, rendition, and torture was justified through a

rhetoric of 'crisis' and 'exception,' and implemented in the name of 'security,' its

practice was calculated, programmatic, and indefinite – it unfolded logically, not

barbarously. The Abu Ghraib photographs show us a glimpse of the modes of torture and

violence that operate beneath the civil veneer of liberal virtues and in the name of those

virtues. "And here we have to see – as Adorno cautioned us," says Judith Butler in

Frames of War, "that violence in the name of civilization reveals its own barbarism, even

as it 'justifies' its own violence by presuming the barbaric subhumanity of the other against who the violence is waged" (93). The very fact that so many images surfaced and that even more remain classified speaks to the mundane nature of the events of torture and the ubiquity of photography.

If the state's calculated torment of the body – its inscription of power upon the surfaces of the indefinitely detained bodies at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere – is not itself exceptional, the photographs depicting it are. They are exceptional because they both furnish proof of torture *and* serve as one mode of its application. That we know anything of the atrocities at Abu Ghraib is owed to the fact that they were photographed, but at the same time, that the atrocities depicted happened in the first place was in part because a camera was present, because the abuses were done "for the pictures." The photographs are entwined with the acts they depict. "The horror of what is shown in the photographs," Susan Sontag observed in "Regarding the Torture of Others," "cannot be separated from the horror that the photographs were taken." Therefore, understanding Abu Ghraib entails understanding its photographs. The photographs serve as both the evidence *and* the crime – they document the torture *and* they were central to its staging. The camera was among a collection of what Jasbir Puar, in her biopolitical survey of the Abu Ghraib incidents, calls "shaming technologies" that "function as a vital part of the humiliating, dehumanizing torture itself" (31). The camera joined other shaming technologies including stress positions, waterboards, sexual acts, forced nudity, fists, leashes, hoods, collars, dogs, boots, boxes, wires, shackles and handcuffs that helped to stage the grotesque tableaus of Abu Ghraib. In this context the camera became an "adjunct

weapon" in what Joseph Pugliese termed the "geocorpography" of Abu Ghraib, where, he

argues, the abused and detained bodies of prisoners "became metonymic adjuncts of the

external terrain of Iraq's territory to be raped, mutilated … conquered" and, it should be

added, humiliated (4, 14). Though the abuses were committed in the name of intelligence

gathering, they also occurred within a larger framework of sexual humiliation, which,

despite any claims to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), security, or liberation,

seemed to be the dominant theme not only of Abu Ghraib, but of the spectacle of the Iraq

War in general – from the Shock & Awe prelude to the "Mission Accomplished" photo-

op to the broadcasted medical examination of the captured Saddam Hussein.[55]

The complicated entanglement of photography and torture at Abu Ghraib is

evident in the public outrage it generated. Much of the public outcry seemed, at times, to

displace the reality of Abu Ghraib onto the photographs themselves, as if, again in the

words of Susan Sontag, "the fault or horror lay in the images, not in what they depict"

(Sontag). Moreover, the photographs have also come to overshadow all the crimes that

are *not* depicted at all – all the abuse and torture not occurring within the purview of the

camera and all the pictures that have not seen the light of day. The public was invited to

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[55] See John Limon, "The Shame of Abu Ghraib," *Critical Inquiry* 33: 543-572. Limon argues that the United States' attempt to afflict shame upon Iraq also exposes America's own culture of shame: "My argument will be that America is engaged in the dispensation of shame, which requires at least an intuition of what it means for the United States, not only Iraq, to be a shame culture" (546). He examines the influence of Raphael Patai's *The Arab Mind* on the policies and practices that were meant to exploit Iraqi shame culture (544). Slavoj Žižek, taking a more Freudian approach, also considers the disguised American shame at work in Abu Ghraib. In "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib" (published in *In These Times*, 21 May 2004), Žižek writes, "If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq were the "unknown unknowns," that is, the threats from Saddam whose nature we cannot even suspect, then the Abu Ghraib scandal shows that the main dangers lie in the "unknown knowns" – the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values" (Žižek).

see the atrocities of Abu Ghraib as an aberration, not standard operating procedure.[56]

Rather than garnering outrage toward the calculated use of torture throughout the theater

of the "war on terror," the photographs came to limit the outrage to what was framed

within them and to their very existence as photographs. Indeed, at the end of the day, the

crime for which the "seven bad apples" of Abu Ghraib were punished was photography –

both taking and being in photographs – not for acts of torture.[57] The MPs involved in the

scandal were punished for humiliating the United States with photographs, not for the

humiliation perpetrated on the prisoners. The events of Abu Ghraib created a reciprocal

tided of shaming in which the humiliators were humiliated. Meanwhile the countless

other crimes including the murder of a detainee by OGA (Other Government Agencies)

personnel during interrogation have gone un-prosecuted.[58]

The special relationship that the Abu Ghraib photographs have to the events that

they depict – that they were taken by the perpetrators, that they added to the humiliation

being perpetrated upon the prisoners, that they serve as evidence of the atrocities

committed – raises important questions about how we address and are addressed by

practices of torture and by the photographs that point to acts of torture. The Abu Ghraib

photographs alter the way we frame our understanding of torture and other forms of state

violence both within and beyond the walls of Abu Ghraib as well as the way we frame

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[56] See Butler, *Frames of War*, 40-41 and Žižek, "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know," for good summaries of government officials' public reactions to the Abu Ghraib photographs in which the disgust is directed at the homosexual nature of the pictures rather than the systematic torture and abuse.

[57] See Morris's New York *Times* blog entry "The Most Curious Thing," 19 May 2008.

[58] A key fact explored in Errol Morris's documentary, *Standard Operating Procedure,* which will be discussed more later in the chapter, is that Sabrina Harman was prosecuted for taking photographs of Manadel al-Jamadi's corpse, but the CIA agents (Mark Swanner in particular) who were responsible for his death during interrogation have remained unprosecuted.

photography itself. The question of torture and the question of photography become interrelated at Abu Ghraib where the torture frames the photograph and the photograph frames the torture.

In her recent endeavor to trace the connections between the visual and political regimes of war in *Frames of War*, Judith Butler argues that the framing of torture and the framing of photography at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere affects and is an effect of the larger frames of the Iraq War. Butler contends that "war is framed in certain ways to control and heighten affect in relations to the differential grievability of life" (26). In other words, the framing of some lives as grievable (and thus recognizable) and the framing other lives as ungrievable (and thus unrecognizable) is central to the practice of war. "Such frames," she says, "do not merely reflect on the material conditions of war, but are essential …to that material reality" (26). For Butler, then, cameras are among the technologies that shape the literal, discursive, and symbolic frames through which war acts on the senses (51-52). Thus, like the dialectic of borders and gulfs at work in the media ecology of the Gulf War discussed in the previous chapter, Butler's concept of the "frames of war" is an attempt to draw out both the links and gaps between bodies, machines, and images that shape both the practice of war and the possibilities of resistance to it. Hearkening back to her Gulf War critique of smart bomb cameras, she links the operation of cameras at Abu Ghraib to the operation of cameras as part of the bombing apparatus, concluding that "there is no way to separate, under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates and which rationalize its own operation" (29). The Abu Ghraib photographs, which both enabled and

documented abuse, seem particularly emblematic of the kind of co-constitutive framing

that Butler identifies as the inseparability of material realities and representational

regimes of war. This inseparability is the work of the screenic. Not only does

photography frame torture and torture frame photography, but the photographs, which

were not meant to be seen, also impose on and augment the frames of war. On one hand,

the Abu Ghraib photographs play a dominant roll in framing not only torture, but the Iraq

War in general. On the other hand, they disrupt the frames of war – the photographs, in

their capacity to show *what has been*, reveal a grievability and thus recognizability to

lives that were previously ungrievable. In framing the war, they alter the frames of war.[59]

From this context, wherein torture and photography are co-framed, this chapter

begins an investigation into the permutations of "picture torture." This is not to equate the

very real torture of bodies with the symbolic "torture" of pictures, but rather to suggest,

first, that our picture of torture is already framed by various cultural, legal, and political

modes of "disciplining the photographic image" (as Tom Gunning puts it) (43) – modes

of contorting them to various purposes as evidence, icons, propaganda, and truth claims –

and, secondly, that our picture of torture, in this instance, is bound to photographs that are

themselves tortured, or rather tormented, even haunted, both by their collusion with the

acts they depict and by all the crimes of Abu Ghraib and elsewhere that remain unseen by

the camera. This chapter seeks to elucidate how the lens-based practices at Abu Ghraib

and throughout the theatre of the Iraq War functioned as "shaming technologies" that

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[59] The argument I am making about the Abu Ghraib photographs via Butler's *Frames of War*, it should be noted, is not a causal, technological-deterministic one. The cameras and image-making practices at Abu Ghraib, the pornographic and colonial gazes they engender, and their digitality are not the *cause* of the actions at Abu Ghraib, but rather deeply embedded instruments of both the epistemological and ontological conditions of Abu Ghraib.

frame war through practices of (sexual) humiliation and how those images are resituated

through cinematic and artistic practices that seek to redraw and disrupt the frames of war.

In particular, I am interested in two works – filmmaker Errol Morris's Abu Ghraib

documentary *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008) and Iraqi-born artist Wafaa Bilal's

web-based interactive art installation *Domestic Tension* (aka "Shoot an Iraqi") – that

endeavor to disrupt the official frames of war by, first, restaging and reenacting the Iraq

War's spectacle of humiliation and, secondly, foregrounding digital visual cultures of

humiliation. Both artists use practices of reenactment to illuminate not only the

humiliation at the heart of the Iraq War spectacle but the visual apparatus and practices

that enable it. Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure* engages the torture that was

staged by the cameras at Abu Ghraib by restaging those photographs as cinematic objects

and contextualizing them through highly stylized (and controversial) documentary

reenactments. I argue that Morris's treatment of the photographs as a cinematic object

highlights the screenic digitality of the photographs yet remains invested in their

particularly photographic qualities. In other words, the digital modes of capture, storage,

and circulation that enabled the existence of the photographs in the first place is shown in

the film to be inextricable from the work they do *as photographs*, which is to point

(sometimes literally and often ambiguously) to torture. Amid the theoretical speculation

surrounding the status of the digital photograph (which ranges from lauding the

expansion of photographic practices to lamenting the loss of the indexical depth of the

photograph), *Standard Operating Procedure* approaches the Abu Ghraib images

dialectically, presenting them both as digital quanta and photographic phenomena. The

film compellingly demonstrates that our understanding of acts of torture at Abu Ghraib is inseparable from our understanding of photography itself, particularly because the photographs serve as both the evidence and the crime. Similarly, Wafaa Bilal's installation, *Domestic Tension*, also reenacts a spectacle of humiliation. Drawing on cyber and gaming cultures, Bilal attempts to provoke a crisis in the viewer and to disrupt what he calls the "curious detachment that attends American spectatorship of war" (Bilal xiii). For *Domestic Tension*, Bilal confined himself for thirty days in a gallery space at the Flat File Galleries in Chicago, during which time people from across the globe could interact with him via chat, webcam, and remote-controlled paintball gun. People had 24-hour web access to the space and they could choose to shoot at Bilal with the paintball gun, transforming the virtual interaction into a very physical one. Over the thirty-day period Bilal took 60,000 shots from 128 countries (xvi). Both Morris's documentary and Bilal's installation reenact and restage the corporeal, visual, and technological conditions of the war spectacle in order to highlight the interpenetration of screens and bodies in the context of war. Despite different modes, both works grapple with and disrupt the frames through which bodies mediate and are mediated by the screens of war via a technocorporeal network of surface effects that encompasses the detained, disarticulated, and dead bodies of war, the screens of war, and the human sensoria of the globalized electronic masses.

As the following sections will elucidate, the Abu Ghraib photographs emerge from a broader visual and political culture of humiliation that frames the Iraq War through both official and vernacular channels. The work of Morris and Bilal draw our

attention to and disrupt the visual operations of humiliation by restaging them as critical encounters on the screens of film and cyber-art. Before engaging directly with Morris's and Bilal's texts, however, I want to first elaborate on two key concepts of the Iraq War and its electronic mediation: embeddedness and indexicality.

Embeddedness

When the bombs began falling over Bagdad at the start of the Iraq War on 19 March 2002, it looked a lot like the 1991 Gulf War. Fixed cameras provided wide shots of the explosions from across the Tigris River. Flashy graphics and brassy music introduced the war coverage on the news, retired generals, who were retained by all the major television networks, offered talking-head analysis, and elaborate studio sets comprised of floor maps and touch screens created an NFL-style news spectacle. Large scale spectacles and photo-ops unfolded for mass consumption – sometimes as manufactured moments meant to be iconic and triumphant, other times as aleatory happenings in front of news cameras. There are so many visual monuments of the Iraq War that could be and have been deconstructed by various media critics: Colin Powell's illusive PowerPoint slide presentation at the U.N. in the drum-up to war (a misleading compilation of dated satellite photos, bulleted lists, and computer-generated illustrations); the live televisual coverage of the toppling of the statue of Saddam (where individual soldiers, Iraqi civilians, and journalists created multiple narratives of who was toppling

what);[60] the video of Jessica Lynch's rescue by Special Forces (eventually made into a television movie); President Bush's virile flight-suited arrival for the "Mission Accomplished" speech aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln; the Rockwellian photograph of President Bush holding a glistening (plastic) turkey on a Thanksgiving platter; the medical examination of Saddam Hussein (grainy video of the sterile latex-glove of the military probing the deposed dictator's mouth). These images and many others are among the visual icons and iconic boondoggles that were used in various attempts to shape the frames through which the war was seen. Such images are the result and continuation of both the contingent events of war as well as manufactured spectacles that promoted and maintained an ideology of humiliation. The images and their framing bolstered a heroic and overwhelming vision of American force and, at the same time, demonized and humiliated the Arab world. In this section I will investigate the various strata of embeddedness through which these images framed and were framed by technological, ideological, and aesthetic practices.

The work of Morris and Bilal, as well as the Abu Ghraib photographs themselves, emerge out of a media context shaped by exchanges between official (mainstream) and vernacular (DIY) forms of media. Throughout the Iraq War, the lens-based practices that created and regulated the visual field of war were not only the purview of official media outlets and military targeting/surveillance technologies, but part of the everyday practice

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[60] See Peter Maass's article, "The Toppling," in the Jan. 1, 2011 *New Yorker*. In the documentary film *Control Room*, Al Jazeera journalists argue that the toppling of Saddam was manufactured event. Peter Maass argues that the toppling was not planned by the military and that the significance and iconicity it took on through live broadcast was unintended. He ties this event to the concept of the "strategic corporal": in 1999, Marine General Charles Krulak wrote an article in which he coined the term "strategic corporal" to refer to idea that in an interconnected world even the actions of a lowly corporal can have global consequences.

of soldiers, insurgents, and civilians through the use of personal hand-held camera

devices. Whereas Anthony Swofford and his fellow Gulf War Marines of the previous

chapter transformed the iconic anti-war Vietnam films of Coppola, Stone, and Kubrick

into the "war porn" upon which they structured their heroic fantasies of war, the soldiers

of the Iraq War created their own "war porn." They strapped cameras to their helmets,

gun turrets, and Humvee dashboards, documented patrols, raids, and everyday soldier life

in Iraq, and edited their footage – aping the techniques and aesthetics of music videos,

Hollywood action flicks, and first-person shooter video games – into highlight reels,

documentary films, and comedic parodies. The mediation of the Iraq War became more

liquid. Screen technologies enabled a more splattered media environment that not only

poured from the main spigots of major news outlets, but also trickled onto video sharing

sites and blogs. In other words, the embeddedness of reporters that became the dominant

mode of the official news narrative was matched by other forms of embedded

representation, namely the digital media practices of soldiers and participants themselves.

The 24-hour news machine – a more thoroughly entrenched and technologically

enhanced media entity than its Gulf War predecessor – followed, at least initially, many

of same formulas of the Gulf War: a frenetic spectacle with little information. With the

reintroduction of the Vietnam War practice of embedded reporting, the coverage had the

appearance of Vietnam-War-style free-range access and transparency in contrast to the

confined aesthetic of the hyper-regulated press pools of the Gulf War. But like the press-

pool model, the Iraq War practice of embedding was controlled by the military and it

created a self-regulating, self-censoring symbiosis between the press and the military: the

security and access of embedded reporters was dependent on the very units they were

reporting on. Within the same milieu of these official channels, an emergent hand-held

media culture – the amateur visual record of war – worked both to reify the official

frames of war (for example, the many heroic, quasi-propagandistic battle highlight reels

that soldiers posted on video sharing sites) and to 'leak' outside the established frame (for

example, the Abu Ghraib photographs and videos as well as other soldier-produced

videos, images, and blogs that punctured the official message).[61] What Butler describes

as an "omnipresence of stray cameras" put the production of the visual culture of the war

in the hands of soldier, insurgent, and civilian eyewitness-participants. Hand-held and

web-based technologies enabled insurgent and rebel groups to produce propaganda and

assassination videos. Soldier blogs and video-sharing channels dedicated to soldier-made

videos introduced new media outlets for first-hand, personal narratives and visuals of the

Iraq War, some of which were appropriated by major news outlets and others of which

remained outside the official frames of the war.[62] The 1991 Gulf War, with its aerial

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[61] See the "Video Verité" chapter in Paula Rabinowitz's *They Must Represented*, which provides an excellent theorization of the George Holliday's video footage of the Rodney King beating as an early example of an emergent form of DIY reverse surveillance within what she calls "the apparatus of real events." Since the Rodney King video (and the Zapruder film before that), such DIY video documentation has, of course, become ubiquitous in the age of the cell phone camera. Events like the 7/7 London Tube bombing, the execution of Saddam Hussein, and the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, in addition to the Occupy protests and the Arab Spring have become free-floating artifacts of handheld verité open to all modes of contextualization and narrativization as evidence, propaganda, or otherwise.

[62] For an overview of soldier-created videos see the little-known MTV News documentary *Iraq Uploaded* (2006) <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1536780/iraq-uploaded-soldiers-post-war-footage-online.html>. A sampling of war blogs turned into books includes U.S. soldiers Colby Buzzell, *My War: Killing Time* and Kayly Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You* as well as Matthew Currier Burden's compilation, *The Blog of War*. Books from Iraqi citizen bloggers includes the anonymous blogger Riverbend's *Baghdad Burning* and Faiza Al-Araji's *The Iraq War Blog: An Iraqi Family's Inside View of the First Year of the Occupation*. First-hand journalist accounts include Evan Wright, *Generation Kill* (originally for Rolling Stone and later turned into an underrated HBO mini-series by *The Wire* creator David Simon); and Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah*.

bombing views, was called a 'Nintendo War', but it was during the Iraq War that the battlefield began imitating the visual world of the first-person shooter video game.

Two working-class women from West Virginia – Jessica Lynch and Lynndie England – illustrate this changing visual culture of the war. They embody the sometimes competing, sometimes converging representational regimes of war (the mainstream and the DIY). Lynch, who was captured in March 2003 by Iraqi forces during the Battle of Nasiriyah and was the first recorded American woman prisoner of war to be rescued, became the heroine of a propagandistic media fable meant to arouse public support for the war. England, on the other hand, the subject of many of the most infamous Abu Ghraib photographs, became the unintended poster-girl for egregious acts that irreparably damaged public support for the war. Beyond the sensationalist narratives of the brave heroine and the wicked sadist, Lynch and England expose how lens-based practices not only construct and deconstruct the frames of war, but how images are used as technologies of humiliation. The Jessica Lynch story, which went through many conflicting permutations in the press and led to a book deal and a television movie, represents the attempt – through manufactured visuals and narratives – to officially manage the frame of the war. Lynndie England, became a chief figure of the handheld DIY version of the war. The diminutive woman who famously pointed mockingly at the exposed genitals of Abu Ghraib prisoners and became, herself, an object of mockery and blame as the 'white trash' girl upon whom public outrage about Abu Ghraib could be directed.[63]

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[63] After the Abu Ghraib scandal broke there were websites devoted to user-submitted photographs of people "doing the Lynndie," which entailed reenacting the pose Lynndie England strikes in one of the

In their framing as women, as female bodies, and as soldiers, Lynch and England

became props in a systematic and condescending process of co-constitutive humiliation

that was founded on the basest assumptions about not only Arab masculinity, but also a

vague notion of liberal democratic feminism. Embedded within the images of Lynch and

England is a particular visual use of gender and class as part of the sexual shaming

machine and its blowback. Rather than just exploit the presumed 'backwardness' of Arab

sexism, ironically, the military-media complex highlighted its own implicit sexism,

racism, and classicism. In the name of progressive liberalism, military women were made

to serve as cultural weapons to inflict shame and sexual humiliation on an imagined Arab

other. Stemming from the most rudimentary understanding of Iraqi culture, both women

were used to visually shame Iraq.[64] Lynch was first portrayed as the heroic warrior of a

progressive nation, and when reports surfaced that she did not engage in combat during

the ambush, the rescue operation became an opportunity to demonstrate how Western

most famous Abu Ghraib images. This phenomenon was a precursor of the widespread popularity of recent photo-memes like planking, owling, and Tebowing. In the original infamous photograph, England has cigarette dangling from her mouth as she points, fingergun-style, at a naked prisoner's genitals. "Doing the Lynndie," then, quoted and recontextualized this act of sexual humiliation in any number of mundane scenarios: parties, happy hours, classrooms, meetings, etc. The "Doing the Lynndie" internet phenomenon, as the title suggests, had very little to say about Abu Ghraib and had everything to do with a kind of classist and sexist mockery of England herself, the West Virginia hillbilly. In many ways it reinforced the official message: Abu Ghraib was the result of low-ranked, individual soldiers, many of whom weren't very smart and didn't know any better.

Not to be perverse, but perhaps this meme is as good a place as any in the Abu Ghraib context to take Butler's advice to go back to Adorno. In *Minima Moralia* he writes of art, not internet memes, but he might as well have been writing about the whole visual genealogy, from the original Abu Ghraib photographs to Errol Morris's film, that is under examination in this chapter: "by turning suffering into images, harsh and uncompromising though they are, it wounds the shame we feel in the presence of the victims. For these victims are used to create something, works of art, that are thrown to the consumption of a world which destroyed them… The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic principle of stylization, and even the solemn prayer of the chorus, make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims; yet no art which tried to evade them could confront the claims of justice."

[64] See the footnote in the first section about Patai's *Arab Mind* and its appropriation by the military.

women are saved from the barbaric Arab male by the American masculinity of its Special

Forces. England, because of her sex and stature, was used as part of a larger strategy of

shame – as one of several tools of torture and interrogation.[65]

For Judith Butler, Errol Morris, Wafaa Bilal, and the many others who have

pondered what is depicted and enacted in the Abu Ghraib photographs (and in the visual

culture of the Iraq War in general) the key question is: what is *in* these photographs?

What do we see? What do we not see? What are the frames that structure our seeing?

These are questions of embeddedness and the Abu Ghraib photographs contain various

strata of embeddedness. They emerged in proximity to a news media culture of embedded

reporting – the "in bed" arrangement that allowed the military to shape the story and

allowed news outlets to give stories the added authenticity (and presumed objectivity) of

proximity.[66] The photographs themselves contain metadata – extravisual information –

embedded within their files. This information contains basic information about the time,

settings, and device used to take the photographs, which later became forensically useful

in the creation of an accurate timeline of events. Relatedly, the photographs also emerge

out of what Timothy Druckery called a general condition of "distributed embeddedness"

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[65] This rescue narrative resonates, of course, with the long tradition and varieties of the ever-popular White Savior trope, whether in the context of the United States' own colonization of American Indians and the consequent extreme popularity of captivity narratives, which we can trace through to John Wayne's Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (1956) setting out to rescue or kill his niece Debbie before she is 'corrupted' and de-Westernized by the Comanche who have kidnapped her. Or, even more recently, we might identify White Savior variants at work in *Avatar* (2009) or even *The Help* (2011). In more strictly postcolonial terms, Gayatri Spivak's often-quoted summary in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" of the British abolition of the Hindu rite of *sati* in India might best sum up what is at work in the Lynch narrative: it is a case of "White men saving brown women from brown men," or more specifically in this instance, a case of white men saving white women from brown men in the name of saving brown women from brown men.

[66] Reporters became not only physically embedded with military units, but also ideologically embedded by dint of their proximity to and dependency on the units they were embedded with. Butler describes embedded journalism as "a way of interpreting in advance what will and will not be included in the field of perception" (*Frames* 66).

in which the notion of discrete identity has been supplanted by the immersion of the self

into the "mediascapes of teleculture … whose boundaries are mapped in virtual transitory

networks, whose hold on matter is ephemeral, whose position in space is tenuous, and

whose agency is measured in acts of implication" (20). Druckery wrote this before the

Abu Ghraib moment and he was addressing the digital shift more broadly, but his

characterization seems apt for embedded media conditions of the Iraq War and, in

particular, the modes under which the Abu Ghraib photographs were taken, stored, and

distributed. We also see it in the transmedial flows between the mainstream and DIY

media cultures just described, where both media forms and media content become cross-

embedded: the news looks more like DIY handheld media and DIY handheld media

looks more like the news. Perhaps the most important form of embeddedness in these

photographs, however, are the ideological currents embedded in these images – the top-

down culture of humiliation that enabled this picture torture and the particularly sexual

nature of that humiliation. The photographs do not point only to the particular visual

regime of Abu Ghraib prison, but, as Butler has argued, to "forms of social and state

power" that are "embedded in the frame, including state and military regulatory regimes"

(72). The enduring image of the Iraq War, the ideology that fueled it, and the shame that

resulted from it is particularly and persistently sexual: the way that a flight suit

foregrounded the President's "package" aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln or the

packaging of the Jessica Lynch story as a sexualized rescue mission or Lynndie England

pointing finger-guns and mocking the exposed genitals of male prisoners or the fact that

she struck this pose under the direction of her male superior (and photo-taker and father

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of her child), Charles Graner, or that people would later circulate pictures of themselves

mockingly "Doing the Lynndie" or that the only footage of the captured Saddam Hussein

was of an oral examination. The thread of sexual humiliation runs throughout the visual

field of the Iraq War, not as subtle subtext, but right there, embedded within the frame.

War and its representation is always sexual and always structured around modes

of humiliation, whether they be dirty wars, hot wars, cold wars, or sterilized wars. Klaus

Theweleit showed us this as well as anyone in *Male Fantasies*, his exploration of the men

of the proto-Nazi Freikorps for whom war was profoundly sexual and, simultaneously, a

primary mode of sexual repression and control. Perhaps that is what is so surprising about

the sexual desire and humiliation embedded in the images of the Iraq War: how

prominently it is displayed and how unacknowledged and repressed it nonetheless

remains. It is the lack of shame that is shocking. In an article on Abu Ghraib that he wrote

for *In These Times*, Slavoj Žižek pulls a Žižekian reversal on Donald Rumsfeld to

describe these phenomena:

> If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq were the
> "unknown unknowns," that is, the threats from Saddam whose nature we cannot
> even suspect, then the Abu Ghraib scandal shows that the main dangers lie in the
> "unknown knowns" – the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices
> we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our
> public values.

Furthermore, this visual culture of shameless shaming is also deeply embedded in

the even less acknowledged sexual politics of colonialism and orientalism. The Abu

Ghraib photographs are haunted by, yet completely unaware of, the sordid photographic

history of the ethnographic gaze, here come about by other more embedded means

(soldier-photographers as participant-observers). Before Butler's metric of grievability

and its relationship to photography in the war-on-terror era, the artist and theorist Martha Rosler, as discussed in the first chapter, similarly observed during the Vietnam War era that war photographs reveal an "ideological stance toward other lives." For her, war photographs are part of a broader ideological frame masquerading as an informational one, which, in the context of the Iraq War, we might understand as the ideological *embedded* within the informational. Caroline Brothers, too, in *War and Photography*, argues that an iconic war photograph, rather than providing evidence of any particular event, instead "bears witness… to the ideological currents which produced it and the collective imagination it inflected and to which it contributed" (185). The Abu Ghraib photos, in many ways, are no different. This is not the first time that photographs have served as trophies and mementos for U.S. soldiers or the first time that photographs have illuminated human rights violations perpetrated by agents of the U.S. Military. But then again, that is why they are also quite different. They are both constitutive and derivative of a kind of ideological framing of other lives. The uses of the camera at Abu Ghraib contributed to the establishment of ungrievable lives, yet the pictures from those cameras, once they became public documents, engendered a kind of grievability of the referent lives within the pictures.

Embeddedness is a concept for thinking about not only what is *in* the pictures, but what is *in* us and our viewing of them. Embedded in these images are all the usual liberal anxieties of looking and power that Susan Sontag made a career out of investigating: we must look; we should not look; our looking is itself a reiteration of violence; our looking indulges the patronizing pity through which the West feels good about itself and validates

its own privilege; our looking is that of bourgeois, Western, orientalist subject that wishes to take hold of its object of desire, consumption, and otherness, as Walter Benjamin observed, "at close range."[67]

Indexicality

Where embeddedness is a general characteristic of representations of the Iraq War, indexicality is that characteristic expressed photographically. Indexicality is a concept that has often been called upon in an effort to unravel the ontological mysteries of what is *in* photographs, and a concept that, in the digital era, is thought to fail us.

Making sense of Abu Ghraib entails an interrogation of both the nature of torture and the nature of (digital) pictures. In other words, in addition to interrogating *what* is depicted in the pictures, we are faced with questions about the nature and existence of those depictions as digital entities. The events at Abu Ghraib not only fueled debates over the slippery definitions of torture, but also lead to questions about the fluid definitions of photography. The Detainee Photographic Records Protection Act of 2009 (H.R. 3015), which banned the release of more photos from Abu Ghraib, Afghanistan, and other detention centers around the globe, demonstrates this fluidity in its definition of the photograph. "The term 'photograph,'" it states in its Definitions section, "encompasses all photographic images, whether originals or copies, including still photographs, negatives, digital images, films, video tapes, and motion pictures."

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[67] In the "Work of Art" essay, during a discussion of the concept of the aura in historical and natural objects, he writes, "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction" (225).

Under the term "PHOTOGRAPH" the Act seeks to ban not just the photograph, but all iterations, analogue and digital, of the photographic base including not only visual images (both still and moving), but presumably any accompanying sound and extra-visual data as well. The definition indicates the convergence at work across media and the general difficulty of delimiting photography from other media. Thus there is little surprise that the Abu Ghraib photographs, though predominantly serving as a touchstone in the political and humanitarian discourses around the practice of torture, are also peripherally, but persistently, attached to a debate within media theory about what art historian Rosalind Krauss has called the "post-medium condition." They have become iconic not only of the indefinite "war on terror" but of digital modes of photographic capture and circulation. The Abu Ghraib photographs pose the question of digitality, or rather, they lead us to ask what kind of questions digitality poses. Unlike photographic icons from past wars, the Abu Ghraib photographs were not the work of professional photojournalists and the images were no longer bound to a photosensitive surface. Rather, the perpetrators themselves were amateur photographers and their digital snapshots had the capacity for newer viral modes of circulation. Yet, despite the drastic changes in the modes of production, circulation, and storage – despite their digitality – the Abu Ghraib photographs seem to reintroduce many of the old critical questions asked of photographs. Given their digitality, do they convey a reliable record of the reality that existed before the lens? As numerically-based rather than chemically-based entities, do they meaningfully retain the emanations of the world? That is, despite their apparent immateriality do the Abu Ghraib photographs still remain "pieces of the world," as

Sontag once said of analog photographs (*On Photography* 93)? Do they still retain what she called a "material vestige" of the world (144)? Like their analog predecessors, do they furnish evidence and lay photographic claim to 'truth'? And, paradoxically, do they remain, like all photographs, ambiguous, mutable, and mysterious? And does it matter?

Certainly digitality represents a fundamental change to the material reality of the photograph. What was once a chemical imprint of emanations of the world is now a matrix of numbers. As David Rodowick describes, what was once an analogical *transcription* of the world, has become a digital *conversion* or *calculation* of the world (116). This transformation from a *transcription* to a *translation* of the world has challenged how theorists of visual culture define the medium of photography, explain the work of photographs, and, importantly, describe our fascination with photographs. Reading across the disciplines engaged in media theorizing, one finds a rhetoric of crisis haunted by anxieties about the status and fate of the photograph in a digital, convergent media environment. Much of the philosophical handwringing stems from the loss of the apparent materiality of traditional photography and the emergence of an apparently immaterial (and therefore dubious) digital photography. The photograph once had a privileged physical relationship with the world, so the argument goes, and now that grounding in reality has been eliminated, leaving its status up in the air, out in the ether. Digitality, then, fundamentally challenges the concept of photography and of medium specificity in general. This leaves theorists of the photograph doubly haunted, first by the seeming ghostly immateriality of digitality and, secondly, by the loss of the very physical relationship to the world that was thought to give photography the power to haunt us in

the first place. This special status is threatened by the emergence of digitality. More precisely, perhaps, the *desire* for this special referentiality – for a physical relation to the object – is under threat.[68]

At the center of this haunted anxiety about photography is the role of indexicality as a concept for describing the representational workings of photography. The index, the famous concept taken from Charles Peirce's taxonomy of signs, has been used to describe, semiotically, the nature and work of the photograph in the world of signs. Like other indexical signs – a footprint, a weathervane, or the word "this" – the photograph "points to" its referent by virtue of a material, causal connection to it. For Rodowick, digitality weakens and even eliminates "the indexical powers of photography." He concludes that "it is probably incorrect or misleading to attribute photographic indexicality or causality to digital synthesis" (106). For him, the digital photograph, as a translation of the world rather than a transcription of it, is, at a certain level, more akin to a painting than a photograph. He writes almost nostalgically of the "phenomenological density" of the 35mm image (109). The density or depth – the physical connection to the world – that Rodowick finds lacking in the digital image is the same quality of the photograph so elegiacally captured in the work of Roland Barthes who, as discussed in the first chapter, was drawn to the "absolutely, irrefutably present" of the photograph (*Camera Lucida* 77). This density was also important to the great film critic Andre Bazin, who argued that the photograph "contributes something to the natural order of creation

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[68] This digital anxiety permeates Paul Haggis's 2007 Iraq War film *In The Valley of Elah*. Central to the plot is a corrupted digital video file of a hit-and-run accident that killed an Iraqi girl. The homemade footage, taken by a soldier, points to the central traumatic event of the film and serves as the only visual evidence of it. The file must be restored in order to solve the case. The digital, in other words, is corruptible and unreliable, calling into question its status as evidence.

instead of providing a substitute for it" (15). The irony that permeates many recent 'obituaries' for the indexical image is that, even though they do a wonderful job of interrogating contemporary media concepts such as "virtuality" (they remind "new media" that it is entangled with "old media"), they remain unwaveringly attached to a concept of the index. They are attached, in other words, to a concept of attachment. Rodowick's argument that the digital photograph is not sufficiently indexical resonates with other laments including Mary Ann Doane's cautious concern that digitality threatens the "constraints and possibilities" of the indexical specificity of photochemical media and, moreover, aesthetic expression in general (131), or with Vivian Sobchack's more apocalyptic claim that digitality, which is "at one remove from previous representational connections," dangerously lacks "a grounded investment in the body" and is instead saturated by "the present instant" that could "cost us all a future" (159). In short, for many theorists, digitality – the separation of inputs and outputs (light goes in, numerical data come out) – makes it impossible for the photograph to corroborate with the world as it once did. It removes the stain of the real from photography. Thus digitality is often diagnosed as a 'condition' – a post-indexical, post-cinematic, post-photographic, or post-medium condition. As Anne Friedberg noted, it is the condition of being "born digital" (4).

Ironically, the Abu Ghraib photographs, which seemingly do the indexical work of 'pointing' to torture and the camera's involvement in it – which seem to be emanations of certain realities of Abu Ghraib – have become one of the sites of debate about the loss of the indexicality. Is it possible that the index was always an insufficient concept for

unraveling the mysteries of the photographic base? Despite the loss of indexicality and all the other revolutionary changes to the lives of photographs brought about by digitality, is the digital photograph not experienced on some level as a photograph all the same? It seems that digital photographs are no more or less likely to become iconic, to furnish evidence, to haunt us, to awaken memories, to be manipulated and doctored, and to garner the phenomenological and ontological fascinations of its beholders.

The Abu Ghraib photographs have appeared amid much philosophical handwringing about the emergence and significance of "the digital" within media theory. The photographs, which mediate one kind of crisis (the ramifications of U.S.-sanctioned torture), have fallen into the middle of another 'crisis': the crisis of the medium itself. The fate of the index has led occasionally to hyperbolic proclamations of the 'death of photography.' But the relevance of the Abu Ghraib photographs tells a different story. If anything, they reconstitute photography with the traits it has always carried. Wouldn't Barthes and Bazin both find in the Abu Ghraib photographs a unique mode of representation that is not a substitute for the world, but an irrefutably present contribution to it? The paradox of the analogue photograph, as Mary Ann Doane has noted, is that it harbors a fullness, "an excessiveness of detail" and, at the same time, an emptiness, "a hollowness that can only be filled" in contingent and always mutating situations (2). This fullness and emptiness is evident in the Abu Ghraib photographs of Lynndie England's thumbs up, or of the hooded "Gilligan" standing, wired, on a box. Simultaneously the viewer is struck by an excess and lack of detail – by all the ways the photographs are framed and could be framed.

Tom Gunning questions this attachment to the concept of the index in his punningly titled essay "What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs," in which he questions not only the worth of the index as a photographic concept but also, more literally, what exactly photographs, indexically, point to. Gunning acknowledges how digital photographs present dramatic implications for how images are stored, transferred, and manipulated, but, he argues, "storage in terms of numerical data does not eliminate indexicality (which is why digital images can serves as passport photographs and the other sorts of legal evidence or documents, which ordinary photographs supply)" (40). After all, he observes, one can think of many indexical devices – thermometers, speedometers, and barometers – that convert information into numbers without calling into question their indexicality (40). His 'point' is that an index does not need to resemble the thing it represents to be indexical: "the fact that rows of numbers do not resemble a photograph…does not undermine any indexical claim" (40). Even the indexicality of a traditional photograph, he reminds us, "inheres in the effect of light on chemicals, not in the picture it produces" (40).

Gunning is essentially demonstrating that the index has been overvalued as a property of the photograph, that it has undue influence on how we think about photographs. This overemphasis on the index has created currents of nostalgia and longing for a photographic presence that was never there to being with. Worse, it has, through what Freud might call "the narcissism of small differences," led to the devaluation of the digital photograph as photograph. It is not that the index is not a useful concept for thinking about photographs, but that perhaps its use for thinking about

photographs is not exactly semiotic. Within the phenomenological and poetic traditions

of theorizing the photograph, the index has served as a useful concept for discussing the

'touch of the real' within a photograph, that particularly mysterious capacity of a

photograph to exceed the bounds of language and to 'prick' us (as Barthes said). The

index, in this context, is less a semiotic category than an ontological and

phenomenological concept – it has more to do with being, presence, and experience (both

the what-has-been and the looking-now) than it has to do with signification. As discussed

in the earlier chapter in the context of Vietnam War photographs, while photographs may

(and do) function as signs, it is precisely where they exceed semiotics that they capture

our fascination. "The semiotic category of the index," writes Gunning, "assimilates

photography to the realm of the sign, and although a photograph like most anything

(everything?) can be used as a sign, I think this approach prematurely cuts off the claims

… that the photograph exceeds the functions of a sign and that this indeed is part of the

fascination it offers" (48).

    This fascination is what Barthes, Bazin, Sontag, Deleuze, and others have set out

to explore. It has sometimes, perhaps wrongly, been called an indexical quality. This

quality, though, is not the thing that resides in the chemical processes of analog

photography, it is the thing resides in the fragmentary persistence of an unknowable (yet

visible) past reproduced ceaselessly into the present. If the index is that which points

directly (literally and causally), like an index finger, and says "that there," the ubiquitous

thumbs-up in the Abu Ghraib photographs shows us a different kind of 'point.' This

'point' – a symbol of inexplicable, obscene optimism amidst torture and death – is

something done *for the photographs*. This is not a candid moment captured; it is posed

for the camera. What does this thumbs-up mean? Where does it point us? It means

nothing, it points nowhere, but it adheres us to the image and to the event.

Errol Morris & The Epistemology of the Photograph

In one of the epigraphs of this chapter – "nobody can commit photography alone"

– Marshall McLuhan's suggestive use of the verb 'commit' seems appropriate in the

context of Abu Ghraib. It lends to the photographs a tinge of criminality – the sense that,

in the act of photographing, one commits, if not a crime, some vague act of violence, and

moreover that 'committing' photography extends beyond the taker of the photograph to

implicate the photographs as well as its beholders – the collective and individual

meanings, outrages, obsessions, and fascinations that photographs seemingly generate in

their viewers and the commitments (epistemological, aesthetic, and otherwise) that

viewers, in turn, impose upon photographs.[69] In the other epigraph to this chapter,

Sabrina Harman, one of the seven "bad apples" of Abu Ghraib, directly addresses the

viewer via Errol Morris's Interrotron camera in his Abu Ghraib documentary *Standard

Operating Procedure* and admits that the infamous photograph of her smiling with

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[69] The criminality inherent to photography has been observed well before McLuhan and well
after. In his "short history" of photography in 1931, Walter Benjamin astutely observed:
> The camera will become smaller and smaller, more and more prepared to grasp fleeting, secret
> images whose shock will bring the mechanism of association in the viewer to a complete halt […]
> Not for nothing were pictures of Atget compared with those of the scene of a crime. But is not
> every spot of our cities the scene of a crime? every passerby a perpetrator? Does not the
> photographer – descendants […] uncover guilt in his pictures? (215).

And, in equal measure, in addition to revealing guilt, there are many confessions of how guilty one
feels for taking photographs. For one famous example we turn to Diane Arbus: "I always thought of
photography as a naughty thing to do - that was one of my favorite things about it, and when I first did it, I
felt very perverse" (Sontag, *On Photography* 12-13)

thumbs up over the disfigured corpse of Al-Jamadi "looks bad." In saying so, she too suggests that something is 'committed' in the photographic transaction, wherein what "looks bad" and what "is bad" become conflated and confused within the frame of the photograph.

This epistemological slipperiness – the peculiar future anterior relationship that the Abu Ghraib photographs establish between what-is-seen and what-has-been – is the main subject of Errol Morris's 2008 documentary *Standard Operating Procedure*. The film attempts to disrupt our photographic commitments by revealing that the crimes we think we see in the photographs are often not the crimes that were committed.[70] Because the cameras at Abu Ghraib both recorded crimes and committed crimes, for Morris it becomes the ideal place to investigate not only the events of Abu Ghraib, but also, necessarily, some fundamental existential questions of photography. Many of the cinematic and journalistic investigations of Abu Ghraib treated the photographs as only one kind of document in a sea of policies and paper trails through which the practices of torture were justified. Uniquely, *Standard Operating Procedure* is premised on the idea that to grapple with Abu Ghraib is to grapple with photography itself. Through its transformation of the Abu Ghraib photographs into cinematic objects, *Standard Operating Procedure* considers them as both photographic images and digital files – the extent to which they behave like all photographs and the extent to which they produce new modes of extra-visual, digital-photographic meaning. The film situates the

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[70] "It is a mistake," Morris says, "to confuse the pictures at Abu Ghraib with the crimes at Abu Ghraib" (Anderson). Similarly, Susan Sontag contends in "Regarding the Torture of Others" that "the horror of what is shown in the photographs "cannot be separated from the horror that the photographs were taken."

photographs centrally within a larger discursive and perceptual network through which practices of humiliation became standard operating procedure (legal, condoned, encouraged). As the title of the film suggests in its military parlance, these photographs are embedded with (and embedded in) a whole apparatus of procedures that meant to be accepted as routine and "standard." His use of photographs in combination with his other filmic practices (namely direct-address interviews and elaborate reenactments) challenges the extent to which such documents can and cannot be separated from the events they depict. Morris operates under the premise that to whatever extent photographs are capable of exposing a particular event, they are equally adept at concealing it. In doing so, his film explores the ways in which the perpetrators were also the victims of more expansive forces. The film restages the standard questions asked of photography: What is the relation between photographs and the events they depict? Do photographs provide evidence? Evidence of what? What do photographs expose and what do they conceal? At the same time, the film also confronts the question of digitality: Are digital photographs a different kind of photographic document? What "extra-visual secrets" (as Caitlin Benson-Allot has put it) do digital photographs hold?

Like much of Errol Morris's filmmaking and writing, *Standard Operating Procedure* is essentially an epistemological project. In a review of Morris's collected essays on photography, *Believing is Seeing*, Kathryn Schulz observes that more than photography itself, "Morris is chiefly interested in the nature of knowledge, in figuring out where the truth – in both senses – lies." Photographs, for Morris, are the ideal documents for investigating where the truth lies within our perceptual practices.

Morris joins the likes of Chris Marker, Andy Warhol, and even Ken Burns in the coinciding traditions of cinematizing photographs and photographizing cinema that begin with Eadweard Muybridge. Morris utilizes recent developments and dramatic shifts in moving-image technology to explore the meaning of recent developments and dramatic shifts in still-image technology. *Standard Operating Procedure* reproduces, reenacts, and reanimates these photographs and pro-photographic events in order, once more, to test the epistemological limits of photography. The raw materials of this documentary consist of 1) the photographs themselves (often depicted in animated, dynamic arrays), 2) direct-address testimony from (paid) witnesses and experts (via Morris's infamous patented device, the Interrotron)[71] 3) highly-stylized reenactments (or "impressions" as Morris has called them) using actors and often shot in excruciating detail with a Phantom camera at 1000 frames-per-second, and 4) a haunting movie score by Danny Elfman.

These four defining elements of the film are the very aspects that many critics found aesthetically over-indulgent and thus inappropriate in Morris's treatment of the subject. Indeed, many critics took issue with Morris's techniques and their connections to his overarching philosophical approach to the Abu Ghraib photographs. They found the film too sympathetic toward the perpetrators and too stylized to achieve the appropriate aura of documentary truth. Manohla Dargis in the New York Times excoriates "the level of fetishistic detail" Morris achieves, "whether he's showing us beautifully backlighted

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[71] The Interrotron is basically a teleprompter screen positioned over the camera lens. For interviews Morris sits elsewhere in front of another camera. A live video feed of his face is then projected onto the interviewer's teleprompter screen so that when the interviewer interacts with the (mediated) Morris, he or she looks directly into the camera. When Errol Morris was asked in an interview if he named the device, he responded, "No, it was named by my wife…She liked the name because it combined two important concepts – terror and interview."

dust motes dancing in the prison air or an exquisitely photographed pearl of blood

dangling from a brutalized prisoner's, or rather actor's, nose." Paul Arthur, in his

ArtForum review of the film, argues that the film's style "belongs to a film genre that

provides titillation through horror." "To employ this rhetoric in a documentary about

actual horror," he says," is obscene, yielding familiar aesthetic thrills as a substitute for

specific meaning" (112). Maggie Nelson echoes Arthur in *The Art of Cruelty*, where she

writes, "One need not immerse oneself in horrific images or a debate about their

epistemological status in order to apprehend and protest barbarities" (18). Many critics

agreed that the film was too focused on philosophical abstractions rather than political

practicalities, citing other Abu Ghraib documentary films like Alex Gibney's *Taxi to the*

Dark Side (2007), whose aesthetic practices, according to Arthur, never supersede or

distract from the film's central "inflamed political indictment" (112), or Rory Kennedy's

Ghosts of Abu Ghraib (2007), which unravels the military procedures and paper trails that

justified and enacted the practices at Abu Ghraib.[72] Moreover, many reviewers accused

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[72] Films like Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (2009) and Sam Mendes's adaptation of
Anthony Swofford's memoir *Jarhead* (2005) as well as Colby Buzzell's blog-turned-memoir *My War* and
journalist Sebastian Junger's book about a forward operating base in Afghanistan, *War,* are often praised
for focusing on the everyday drama and personal struggles of individual soldiers. They are praised, in other
words, for their material realism and even more so for not being "political." These works value and are
valued for what is perceived as the ideological neutrality of individual struggle. The personal suffering of
individuals is meant to let the (American) viewer/reader off the hook. These works reveal the impact of the
war on a few U.S. soldiers' lives at the expense of other lives and demographics of the war. Here, we make
heroes duty-bound soldiers. We are meant to sympathize with their burdens at the expense of others'
burdens – namely the occupied and besieged civilian population. It is possible, however, to see something
else at work in war text like the *The Hurt Locker* and its alien and alienating subtext. It is essentially a
space travel movie set in Iraq (thus, perhaps it has more in common with its Oscar rival, *Avatar*, than one
might think). The scenes of Jeremy Renner's Sgt. William James trying to communicate, astronaut-like,
with Iraqi citizens while in his bomb suit represents a kind of impossibility of communication (not to
mention a cute reference to William James's philosophy). Despite the efforts of James, the streets of Iraq
remain and alien place, he is separated by the suit that is meant to protect him. Like the oil-well firemen of
Werner Herzog's bizarrely fascinating sci-fi Gulf War documentary *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), *The Hurt*
Locker projects an imperial/anthropological perspective, where bomb diffusing is the work of itinerant

Morris of being an apologist for the perpetrators at Abu Ghraib.[73] For these reviewers,

Morris fails to adequately protest the atrocity. He's too generous to both the photographs

and their takers. He beautifully cinematizes these horrifying images and thus the

horrifying acts they point to.

These criticisms, however, fundamentally misread the approach of *Standard*

Operating Procedure and, in doing so, betray their own limited view of documentary

rhetoric itself, of what documentary should be and what it should do. It is ironic that a

filmmaker as obsessed with the pursuit of truth as Morris is – as obsessed with recovering

"what happened" through a rigorous gathering of facts – is accused of making a

documentary that doesn't look "documentary enough" to garner the proper amount of

outrage.[74] Morris famously has, after all, freed a man (Randall Adams) from prison

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space rangers armored up for a hostile planet. Although perhaps a generous reading, this alienation, it could be argued, serves not to reiterate the entrenched orientalist perspectives of the West so much as it opens up a critique of that perspective by admitting the futility and absurdity of the context in which occupier and occupied encounter each other. The film is an effort to point out our failure to make other lives grievable even as it fails to make its grieving mean anything.

[73] For criticism of the kind see, for example, Manohla Dargis, ""We, the People Behind the Abuse,"" New York Times, April 25, 2008, www.movies.nytimes.com/2008/04/25/movies/25stan.html; Richard Schickel, ""Standard Operating Procedure, Too Much Style?,"" Time, April 24, 2008, www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1734936,00.html; J. Hoberman, ""Errol Morris Lets Torturers Off Easy,"" Village Voice, April 22, 2008, www.villagevoice.com/2008-04-22/film/get-out-of-jail-free/; Paul Arthur, ""The Horror,"" Artforum (April 2008), www.artforum.com/inprint/id=19738.

Alex Gibney's *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007) investigates the CIA's use of torture in the War on Terror. It focuses on an Afghan taxi driver named Dilawar who was beaten to death by American forces while in extrajudicial detention. It won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007), directed by Rory Kennedy (daughter of Senator Robert F. Kennedy), also investigates the creation of the political and legal precedents that formed the framework for torture at Abu Ghraib. In addition to featuring interviews with a number of soldiers from Abu Ghraib, the film also features testimony from former prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

[74] It should be noted that, in collaboration with Philip Gourevitch, Morris also published a book was published at the same time the film was released. It originally shared the title *Standard Operating Procedure*, but was later republished as *The Ballad of Abu Ghraib*. In it, Gourevitch uses the hundreds of hours of Morris's interviews as a primary source to investigate Abu Ghraib prison. The book has three sections: "Before," "During," and "After." It gives a deeper, more perceptive account than a film could of how Abu Ghraib prison came to be what it was and the resulting fallout. Notably, unlike the film, it

through a dogged documentary investigation of which way a milkshake fell.[75] When

reading Susan Sontag's *Regarding The Pain of Others*, he got hung up on a brief portion

where she discusses Roger Fenton's photographs of the Crimean War. Sontag argues that

Fenton's photograph of cannon balls on the road was "obviously" staged. Morris was

annoyed by the assumptive word "obviously" and dove into an exhaustive exploration of

which of Fenton's two photographs came first, "cannon balls on the road" or "cannon

balls not on the road."[76] Morris eventually concluded that Fenton did stage the

photograph because of five pebbles that appear to roll down the hill when flipping back

and forth from one photograph to the next. Gravity gave it away. All these obsessions –

milkshakes, cannonballs, and Sabrina Harman's thumbs-up – reiterate Morris's

overarching epistemological trajectory. He want things to "add up."

In 1999, the renowned filmmaker Werner Herzog, delivered a manifesto at the

Walker Art Center called "The Minnesota Declaration: Truth and Fact in Documentary

Cinema," which helps to reveal the paradox at the center of Morris's documentary

methods. In the manifesto, Herzog (who once held a bet with Morris that famously

resulted in Herzog eating his own shoe) argues that there are superficial truths and deep

truths in cinema.[77] Herzog ironically locates superficial truth in realist cinema practices:

"Cinéma Vérité is devoid of vérité. It reaches a merely superficial truth, the truth of

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includes conversations with Ivan Frederick and Charles Graner, two key figures of the scandal that are absent from the film (an aspect explored further later in this chapter).

[75] See his 1988 documentary *The Thin Blue Line*.

[76] He even traveled to the spot where Fenton took the photographs. See Morris's New York *Times* blog, *Zoom*, as well as his book *Believing is Seeing: Observations on the Mysteries of Photography* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

[77] As a motivational dare, Herzog bet Morris that if Morris ever finished his first feature film, *Gates of Heaven* (1978), Herzog would eat his own shoe. The film was eventually finished and, as promised, Herzog boiled and ate a shoe, an event that was itself filmed and turned into a short documentary by Les Blank titled *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe* (1980) – an homage to Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*.

accountants." Herzog then states his thesis for deep cinematic truth: "There are deep strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization." The paradox of Morris is that he believes that when things "add up" (the accountant's truth) it can lead to a deeper, "ecstatic" truth. He likes facts. He finds very little satisfaction in the explanation that Fenton might have successfully documented some "emotional" or ecstatic" truth by manipulating his photo in placing all those cannonballs on the road. At the same time, and in equal measure, Morris readily turns to cinematic practices of "fabrication," "imagination," and "stylization" for crafting his own documentaries.

To call into question the practice of hiring professional actors, paying interviewees, inserting stylized reenactments, and scoring the film with a 'Hollywood' soundtrack is certainly critically valid. We might rightfully wonder what the added documentary value is, for example, of the reenactment in *Standard Operating Procedure* of Saddam Hussein frying an egg filmed from a decidedly fantastical beneath-the-pan perspective on a Phantom camera.[78] The comparisons critics make between Morris's work and other strong documentary efforts on the subject also raise reasonable questions. The other Abu Ghraib documentaries, especially Gibney's and Kennedy's, are powerful, effective endeavors to elucidate what happened at Abu Ghraib and how it happened, as are the great journalistic efforts by Mark Danner, Jane Meyer, Scott Horton, and Seymour

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[78] The paradox of the Phantom camera is that it shoots more frames per second than ever before in order to produce the most detailed slow motion that has ever been achieved - it generates thousands of images in order to slow the filmic experience to an almost-photographic stillness. Its name suggests that it creates ghosts or at least captures them. The more frames it shoots per second the closer it gets to appearing as a still image, moving.

Hersh. However, as Caetlin Benson-Allot has succinctly observed, where these other

documentaries "use their media to expose atrocities," *Standard Operating Procedure*

"focuses on how atrocities become media files" (40-41). This is the key distinction that

Arthur, Nelson, Hoberman, Dargis, et al., fail to account for. Its not that the files will lead

us to the atrocities, but that the files are inextricable from the atrocities. As Linda

Williams rightly argued in her essay on the film, *Standard Operating Procedure* focuses

on "the digitally framed, proliferating pictures themselves whose status as evidence is

continually interrogated" (34). The film asserts that these photographs cannot provide a

transparent window onto the events of Abu Ghraib. Quite the opposite: they hide more

than they reveal.

The aesthetic critiques of *Standard Operating Procedure* are premised on the idea

that a good documentary is one whose aesthetic gives the impression that no aesthetic

choices were made. Stylized reenactments and musical scoring (especially when they

announce themselves too prominently, as they do in this film) are perceived as an

aesthetic overindulgence unbecoming of documentary, which distracts the viewer from

the 'proper' outrage toward the crimes the documentary is exploring. This is not a new

critique.[79] Morris has made a film about digital photographs using nonstandard

documentary procedures. All documentaries, even more documentary-looking

documentaries than this one, are constructed out of modes of reenactment: testimony is a

form of reenactment; editing is a form of reenactment; assembling an archive filmic-ly is

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[79] Pare Lorentz's government-sponsored documentaries about The Depression in the 1930s, which were scored by Virgil Thompson and included cinematographers such as Stacey and Horace Woodward, had all the trappings of Hollywood production and were the cause of much debate from the right and left as the modern syntaxes of American documentary and propaganda were being established.

a form of reenactment; and, in this case, the photos themselves are already staged and reenacting certain practices of detainment and interrogation. Morris knows this and his film performs this knowledge.

Standard Operating Procedure opens with various snapshots of the sunrise over the outer walls of Abu Ghraib prison and ends, predictably, with a similar snapshot of a sunset. More than serving as heavy-handed bookends to the film, these mundane, 'artsy' images (like any generic postcard image any tourist might take) become more haunted as the film progresses. These banal photographs occupy the same digital storage space as all the iconic images of Abu Ghraib. They are part of the same set of images as Lynndie England holding a prisoner by a leash and pyramids of naked prisoners. The same people who used the camera as an instrument of humiliation also took these benign, pedestrian images of beauty. Like the Parisian Arcades of Walter Benjamin's flaneur, which flattened history into an anachronistic collection of artifacts and objects, the digital cameras of Abu Ghraib situate images of torture, tourism, and leisure into one un-curated array of binary data. Morris takes some pleasure in the perverse juxtaposition this flattening creates: in this picture, a beautiful sunset beyond the walls of Abu Ghraib, in that picture, soldiers goofing around during some down time, in the next picture, a bloodied prisoner tied to his cell bunk.

Morris makes the flattening effect of digitality evident from the opening credits. The sunrise pictures flash on screen as Tim Dugan, a former civilian interrogator from CACI Corps and a primary witness in the film, tells us that Abu Ghraib was no vacation. The last sunrise photograph shrinks away and joins a dramatic animated thumbnail array

of all the Abu Ghraib photographs as the opening credit sequence begins. This is the first

of several moments where the film visualizes digitality for us. This animated array of

photographs, which appears as something out of Minority Report or perhaps debris

floating in space provides, as Linda Williams describes, a "striking picture of cinema's

attempt to contain the elusive multiplicity of the digital" (XX). The film presents the

photographs as data. Morris creates a cinematic version of the ether in which the binary

data and the photographs appear to float and constellate in space – a digital ballet. Morris,

through cinematic techniques far afield from the "Ken Burns effect," reveals the

photographs, not as simply illustrative visuals, but as digital entities that are

simultaneously photographs as such and something qualitatively different from analog

artifacts. What exists in the photograph is more than the picture we see. In addition to the

signature of light, the film unfolds the extra-visual information embedded in the photo-

files: the signatures of the device, the time, and the exposure settings. According to Brent

Pack, an Army Investigator interviewed throughout the film, the traditional mysteries of

the photograph are a distraction. For him, definitive evidence is available from the

photograph. The digital photograph is an unlockable and literal document:

> Photographs are what they are. You can interpret them differently, but what the
> photograph depicts is what it is. You can put any kind of meaning to it, but you
> are seeing what happened at that snapshot in time. You could read emotion on
> their face and feelings in their eyes, but it's nothing that can be entered into fact.
> All you can do is report what's in the picture.

Pack's understanding of photographs is more purely evidentiary than Morris's is.

Where Morris builds upon the image with testimony and reenactment to provide a depth

to the image that it does not itself have, Pack sees the photograph as only the data and metadata contained in its file – its surface and metasurface.

The film is structured around the following primary sources: the photographs and cell phone movies taken by U.S. soldiers working at Abu Ghraib prison; interviews and first-person testimony with those who were involved, including among others Specialist Lynndie England, Specialist Sabrina Harman, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, Brent Pack, and Tim Dugan; and, finally, the letters from Sabrina Harman to her wife, Kelly.

The photograph of a hooded Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, the detainee they called 'Gilligan,' standing on a box with wires connected to him, is now perhaps one of the most famous photographs in the world.[80] It epitomizes the use of the camera as a torture device. In this case, Faleh was forced to pose on the box and told that he would be electrocuted if he fell off (unknown to him, the wires were not connected to anything). This 'softening' technique was organized by Sergeant Ivan Frederick who, along with Charles Graner, was one of the main ringleaders in staging these acts, specifically with picture-taking in mind.[81] Morris shows us another, less famous photograph of this event taken by Sabrina Harman. In her photograph we see Graner looking at his camera at a picture he has just taken. He is most likely looking for the very first time at one of the most iconic photographs in history – at the photograph of 'Gilligan.' Here a soldier has photographed a soldier looking at a photograph. *Standard Operating Procedure* shows this act occurring throughout the Abu Ghraib photographs. Each of the "naked pyramid"

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[80] For more on the confusion over the identity of the prisoner they called Gilligan, see Morris's New York *Times* blog post, "Will the Real Hooded Man Please Stand Up," (15 Aug 2007).

[81] Frederick's and Graner's testimonies are both notably absent from the film. Graner was still in prison and was not allowed to testify. Frederick had just been paroled during production of *Standard Operating Procedure* and presumably did not want to talk.

photographs, for example, shows another soldier holding another camera taking a photograph from another angle at the same time. These meta-photographic moments become emblematic of the not only the staging of torture for the camera, but of the challenges that digitality brings to our changing conceptions of war photography.

Morris moves us toward the 'Gilligan' photograph and its context by starting with snapshots of the MP's leisure time: lounging around, sleeping, engaging in crude sophomoric antics (acting out various sex acts on each other with a banana and some toothpaste) in the jail cells that were their living quarters. The leisure photographs serve several purposes: they help Morris disprove the notion that Abu Ghraib scandal was the result of a "few bad apples." He undoes the possibility of a monstrous notion of them and returns them, as he says, to the "realm of the human." Throughout the film, Morris does not want to deny their imperfections and even their culpability, but he also wants to reveal the extent to which these soldiers were scapegoats, and, in a sense, themselves victims of a much larger military-political shaming machine. In another sense, the leisure pictures that precede the 'Gilligan' photograph, serve also to recall how toxic life in Abu Ghraib was – where the antics of leisure and the 'antics' done to the prisoners become entwined – they exist in the same digital milieu of the camera's memory card.

Throughout the film Morris seems to contend that photographs do provide evidence, but very limited evidence. The film treats the photographs as a point of entry, but in order to know more we must move beyond the frame of the image and beyond its framing in the public sphere. The film strives to explore the before and the after of the

image – the context and the motivations behind their existence. He believes that the photograph alone is not enough.

In addition to the 'Gilligan' photograph, the film also focuses heavily on Manadel Al-Jamadi, whose death during CIA interrogation at Abu Ghraib was ruled a homicide by medical examiners. Mark Swanner, the CIA agent later found to be responsible for Al-Jamadi's death, was never charged and received only a letter of reprimand. Sabrina Harman, however, by taking a photograph of Al-Jamadi's body (by making visible that which was meant to remain invisible) was charged with tampering with evidence when she and Charles Graner took the now-famous photographs of each other smiling over the body, thumbs up. The photographs simultaneously serve as evidence of the crime and a distraction from it. These are the epistemological conundra that Morris is keen to investigate. They are both the revelation of and distraction from 'what happened' at Abu Ghraib. Sabrina Harmon's thumbs up, which might be taken to epitomize Abu Ghraib's perverse combination of plucky best intentions and sadistic torture, becomes for Errol Morris, like many of Abu Ghraib's images, a more complicated epistemological-photographic situation. Harman explains her thumbs-up pose to us as something that you do 'for the camera' – a habitual and artificial pose that stems from the self-consciousness one feels in front of the camera. For Harman, it's what you do when you don't know what to do. She explains in the film that she took the pictures in order to collect evidence of the abuses. She saw herself as a crime scene investigator who was documenting this homicide in order to prove what was going on inside Abu Ghraib, a claim that is supported by the letters she wrote to her wife.

Standard Operating Procedure reveals that many of the Abu Ghraib photographs, often the ones that seem the most graphic and offensive, actually fall within the legal boundaries of 'standard operating procedure' for the treatment of detainees. It's not the pictures that are damning so much as the military and intelligence apparatus that made them possible. Many of the photographs don't depict any illegal acts – simply routine humiliation techniques – and, in the case of Harman, the photograph that seems particularly horrific turn out to be more evidentiary than sadistic. Her "thumbs up" is not an index pointing to her wrongdoing, but rather a distraction from a murder.

The film, in these instances, is somewhat sympathetic to Harman (and, in other places, Lynndie England). Some have argued that the Interrotron makes her sympathetic because it allows her to directly address viewer. But it is not the Interrotron that creates the sympathy, it is Morris. He is not interested in wholly demonizing the Specialists who took these pictures. Rather, the film focuses its indictment on two other parties: 1) the powers that put into place this particular set institutional practices that were used throughout the U.S. detainment industry and 2) our very assumptions about what these photographs – or any photographs – show us. If anything, the Interrotron is the last stop in a concentric circle of interrogation practices that mark the Abu Ghraib scandal. Most of the Abu Ghraib images depict the standard procedures (forced nudity, stress positions, etc) used to 'soften' prisoners for interrogation and most of the Specialists who are interviewed in the film have been interrogated throughout the post-scandal investigative and legal process. While much is made of the power of the direct address that the Interrotron enables, our contact with Harman, England, Pack, Dugan and the others is

also indirect. The apparatus suggests an immediacy while also being inescapably mediated. Morris makes this apparent when Specialist Roman Krol approaches the Interrotron to look at a photograph that Morris is holding up. He backs away and tilts his head to the side as he studies the image. To the viewer, Krol approaches the camera and us, tilts his head at us. This moment, quite intentionally, ruptures the facade of the direct-address interview. Krol breaks an invisible plane to inquisitively study a photograph and as he approaches, squinting, looking, he appears to be puzzling over us, the people on the other side of this screenic encounter.

Wafaa Bilal's Disruptive Technocorporeality

If Morris literally restages the Abu Ghraib photographs as cinematic objects, Iraq-born artist Wafaa Bilal restages the modes of looking that enable the taking and the seeing of those photographs. Broadly speaking, Bilal's cyber performances explore the entanglement of bodies and media technologies within digitally mediated visual environments. His projects over the last decade have sought to both enact and challenge the modes and practices of witnessing twenty-first-century conflict. Drawing from video-game interfaces and interactions, surveillance technologies, robotics, mass media, internet cultures, and social networks, Bilal constructs plainly oppositional situations in which his body must "suffer" media phenomena. His critique and exploration of global media phenomena and Western ways of witnessing take place at the intersection of two perceivable surfaces: the skin and the screen. His work has involved modifying both skin and screen by implanting his body into technologically mediated environments and,

conversely, implanting technologies (surgically) into his body.[82] The most significant

aspects of Bilal's performances, sometimes despite his authorial intentions, arise out of

accidents and failures – the bodily, technical, and legal glitches that inevitably beset his

projects. I locate in these contingent strands of these performance pieces a continuation of

the disruptive frames that I have elucidated elsewhere in this chapter. Bilal introduces an

art practice that turns contingency and failure into elucidatory sites for thinking about the

technocorporeal conditions of postmodern witness.

This section, then, examines the contingencies that emerge from the human-

machine interactions and interventions that Bilal and other artists construct. I will focus

here mostly on Bilal's 2007 cyber-performance *Domestic Tension,* aka "Shoot an Iraqi,"

in which he lived for thirty days in a confined space under attack by a remote-controlled

paintball gun. I will also touch on some of Bilal's other related installations including

Virtual Jihadi (2008), *...and Counting* (2010), and *3rdi* (2010-11) as well as work by

Joseph DeLappe and Anne-Marie Schleiner.

Domestic Tension (2007) reenacts the Iraq War's spectacle of humiliation.[83] For

the performance, Bilal confined himself for 30 days in a gallery space at the Flat File

Galleries in Chicago, during which time people from across the globe could tele-interact

with him via chat, webcam, and remote-controlled paintball gun. People had 24-hour web

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[82] The latter tradition, often referred to as human enhancement, body modification, or body hacking has a much deeper history that will not be adequately explored here. Bilal's body modifications represent a brief foray into this tradition. For more on this, see the work of the Cypriot-Australian posthuman artist Stelarc and also the French feminist plastic surgery artist Orlan. Relatedly see also the work and theory of Quinn Norton, who also happened to be the partner of the late Aaron Swartz, hacker wunderkind and influential information freedom advocate.

[83] Bilal wanted to call the piece "Shoot an Iraqi," but the owners of the FlatFile Galleries thought it might be too racially inflammatory (Bilal 24).

access to the space where they could, with the click of the mouse, aim and shoot at Bilal

with the paintball gun, transforming the virtual interaction into a very physical one. Bilal,

who wore goggles and a keffiyeh, was "an available target" for most of that month (Bilal

2). Over time, the space became saturated in yellow paint. Bilal often stayed below the

gun line or took cover behind strategically placed plexiglass in front of his computer

desk. The entire month was streamed live on the internet via the webcam mounted on the

paintball gun. The image was grainy and without sound, echoing with the media

aesthetics of the Gulf War. And like Rovner's grainy Gulf War photographs, the lo-fi

quality, according to Bilal, was meant to "heighten the sense of remoteness and

detachment" of mediated conflict. Over the thirty-day period, Bilal's site received 80

million hits and 60,000 shots from people in 128 countries (xvi).

     In a cyber-performance that is both fascinating and frustrating, Bilal returns us the

question posed in the opening lines of the film *Three Kings* discussed in the second

chapter*:* "Are we shooting people or what?" We *are* shooting Wafaa. Or what? We are

choosing *not* to shoot? Choosing to watch passively? Choosing to aim the gun away from

him? This project fascinates, because in its media-microcosm, it restages the various

media conditions of the Iraq War from Predator drones and other robotic weapons to the

gaming and hand-held visual cultures through which soldiers modeled, recorded, mixed,

edited, and mashed their war experiences. This project frustrates because in a way it

requires us to shoot at the same time that it condemns our shooting. It risks being overly

didactic, in other words, by inviting the viewer to shoot – to engage in violence – in order

to condescendingly "teach" the viewer about the violence of their spectatorship. At its

best, though, it is a performance that provokes a crisis in the viewer and causes them to question their own spectatorship of war. It imbricates comfort zones with conflict zones. The performance showcases the interference created by the proximity of these disparate yet telepresently intimate zones of safe distance and dangerous presence both for the expatriate Iraqi artist in Chicago and the millions of visitors who trafficked this site of remote interaction and violence.

He wanted the project to address both cybergaming culture and the robotics of drone warfare, both of which, he argues, foster a "curious detachment that attends American spectatorship" (xiii).[84] I am very skeptical, however, of such directly causal arguments whereby technology becomes a pathogen in a perceptual and moral disease. Rather, I think, as Carol Becker argues in the introduction to *Shoot an Iraqi,* that Bilal "created an axis of action to intercept daily life" (xix). I see *Domestic Tension* offering a more nuanced screenic encounter. By transforming a virtual interaction into a physical one, *Domestic Tension* not only offers a provocative reenactment of modern technological warfare, internet cultures, gaming cultures, and social network self-

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[84] This project and Bilal's framing of it is indebted Harun Farocki's famous Vietnam-War-era film installation, *Inextinguishable Fire* (1969). On its surface, the film protests the production and use of napalm by the U.S. Military, but on another level it protests the "curious detachment…of American spectatorship" that Bilal is also interested in. At the beginning of the film, in the immediacy of second-person address, Farocki asks the viewer, "How can we show you the injuries caused by napalm?" If we show you pictures of napalm burns, you'll close your eyes. First, you'll close your eyes to the pictures. Then you'll close your eyes to the memory. Then you'll close your eyes to the facts. Then you'll close your eyes to the entire context." In what becomes an escalating experiment in disrupting the detachment of the spectator, Farocki uses first-person testimony, self-harm performance art, and reenactment to make the realities of napalm known to the "you" of the audience. The film begins with Farocki reading a statement from a Vietnamese individual describing the experience of being burned by Napalm. Next, Farocki pulls up his sleeve and burns himself with a cigarette, stating, "A cigarette burns at 400' C. Napalm burns at 3000' C." The rest of the film takes place in a simulated Dow Chemical plant where actors play corporate scientists who are indifferent to the consequences of the products they produce. At one point, the scientists watch television coverage of the war and complain of boredom. The film emphasizes the everyday complicity of students, engineers, scientists, and casual observers who could resist the production of weaponized material, but do not.

commodification, it also invites contingent disruptions. It creates the possibility for a range of chance interventions and cybercultural expressions from troll rants and racist diatribes to serious discussions and thoughtful engagement. It becomes a site of contingency and cyber-activism. At one point in the performance a cadre of enterprising hackers modified the paintball gun into a fully automatic rapid-fire device – cyber-attacking the code in order to better attack Bilal. In response, another group of hackers responded by forming a "shield" for Bilal by taking control of the gun and turning it to the left (xvii).

Domestic Tension reenacts and restages the corporeal, visual, and technological conditions of the war spectacle, thus highlighting the interpenetration of screens and bodies and their evolving interconnections in the context of war. Bilal disrupts the frames of the Iraq War by restaging its mediascapes – restaging the bodies that mediate and the bodies that are mediated by the screens of war via a network of surface effects that encompasses the detained, disarticulated, and dead bodies of war, the screens of war, and the human sensoria of the globalized electronic masses. Moreover (to return once more to Butler) Bilal, by dramatizing (and in fact gamifying) the sensory conditions of mediated war, creates a small opening in which we might consider the precariousness of another life through mediated perception (Butler, *Frames* 52).

Like *Domestic Tension*, Bilal's more recent works pose many of the same questions, risk on-the-nose didacticism, create potential spaces of disruption, and, most importantly, put the body at risk to media technologies. In each of the following performances, Bilal configures his body in relation to media technologies in ways that not

only stage a basic critique of contemporary media culture, but also invite the glitches and accidents that reveal the most about those interactions.

In his video game intervention, *Virtual Jihadi* (2008), he modified the game *The Night of Bush Capturing*, an Al-Qaeda-made modification of the popular video game *Quest for Saddam*.[85] In the original *Quest*, players fight stereotypically mustachioed Iraqis with the ultimate goal of killing Saddam Hussein. The Al-Qaeda mod reverses the premise, making the goal to kill George W. Bush. For his intervention, Bilal placed an avatar of himself as a suicide bomber in Al Qaeda's mod of the game. The work drew controversy and the original exhibition at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute was shut down by the school's administrators. Those who opposed the exhibition saw Bilal's work as pro-terrorist project and failed to see it as nuanced attempt to create an alternative narrative through a hybrid of autobiographical details and the game's narrative. Bilal's stated goal was to investigate the inherent racism within Western media depictions of the Arab world and the conditions under which terrorist recruitment becomes an option.

…And Counting (2010) was a 24-hour tattoo project in which dots of visible and invisible (UV) inks placed cartographically on Bilal's back represented American and Iraqi dead respectively. Inspired in part by the death of Bilal's brother by a missile at a checkpoint in Kufa, Iraq, the project was meant to bring awareness to the imbalanced visibility and invisibility of American and Iraqi deaths respectively. The 5,000 dead American soldiers were tattooed as permanent visible red ink dots and the 100,000 Iraqi casualties were tattooed as dots of green UV ink, which is invisible unless seen under

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[85] Wafaa Bilal's website, *Virtual Jihadi*, 2008, http://wafaabilal.com/html/virtualJ.html (accessed 15 Jan 2011).

black light. The dots were placed cartographically on Bilal's back near the Iraqi cities where the casualties took place.

In the cyborg experiment *3rdi* (2010-11), a camera was surgically implanted in the back of Bilal's head that transmits one image per minute to a website. The piece was commissioned as part of the Told/Untold/Retold exhibition at the Arab Museum of Contemporary Art in Doha, Qatar. The side effects (both biological and political) of this project were in many ways more central to the projects significance. Notably, Bilal's body eventually rejected the camera implant and it had to be removed or he would risk serious infection. Furthermore, his employer, New York University, citing concerns about student privacy, requested that the device be turned off at work (after all, anyone standing behind him could be photographed and publicly broadcast).

Bilal's work offers examples of an art practice that is critically engaged with the media aesthetics of war and, in particular, seeks to transform the screenic milieux of the Iraq War into modes of resistance. Bilal and other artists, hackers, modders, and activists attempt to think about (and with) war media by penetrating its screen space, if only fleetingly, through tactical media interventions. These artists interface with the screenic and, as Rita Raley argues in *Tactical Media*, seek out ways to "evolve the virtual effects of war into a mode of resistance" (71). They are screen modifiers. Conversely, other artists have responded to the militarized screen by disconnecting from it and resettling the images in non-screenic spaces. In other words, they engage the screens and digital objects of war by transposing them to more durable substrates, engaging in practice of screenic displacement. These works intervene in digital aesthetics of war by inserting them into

analog, material environments. They defamiliarize the screen by resituating its images

elsewhere. They are screen displacers.

Screen-displacing artists seek a sustained, un-flickering response to the war screen

as we can see in several artists' responses to the digital snapshots of abuse at Abu Ghraib:

Richard Serra's crude charcoal sketch of Gilligan on the box at Abu Ghraib with "STOP

BUSH" scrawled on it like a hurried piece of graffiti or a cave painting; Susan Crile's

delicate chalk and pastel renderings of the Abu Ghraib photographs where light white

lines and vast negative space are punctured by the dramatic bold colors of an

interrogator's black gloves or a prisoner's green hood; Fernando Botero's painted

recreations of the Abu Ghraib photographs, where his comically rotund figures take on a

moral and emotional weight in their excess; Martha Rosler's reboot of her Vietnam era

collages *Bringing the War Home*, where conflict zones, comfort zones, and consumption

zones collide when, for example, American soldiers are pasted into the idyllic domestic

space of a magazine-ad living room; and, lastly, Jenny Holzer's *Redaction Paintings*,

which make a public spectacle of various redacted government documents related to

torture, detainment, and the "war on terror." Each of these works creates an intervention

that, rather than entering the screen frame through cyber art practices, reframes the screen

in a different milieu. They are decidedly off screen objects that think about the screen.

There are more artists and works that speak both directly and indirectly to Abu Ghraib.[86]

The practices of screen-modifying artists like Bilal, on the other hand, have sought a

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[86] Art critic Tyler Green wrote a series of brilliant columns on this in his former blog for *ArtsJournal,* which he was gracious enough to send me through email correspondence. In the posts, he discusses Bruce Nauman's 1981 'hanging chairs' sculpture, Martha Rosler's "The Gray Drape" (2008), and Gerhard Richter's "Uncle Rudi" (1965) to explore what it means to make and consume art in the context of Abu Ghraib and the American torture infrastructure.

more embedded approach that addresses, reframes, and thinks through (and with)

emerging militarized modes of perception and as such paradoxically return to indexicality

with a vengeance. Such tactical art practices seek to interfere with, disrupt, or otherwise

interface with the screens of war. Rather than displace the screenic, they place themselves

within it. Bilal's *Virtual Jihadi* along with work by artists like Joseph DeLappe and

Anne-Marie Schleiner, have experimented with the tactic of video game intervention,

which utilizes game space to disrupt, if only fleetingly, our acquiescence to the screenic

space of war.

In *dead-in-iraq* (2006), DeLappe entered the online first-person shooter *America's

Army*, a tax-payer-funded recruiting and publicity tool for the U.S. Army.[87] As a neutral

non-participant, rather than play the game, DeLappe, under the screen name "dead-in-

iraq," proceeded to type the names of dead American soldiers in the game's chat box. If

his avatar was killed he would simply resume typing upon regeneration. Over the course

of the project, DeLappe logged the name, rank, service branch, and date of death of over

4000 American casualties of the Iraq War. Some of the players that encountered *dead-in-

iraq* in the gamespace were indifferent, some were curious observers, and others went so

far as to protect his avatar. Many of the players who encountered DeLappe's project

within the game, however, became angry or defensive. To them, *dead-in-iraq* was not

only breaking the social contract of the game by not playing, but he was also politicizing

their fun. By interrupting the game with the names of the dead, he momentarily punctured

a riskless and regenerative military fantasy.

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[87] Joseph DeLappe's website, *dead-in-iraq*, 2006,
http://www.unr.edu/art/delappe/gaming/dead_in_iraq/dead_in_iraq%20jpegs.html (accessed January 10
(2011).

In *Velvet-Strike* (2002), Schleiner, along with Joan Leandre and Brody Condon, created an intervention in the game *Counter-Strike*, a mod of the popular first-person shooter *Half-Life*.[88] Instead of the usual "spray paints" players use to tag territories or mark kills within the game, *Velvet-Strike* invited players to create and use spray paints with often humorous or provocative counter-military messages including a soldier and an insurgent kissing. Like *dead-in-iraq*, *Velvet-Strike* garnered interest in the press and in some corners of the art world, but many players within the game's online community were dismayed by the intervention into their game. Rather than see *Velvet-Strike* as a challenge to the burgeoning post-9/11 militarized discourse, they saw it as an attack aimed directly at the game itself.

These artists address the medial entanglements of the screenic by creating a glitch – an ephemeral moment of interference – that attempts to temporarily disrupt the accepted screen world and, in doing so, disrupt the ideology that underwrites it. By engaging video-game interfaces and interactions, surveillance technologies, robotics, mass media, internet cultures, and social networks, such art practices construct situations that fleetingly expose the screenic entanglement of bodies and media technologies within digitally-mediated visual environments. The interventions are aimed less at the games themselves and more at the perceptive practices that structure the waging and witnessing of modern war. These interventions invite a critical dissonance that allows us to not only see the game, but more importantly to see ourselves gaming in the context of virtual war.

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[88] Velvet-Strike website, 2002, http://www.opensorcery.net/velvet-strike/ (accessed January 15, 2011).

As Rita Raley has observed, such interventions are inherently temporary, ephemeral, and aleatory. "Tactical media," she says, "signifies (sic) the intervention and disruption of a dominant semiotic regime, the temporary creation of a situation in which signs, messages, and narratives are set into play and critical thinking becomes possible" (6). They are tactical, not strategic, because their outcomes are temporary, uncontrollable, unpredictable, and most importantly, unsustainable. Their most elucidatory moments can arise out of accident and failure. They are rooted in contingent potentiality. They are timely, but they do not last; all that remains are secondary objects such as screenshots, videos, photographs, and bits of code. What, then, do these tactical media interventions accomplish? Are they part of real political change or just fleeting commentary? Are they a mode of resistance or a gesture toward resistance? What kind of action is cyber intervention?

CODA
No Human Occupant: Toward Autonomous Tactical Weapons and Anonymous Tactical Media

> The distributed and windowless drone, devoid of any interior, requires no human sightline for its flight. In an operational sense, its trajectory is not visual. Geometries of looking, whether from a cockpit or a control tower, have been replaced by networks of sensing.   – Jonathan Crandall

In all likelihood, this project has investigated a disappearing object. The screen is becoming either more or less than what it was throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Jordan Crandall, a drone performance artist, makes an astute paradigmatic observation in the epigraph above: there is a perceptual shift occurring from networks of looking to networks of sensing. The trend is toward lessening the screen's presence as much as possible in favor of making the world itself an interface – to expand and extend sensory space beyond the virtual window**.** When I embarked on this project, the screen interface was in the midst of proliferating, atomizing, and evolving at a hyper-accelerated rate; it has become a daily, ubiquitous portal of multimedia human-information interaction. A new genre of often sloppy journalism has emerged that is devoted to wildly speculating about all the horrors and corruptions society's screen-attachments will inflict on our children and on our brains. However, given the rate of technological change, what seems to be the zenith of the screen may already be its denouement. What was once something to be passively watched, then something to be interacted with via the peripheral tools of mice and keyboards, then something to be touched directly, is becoming more natively integrated into the human sensory apparatus. Our metaphors are getting more primordial: we've moved from command-line terminals to desktops, and recently (and quite biblically) to tablets. Like Moses, we receive messages from

proprietary clouds. One day we may not need to negotiate these human-computer

mediations through metaphor at all: we will connect directly as holy consumer-

commodities. The screen is dead, long live the interface.

The Tangible Media Group at MIT envisioned this thinning of the screen more

than a decade ago when they helped create the well-known scene in Steven Spielberg's

Minority Report (2002) in which Tom Cruise swipes, pinches, and tosses bits of

information around an interactive, transparent screenspace.[89] Such gestures, which were

for a brief moment the stuff of cinematic sci-fi visions of the year 2054, have become the

mundane gestures of everyday screen interaction 40 years early. The Tangible Media

Group has strived to create user interfaces that are, according to John Underkoffler,

"space soluble and network soluble" (Underkoffler). In other words, they seek an

interface design that allows computations to be tangible and manipulable in three-

dimensional sensory space as well as easily transportable from platform to platform. This

design goal stems from our embeddedness in a media-information environment of

ephemeral ubiquity rather than tangible scarcity. Information that was once hard to get

but easy to touch is now easy to get and hard to touch. Interface designers like the

Tangible Media Group provide a vision of interface design that puts us back 'in touch'

with information. It makes information appear as human-oriented objects rather than

making humans comport into machine-oriented objects. That is the illusion anyway.

At about the time when Tom Cruise was performing those iconic gestures in

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[89] Relatedly a joint Disney Research and Carnegie Melon University team have produced a demo of their Touché system, which transforms everyday objects into haptic, gesture-controlled surfaces. As Cory Doctorow recently reported on BoingBoing, the system uses "capacitive coupling to infer things about what your hands are doing. It can determine which utensil you're eating your food with, or how you're grasping a doorknob, or even whether you're touching one finger to another or clasping your hands together."

Minority Report, Lev Manovich was declaring the primacy of the screen in *The Language of New Media*: "We may debate whether our society is a society of spectacle or of simulation, but, undoubtedly, it is a society of the screen" (94). He follows this declaration with a question: "What are the relationships between the physical space where the viewer is located, her body, and the screen space?" (94-95). Despite the likely disappearance of the literal screen surface, I, too, have posed and continue to pose this question and add to it a concern not only for the viewer's position, but also for the position of those who are (and that which is) screened. I have attempted to abide such questions in these pages through a close reading of photographs, mainly, but also other surfaces of war. Here, in the coda, I want to consider how we keep asking these questions.

The title of the coda, "No Human Occupant," is the message stenciled on the fuselages of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). The message is put there, one imagines, in case of mishap – in case some passerby stumbles upon the wreckage of a crashed drone in the middle of a Yemeni desert. The message alerts the passerby not to attempt to rescue anybody because there is no body there. But it also serves as a reminder of the increasing tele-agency and machine-agency of the screenic era. Drones are the model 'picture' of the screenic today just as the F-117 stealth fighter was for Virilio a model 'picture' of the screenic during the Gulf War. They indicate not only new military tactics, but new military strategies of tele-agency.

As such robotic tactical weapons become increasingly autonomous (and media activists become more tactical), how do we continue to describe and understand screenic

entanglements? As weaponized networks move from a man-*in*-the-loop to man-*on*-the-loop model, where, as Patrick Crogan has observed, the human merely "monitors" (rather than enacts) "the execution of the robot's now realtime 'perceive and act vector'", what and who is animated by and granted agency in these configurations (Crogan)? How do we grapple with the ethical and political challenges of such trajectories? How do we disrupt and resist such trajectories?

Donna Haraway observed in 1985 that "the ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs is precisely why [they] are so deadly. They are as hard to see politically as materially" (12). For her, being deadly and hard-to-see is not only reason to fear cyborgs, it is part of their appeal as key figures in the ironic political myth she is constructing. This paradox still holds true for contemporary hacktivists, media interventionists, and other tactical media practitioners. The very ideological and technological systems they seek to disturb and disrupt are often deadly and hard-to-see. For that very reason, tactical media practices (like those of Wafaa Bilal, Joseph DeLappe, and Anne-Marie Schleiner, which I discussed at the end of the last chapter, among many, many others) are "as hard to see politically as materially." Although tactical media interventions are ephemeral, temporary, and aleatory modes of action, which may only offer what Rita Raley, in *Tactical Media*, describes as a "hollow laugh at power," they at least make laughter possible – the laughter that potentially "forges a social bond and a political consciousness held in common" (2). New screenic modes of warfare, particularly the increasingly autonomous networks of weaponized robots, pose serious political and ethical conundra that are only beginning to seep into public discourse. One possible response to this

emerging war machine may be the disruptive laughter of tactical media interventions, the

kind of laughter that interrupts the status quo and opens the possibility of critical thought.

Raley points to these potentialities in her definition of tactical media:

> Generally taken to refer to practices such as reverse engineering, hacktivism, denial-of-service attacks, the digital hijack, contestational robotics, collaborative software, and open-access technology labs, 'tactical media' is a mutable category that is not meant to be either fixed or exclusive...tactical media signifies the intervention and disruption of a dominant semiotic regime, the temporary creation of a situation in which signs, messages, and narratives are set into play and critical thinking becomes possible (6).

It is unfortunate that the term 'disruptive' has very recently become a popular buzzword

to describe all kinds of standard tech industry practices. Every Silicon Valley consultant

and media guru traffics in the language of 'disruption'; every startup company describes

their work as 'hacking.' The term 'disruptive' has ironically lost much of its disruptive

capacity as it gets appropriated as a virtue of venture capital. Still, the concept as Raley

uses it to describe certain modes of artistic and political engagement is meaningful. It is

and should be 'disturbing.' I want it to retain that subversive meaning here, the idea of

glitching the system. In these closing pages I want to look at the military's 'meta-

strategy' for the screenic era – its fantasies – and counter them with the potential

disruptiveness of tactical media.

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This dissertation began with an excerpt from Richard Brautigan's poem "All

Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace," an ironic title all too fitting for this

current era of omni-surveillance, where so many people are not only "all watched over"

but also *watching* all over, officially and unofficially, insidiously and innocently,

intentionally and accidentally, everyday from everywhere.[90] Recently the United Air

Force Center for Strategy and Technology released a breathtaking "trailer" on YouTube

for its Blue Horizons project, a multi-year future study. The tagline for this trailer is,

incredibly, "Meta-Strategy for the Age of Surprise." If tactical media artists like Bilal,

DeLappe, and Schleiner are seeking small openings for impermanent tactical

interventions in the dominant screenic regimes of war, the Air Force, here, is seeking a

broad universal strategy to control those screenic regimes. Over fast-paced graphics

depicting a timeline of technological innovation through the centuries, the following

message appears on screen:

> We can predict broad outlines, but we don't know the ramifications. Information travels everywhere; anyone can access everything — the collective intelligence of humanity drives innovation in every direction while enabling new threats from super-empowered individuals with new domains, interconnecting faster than ever before. Unlimited combinations create unforeseen consequences.

The Air Force, it seems, has been reading Virilio and Gilles Deleuze. The video

predicts an unpredictable era – an era of known unknowns and unknown unknowns (to

invoke once more the former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld). It predicts, perhaps,

the end of (or rather amplification of) what I have called here the screenic era. Echoing

Ray Kurzweil's theory of the coming Singularity, this "Age of Surprise" is a vision of

Big Data on hyperdrive where everything moves at unfathomable rates at an

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[90] One artist whose work explores the potential reversals of surveiller and surveilled in the context of military secrecy is Trevor Paglen. His work involves photographing and mapping restricted military installations, secret surveillance satellites, drone bases, and other 'black spots.' His work stands as a counter-image or reverse surveillance of military surveillance technologies. Like Michal Rovner's photographs of Gulf War television screens that I discussed in the second chapter, Paglen's photographs maintain a literal and figurative distance from their objects. There never seems to be enough detail; the images themselves are restricted. In a sense they perform the very culture of restriction and secrecy they seek to picture.

unfathomable scale.[91] In this future-scenario tactical media interventions by "super-empowered individuals with new domains" *are* the main threat. Blue Horizon seeks a (meta) strategy to cope with what Gabriella Coleman and others in the hacker community have referred to as "ultra coordinated motherfuckery" (Coleman). This motherfuckery is the official threat in the "Age of Surprise," but is also a key virtue of tactical media – it creates unpredictable, disruptive, and disturbing potentialities of political and screenic transgression.

As I write this coda, several events have pointed to this emerging fear. Internet prodigy and information activist Aaron Swartz has committed suicide while in the midst of being federally prosecuted for gaining access to an MIT computer closet to download a massive dataset of JSTOR articles. Similarly, Andrew Auernheimer, aka weev, a well-known grey-hat hacker and troll, will soon face sentencing from federal prosecutors for exposing a security flaw in AT&T's iPad user database when he scraped data from 114,000 AT&T customers. Bradley Manning recently provided stunning testimony during his court martial on his motivation for leaking the State Department documents and Apache helicopter footage (which I discuss in more detail later on) that were released on Wikileaks. At about the same time, the *New York Times* profiled its own battle against hackers in China who are possibly linked to the cyberwar and cyber-intelligence wings of the Chinese military. This led other major American companies and news outlets, including Apple, to publicize similar cases of massive data theft at the hands of hackers

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[91] Kurzweil defines the Singularity as "a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed. Although neither utopian nor dystopian, this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give meaning to our lives, from our business models to the cycle of human life, including death itself" (7-9).

in China, leading the White House to ask the Chinese government to play nice and agree to "acceptable norms of behavior in cyberspace" (Landler). This news comes after two years of increasing public understanding of large-scale cyber weapons like Stuxnet, Conficker, and Flame, which were developed and deployed by or in partnership with the United States military complex to disrupt Iranian nuclear development among other things. Meanwhile, Congress, the press, and other groups are increasing pressure on the Obama Administration to release memos related to drone strikes and drone target adjudication procedures, particularly in relation to the extrajudicial drone assassinations of American citizens who are linked to terrorist groups. Drones, in the meantime, remain the United States' standard weapon of choice for fighting an expanding, secretive unofficial war even as there is no real understanding of the collateral damage or the potential blowback of this strategy.

I offer this brief microhistorical chronicle of recent events because they point to a highly screenic moment in which political hacktivism, anarchic disruptive practices, state-sponsored cyberwar, and the proliferation of robotic warfare intersect in interesting and troubling ways. Amid over-zealous federal prosecution of activists, a shroud of mystery over drone targeting procedures, and the mythologization of the Chinese hacker threat, we face new questions about how to meaningfully resist new modes of power, how to use new forms of resistance against traditional modes of power, and how to create meaningful political and social relations under these emerging technological configurations. Additionally, to look at this moment as Paul Virilio would, we might consider the new accidents and disasters that loom up from these emerging technological,

social, and political configurations.

Over the last few years, the United States military has been testing a new surveillance system – a "machine of loving grace" called Gorgon Stare – that can track and transmit real-time movement across an entire town.[92] The system consists of a spherical array of nine cameras attached to the belly of an aerial drone. Each $17.5 million pod weighs 1100 pounds and shoots at two frames-per-second at half-meter resolution, creating live three-dimensional geo-intelligence of an area. What it currently lacks in frame rate it makes up for in coverage. It utilizes tagging and other metadata in conjunction with ESPN-like instant replay software to organize different views and disperse them to various screens such as the tablets of soldiers on the ground and the centralized databases of Air Force analysts. The goal of this technology is to supplement the perceptual limitations of physical battlespace with a corresponding dynamic screen-based representation. Even though the system has thus far proved buggy and unreliable, its very existence reveals a long-enduring military fantasy of total vision – to integrate and suture the optical world and the screen world in order to create a more perfect, totalizing picture.

Such a system is rooted in a first-person screen subjectivity that exposes, dominates, and annihilates its 'other' while limiting its own exposure. It is a disembodied point-of-view that sees but cannot be seen, that targets but cannot be targeted, that shoots but cannot be shot. More Sauron than Gorgon, this omniscient eye that can see everything – that spies, targets, and shoots – is yet another construct of human and machine

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[92] See Ellen Nakashima and Craig Whitlock, "Air Force's New Tool: 'We Can See Everything,'" *The Washington Post* (02 Jan. 2011): A1.

operations situated within the larger screen ecology of war. It is but one screen cluster

within the imbricated screen-space of war that includes the weaponized screens of

targeting and surveillance, the news screens of information and entertainment, and the

videogame screens of fantasy and training. The screen has become a domain of war – a

key battlespace of its own, distinct from but inseparably interfaced with 'real'

battlespaces of war where target acquisition, televisual news spectacle, and video game

graphics intersect and entangle.

As this dissertation demonstrates, examples of the screenic entanglement of war

and media technologies are not difficult to locate. The handheld footage provided by

embedded television reporters shares the same intense proximity to battle as that of

soldiers' homemade YouTube videos, which in turn recreate the perspective of first-

person shooter video games (in several YouTube videos of patrol missions, for example,

United States soldiers have explicitly recreated the first-person video game perspective

by attaching their digital camcorders to their helmets).[93] This intersection of self-

produced social media, corporate entertainment media, and large military targeting and

surveillance apparatuses can be found in the visual similarities between the "AC-130

Gunship" level in the video game *Call of Duty*, for example, and the Wikileaks

"Collateral Murder" footage taken from the onboard targeting screen of a U.S. Apache

attack helicopter from a 2007 mission over Baghdad.[94] In *Call of Duty*, players acquire

and destroy targets from an aerial perspective. Likewise, in the Wikileaks video we

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[93] For collected examples of this see *Iraq Uploaded: The War That Network TV Won't Show You,* MTV News Documentary (2006) and Mark Glaser, "Your Guide to Soldier Videos from Iraq," *PBS MediaShift* (01 Aug. 2006).
[94] http://collateralmurder.com

witness, through a similar onboard targeting screen, the slaying of about a dozen people including two Reuters news employees with the Apache's 30-millimeter cannons. The game and the footage share the same black-and-white, cross-haired perspective and the squelchy audio of seemingly casual radio communication by the pilots and gunners as they carry out their destruction. Furthermore, they share a mode of seeing structured by the same military fantasy of weaponized vision. Of course, despite their aesthetic similarity, they are not the same. Equating the game to the Apache footage both trivializes war ("it's just like a game") and trumps up the game ("it's just like war"). There is, after all, a significant and practical difference between war-like games and game-like wars. Games, though ideologically troubling at times, are for fun and entertainment. And wars, though sometimes fun and definitely entertaining, are for state-sanctioned systematic destruction and death in the name of ideology. The videogame and the Apache do, however, share a screenic kinship; they live in the same media ecology. Game-makers strive for the most intense version of war's reality in their games while war-makers strive for the game's reality in war. This aesthetic and ideological kinship, and the ways that we address it and are addressed by it, has been the focus of this dissertation.

The screen, in all of these contexts, is more than a surface of representation; it belongs to and creates the event. Under these medial conditions, the distinctions erode between the screens on which war is waged and the screens on which it is witnessed. For example, the "Collateral Murder" video, like the Abu Ghraib photographs, serve not only as potential proof of a crime, but is also the very screen through which the crime took

place. The virtual screen world in these cases is indelibly linked to – and determinant of –
events in the 'actual' world.

The boundaries between war fantasies and war acts, between information and
propaganda, between document and spectacle come under question. Military technologies
like Gorgon Stare raise important questions about the phenomenology of the war screen.
How do we address this transmedial screen phenomena? What are the consequences of
this evermore distant and robotic weaponry? What is the nature of virtual war or netwar
in relation to the notion of a lived, embodied world? What are the modes of protest or
resistance to a war machine increasingly comprised of autonomous robotic systems and
cyborg constructs? Do drone operators dream of electric sheep?

How do we address these entangled screens of war? And how do we respond to the
address of the screen? As I have argued, these are questions of an inherently ecological
nature. The phrase 'media ecology,' though perhaps overdetermined, is, as Matthew
Fuller elaborates in *Media Ecologies*, a concept that perhaps best describes the complex,
layered, "multiple relations of media dimensionality" that structures our "life in media"
(including our wars in media) (x, 5). The interpenetrated nature of the screen world,
especially in the context of war, requires an ecological concept of the surface, that I have
called 'the screenic' – a transmedial, ethico-aesthetic concept referring to the
transformation of complex medial, technological, bodily, and social operations into a
surface of perceivable events. As I have attempted to picture in these pages, the screenic
is the concept that addresses the interpenetration of bodies, machines, and images of war
across various media junctures that integrate and disintegrate human sensoria within the

expanding nexus of screen networks. The screenic, then, is a kind of ecology of the surface where we address and are addressed by a host of technocorporeal and technosensory concerns, where the screen can serve as a site of weaponization (through surveillance, targeting, and tele-control), of record (through documentary and journalism), and of resistance (through hacktivism, art, and other tactical interventions).

Perhaps one path of resistance is the "hollow laugh at power" that Rita Raley locates in tactical media. Perhaps it's the laughter, or rather the 'lulz,' that offer a tentative obstacle to the momentum of militarized networks.

In a *New Yorker* essay titled "For Laughs," about the conceptual artist Francis Alÿs, Peter Schjeldahl writes, "Most artists are still what artists have always been: people who make things. But the past half century has seen an increase, in number and in prestige, of artists as conceptual performers: people who chiefly do things, whatever their auxiliary output of pictures and objects" (84-85). Of course, "making" and "doing" are not as mutually exclusive as Schjeldahl suggests here, but his distinction does point to two different kinds of art objects: for makers the object itself *is* the work and for doers the objects are the remaining *record* of the work, not the work itself. Videogame interventionists (like Bilal, DeLappe, and Schleiner) are, at the end of the day, like Alÿs, doers insofar as their work is more event than thing. The 'work' is impermanent save for an archival trail of text, code, screenshots, and clips. This kind of "doing" is what gives tactical media art its disruptive and aleatory qualities – the qualities of laughter and mischief. The regimes that hackers and tactical media artists tackle are often serious and somber – not "for laughs" – but the nature of their work is mischievous. They break the

rules of the game and create little glitches in the screenworld. At about the same time that

Schjeldahl published "For Laughs," a network of hackers with connections to the

amorphous Anonymous collective calling themselves Lulz Security, or LulzSec, carried

out a series of short-lived but highly publicized hacks that exploited and exposed security

loopholes on several high-value sites including the U.S. Congress and the Central

Intelligence Agency. LulzSec portrayed themselves as a band of merry hacksters who,

like Alÿs, did it "for the laughs," or in their case "for the lulz." Lulz – which is modified

internet-speak for LOLs or "laughs out loud" – in addition to laughter, also connotes the

perhaps more radical idea of "lulls," a break in the flow of things. If there is no way

outside of the techno-military screen world, perhaps the lulls and lulz of tactical media

intervention become a gesture of resistance that, though it cannot break the frame, does

manage, for a moment, to crack the surface. Somewhere between Alÿs and LulzSec, the

screenic interventions of artists and hacktivists seek ways to penetrate the weaponized

surface – to create lulls in its illusive continuity; to be the wilier, regenerative Prometheus

in the face of the Gorgon's stare.

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