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# Cultural governance and pictorial resistance: reflections on the imaging of war

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## Introduction

If we assume that the state has no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that bring it into being, then the state is an artefact of a continual process of reproduction that performatively constitutes its identity. The inscription of boundaries, the articulation of coherence, and the identification of threats to its sense of self can be located in and driven by the official discourses of government. But they can equally be located in and driven by the cultural discourses of the community, and represented in sites as ‘unofficial’ as art, film and literature. While such cultural locations are often taken to be the sites of resistance to practices of government, their oppositional character is neither intrinsic nor guaranteed. Indeed, states have often engaged in or benefited from practices of cultural governance. As Michael Shapiro argues, cultural governance involves support for diverse genres of expression to constitute and legitimise practices of sovereignty, while restricting or preventing those representations that challenge sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, cultural governance is a set of historical practices of representation – involving the state but never fully controlled by the state – in which the struggle for the state’s identity is located.

In this article, I focus on some issues concerning the visual media’s representation of recent wars as a means of exploring cultural governance in the contemporary period. Focusing on elements of the news media, film and documentary photography, this article explores how these diverse genres have contributed to the expression of collective identity. Arguing from a position in which governance and resistance are understood to be intrinsically related practices rather than discrete modes of acting, this article also explores the pictorial challenges to common understandings that underpin the collective identities enabled by cultural governance.<sup>2</sup> The story begins with a film.

<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, *Methods and Nations: Cultural Governance and the Indigenous Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2004), especially chs. 4–6.

<sup>2</sup> For an argument about the theoretical interdependence of governance (power) and resistance, see David Campbell, ‘Why Fight: Humanitarianism, Principles and Poststructuralism’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27:3 (1998), pp. 497–521.

### A film fable

Long before the United States, Britain and Australia invaded Iraq, before the attack on the World Trade Center precipitated Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and prior to the NATO intervention in Kosovo and the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Barry Levinson's film *Wag the Dog* (1997) told the story of a president compromised by sexual misconduct who deflects the scandal by engineering a foreign crisis in a faraway land. Based upon the plan of an intelligence operative (Conrad Brean, played by Robert de Niro), a Hollywood producer (Stanley Motts, played by Dustin Hoffman) is engaged to construct the appearance of a war. Disturbed by the notion that this ruse is untrue and will inevitably be exposed, both the nervous producer and anxious White House staffers are placated by Brean's belief that the truth makes no difference once the aura of a scandal takes hold.

Central to establishing the truth for both of the competing stories (the president's alleged affair and the emerging war) is the public use of photographs. News reports detailing the allegations of sexual misconduct are anchored by an image of the president with the girl who later made allegations against him. Likewise, in his effort to convince Motts that a Hollywood producer is ideally placed to simulate a war, Brean asserts that war is a performance remembered for its slogans rather than its specificities. After running through a series of iconic black and white images that are almost subliminally cut into the film – 'naked girl covered in napalm'; 'V for victory'; 'five marines raising the flag on Mount Surabachi' – Brean asserts 'you remember the picture 50 years from now; you will have forgotten the war'. Similarly for the Gulf War: 'smart bomb falling down a chimney; 2500 missions a day; 100 days; one video; one bomb . . . the American people bought that war . . . war is show business . . . that's why we're here', Brean says.

Brean directs Mott to think of the war as a pageant, something with a theme, song and visuals. Of course, given that the proposed war has no actuality, the images have to be created from scratch. First off, an enemy has to be put in place, and Brean opts for Albania on the grounds that no one has heard of it and no one knows anything about Albanians. This permits Brean to conclude they must therefore be shifty, standoff-ish and untrustworthy. On this foundation, Motts starts to weave a narrative of fundamentalist danger and the threat of nuclear proliferation, with Albanian terrorists attempting to smuggle a 'suitcase bomb' over the Canadian border into the US.

Embodying conflict often requires that someone be cast in the role of victim. To this end, Motts' constructs an image of a 'young girl in rubble . . . driven from her home by Albanian terrorists' as the pivot for popular support to justify the military mobilisation. Captivated by the idea of having grainy, hand-held news footage with her clutching a kitten while running from the ruins, a series of models' photographs are scanned to select the suitable candidate. Rejecting one for being 'too Texan', Motts and his staff settle on a beautiful young blonde and dress her to fit the stereotype of East European peasant, head scarf and all. After dismissing the make-up lady – because the victim has to look like 'she's been raped by terrorists' – the actress makes a couple of runs towards the camera against the standard blue TV background that allows images to be manipulated around her. The production staff, sitting on high in the control room perusing picture library files for suitable elements

of the shot, digitally add the kitten along with a backdrop of a devastated village on fire, a bridge over a stream, and a soundtrack of screams and sirens. Mocked up in a few hours, the simulated news footage is leaked *via* satellite and instantaneously broadcast by a 24-hour news channel. After it is shown and described, the newscaster concludes, 'America has seldom witnessed a more poignant picture of the human race'. In place of the president's alleged affair, the news media had been fed a new story to consume endlessly.

### News media and contemporary war

The propaganda practices that make up the plot of *Wag the Dog* may be crude and fictional, but they do highlight elements found in the news media's coverage of contemporary war. The insatiable appetite of a twenty-four hour news cycle, the proliferation of cable and satellite channels, the emotional value of feminised victims, the historical resonance of iconic images, and the official appreciation of all these factors, can all be located in recent coverage.

One of the lessons the Pentagon took from Vietnam was that the power of television meant control of the military's message was central to the success of their operations. As such, the combination of independent reporting and regular military briefings (the infamous 'five o'clock follies') US officials used to conduct daily in Saigon were to be restricted. Learning also from the British experience in the Falklands, the US developed constraints for media coverage of its operations in Grenada and Panama, before deploying them most successfully during the Gulf War of 1990–91. By arranging selected media representatives into pools – which would then be handled by military liaison staff and given only restricted access to the battlefield – and organising military briefings around video images the Pentagon itself produced, the Pentagon effectively controlled the story of its campaign.<sup>3</sup>

The success of military media management in the Gulf War led to the 1992 promulgation of the 'Principles of Coverage'. These principles state that the US military should, as quickly as is practicable, but cognisant of any possible impact on military operations, provide reporters with independent access to combat operations. In practice, those principles were not applied in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> According to *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd:

Military reporters say they are more handcuffed now than during Desert Storm. They have had only the most restricted and supervised access to Special Operations units. Even reporters who went to Afghanistan with Marines found themselves quarantined in warehouses and handed press releases from Central Command in Tampa about casualties less than 100 yards away. Some who got close to the action had film confiscated and guns pointed at them by Special Operations soldiers or their mujahedeen bullies.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See John J. Fialka, *Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> 'In the War on Terrorism, a Battle to Shape Public Opinion', *New York Times*, 11 November 2001, <<http://nytimes.com/2001/11/11/politics/11PROP.html>>

<sup>5</sup> Maureen Dowd, 'Coyote Rummy', *New York Times*, 24 February 2002, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/24/opinion/24DOWD.html>>. See examples of this given in Frank Rich, 'Freedom from the Press', *New York Times*, 2 March 2002, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/02/opinion/02RICH.html>>

In the place of independent journalism, the Pentagon produced its own material. To cope with the void of imagery in the opening weeks of the US military operation, the Defence Department provided its own pictures, among which the firing of a cruise missile from a navy ship, the American flag caught in the rocket's bright plume, was much used around the world. Phone interviews with groups of pilots fresh from bombing runs over Afghanistan were arranged and their patriotic sentiments broadcast far and wide.<sup>6</sup> Some operations were themselves designed for the images they could produce. When US Army Rangers parachuted into a Taliban airbase near Kandahar in late October 2001, the story of the first action by US ground forces was made possible by the green, grainy night video of troops in action released by the Pentagon. But the Rangers were not the first on the ground, as an Army Pathfinder team had already secured the base to ensure it was safe, leading a number of senior military officials to deride the much covered parachute jump as a 'television show' designed largely to influence public opinion.<sup>7</sup>

The military's desire to increasingly manage information was also made clear by the strange case of the proposed Office for Strategic Influence (OSI) in the Pentagon. Throughout the fighting in Afghanistan, the US and Britain established a series of 'Coalition Information Centres' in Washington, London and Islamabad in order to produce coordinated messages and rebuttals concerning alliance strategy, and have them available for the ceaseless global news cycle. Having been caught off guard by Osama Bin Laden's release of video messages to the media through Al-Jazeera, the Bush administration opted to expand the *ad hoc* wartime arrangements into a new office of global diplomacy run by a former advertising executive.<sup>8</sup> But it is the plans for the OSI that has been most revealing. Concerned with 'information operations' to influence foreign audiences, it was envisaged after September 11th that the OSI would coordinate everything from factual news releases to foreign advertising campaigns (billboards in Pakistan with images of the World Trade Centre under attack was one suggestion) to covert disinformation programmes designed to plant pro-American stories in the international media, sometimes using private firms to achieve the strategy.<sup>9</sup> The dilemma for the Pentagon, once OSI's existence had been revealed, was how to maintain the credibility of its public statements – how to make clear the Department of Defence was not engaging in spreading lies, while declaring that its strategy was to engage in 'tactical deception' of people beyond the US.<sup>10</sup> In an ironic outcome, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld claimed that 'the misinformation and adverse publicity'

<sup>6</sup> 'A Public Flooded with Images from Friend and Foe Alike', *New York Times*, 10 October 2001, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/10/arts/television/10NOTE.html>>

<sup>7</sup> For the images, see 'Revealed: How Bungled US Raid Came Close to Disaster', *The Guardian*, 6 November 2001, p. 1. For the background account of the raid and its filming, see Seymour M. Hersh, 'Escape and Evasion', *The New Yorker*, 12 November 2001, <[http://www.newyorker.com/PRINTABLE/?FACT/011112fa\\_FACT](http://www.newyorker.com/PRINTABLE/?FACT/011112fa_FACT)>

<sup>8</sup> 'Bush Will Keep Wartime Office Promoting America', *New York Times*, 20 February 2002, <<http://nytimes.com/2002/02/20/international/20INFO.html>>

<sup>9</sup> 'Pentagon Readies Efforts to Sway Sentiment Abroad', *New York Times*, 19 February 2002, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/19/international/19PENT.html>>

<sup>10</sup> 'New Agency Will Not Lie, Top Pentagon Officials Say', *New York Times*, 21 February 2002, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/21/international/21 INFO.html?>>



OSI attracted meant that it had to be closed.<sup>11</sup> Which does not mean that its activities no longer occur, just that they take place within existing Pentagon offices or through private subcontractors to the US government.

One of those private domains and corporate spheres through which American strategic information operations has been and will be pursued is Hollywood. While reporters from ABC's news division (along with those from CNN and others) were not able to gain access to the military in the Afghan battlefield, the same restrictions did not apply to representatives from ABC's entertainment division. In the aftermath of September 11th, the satirical magazine *The Onion* ran an article entitled 'American Life Turns into Bad Jerry Bruckheimer Movie.'<sup>12</sup> It is a notion that was strangely prescient. Bruckheimer, the producer of successful blockbusters such as *Top Gun*, *Pearl Harbour*, and *Black Hawk Down*, joined forces with the television producer behind the reality programme 'Cops' to develop a 'patriotic' series about US soldiers fighting the war against terrorism. All Bruckheimer's films have portrayed the US military favourably, which is not surprising given they were made with the Pentagon's assistance and blessing (in the case of *Black Hawk Down*, they provided the Apache helicopters and one hundred soldiers on location in Morocco). Similar cooperation made the six hour-long episodes of the 'Profiles from the Frontline' project possible, with the Pentagon guaranteeing access to those US troops in Afghanistan and around the world previously shielded from news journalists.<sup>13</sup> Screened on network television in the month prior to the invasion of Iraq, 'Profiles' provided a visual link for the war on terror from Afghanistan to Iraq, and gave both the media and the viewers a clear idea as to how the strategy of 'embedding' journalists with military units would produce a paean to valour and virtue.<sup>14</sup>

The Bruckheimer production of the war on terrorism will not be the only Hollywood film effort in this new patriotic struggle. There is, of course, a long history of Hollywood's association with US military causes, so cooperation post-September 11th is hardly novel. Nonetheless, the willingness of all branches of the television and film industry to meet President Bush's top political advisor Karl Rove in November 2001 reflected, as the head of Paramount Pictures said, 'this incredible need, this incredible urge to do something.'<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding the administration and industry's assertions that there is no question of the government control of content, it is clear from such views that official control, let alone censorship, would be redundant. Moreover, increasingly positive portrayals of US national security issues predate September 11th. After years of declining even media comment, let alone media assistance, and reaping a negative image in film and television as a

<sup>11</sup> 'Pentagon May Eliminate New Office of Influence', *The New York Times*, 25 February 2002, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/25/politics/25CND-MILI.html>>; 'Rumsfeld Formally Disbands Office of Strategic Influence', *New York Times*, 26 February 2002, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/26/national/26CND-PENTAG.html>>

<sup>12</sup> 'American Life Turns Into Bad Jerry Bruckheimer Movie', *The Onion*, 26 September 2001, <[http://www.theonion.com/onion3734/american\\_life\\_turns\\_into.html](http://www.theonion.com/onion3734/american_life_turns_into.html)>

<sup>13</sup> "'Reality TV' About GIs on War Duty', *New York Times*, 21 February 2002, available from the New York Times on-line archive.

<sup>14</sup> For details of the show, see its official web site at <<http://abc.go.com/primetime/profiles>>

<sup>15</sup> 'Hollywood Signs on to Assist War Effort', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 2001, <<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-111201holly.story>>

result, the CIA appointed a former Latin American specialist as a full-time entertainment liaison officer. With the promise of official cooperation, scriptwriters and producers have submitted their work for approval, and incorporated suggestions from CIA staff. The result has been some three television series and five feature films in which the agency is flatteringly featured as hard-working and heroic, though some (such as the Robert Redford movie *Spy Game* and the television series *24*) were completed and shown even though agency approval was withheld.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to understand – so that we can appreciate the full extent of the challenge that faces those who want to develop a politically critical stance in relation to developments and issues such as those outlined here – that the interweaving and interdependence of the military, media and information industries is neither an unforeseen accident or a failure of nerve on the part of the participants (especially the media). This blurring of what previously appeared to be distinct domains is the core of the new military strategy that results from the ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ (RMA) that has preoccupied the Pentagon for some time.<sup>17</sup> The RMA is concerned with how networked information technology is integrated into and changes the battlefield for the US military. One of the principal changes that result from this is a different understanding of the nature and extent of ‘the battlefield’. No longer confined to a spatial or temporal exception, it stems from what James Der Derian has called the ‘military-industrial-media-entertainment network (MIME-NET)’.<sup>18</sup> While the interaction of civilian and military technologies is not a recent development, what is new about MIME-NET, Der Derian argues, ‘is the power of MIME-NET to seamlessly merge the production, representation, and execution of war. The result is not merely the copy of a copy, or the creation of something new: It represents a convergence of the means by which we distinguish the original and the new, the real from the reproduced.’<sup>19</sup> This seamless merging of production, representation and execution comes about because ‘the new wars are fought in the same manner as they are represented, by military simulations and public dissimulations, by real-time surveillance and TV live-feeds. Virtuality collapses distance, between here and there, near and far, fact and fiction.’<sup>20</sup> As a result, the battlefield is now global and inclusive, overriding previous boundaries between the military and civilian, combatant and non-combatant, participant and observer. In such a world, the Pentagon’s suffocating restrictions on the press, the demise of news programmes in the face of entertainment alternatives, intimate relations between Hollywood and the national security establishment, and the conduct of military operations for their information outcomes and representational value in the struggle for strategic influence, are the norm rather than the exception.

From the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the story of Private Jessica Lynch’s ‘rescue’ demonstrates the ever-increasing cultural governance of the news media by the

<sup>16</sup> ‘Hollywood Helps CIA Come in From the Cold’, *The Guardian*, 6 September 2001, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4251281,00.html>>, ‘The Caring, Sharing CIA’, *The Guardian*, 5 October 2001, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4270257,00.html>>

<sup>17</sup> For details, see the on-line resource *The RMA Debate* at <<http://www.comw.org/rmal/index.html>>

<sup>18</sup> James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

military. Lynch's release was made public through the Coalition Media Centre (CMC) at the US Central Command headquarters in Qatar. This \$1.5m briefing operation, with a futuristic, Hollywood-inspired set replete with plasma TV screens, is housed in a remote warehouse hundreds of miles from the battlefield, but offering the military overview desired by its US, UK, and Australian media minders. The CMC was integral to the strategy of embedding reporters with military units, for those on the front line provided images and stories from an unavoidably narrow perspective, while the journalists at the CMC were given what was said to be the broad overview but in effect only amplified the narrow perspective desired by the Pentagon and its partners. As one media critic observed, the 500 or more 'embeds' (with 100 cameras) were 'close up at the front' while the 600 CMC journalists were 'tied up in the rear'. This meant the military could be confident journalists would produce 'maximum imagery with minimum insight'.<sup>21</sup>

The Lynch story demonstrated how well this operation could function. CMC journalists were roused from their sleep in the early hours of 2 April, thinking that a major story (such as the death of Saddam Hussein) was breaking. Instead they were presented with an edited five-minute military video – shot through a night lens, producing green, grainy images of silhouetted figures – detailing the Special Forces rescue of Private Lynch. The video encapsulated a narrative familiar to viewers of *Black Hawk Down* and *Behind Enemy Lines* – that the US military 'never leaves a fallen comrade'. A single still image was taken from this operation and circulated widely, showing Lynch lying on a stretcher aboard a US special forces helicopter, smiling grimly from under a US flag draped across her chest.

That Jessica Lynch is a fair-skinned, 19 year old blonde female from West Virginia helped spur the stories of heroism surrounding her captivity and rescue. Said to be suffering gun shot and stab wounds, and having been reportedly mistreated during her detention in an Iraqi hospital, a much used *Washington Post* story from 3 April cited unnamed sources as describing how Lynch had fought bravely during the battle of 23 March that led to her capture, firing a weapon repeatedly despite being hit and seeing many of her comrades killed.<sup>22</sup> Unsurprisingly, the cinematic quality of this description has led to quickly produced TV documentaries (the *Arts and Entertainment* network screened 'Saving Jessica Lynch' within two weeks of her rescue) and a massive effort to secure an exclusive interview upon her recovery, with CBS (which is part of the media conglomerate Viacom) offering a package of media inducements that included proposals for shows and publications from CBS News, CBS Entertainment, MTV (who dangled the prospect of Lynch co-hosting an hour long programme, with a concert held in her home town of Palestine, West Virginia), Paramount Pictures, and Simon and Schuster books.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> John Kampfner, 'War Spin', *Correspondent*, BBC2, 18 May 2003. For critical accounts of the CMC operation, see Michael Wolff, 'You know less than when you arrived', *The Guardian (Media supplement)*, 31 March 2003, <<http://media.guardian.co.uk/mediaguardian/story/0,7558,925900,00.html>>; Wolff, 'I was only asking', *The Guardian (Media supplement)*, 14 April 2003, <<http://media.guardian.co.uk/mediaguardian/story/0,7558,936087,00.html>>

<sup>22</sup> 'Reporting Private Lynch', *Washington Post*, 20 April 2003, B6.

<sup>23</sup> 'In Hoopla Over a POW, A Mirror of US Society', *New York Times*, 18 April 2003; and 'To Interview Former POW, CBS Offers Stardom', *New York Times* 16 June 2003, available from the New York Times on-line archive.



Apparently Lynch cannot recall any aspect of her time in an Iraqi hospital or subsequent release. But later media investigations have discovered that most of the dramatic elements of the early accounts of Lynch's condition and return are open to serious question. A BBC documentary, which interviewed staff involved in Lynch's care after the war had been declared over, revealed that she had no war wounds but was diagnosed as a serious road traffic accident victim, had received the best available treatment from Iraqi medical staff, and that their attempt to return her to US forces in an ambulance had been repelled at a US military checkpoint.<sup>24</sup>

While the basic coordinates of Lynch's story were not invented (she was injured, captured then recovered), the account was staged, in so far as the particular narrative that was attached to and derived from the military film of her release was constructed by the Pentagon's media operation to convey a heroic and redemptive meaning (implicitly recalling the captivity narratives common in the early days of American settlement, with Iraq functioning as 'Indian country'). The power of the image – both the night-vision video, and the still of Lynch on the stretcher, redolent of the fair-haired victim in *Wag the Dog* – was key to the way this account represented part of the invasion of Iraq. But are there images resistant to such official discourses of cultural governance?

It is important to remember that, whatever the power of MIME-NET and information warfare strategies, alternative images to those released and broadcast are captured all the time. That is because a not insignificant number of cameramen and photographers operate independently and unilaterally in war zones. But even embedded cameramen have recorded shocking images of wars effects that counter the clean narratives of surgical strikes. The problem is that the media industry itself operates in terms of codes and norms that mesh with the military's restrictions and prevent the public release of such images by invoking conceptions of 'taste' and 'decency'. In this context, it is worth exploring one branch of the media that has not bowed to these conventions and continues to represent much of the unvarnished horror of war – the traditions of documentary photography and photojournalism. This necessitates reflecting on concerns about the truth of the photograph, before examining Don McCullin's photojournalism as an instance of potential pictorial resistance to the cultural governance of war's representation.

### **Photographs and the question of truth**

It might seem anachronistic in the age of digital video and real-time news coverage to be concerned with the photojournalism of war and the politics of documentary photography. After all, it has been argued that Biafra (in 1968) was the last war in which newspapers scooped television, and black and white photographs played a

<sup>24</sup> Kampfner, 'War Spin', *Correspondent*, BBC2, 18 May 2003; Kampfner, 'The Truth about Jessica', *The Guardian* (G2 supplement), 15 May 2003, pp. 2–3. Many of these features were confirmed by the *Washington Post's* re-examination of the story two months after its initial account (which is no longer available in its online archives). See 'A Broken Body, a Broken Story', *Washington Post*, 17 June 2003, A1.

major role.<sup>25</sup> However, it is interesting to note – as the opening to *Wag the Dog* makes clear – when it comes to historical memory the photograph retains a considerable power. Indeed, as Susan Sontag has argued, it might be *precisely because of* the ubiquity of television’s visual flow that the arrest of time in the photograph offers space for contemplation and critique.<sup>26</sup>

The digital age has, however, had an important impact on contemporary debates about photography. With the increased capacity for pictorial manipulation arising from the use of digital cameras and computer imaging, public laments about the associated loss of authority and truth are common. For example, the new technology has led Fred Ritchin to wonder how the photograph’s documentary authority can be maintained when the computer provides no archival notion of an original photographic negative against which changes and tamperings could be checked. As a result, Ritchin speculates that ever-increasing digitisation might paradoxically mean ‘a revival of the largely dormant photo essay taken by living, breathing, thinking photographers; the photograph, unchained from its simplistic role of authentication, will then be recognized for its linguistic subtlety and broader reach’.<sup>27</sup>

While computerisation might produce that paradoxical outcome, the resultant photographic product will not function as a stable referent of objective truth in contrast to the computer’s indeterminate subjectivism. In large part, that is because the age of computer-based photography has heightened but not introduced the element of bias to an otherwise certain domain. Indeed, the digital revolution’s most important effect has been to end the ‘interlude of false innocence’ in which the referential veracity of the photographic image was too often unquestioned.<sup>28</sup> But even those who did not assume that photography corresponded directly to the external world, have sometimes been moved by the computer to a different position. As John Roberts observes, ‘one of the ironies of the debate on simulation and the chemical photograph is that all those who previously took documentary photography to task for believing in the ‘truth-value’ of the naturalistic image, now talk nostalgically about the disappearance of documentary’s reportorial and archival role’.<sup>29</sup>

The irony of this situation is even more marked if we reflect on the way the truth-value of the photographic image has always been challenged through allegations of manipulation leading to fraud. Indeed, many of the most famous war photographs have been the subject of controversy, with at least elements of the alleged naturalism dispelled. For example, during the American civil war, photographers (such as Alexander Gardner and Matthew Brady) moved bodies around to make images;<sup>30</sup> Robert Capa’s falling Spanish republican soldier is alleged to have been staged (or at

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), pp. 17–18.

<sup>27</sup> Fred Ritchin, ‘Photojournalism in the Age of Computers’, in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1990), pp. 35, 36.

<sup>28</sup> William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1992), p. 225.

<sup>29</sup> John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 221.

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye*, pp. 44–5; John Taylor, *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe and War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 64.

least consistent with other interpretations, such as someone slipping during training);<sup>31</sup> the image of five marines raising the flag at Mt Surabachi, Iwo Jima on 23 February 1945 was re-enacted with a different flag some hours after the flag raising ceremony;<sup>32</sup> and General William Westmoreland, former US commander in Vietnam, claimed in a 1986 speech that Huynh Cong Ut's 1972 photo of the Vietnamese girl fleeing a napalm attack showed nothing more than a 'hibachi accident at a family bar-b-que'.<sup>33</sup> Recently, the still of the Bosnian prisoner Fikret Alic, emaciated and standing behind a barbed wire fence at the Bosnian Serb-run Trnjopolje camp – frame-grabbed from an ITN television news report in August 1992 by newspapers and magazines around the world – has (wrongly) been declared a misleading fabrication by those with an interest in denying the charge of genocide against Serbian commanders.<sup>34</sup>

In a similar vein is the controversy surrounding Arthur Rothstein's photographs of the South Dakota drought during the Depression. Rothstein placed a locally obtained cow skull against various backdrops to obtain an image of the economic and environmental plight of farmers in the area. As part of the famous Farm Security Administration's (FSA) photographic unit, which did so much to establish the reputation of documentary photography as a progressive social practice, Rothstein was part of the effort to visualise the Depression in such a way that enabled New Deal policies. As such, regional newspapers opposed to the economic strategies of the New Deal seized on Rothstein's work as a way of supposedly demonstrating that such policies were based on 'trickery'.<sup>35</sup>

Given the political stakes in the debate around Rothstein's image, the controversy almost brought a premature end to the FSA photographic unit by putting in doubt the aura of naturalist veracity its work had acquired.<sup>36</sup> Even some of Rothstein's colleagues were appalled by his action. Walker Evans, one of the FSA's most famous photographers and one of the most noteworthy photographers of the twentieth century, declared 'that that's where the word "documentary" holds: you don't touch a *thing*. You "manipulate", if you like, when you frame a picture – one foot one way or one foot another. But you're not sticking anything in'.<sup>37</sup>

Evans' stipulation that one can 'manipulate' in terms of picture selection and composition, but one cannot 'stick anything in', requires a fine but tenuous sense of legitimate practice. It flows, of course, from a conventional sense of the meaning of

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye*, pp. 40–2; Taylor, *Body Horror*, pp. 58–9.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye*, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> David D. Perlmutter, *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy: Icons of Outrage in International Crises* (Wesport, CT: Praeger, 1998), p. 23; Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye*, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> For a full analysis of this controversy, see David Campbell, 'Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia – The Case of ITN versus *Living Marxism*, Part I', *Journal of Human Rights*, 1:1 (2002), pp. 1–33; and 'Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia – The Case of ITN versus *Living Marxism*, Part II', *Journal of Human Rights* 1:2 (2002), pp. 143–72. Both articles, and the relevant images and video, are available at <www.virtual-security-net>

<sup>35</sup> Martha Rosler, 'In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)', in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. by Richard Bolton (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 337n.

<sup>36</sup> William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

photography, a traditional understanding of the genre of documentary, and associated theories of reality and truth that undergird each. However, each of the above examples of controversial war pictures demonstrates the way in which these well understood realist accounts of photography are largely insufficient in making sense of the politics of photography. That is because in each of the cases there is no fraud equivalent to the obviously staged nineteenth-century images of fairies at the bottom of the garden, equivalent attempts to portray the Loch Ness monster or UFOs, or the manipulative construction of the Albanian victim in *Wag the Dog*. In each of the above cases, none of the critics doubt the basic elements of the images were there; what they doubt are the meanings most derive from the use of such images. Which raises the interesting prospect that a realist image may be a poorer conveyer of truth than either a heavily interpreted or even partially constructed image (such as Rothstein's cow skull). If we accept that, then what is the line – if any such line exists – between Rothstein's cow skull and *Wag the Dog's* Albanian beauty?

One of the major problems with war photography that focuses on victims as an antidote to heroic images is that it can produce a generalised and standardised visual account that anonymises victims and depoliticises conflict.<sup>38</sup> This results in what Allen Feldman calls 'cultural anaesthesia', and effects what Martha Rosler has termed *the revictimisation of victims*.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, given the importance of photography in the emergence of social science discourses such as anthropology and criminology in the late nineteenth century, the reduction of the mobile and multiple contingencies of personhood to the figure of a static, one-dimensional victim have a long history. As John Tagg observes, in turn-of-the-century social science 'the working classes, colonised peoples, the criminal, poor, ill-housed, sick or insane were constituted as the passive – or, in this structure, "feminised" – objects of knowledge. Subjected to a scrutinising gaze, forced to emit signs, yet cut off from command of meaning, such groups were represented as, and wishfully rendered, incapable of speaking, acting or organising for themselves.'<sup>40</sup>

The issue to consider, then, is whether being 'culturally anaesthetic' is an inevitable and unavoidable element of the photographic representation of victims of war, and to ask what are modes of photographic representation that can dissimulate if not dispense with such depoliticising effects? To locate this questioning, I will look at the work of noted British photojournalist Don McCullin.

### Don McCullin and the ghosts of victims

Known in particular for his photographs of the conflict in Cyprus, the war-driven famine of Biafra, the fighting in Vietnam and the refugees created by the secession

<sup>38</sup> Allen Feldman, 'On Cultural Anaesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King', *American Ethnologist*, 21:2 (May 1994), p. 407; and Liisa Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', *Cultural Anthropology*, 11:3 (1996), p. 386.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through the Shadows: Memory, Photography and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. xiv.

<sup>40</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 11.



of East Pakistan, Don McCullin readily acknowledges that his photography is preoccupied with often personalised images of atrocity. 'I thought of my pictures as atrocity pictures. They were not of war but of the dreadful plight of victims of war.'<sup>41</sup> Invariably, though not exclusively, composed of one or two individuals in a situation of distress, McCullin's dark, tonal images brood with a violence that exceeds the events being depicted.

The force of these images – what McCullin describes as their 'fist-like black and white' quality – is not something developed because of the fetishistic pleasure of death and disaster.<sup>42</sup> As Mark Haworth-Booth has observed, McCullin's 'photography of suffering has been a kind of *service*' to its audience.<sup>43</sup> The nature of that service? To be a *witness* – 'someone who epitomises the role of witness to the despair of our time',<sup>44</sup> 'our eye-witness', a 'passionately eloquent witness' whose work is itself a 'witness to history'.<sup>45</sup>

Essential to the role of witness for McCullin is emotion. 'Photography for me is not looking, it's feeling. If you can't feel what you're looking at, then you're never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures.'<sup>46</sup> What McCullin feels more often than not is a combination of disgust at the violent circumstances embracing the innocent, and an empathy with those who become the victims of war. Indeed, for McCullin that empathy is so strong he shares intimately the danger of those being fired upon. 'There were times', McCullin says, 'looking at those people when I felt I was looking at a mirror. There was an empathy because of my background. It never went away from me.'<sup>47</sup>

Empathetic witnessing, McCullin originally thought, would not be a political exercise. 'When I began as a photographer, I believed that my work would suffer if I allowed it to become political. In the event, it turned out to be nothing but political for I consistently took the side of the underdog and the under-privileged.'<sup>48</sup> This political exercise in photography was, however, for a clear purpose. By portraying 'the appalling things we are all capable of doing to our fellow human beings', McCullin's photojournalism sought 'to stir the conscience of others who can help'; to show those comfortably at home in Britain . . . how these people were suffering.'<sup>49</sup> But while political, McCullin's pictures, especially those of Biafra, 'were not partisan. I would like to think these images brought help to the beleaguered hospitals with their dying children. I knew my pictures had a message, but what it was precisely I couldn't have said – except perhaps, that I wanted to break the hearts and spirits of secure people.'<sup>50</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Don McCullin, *Unreasonable Behaviour: An Autobiography* (London, Vintage, 1992), p. 165.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Pam Roberts, 'War and Peace', in *Don McCullin: A Retrospective* (London: British Council, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Haworth-Booth, 'Introduction', in Don McCullin, *Sleeping with Ghosts* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Holborn, 'Don McCullin', at <<http://www.hamiltonsgallery.com/>>, 20 August 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Haworth-Booth, 'Introduction', p. 9. McCullin notes he has always tried to be an 'independent witness – though not an unemotional one'. McCullin, *Unreasonable Behaviour*, p. 101.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Peter Hamilton, 'Laying Some Ghosts to Rest', *Photographic Journal*, 137:7 (1997), p. 299.

<sup>47</sup> Chris Townsend, 'Ghostly Vision', *British Journal of Photography*, 7142 (1997), p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> McCullin, *Unreasonable Behaviour*, p. 270.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 82.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.



As the previous quote suggests, the clarity of purpose, in the face of abundant atrocity, articulated by McCullin, was not matched by the certainty that any of the images he produced contained within them a clear message, let alone a message that would automatically induce the sort of practical response required for the situations depicted. Perhaps for this reason, Don McCullin has been haunted by his work, often commenting on the presence of ghosts in his world. Reflecting on how he operated during the East Pakistan refugee crisis, McCullin has remarked, ‘I felt as if I were using the camera as something to hide behind. I stood there feeling less than human, with no flesh on me, like a ghost that was present but invisible.’<sup>51</sup> The motif extends to the production of the print itself: ‘If I’m printing a picture of a man whose wife lies dead before him, or the albino boy in Biafra, the moment I see them appearing through the fog of the developer it’s as if they are still alive, and the full force of the tragedy comes flooding back’.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, given that a photojournalist such as McCullin finds himself surrounded by an archive of still images of dead people who can be brought back to a limited form of pictorial life, the retrospective exhibition at the V & A Museum in London displaying McCullin’s lifetime of work was entitled *Sleeping With Ghosts*.

Of course, one of the spectres hanging over the status of the documentary photograph as authentic witness is the code of practice articulated by Walker Evans and discussed earlier. Evans insisted that the truth of a realistic image can only be secured by the photographer refraining from meddling in any way with the subject (beyond the need to compose the shot), and declared that the whole point about documentary is ‘that you don’t touch a thing’ and you certainly ‘cannot stick anything in’. It is a view that McCullin – who has argued, ‘what comes into the frame is truth’ – endorses.<sup>53</sup>

However, in his role as eyewitness, trying to convey an image to a distant public that might disturb their collective conscience, McCullin has occasionally violated Evans’ dictum in a manner akin to Arthur Rothstein’s New Deal photograph. One case in point is his famous image of a dead North Vietnamese soldier lying, eyes fixed open and arm outstretched, next to his scattered personal effects – his wallet with the photo of a young child, along with a letter and other family photos strewn from an open tin. The placement of these personal effects alongside the body was something that McCullin created. As he has explained: ‘I saw a whole bunch of [American] soldiers vandalising his body for souvenirs. I thought there’s got to be something I can say about this. So I put these things together, I put them there to make the picture. It was the first time I thought I could justify it. And I don’t have any shame about doing it. It wasn’t the dead soldier that is the statement, it was the family photographs, the wallet. I was making a still-life.’<sup>54</sup>

McCullin experienced a similar moment in Biafra. One of his photographs from that conflict shows a solitary girl perched on a wooden bench. Smiling wanly, the image is notable in part for the girl’s hands crossed in her lap, a pose that would not,

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>52</sup> Hamilton, ‘Laying some Ghosts to Rest’, p. 299.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted Ibid., p. 300. The photograph – along with the preceding image showing two guilty-looking GI’s looting the body (alongside which there are no personal effects) – can be found in McCullin, *Sleeping with Ghosts*, pp. 74–5.

save for the obvious distress her body has endured, be out of place in a formal portrait. McCullin has discussed how this picture was produced:

Before leaving I found a young girl of about sixteen sitting naked in a hut, looking ill and very frail, but beautiful. Her name, I was told, was Patience. I wanted to photograph her and asked the orderly if she would persuade the girl to cover the private parts of her body with her hands so that I could show her nakedness with as much dignity as possible. But the sight of her stripped me naked of any of the qualities I might have had as a human being. The whiplash of compassion and conscience never ceased to assail me in Biafra.<sup>55</sup>

In this case, as many others, the portrayal of the victim's *dignity* was McCullin's purpose. Commenting on his experience of covering a famine in the Bihar region of India, McCullin observed 'no heroics are possible when you are photographing people who are starving. All I could do was try to give the people caught up in this terrible disaster as much dignity as possible.'<sup>56</sup> In common with a photojournalist like Sebastiao Salgado, McCullin has made dignity the leitmotif of his work. Equally in common with Salgado, the portrayal of dignity has meant that McCullin's work has entered the debate about the place and role of aesthetic values in atrocity pictures.<sup>57</sup>

The identification of beauty in the midst of disaster is controversial and contestable. While the alleged timelessness and universality of images like the McCullin photograph of Patience are often taken to be the product of the aestheticisation of the image, and this is taken to be one way to make an image stand out despite its generalisable quality, critics such as Robin Andersen maintain that aestheticisation only further depoliticises the issue at hand, especially when tragedy is the product of agony beautified. As Andersen remarks, 'the beautification of squalid reality offers the viewer a certain amount of emotional distance. This distancing lessens the impact, and in the process the media have created a public which has learned not to care much.'<sup>58</sup>

Such effects would be contrary to most photojournalists' hopes. They would certainly be contrary to what McCullin has aimed for with his documentary work. Nonetheless, the standard critique of McCullin's work is that his overriding emphasis on subjects either alone, or framed with another in a similar state of suffering, is highly problematic. As Andersen writes:

In McCullin's work, and in much of the work of photographers who have come after him, neither starvation's victims nor victims of war are shown in a social context. They don't explain or inform. They become suffering individuals of the human condition. The social and political – human made – causes are not in appearance, and therefore not in the image. And many times, indeed most, the news context does not supply adequate information and explanations.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> McCullin, *Unreasonable Behaviour*, p. 124. The photography can be found in McCullin, *Sleeping with Ghosts*, p. 86.

<sup>56</sup> McCullin, *Unreasonable Behaviour*, p. 82.

<sup>57</sup> See David Campbell, 'Salgado and the Sahel: Documentary Photography and the Imaging of Famine', in *Rituals of Mediation: International Politics and Social Meaning*, eds. Francois Debrix and Cynthia Weber (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Robin K. Andersen, 'The Ideological Significance of News Photography: The Case of El Salvador', *Ideologies and Literature*, 3:2 (Fall 1988), p. 251.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 237–8.

In Andersen's view, 'without a social or political context, and without information or explanations which would explain or account for suffering, photographs which document pain, misery and death *cannot* elicit public concern and empathy'.<sup>60</sup>

For one concerned to emphasise the importance of context, Andersen makes a definitive and emphatic judgement about what the photograph alone can and cannot do. It is, moreover, a judgement that differs in some respects from John Berger's meditation on the potential impact of what he calls atrocity photos. Moved to write after viewing a McCullin photo from Vietnam, Berger opined that such images had one predominant purpose:

They bring us up short. The most literal adjective that could be applied to them is *arresting*. We are seized by them . . . As we look at them, the moment of the other's suffering engulfs us. We are filled with either despair or indignation. Despair takes on some of the other's suffering to no purpose. Indignation demands action. We try to emerge from the moment of the photograph back into our lives. As we do so, the contrast is such that the resumption of our lives appears to be a hopelessly inadequate response to what we have just seen.<sup>61</sup>

The terms of Berger's reading are, of course, loaded, the only options for response being 'despair' *versus* 'indignation', with despair having no purpose. Berger is interested in whether a photograph can politicise understanding, and appears to endorse Roland Barthes' notion that 'photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatises, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks'.<sup>62</sup> In this context, Berger claims 'it is not possible for anyone to look pensively at such a moment [of agony, as in McCullin's photos] and emerge stronger'.<sup>63</sup>

Although he wants to rule out this possible effect, Berger nonetheless thinks that the war photo is contradictory. While it is assumed to awaken concern, once the reader who is arrested by the image emerges from it to carry on with her life, the disjuncture of the experience will leave her, says Berger, feeling morally inadequate. That inadequacy may now shock her as much as the war itself, and either she shrugs that paradox off or ' [s]he thinks of performing a kind of penance – of which the purest example would be to make a contribution to OXFAM or to UNICEF'. Whatever the response, concludes Berger, 'the issue of the war which had caused that moment is effectively depoliticised. The picture becomes evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody'.<sup>64</sup> Andersen thinks atrocity photos cannot elicit concern and sympathy, while Berger thinks they do provoke a response, but one that is misplaced and unhelpful.

### Concluding reflections

Those differences notwithstanding, both Andersen's and Berger's accounts burden *the image itself* with the responsibility for politicisation, rather than viewing it in the

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 238. Emphasis added.

<sup>61</sup> John Berger, 'Photographs of Agony', in Berger, *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1980), p. 38.

<sup>62</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> Berger, 'Photographs of Agony', p. 39.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 39–40.

intertextual context of the news, information, captions, layout, outlets and the like. This emphasis on the power of the image itself would be consistent with the thematic view that we are witnessing in social theory a ‘pictorial turn’ that is taking over from the ‘linguistic turn’ of twentieth century philosophy. However, this identification of the importance of the pictorial does not mean that we have to invent a new and singular mode of analysis for the visual.<sup>65</sup> As W. J. T. Mitchell argues, ‘whatever the pictorial turn is, then, it should be clear that it is not a return to naïve mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial “presence”; it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality’.<sup>66</sup> As such, Mitchell’s argument chimes with Susan Sontag’s view that while the photograph is significant because of its capacity to engender a space for thought, it cannot by itself be an instrument for change. Sontag maintains the image can help build or reinforce a moral position, but it cannot create such a position in the absence of ‘an appropriate context of feeling and attitude’.<sup>67</sup> In other words, the photograph requires the politics produced by the interplay of image and context about which Mitchell writes. Moreover, the photograph requires the overt and committed politics of a photojournalist like Don McCullin.

As a practice of resistance, documentary photography has its work cut out. The speed at which (dis)information circulates in the media-managed battle space means the time for contemplation and critique offered by the still image is more compressed than ever. Nonetheless, while the images alone are unlikely to lead to change, especially in the short time available, they become part of what Sontag calls the vast repository of pictures that make it difficult to sustain the ‘moral defectiveness’ of ignorance or innocence in the face of suffering. Images may only be an invitation to pay attention. But the questions photographs of war and atrocity pose should be required of our leaders and us: ‘Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible? Is it excusable? Was it inevitable? Is there some state of affairs which we have accepted up to now that ought to be challenged?’<sup>68</sup>

The conclusion Sontag reaches is a battle cry in which the picture functions as a ghost: ‘Let the atrocious images haunt us. Even if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing – may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don’t forget.’<sup>69</sup> *The Guardian* used this Sontag quote in a short editorial to support its publication, twelve years after the event, of many previously unseen photographs from the Persian Gulf War.<sup>70</sup> Under the title ‘Blood in the Sand’ and edited by Don McCullin, these unsparing

<sup>65</sup> See Martin Jay, ‘Vision in Context: Reflections and Refractions’, in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, eds. Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 3; and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), ch. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, pp. 4–5, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>69</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), p. 115.

<sup>70</sup> ‘The Pity of War: It is Right to Confront Images of Death’, *The Guardian*, 14 February 2003, p. 23.

images 'reveal[ed] the true horror of the Gulf war', and their publication was timed to coincide with the global anti-war marches on 15 February 2003.<sup>71</sup>

One of the images in this selection was Keith Jarecke's famous image from the Gulf War of 1991 (published originally on the front page of *The Observer* under the title 'The Real Face of War') showing a charred Iraqi corpse still upright in his vehicle. As evidence of the infamous 'turkey shoot' on the Basra road – when allied jets devastated a vast convoy of Iraqi vehicles after they had fled Kuwait – this photograph immediately contested the well-established view of the conflict as casualty-free. Against the larger narrative of the conduct of the Gulf War, this image functioned as a point of disruption, a reminder of what that narrative hid. As a result, the publication of the photo was immediately controversial, with the political issues of reportage being contested by complaints of taste. Indeed, in most newspapers, issues of taste easily trumped the significance of the photograph as editors refused to contemplate its publication.<sup>72</sup>

Nonetheless, Kenneth Jarecke's photograph demonstrates the potential (through its publication both in 1991 and 2003) for such images to serve as a form of 'post-reportage', whereby one can speak in 'considered retrospect' of events narrated in contradictory ways.<sup>73</sup> In this context, what photographs can do is 'provide moments of silence, caught in the uneasy space between what was experienced *there* and what is being experienced *here*'.<sup>74</sup> Evocative of Barthes' contention that the photograph produces a different rendering of space-time, and is subversive when it is pensive, understanding photographs as opening critical spaces for thought (and political re-enactments) through their narrative *positioning* is suggestive of one way to promote photography's capacity to politicise war – especially when the power of MIME-NET propels us frighteningly close to the official promulgation of *Wag the Dog's* propaganda practices. It is a position that neither dismisses the art gallery as a critical site for public consumption (especially given the way a gallery and its commentary fosters contemplation rather than gratification), nor insists that a strict adherence to realist documentary protocols is essential for the truth-value of an image.

With the changing international political economy of the media – in which serious documentary reportage has given way to the fluff of consumerist lifestyle coverage – these alternative uses and locations of images are far from being irrelevant to the development of resistant political positions. Moreover, it demonstrates that pictorial resistance to the official practices of cultural governance can take place in a multitude of previously unacknowledged political spaces. What is required, however, is for that resistance to be timelier, more in tune with the speed of contemporary war.

<sup>71</sup> *The Guardian* (G2), 14 February 2003, pp. 1–17. For a similar series (two of which appeared in *The Guardian*) with a similar aim, see Peter Turnley, 'The Unseen Gulf War', *The Digital Journalist*, December 2002, at <[http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0212/pt\\_intro.html](http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0212/pt_intro.html)>, 29 January 2003. For a discussion of the decision to print, see Ian Mayes, 'The Face of Reality', *The Guardian*, 17 February 2003, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Taylor, *Body Horror*, pp. 181–3.

<sup>73</sup> Ian Walker, 'Desert Stories or Faith in Facts', in Martin Lister (ed.), *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 239–40.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244. Walker considers the Jarecke photo at pp. 247–8.



