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PHOTOGRAPHY AND SOCIOLOGY:
AN EXERCISE IN SERENDIPITY

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Submission for PhD (by research)

University of Glasgow

History of Art

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c. Alison Eldridge June 2015

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Finally, but not least, I continue to remember Gillian Morag March (1975-2013)
(I have a photograph...)

PHOTOGRAPHY AND SOCIOLOGY: AN EXERCISE IN SERENDIPITY



Camera Sculpture by Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs

“If your pictures are not good enough, you aren’t reading enough”¹

*“The camera was invented in 1839. August Comte was just finishing his *Cours de Philosophie Positive*. Positivism and the camera and sociology grew up together. What sustained them all as practices was the belief that observable, quantifiable facts, recorded by scientists and experts, would one day offer man such a total knowledge about nature and society that he would be able to order them both. Precision would replace metaphysics, planning would resolve social conflicts, truth would replace subjectivity, and all that was dark and hidden in the soul would be illuminated by empirical knowledge. Comte wrote that theoretically nothing need remain unknown to man, except perhaps the origin of the stars! Since then, cameras have photographed even more than the formation of stars. And photographers now supply us with more facts every month than the eighteenth century Encyclopaedists dreamt of in their whole project”.²*

¹ Tod Papageorge cited in Broomberg, A and Chanarin, O : *Unconcerned But Not Indifferent*;
<http://foto.8com/new/blog/337>

² Berger J and Mohr J (1982) *Another Way of Telling*; Writers and Readers Co-operative Publishing Society Ltd p99

Introduction

As John Berger and Jean Mohr have thoughtfully pointed out, sociology and photography emerged at the same time and have since, grown up beside each other. In this thesis, I want to consider what the practises of photography and sociology have to offer each other, as mutually beneficial modes of social, cultural and aesthetic critique that facilitate an increased understanding of ourselves and the world we live in.

Before offering an overview of Pierre Bourdieu's demonstration of what he saw as a useful relationship between photography and sociology³, I will begin by reflecting on Bourdieu's own photographic practice in Algeria during the 1950s. Bourdieu's experience in Algeria had an important effect on his intellectual development, his achievements as a sociologist, and most specifically towards his analysis of cultural production as existing within a *field* of power.⁴

A reflexive approach that considers the relationship between history and biography, the empirical and the theoretical is made explicit in Bourdieu's account of his time in French-occupied Algeria during the late 1950s.

Bourdieu's case raises sharp questions about the connections that can be made between lived experience, practice and the contribution that this makes towards both the construction and critique of social theory. As such, attention will be given to Bourdieu's broader outline of the field of cultural production.

Bourdieu's concept of the *field of cultural production* will be used to explore three different categories of photographic production: documentary photography, photojournalism and fine art photography. This allows for an

³ Bourdieu, P with Boltanski, L, Castel, R and Chamboredon, J C (1990) *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*, Cambridge, Polity Press

⁴ Bourdieu, P *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) Cambridge, Polity Press and Bourdieu, P (1992) *Distinction* London, Routledge

examination and assessment of the relationship between these practices and at the same time enables a reconsideration of the values and limitations of the concept of ‘field’ itself.

The surprising connections that might be made between practice and theory have been considered by the sociologist Robert Merton through his use of the concept of *serendipity* as an important, reflexive component within the research process.⁵ Merton’s concerns will be further discussed. They have much in common with C W Mills and his idea of *The Sociological Imagination*.⁶

Mills was here expansive in his approach. His concept of the sociological imagination was not limited to sociology as an academic discipline but was present within the division of labour more generally. It was simply a way of looking at the world; a vantage point towards understanding the relationship between the individual and society; history and biography; of private troubles and public issues and making the connections between them. In Mills’ own words, “The term matters less than the idea.”⁷

Mills was starkly critical about some versions of sociology, particularly *Abstracted Empiricism* as the reification of method, and *Grand Theory* as an empirically empty reification of concepts. He was also generous in his comments towards other disciplines: journalism, fiction, politics, and history all offered examples that suggested at times “the sociological imagination is very well developed indeed.”⁸ To this list, we can also add photography.⁹

Yet, Mills chose the term because he *was* a sociologist, and for better or worse, “every cobbler thinks leather is the only thing.”¹⁰ Mills nonetheless advocated

⁵ Merton R (1968) *Social Theory and Social Structure*; New York Free Press

⁶ Mills, C W (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*; Oxford University Press

⁷ *Ibid* pp 18-19 (footnote 2).

⁸ *Ibid* p19

⁹ Here we can note Mills’ review of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee and Walker Evans (1941). While Mills was less impressed by Agee’s narrative, Evans’ photographs are described as a form of “sociological poetry”; in Summers, J (ed) (2008) *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C W Mills*; Oxford University Press (pp 33-35)

¹⁰ Mills, C W (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*; Oxford University Press: pp 18-19 (footnote 2).

the values of craftsmanship as a crucial aspect of both intellectual and practical work that could be assessed through their conjunction.

In light of this, I want to consider *the photographic imagination* and explore the ways in which photographers have been reflexively (re)active within and across the field of cultural production.

Documentary photography, fine art photography and photojournalism are distinct, but at times, complementary practices operating as visual methodologies that call attention to the aesthetics, ethics and politics of representation. In the later sections of this thesis I will focus on photographic images of war and the narratives that surround them as offering a critical location for exploring these complex relationships.

In the interplay of words and pictures, representing war and conflict is a critical site for encouraging collective thinking about ourselves, others and the social conditions in which we live. The representation of war, through words and pictures offers an arena where arguments about the relationship between ethics, politics and aesthetics compete and conflict with each other and appear in concentrated form. At the same time, exploring the relationship between words and pictures here raises critical questions about what is at stake in creative and intellectual production.

In this task, I will explore the use of the essay as a methodology that is helpful towards illuminating allegiances and ambivalences, contradictions and convergences. The essay, once dismissed as a peripheral academic practice, is now understood and accepted as an experimental playground for ideas. In this sense, the use of the essay may be regarded as a methodology in its own right in both its form and its content. The chapters in this thesis are thus produced and set out in essay form. However, taken together they respond, intellectually and aesthetically to the aims of the photo-essay in order to produce a collaborative voice, reviewing established critical texts in the light of emerging practices and discourses.

The images and narratives selected for study here are chosen as exemplary instances in which changing ideas about the production and reception of images of conflict, have been and continue to be, confronted across a range of disciplines. The aim of this thesis is to provide an interdisciplinary study: to eavesdrop in art history, sociology, visual studies and philosophy and to synthesise, critique, and contribute to the existing conversations that surround these photographs.

Bourdieu in Algeria: Towards the Sociology of Photography

By the time Bourdieu was in Algeria (1955), photography was already undergoing significant changes as a tool for anthropological work. The relationship between anthropology and photography has, to say the least, an uncomfortable and disconcerting history. Much early photographic work was undertaken to support essentialist concepts of ‘race’ and racist ideologies that at times worked to ‘legitimise’ the violence of colonial and imperialist adventurism. Photographs were used to document body measurements and physical characteristics in order to classify and present a quasi-scientific study of cultures and societies in a hierarchy of ‘civilisation’.¹¹ It is nonetheless worth noting that at the same time the ‘incorruptible Kodak’¹² was used by others involved in colonial programmes to actively document evidence of that violence. Photographs became a central force, for example, in exposing the atrocities of Leopold’s Belgian campaign in The Congo at the end of the 19th century and in early 20th century.¹³

¹¹ Harper, D (2012) *Visual Sociology*, Routledge, p11 see also Williams, R, (1983); *Keywords* for historical overviews of the interdependent and changing meanings of the terms ‘culture’ (pp87-93) and ‘civilisation’ (pp57-60) Fontana Press, Glasgow.

¹² Mark Twain, (1905) *King Leopold’s Soliloquy: A Defence of His Congo Rule*; Boston Ma pp36-7

¹³ See for example the work of the missionary and photographer Alice Harris. (www.autograph/APB) See also Twomey, C; *The Incorruptible Kodak*; in Kennedy, L and Patrick, C (eds) (2014) *The Violence of the Image*; I. B. Taurus, London (pp9-33) for an extended discussion of this as an important although relatively isolated case.

Within anthropology itself, the format and use of early photography and its use in supporting racist ideologies was perhaps most seriously challenged by Bateson and Mead's study *Balinese Character* (1942) which used photography as a way of making new arguments about the relationship between civilisation and culture. They did this on an unprecedented scale, producing an archive of 25,000 images. 759 of these were then published in a large format book complete with a 50 page essay that introduced the use of the photographs and a shorter essay outlining the history and the situation in Bali at that time.¹⁴

Nonetheless, Douglas Harper argues that despite its innovative use of visual methodology, the book failed to transform ethnographic practices in anthropology, and the social sciences more generally, in any significant way.¹⁵

Harper offers a number of reasons as to why this may have been the case. They are worth noting here in light of Bourdieu's limited use of photography in his own published ethnographic work. Firstly, there are limitations on the impact that a single publication can have in revolutionising an entire discipline.

Alongside this, the book's lavish publication and elegant design was in part undertaken to celebrate the 125th Anniversary of the New York Academy of Science. In this context, the book's high aesthetic quality, as an object in itself, was acceptable. In the more routine world of academic publishing there were few publishers willing, or indeed economically able to publish "what looked more like art than anthropology."¹⁶ The aesthetic quality of the work further worked against it: contemporary critics regarded the work as lacking scientific rigour, questioning its sampling and demanding that the 'indirect evidence' of the photographs should be more properly cross-checked by a full demographic and sociological account of all the people framed within them.

¹⁴ Harper. D (2012) *Visual Sociology*, Routledge, p13

¹⁵ Ibid, p11

¹⁶ Ibid; p15

Finally, the timing of the book's publication can be noted. While Bateson and Mead's visual ethnography did represent significant changes in the nature of the 'anthropological gaze', shortly after its publication, photographic ethnography itself became outmoded by the use of portable 16mm film or 'movie' cameras. Film, rather than photography became the dominant mode of visual ethnography.¹⁷

The ambiguous nature of early anthropological photographers continues to haunt contemporary visual ethnography and the field of photography more widely through the differential power relationships that are recognised between the photographer, subject and viewer. Acknowledgement of the tensions within and between each position marks much of Bourdieu's visual and written work.

Bourdieu arrived in Algeria at the age of 25, after having been conscripted into the French army. His presence in Algeria was the result of disciplinary action. Bourdieu refused to take the exams necessary for a career as a Reserve Officer which was expected of soldiers coming from a higher educational background at that time. Bourdieu's army experience was an unhappy one. During his training in Chartres, Bourdieu was subject to the harassment and humiliation of his military superiors as well as the suspicion of his peers because of his political ideals. This continued in Algeria. Eventually, after the intervention of his parents who made appeal, through relatives, to a General with a distant connection to Bourdieu's rural home region of Béarn, Bourdieu was re-assigned to the General Government's service of documentation and information. This provided him with a wealth of material about Algeria but simultaneously offered him an increased opportunity for an anthropological understanding of the devastating role of French colonial occupation there. Bourdieu's aim was to disenchant the then dominant French views on Algeria, which he understood as being limited in their awareness of the realities of Algerian society.

¹⁷ *ibid*;p16

Bourdieu left the French army in 1957 but remained in Algeria for some years afterwards, carrying out independent field work and eventually taking up a teaching position at the University of Algiers. Here, Bourdieu formed a number of life-long colleagues as he attempted to capture and record “the fast unfolding reality” of Algerian life and the destruction of rural communities under French occupation.¹⁸

The practicalities and the aesthetics of undertaking photographic work were ethically and politically important to Bourdieu and suggest a respect for his discipline as much as his subjects. In Algeria, the intense heat and searing light would burn and scar the film as the camera shutter opened and closed. To cope with this, Bourdieu sought out and purchased an expensive German made Ziess IkoFlex camera, as well as a special lens, in order to overcome these problems. For Bourdieu, photography was a way of actively demonstrating and recording his own partisanship and political commitment as a witness to the Algerian cause. As Back has argued:

“This comes through very strongly in the portraits where the address and the presence of the person being photographed is direct, as if the look is an exchange of recognition and political acknowledgement.”¹⁹

Nonetheless, Back suggests that some of Bourdieu’s photographs do still appear as “pilfered and surreptitious”; stolen moments that betray his own position in a “silent narrative” of colonial order.²⁰ With a downward viewfinder this particular camera had additional benefits. Back describes these photographs as offering a “belt-buckle view of the world” which, aesthetically in some images

¹⁸ Back, L (2009); Portrayal and Betrayal: Bourdieu, Photography and Sociological Life; *The Sociological Review* 57:3, p477

¹⁹ Ibid p480

²⁰ Ibid p484. Back’s discussion of a photograph of male circumcision and later responses to the exhibition of this image pp 481-487 is especially useful and illuminates the space between spheres of photographic production and consumption.

serves to challenge Bourdieu's own insistence that in taking photographs he was "on the side" of the Algerians.²¹

Bourdieu's photographic archive from Algeria is now known to have numbered more than 2500 images. Yet, perhaps in light of Harper's discussion of Bateson and Mead above, only a handful of these images were published as complementary or explanatory illustrations to his extensively detailed written ethnographic work. The use of photography greatly enabled this dense, or 'thick' description; as a documentary tool for retrospective study the photograph allowed Bourdieu to pursue and understand how particular objects, and subjects, were both made and used.

Back has argued that Bourdieu's photographic practice during his ethnographic work in Algeria, combined with a highly selective use of an extensive photographic archive in his subsequent publications, both portrays the imperial misadventures of French occupation there as much as it betrays Bourdieu's self-consciousness. In his role as anthropologist and photographer, combined with his experience of military occupation in Algeria, Bourdieu was reflexively aware of the shadows cast by the 'imperialist light' of the social conditions that contributed to, and shaped his presence in Algeria²². As he took his photographs of the interiors of Algerian peasant houses he was conscious of the social and political circumstances that enabled him to do this. Bourdieu was uncomfortable with the knowledge that his anthropological access to the interiors of roofless Berber and Kabyle dwellings, and his understanding of them was only made possible because of the French occupying force whose violence had facilitated this.²³

²¹ *ibid*

²² *Ibid*,

²³ *Ibid*

As Apel suggests the photograph's ability to show 'what was there' is never *only* what is visible in the photograph. The photograph *also* reproduces a set of social relations that make the taking of the photograph possible.²⁴

Through consideration of his photographic *practice*, Bourdieu imagined and developed a *theoretical* model and an investigative methodology by which photography could be situated within a field of power relations. This reflexively recognised and wrestled with the concept of symbolic violence which, later, he articulated as a conceptual tool.

Bourdieu was certainly not the first to consider the differential power relationship between the photographer and the photographed. He nonetheless offers a useful springboard for discussion. As I will argue, wrestling with the questions that surround differentials of power has historical longevity in the field of photography and remains central to contemporary photographers; in art photography, documentary photography and in photojournalism. It is useful to remember that for Bourdieu, the situation in Algeria was precarious and dangerous. Algeria was a war zone. There was not always time to do more than 'snatch' an image. Bourdieu's photographs thus offer an unusual point of access towards thinking about the politics, ethics and aesthetics involved in the representation of conflict in relation to his later and expanded account of the field of cultural production.

While it is not necessary to buy into Bourdieu's theories wholesale, I will argue that he nonetheless suggests some important insights towards thinking through the relationship between the production and reception of cultural goods and the possibilities for social change that this might offer. I will now offer an outline of Bourdieu's ideas about the relationship between photography and sociology.

²⁴ Apel, D (2012) *War Culture and the Contest of Images* Rutgers University Press p6

Photography and sociology: Bourdieu's contribution

The relevance of photography for sociological study was directly questioned by Pierre Bourdieu and his colleagues in the 1965 publication *Photography: A Middle Brow Art?* Bourdieu asked: "Is it possible and necessary for the practise of photography and the meaning of the photographic image to provide material for sociology?"²⁵ Bourdieu's answer was not about *photographs* as such.

Instead, he embarked on an exploration of the social practice of taking photographs, aiming to avoid "the formalistic discussions which accompany most art historical discussions of photography."²⁶

Bourdieu's work on photography represented something of a landmark in sociological study and lay in the context of a much wider study of culture. This included a critique of sociology itself. Max Weber had argued against the *total* objectivity of sociological knowledge given that a degree of subjectivity was always present through the researcher's interest and value accorded to the chosen object of research. To this Bourdieu retorts that the concept of 'choice' here is merely an illusion and one that even "the most rudimentary techniques of a sociology of sociology" could uncover.²⁷ Sociology, like all fields of academic practice was governed by explicit and implicit, or tacit, codes of regulation. Nonetheless, despite concerns over the status of sociological knowledge, Weber insisted that objectivity was still possible – and it was the use of sociological method combined with a rational system of thinking that made this so. While the sociological statement could be used to present value judgements (as in the world of politics for example) the values of the researcher should, according to Weber, have no impact on the construction of the

²⁵ Bourdieu, P et al (1965) *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*: (1990) Polity Press (p1)

²⁶ Gonzales, J A (1992) A Contemporary Look at Pierre Bourdieu's *Photography: A Middle brow Art*; in *Visual Anthropology Review* Volume 8, No 1, Spring 1992, p126

²⁷ Bourdieu, P (1965) *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*: (1990) Polity Press (p1)

sociological statement itself.²⁸ I will return to this point in the concluding part of this chapter in relation to Bourdieu's own work.

Bourdieu certainly had his own personal interests in photography – particularly as I have shown, as a documentary aspect of his anthropological work in Algeria between 1958 and 1961. Yet despite his evident enthusiasm for photography's potential as an aesthetic, ethical and political practice he consigned photography to remain as a 'middle brow art' within the field of cultural production. Ironically, given the position Bourdieu ascribed to photography his Algerian photographs are now themselves the subject of some celebration and aesthetic acclaim.²⁹

The significance of photography for Bourdieu lay, paradoxically, in its insignificance; it had become, even by the time of writing in 1965, a taken for granted practise "predisposed to diffusion, so wide, that there were few households, at least in towns, which do not possess a camera".³⁰ The rise of photography as a mass social practise placed it firmly within the parameters of a sociology of 'everyday life'. Yet its mass social practice should not mask the fact that photography was neither homogeneous nor democratic: class distinctions could yet be located in its use. Bourdieu observed that:

One might say of photography what Hegel said of philosophy: "No other art or science is subjected to this last degree of scorn, to the supposition that we are masters of it without ado." Unlike the more demanding cultural activities such as drawing or painting, or playing a musical instrument, unlike even going to museums or concerts, photography presupposes neither academically communicated culture,

²⁸ This was however a point of contention between Howard Becker; (1967) Who's side are we on? In *Social Problems* vol.14, no 3 pp239-247 and Alvin Gouldner (1968) The Sociologist as Partisan in *The American Sociologist* vol 3 no 2 pp103-116

²⁹ A selection of Bourdieu's photographs from Algeria was exhibited at Goldsmiths in autumn 2006 to spring 2007 and was followed by a series of seminars and discussions resulting in *Pierre Bourdieu in Algeria: Testimonies of Uprooting* (see Les Back for a full and equally reflexive account of this and his role as an organiser in this endeavour, as above p473.)

³⁰ Bourdieu P et al (1965) *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*: (1990) Polity Press p1

nor the apprenticeships and the ‘profession’ which confer their value on the cultural consumptions and practices ordinarily held to be the most noble by withholding them from the man in the street.³¹

While photographic practice was considered to be accessible to everyone, from both a technical and economic viewpoint, it was nonetheless a regulated and conventional practice. So for Bourdieu, the importance of his study was in part driven by a need to recover the meanings the photograph proclaims, or in other words, the intentions of the photographer; but equally there is the need to decipher “the surplus of meaning which it betrays by being part of the symbolism of an age, a class or artistic group.”³² Photographic practice was both an index and instrument of integration.

In Bourdieu’s study, the uses of photography are outlined with reference to Emile Durkheim’s ideas on the social function of the family and also to Max Weber’s analysis of class and status positions.³³ Following Durkheim’s ideas on the mechanisms for social cohesion³⁴, Bourdieu demonstrated that the use of photography and its accompanying aesthetics were inseparable from a base in dominant and normative ideas of the social requirement or social function of the family and the processes by which its members are integrated within this particular institution. Durkheim’s study of suicide is especially notable here. Durkheim argued that what had previously been regarded as a deeply individual, privatised and psychological phenomenon could instead be causally explained by the structural factors that contributed to the individual’s experience of collective life.³⁵

Bourdieu aimed to synthesise Durkheim’s functionalism with Weber’s interpretive sociology. Weber was amongst the first of a young generation of

³¹ Ibid p5

³² Ibid p7

³³ Gerth H and Mills CW (eds) (1948) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*; RKP London

³⁴ Durkheim, E (1972) *Selected Writings* edited by Anthony Giddens, Cambridge University Press

³⁵ Durkheim, E (1938) *The Rules of Sociological Method* New York, The Free Press

German scholars to engage with Marx but challenged the idea of economic determinism that had become associated with his writing. Weber's work questioned the idea that people in the same economic position would necessarily or inevitably engage in collective and revolutionary action. The categories of *class*, *status* and *party* allowed Weber to offer a more nuanced evaluation of the distribution of social power. Economic power, social prestige and collective allegiance interpenetrated each other in complex and dynamic ways. As such, Weber argued that there was no necessary correlation between economic power, social status and collective or political allegiance.

Nonetheless, the centrality of Marx's conception of economic power was not lost to Weber, nor was it lost to Bourdieu.

Bourdieu's study of photography set out what he saw as the respective attitudes towards both professional and amateur ownership of camera equipment and the application of photographic technology in distinct social settings.

By exploring the use of photography within the domestic setting of the family, Bourdieu identified photography as operating to confirm group solidarity and unity. Photography itself had come to represent, replace and continue traditional ideas of rite and festival that had previously marked the occasions for celebrating this unity. As Bourdieu and Bourdieu put it:

If one accepts, with Durkheim that the function of festivals is to revivify the group, one understands why photography should be associated with them, since it provides the means of eternalising and solemnising these climatic moments of social life wherein the group reasserts its unity.³⁶

For Bourdieu, photographic representation is symbolic of a choice "that praises, captures, solemnises and immortalises"³⁷ specific occasions. These apparent photographic 'choices' cannot however be "given over to the randomness of

³⁶ Bourdieu, P and Bourdieu M C (1968) The Peasant and the Photograph in *Ethnography* vol. 5 no 4 December 2004 p601

³⁷ Bourdieu P et al (1990) op cit p16

subjective internalisation of objective conditions.’³⁸ The ‘choices’ were instead arbitrarily structured and systematically reproduced.

Bourdieu undertook part of his research in his home village in the region of Béarn, South Western France in order to gather data on the uses (or lack of uses) of photography within peasant society. The location was ideal since it offered a dual structure between the *bourg* (the market village) and its surrounding *hameaux* (hamlets). These areas, although separated only by a few hundred yards in places were nonetheless significantly marked by their oppositions; this was in terms of language and also for example in terms of family size. In the village, the population was made up of pensioners, civil servants and members of the professions (42.2%), with a smaller number of craftsmen and shopkeepers (36.6%); the minority population being agricultural labourers, workers and landholders (11.5%). In the surrounding hamlets however, this last sector made up almost 88% of the population. Because the village had monopolised almost all urban functions, including speaking French, the hamlets were regarded as backward. In retaining the spoken use of Béarnais, peasants were deemed as being attached or chained to their traditions.³⁹

Photography was introduced to the peasant way of life through the village population (as intermediaries between the hamlets and the city) – but peasants were *consumers* rather than producers. This consumption was initially on the occasion of the family wedding and dated from around 1918. Professional photographers would turn up at local weddings and offer their services (rather than being called in) and would not be refused since the wedding signified a celebration where extravagance was an important aspect of festive and honourable behaviour. The wedding photograph then operated as a form of gift exchange between hosts and guests. The guests’ participation in and purchase of

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Bourdieu, P and Bourdieu M C (1968) (2004) *op cit* p602

the photograph, not in itself expensive, was a tribute to the host, and to refuse either would be considered miserly.⁴⁰

The presence of the ‘official’ photographer then came to sanction the solemnity of the occasion itself which gradually encroached on other ritual occasions to include christenings and first communions. All that was required in this was that the photograph be ‘right’ – that those represented could be identified and recognised by the family group, not just as individuals but in terms of their social roles. This included the status of the family itself – in wedding photographs for example, the number of guests and the inclusion or absence of important family members was important. However, few of these photographs came to adorn the walls of peasant dwellings. To display them for all to see would be ostentatious, so they were mostly stored away. The exception here was images of deceased relatives. These would often be displayed in the personal space of bedrooms alongside other ritual and ‘sacred’ objects such as crucifixes.

Whereas any *amateur* photographs given to the peasants were also kept in drawers, in the village houses of the *petit bourgeoisie* such images would appear, enlarged and framed on both walls and mantelpieces. In the village, the amateur practice of taking photographs was more prevalent. Yet it was held with suspicion by those in the hamlets as being symbolic of the luxurious expenditure associated with ritual and thus not for everyday use. Amateur photography was understood in the hamlets as being a form of conspicuous consumption, an extension of urban taste and ultimately, the denial of tradition. Amateur photography was regarded as “the will to distinguish oneself, to stand out, to dazzle or put down others.”⁴¹ Peasant life was not however against innovation *per se* – so, for example new farming techniques and equipment

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ *ibid* p607

were embraced; innovation mattered only in relation to the social conditions of necessity in which ‘photography for photography’s sake’ had no place.

Bourdieu thus identified a domestic framework by way of which both technological and aesthetic constraints and innovations in photography could be both examined and explained. An understanding of the centrality of economic class, and more obliquely of gender relationships was located as being performed through the act of photography itself. Bourdieu noted that most enthusiastic amateurs were predominantly male – this group rejected family photography in favour of still lives or landscapes. The recording of family life was in these households given over to their wives as an aspect of a middle class gendered division of labour. Kodak themselves undertook an aggressive marketing campaign aimed at women as the recorders of family life.

Bourdieu argued that even the most trivial photograph expressed a system of schemes of perception, thought and appreciation that could be seen as being held in common by a particular group. Whether this was a class, a profession or an artistic coterie, the photographic aesthetic could not be disassociated from an implicit system of values maintained by the group. Whilst photography was recognised as offering a realistic appearance of ‘the real’, this recognition was naive without consideration of “the socially conditioned forms of perception and conformity to rules”, which in turn “define its syntax within social use.”⁴²

These forms of perception are dependent on *habitus*. *Habitus* refers to the individual’s *unconscious* internalisation of objective relations that in turn enable or constrain subjective possibilities and are experienced as a ‘second nature’. Class *habitus*, for Bourdieu reveals a hope or ambition as being either reasonable or unreasonable; a commodity as being accessible or inaccessible and finally, an action as being suitable or unsuitable.⁴³ *Habitus* is a ‘strategy-generating principle’ based on a set of dispositions that are triggered by and enable agents

⁴² Bourdieu, P et al (1965) *Photography : A Middle Brow Art* p5

⁴³ *ibid*

to cope in particular situations. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* aims to transcend the duality of structure and agency: it is at once creative and inventive but exists within the limits of its structure – being both 'systematic' and 'ad hoc', *habitus* operates as a form of social improvisation.⁴⁴

This was located as being particularly marked in the distinctions made between amateur and professional photographic practice. Against the practices of professional photographers, especially those photographers who aspired to an artistic legitimacy of the medium, the amateur use of cameras amongst the working classes was suggested as representing a popular or 'vulgar' aesthetic technique, articulated and encouraged by the commercial producers of photographic technology.⁴⁵ Here, both the camera and the photograph were judged by the level of automatism offered by the marketers of the technology itself. This popularised technique included ideas of not moving in order to escape blurring; not holding the camera at an angle or shooting into the light. Bourdieu argued that these prohibitions encompassed an aesthetic which "must be recognised and admitted so that transgression of its imperatives appears as a failure."⁴⁶ Blurred images or a lack of focus are rejected by the amateur, popular photographer as being clumsy and unsuccessful.

Bourdieu argued that the 'popular' aesthetic is "defined and manifested (at least partially) in opposition to scholarly aesthetics, even if it is never triumphantly asserted."⁴⁷ For Bourdieu, 'scholarly aesthetics' achieve their highest acclaim through the pursuit of the disinterested 'pure gaze' and an engagement with 'pure form'. Educated people were "at home with scholarly culture" and the perception of the work of art as a symbolic good is then

⁴⁴ Bourdieu, P and Wacquant, L (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge p19

⁴⁵ I am thus not convinced by Stallabrass's claim that Bourdieu did not consider enough the effects of the technological and manufacture of photographic equipment. See Stallabrass J (1996) Cold Eye: A review of Pierre Bourdieu's *Photography: A middle brow art* in *New Left Review* November- December 1996 pp147-52

⁴⁶ Bourdieu P et al (2004) op cit pp5-6

⁴⁷ Ibid p8

recognised only by those who have the means to appropriate it.⁴⁸ The least sophisticated however, when confronted with a work of art, may find themselves “as though in a foreign society, present, for instance, at a ritual to which they do not hold the key.”⁴⁹ For the less sophisticated, as in peasant society, Bourdieu noted that the value of the photographic image tended to correspond to the value attributed to the thing represented in the photograph:

Factorial analysis of judgements on ‘photogenic’ objects reveals an opposition within each class between the fractions richest in cultural capital and poorest in economic capital and the fractions richest in economic capital and poorest in cultural capital. In the case of the dominant class, higher education teachers and artistic producers (and secondarily, teachers and the professions) are opposed to industrial and commercial employers; private sector executives and engineers are in an indeterminate position. In the petit-bourgeoisie, the cultural intermediaries (distinctly separated from the closest fractions, the primary teachers, medical services and art craftsmen) are opposed to the small shopkeepers or craftsmen and office workers.⁵⁰

Manual workers invariably rejected the idea of ‘photography for photography’s sake’ (as when shown a photograph of pebbles for example):

“A waste of film!”; “They must have film to throw away!”; “I tell you, there are some people who don’t know what to do with their time.”; Haven’t they got anything better to do with their time than to photograph things like that?”; “That’s bourgeois photography.”⁵¹

Similarly a photograph of a dead soldier provoked reactions and judgements in response to the ‘thing’ being shown and the uses this could be put to: “the horror of war or the denunciation of the horror of war which the photographer is

⁴⁸ Bourdieu P (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production* Cambridge, Polity Press pp217-220

⁴⁹ Ibid p217

⁵⁰ Bourdieu, P (1992) *Distinction*; Routledge, London (p39)

⁵¹ Ibid p41

supposed to produce simply by showing that horror.”⁵² Thus the aesthetic value of the photograph was synonymous with an ethical position surrounding the perceived *function* of the representation. This ‘barbarous’ appeal to the senses and specifically the application of an *ethical* standard is understood as being at odds with the contemplation of ‘pure’ aesthetic judgement which Bourdieu understands as being generated by a distance from material necessity. “Like all pure gazes, it is observation which has acquired dignity by being detached from participation and action.”⁵³

Bourdieu’s study is more than a critique of photographic practices – it is also a sharp appraisal of the education system more widely. Here, access to the culture fashioning industry of which education is a part, is stratified along economic or class lines. I will return to the role of education in Bourdieu’s work with further reference to Bourdieu’s concept of field itself below. However, it can be noted that recent research into students’ ‘choices’ for higher education continues to support Bourdieu’s main contention here. Despite widening participation (in terms of class, gender and ethnicity) and an expansion of higher education since the 1960s in the UK, students’ ‘choices’ remain constrained. Even when the required entry levels to the elite universities are attained by students from lower socio-economic households and those from ethnic minorities, these institutions may still be viewed, and resisted as being “not for the likes of me” because they are, predominantly, populated by white, middle and upper-class students.⁵⁴

It can be noted then that Bourdieu’s study of class in relation to the practice of photography is not in terms of a so-called ‘vulgar’ Marxist analysis – this was not simply about economic access to photographic equipment, which at that time could be fairly cheaply won. His interest was in the particular patterns or

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ Fowler, B (1998) *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory*: Sage Publications, London (p46)

⁵⁴ Reay, D et al (2001); Choices of Degree or Degrees of Choice? Class, ‘Race’ and the Higher Education Process, *Sociology* 35 (4) pp855-874

expressions of cultural attitudes towards the use and function of photography which, for Bourdieu, had their base in the economic relations of production.

As Les Back comments, “Photography is interesting to Bourdieu because it manifests decisions about judgement and value. It reveals the social and cultural forces that guide the process of training the photographer’s lens, whether amateur or professional.”⁵⁵ Back suggests that the photograph, as a vehicle offering surplus meaning, betrays the “social and historical dispositions of the photographer” and in doing so “the biography of the photographer is revealed in the choices s/he makes and yet at the same time the image-maker remains visibly absent.”⁵⁶

Photography: why a middle brow art?

For Bourdieu, photography was understood as occupying a subordinate place in the hierarchy of cultural production and artistic practises. Although in theory, photography may offer an opportunity to actualise artistic values, its lesser status in the field of artistic production suggested to Bourdieu that its practitioners would be less inclined to compete for market conquest.

Photography would therefore remain as occupying a liminal space between the vulgar and the pure art form – “disdained or neglected by the big holders of educational capital”. At the same time, because Bourdieu did not concede that it would become recognised as a fully legitimate art, photography would at best only offer “a refuge and a revenge” for the middle classes who, as the dominated faction of the dominant class, used it as a form of distinction from working class tastes in order to demonstrate their aspirations towards social betterment and the adoption of elite tastes. Bourdieu suggested that:

⁵⁵ Back, L (2009) Portrayal and Betrayal: Bourdieu, photography and sociological life; in *The Sociological Review*, 57;3 p474

⁵⁶ *ibid*

The petit-bourgeois gives photography a meaning that betrays his own relationship to culture eg the upper classes who retain the privilege of cultural practices that are held to be superior, and to working classes from whom they wish to distinguish themselves at all costs, by manifesting, through the practices available to them, their cultural good will.⁵⁷

This functioned to secure the best return on middle class cultural capital and its conversion to educational capital, and from this to economic capital, in order to contest “the established hierarchy of legitimacies and profits” and to gain credit for doing so.⁵⁸ Thus the attempt to liberate photography from its subordination to mass social practice was also an attempt to bring it into scholarly practice. Given Bourdieu’s critique of the education system, the inclusion of photography within scholarly culture would be more inclined to operate towards maintaining class divisions rather than fostering increased democracy. The process of photography’s aestheticisation was simply a vehicle for social aspiration and upward mobility. Unlike the techniques required for painting or sculpture which require extensive training in art academies, photographic production as ‘art’ was held in double suspicion *because* of the popularity and easy accessibility of photography as being dependent merely on pressing a button. ‘Middle brow’ culture is effectively condemned to define itself in relation to ‘legitimate’ culture and must borrow from ‘high art’ by adopting its most valued themes and subjects.

Whilst this thesis owes a debt to Bourdieu’s question regarding the merits of photography for sociological study, it does not aim to provide a sociological account of photography in the manner by which Bourdieu tackled the question. The answers to his question would certainly look different today – not because class, and we can add disability, gender and ethnicity, is irrelevant to

⁵⁷ Bourdieu P et al (1965) *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*: (1990) Polity Press p9

⁵⁸ Bourdieu, P (1992) *Distinction* London, Routledge p87

photographic production but because these positions have undergone significant changes since his time of writing, as marked to an extent by educational expansion (noted above) and by the increased volume of feminist and post-colonial voices. Moreover, the social and cultural status of photography itself has greatly altered in the half century since Bourdieu wrote. This is not only in terms of the contemporary proliferation of photographic images but specifically in the acceptance of photography as a legitimate artistic form.

This was an important aspect of cultural change unanticipated in Bourdieu's work. Even as late as 1983, Bourdieu perceived photography as an activity "on the way to legitimation."⁵⁹

In this way, photography – a middle brow art situated midway between 'noble' and 'vulgar' practices – condemns its practitioners to create a substitute for the sense of cultural legitimacy which is given to the priests of all the legitimate arts. More generally, all the marginal cultural producers whose position obliges them to conquer the cultural legitimacy unquestioningly accorded to the consecrated professions expose themselves to redoubled suspicion by the efforts they can hardly avoid making to challenge its principles.⁶⁰

As Bridget Fowler recognises in her study of obituaries and collective memory, the construction of a consecrated artistic photographic canon or academic legitimacy for this medium has, in contrast to Bourdieu's theorising, now come about. Photographs now grace the walls of museums and galleries in major metropolitan centres and more over, 'fine art photography' now commands exorbitant prices on the art market.

In noting the contemporary consecration of photography, Fowler puts it that:

⁵⁹ Bourdieu, P (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production*; Polity Press, Cambridge (p131)

⁶⁰ *ibid*

Bourdieu and his fellow writers, astute about many things, failed to predict this degree of dynamism within artistic taste, regarding photography as perpetually doomed to be a ‘middle brow art’.⁶¹

The contribution towards a shift in the hierarchies of cultural production that photography might claim to have made, nonetheless, allows for and perhaps even demands an examination of photography in terms of Bourdieu’s concept of *field*.

Whilst Bourdieu constructed a field of literary and artistic production, he did not set out a field of photographic production as such. Given that photography has now come to inhabit almost every area of our daily lives, setting out a full analysis of the field of photography would exceed the limits of this thesis. The emergence of photography as a legitimate form of fine art has coincided with the considerable increase of vernacular photography through the use of social media for example. However, as noted at the outset of this thesis, as a strategic case study, I will consider the relationships between three main categories of photography: documentary photography, photojournalism and fine art photography. This is not to suggest that each of these spheres of practice is homogeneous. Bourdieu has been criticised on these grounds.⁶² The terms are instead used here with reference to Weber’s concept of the *ideal type*.

The *ideal type* offered Weber a conceptual yardstick for understanding different forms of action; instrumental rationality, value rationality, traditional and affective action. Each of these could be examined independently in theory, however in reality they never appear in any pure form. Instead, each frame of action interpenetrated each other in diverse and complex ways. This is also central to Bourdieu’s concept of field – he does not claim this to be a fixed

⁶¹ Fowler, B (2007) *Op Cit* p205

⁶² See Hooker, R, Paterson, D and Stirton, P; *Bourdieu and the Art Historians* in Fowler, B (ed) (2000) *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture*; Blackwell Publishers, Oxford (pp212-228)

concept. Its openness aimed to remove it from charges of positivism. As Bourdieu commented, “To think in terms of field is *to think relationally*.”⁶³

This is an important point to consider, since beyond the emergence of photography as a legitimate medium for fine art, Dora Apel has argued that there is now a blurring of boundaries between the different practices of photography examined in this thesis. She suggests that an increasing aesthetic turn to a ‘documentary formalism’ within contemporary fine art photography means that these practices have now come to occupy an unstable relationship to one another within the field of photographic production.⁶⁴ The extent of this ‘blurring of boundaries’ will be considered throughout this thesis. I will argue that while this may be so in terms of photographic production, this does not necessarily imply that the stratification of visual culture has been undone.

The photograph, as Bourdieu noted, materialises social relationships in subjective ways which are themselves the product of wider social influences. Photography, as much as the narratives that surround it, perform and contribute to cultural ideas about ‘ourselves’ and ‘others’ – as insiders and outsiders - and as such articulates and contributes to changing understandings of collective life. Photography and its narratives perform group membership through a “visual site of particular human networks of value.”⁶⁵ In this sense, Bourdieu’s use of the domestic setting of the family, as a microcosm of social life which both secures and defends its solidarity through the use of photography, is underpinned by a concern with a more extended use of the term – as for example exemplified in the *ideals* of Steichen’s Family of Man exhibition in 1955 – and collective living.⁶⁶

I will turn now to an examination of Bourdieu’s *field of cultural production*.

⁶³ Bourdieu, P and Wacquant. L (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*; Polity Press, Cambridge (p96)

⁶⁴ Apel, D (2012) op cit p2

⁶⁵ Gonzales, J (1992) op cit p127

⁶⁶ Edward Steichen; *The Family of Man*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955

Bourdieu's concept of field: values and limitations

The concept of *field* was the “principle organising logic of Bourdieu’s work” in its bid to expose cultural divisions and explicitly the division between forms of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. *Field* is defined as a competitive arena; a social network of conflict-occupied positions; a game, not unlike chess, in which the players are engaged in strategies appropriate to their location in the game.⁶⁷ According to Bourdieu, the field of cultural production, and specifically the production of art, offered the most significant scope for demonstrating a hierarchical range of aesthetic dispositions that are arbitrarily imposed. However, for Bourdieu, there was no area of practice in which “the aim of purifying, refining and sublimating primary needs and impulses cannot assert itself.”⁶⁸ Thus economic, political, intellectual and aesthetic fields are located as being ‘life orders’ into which social life partitions itself under modern capitalism. Each life order or field, “prescribes its particular values and processes its own regulative principles” which further “delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space either to change it or preserve its boundaries and form.”⁶⁹

Bourdieu puts it that:

The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces. The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the struggles to defend or improve their positions (i.e. their position

⁶⁷ Prior, N : *A Different Field of Vision*; in Fowler, B (ed) (2000) *Reading Bourdieu on Culture and Society*; Blackwell Publishers. Oxford p143

⁶⁸ Bourdieu, P (1992) *Distinction*; Routledge, London p3

⁶⁹ Bourdieu, P and Wacquant. L (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*; Polity Press, Cambridge p17

takings), strategies which depend for their force and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations.⁷⁰

The concept of field is, as Wacquant points out, analogous to the battlefield and consists of a fight for monopoly or at least authority over the specific kinds of capital required in order to be effective within it. The field is also a space of play, and here playing with the rules is part of the game itself. The ability to ‘play with the rules’ is governed, for Bourdieu, by the concept of *habitus*. This includes what Bourdieu defines as a combination of different capitals – economic, symbolic, social, educational and cultural which, in their specific combinations allow agents ‘a feel for the game’. Each of these capitals *in theory* contains the potential for conversion to another. Thus economic capital could be converted into educational capital (through private schooling for example). Where educational capital is required for access to ‘high culture’, educational capital could be converted into cultural capital and so on. But forms of capital are not reducible to one another. Symbolic capital is not always reducible to economic capital, which in turn does not imply possession of cultural or educational capital.

However, the value of a given capital does not exist except in relation to *field*. It is the structure of the field itself that “guides the strategies which people employ in order to maintain, safeguard or improve their position and to impose the principle of hierarchisation most favourable to their own products.”⁷¹

Bourdieu argues that the field of cultural production, and its ‘high/low’ divisions existed as “the economic world reversed” with a “winner loses” logic in which economic success could be a barrier to consecration and symbolic power.⁷² The economy of the field is based on the production of belief about what constitutes a cultural work and its aesthetic and social value. This is often

⁷⁰ Bourdieu, p (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production*; Polity Press, Cambridge p30

⁷¹ Bourdieu, P and Wacquant. L (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*; Polity Press, Cambridge p101

⁷² Bourdieu, P (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production*: Polity Press, Cambridge, p7

based, for Bourdieu, on an essentialist belief surrounding the work's autonomy from external determinants. In the most perfectly autonomous and restricted sector, producers produce only for other producers, condemning honours and eschewing the pursuit of economic profit (here, the absence of academic training and consecration may be considered a symbolic virtue.) It is this space that is most conducive to formal experimentation and innovation. At the other extreme from the sub-field of restricted production lies the field of large scale production. This is the space of mass produced, popular culture where the pursuit of economic profit is dominant. The large scale field requires the broadest possible audience and as such this makes it far less susceptible to formal experimentation – although Bourdieu notes that it may attempt to renew itself by borrowing from the restricted field.⁷³

Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production has been criticised on a number of levels. In particular, Hooker et al have rightfully questioned the priority given to the 'pure gaze' and a focus on *form* as a dominant art historical practice. They argue that art history is much more fragmented and disparate than Bourdieu would allow for. By positioning art and art history as a continuous field, Bourdieu denies the possibility of art historians as having a critically reflexive relationship with its objects of study.⁷⁴ This point can be sustained by the emergence of both Marxist and Feminist perspectives in art history, many of whom share Bourdieu's concerns, by confronting the role of ideology within art, and art history's exclusions. This reading of Bourdieu highlights a significant problem in Bourdieu's overt, even extreme objectifying practice towards social relations (a critical practice to which he nevertheless submitted his own intellectual position).⁷⁵ Bourdieu would counter this by arguing that following Weber, in setting out the field of art in relation to an

⁷³ Ibid p16

⁷⁴ Hooker et al in Fowler, B (ed) (2000) *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture*; Blackwell Publishers, Oxford (p221)

⁷⁵ Bourdieu, P (1988) *Homo Academicus*; Polity Press, Cambridge

object that cannot exist without the production of belief in ‘art’, he prevents himself from including his own value judgements (as a ‘lover’ of art rather than as antithetical to it) in his sociological statement. As such, even an iconoclastic treatment of the art object (heresy versus orthodoxy) is still necessarily engaged *in, against and for* the production of belief in art.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, as Fowler has pointed out, Bourdieu’s thesis is guilty of over-simplifying the exact nature of the struggles involved in the production of a democratic or popular art.⁷⁷

The field of photographic production

While photography has arguably transformed elements of Bourdieu’s wider field of cultural production in terms of becoming a medium for a consecrated art form, the field of photography (including but not limited to art, documentary and photojournalism) as a site of institutional power relations can nonetheless be shown to conserve dominant elements of a hierarchy of cognitive, physical and emotional labour in which the identification of a specific combination of emotional and cognitive labour is privileged and rewarded. Rewards may be economic and/or social, directly and indirectly in terms of money or status; economic or symbolic capital. In the case of photography, economic and symbolic capital can often be co-dependent despite or because of the fact that the concept of art as commodity is often rejected. This point will be further established in the later exposition of fine art photography. For the time being, I will outline some of the positions which photographers may take across this field.

In a discussion surrounding the appropriation of existing photographic images by art photographers, the artist and writer Martha Rosler draws from Bourdieu’s

⁷⁶ Bourdieu, P and Wacquant. L (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*; Polity Press, Cambridge (pp85-89)

⁷⁷ Fowler, B (ed) (2000) *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture*; Blackwell Publishers, Oxford (p15)

field concept suggesting that professional or ‘working’ photographers exhibit a ‘fear’- even a ‘loathing’- of art photographers “for their lack of respect for the unmediated image”. She goes on to say that:

Art photography perpetually defines itself by stressing its distance from the recording apparatus; it does so by relying on arcane theories of vision and on manipulation of the print, more recently on conceptual and theoretical grounding. In the eyes of professional photographers this no doubt makes them skill-less charlatans, loose cannons who get rich by fleecing the public. Such professional photographers, fixing their eyes on the level of copyright, are in no position to see that artists’ motivations for appropriating photojournalistic and other workaday photographic images are not so far from their own fears of manipulation; the difference, of course is that the artists see commercial photography and photojournalism as deeply implicated in the processes of social manipulation while the producers of the images are much more likely to see themselves at the mercy of those who control the process. Autonomy for each is the underlying theme.⁷⁸

While there is some truth in this statement, Rosler’s assessment of the antagonistic positions taken by photographers across the field of photography is somewhat simplistic, gliding over the complexity of political, ethical and aesthetic concerns which such positions may involve. Photojournalists and documentary photographers do not only fix their eyes on copyright issues, but have complex ethical, political, and aesthetic gazes that exist within their interpretive communities. Rosler’s statement implies that artist photographers see photojournalists or documentary photographers as being fully incorporated within an economic and political system, or as parts of an industry, in ways that

⁷⁸ Rosler M (2004)*Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p273

artists are not. This clearly merits further discussion. I will explore the point at length by focussing specifically on Martha Rosler's visual and literary critique of photography within the context of her biography.

Artists working in a variety of media have long positioned themselves as operating outside the 'vulgar' realm of commodity trade and commerce. As Battani points out, early practitioners of the Daguerreotype defended themselves against a burgeoning market by promoting 'taste and skill' over "pecuniary advancement"; the 'worthy artistic gentleman' and the 'man of mind' versus the 'less worthy operator, machine and money-getter'.⁷⁹ Taste and skill however came at a price. The cultivation of reputation developed by linking photography to artistic practises attracted high paying customers; symbolic capital being alchemically transformed into economic capital in this process. As Freund has also pointed out, referring to photography's relationship with painting, as much as relations between photographers themselves, in the face of an increasingly competitive photographic profession, "The question of art versus industry frequently served to camouflage economic rivalry."⁸⁰ The rise of the photographic portrait had serious consequences for the miniature portrait painter. Freund notes that:

The money-conscious and money making class had come to *prefer* photographs, which were cheap and offered an exact rendering of the subject. For a few additional francs, clever photographers coloured the prints with 'all-natural' pinks and blues. The artist who made his living painting portraits saw the number of his commissions drop daily.

Photography was responsible for his diminishing business, and it is not surprising that the majority of such artists, especially those of little

⁷⁹ Battani, M (1999) Organisational fields, cultural fields and art worlds: the early effort to make photographs and make photographers in the 19th century United States of America; in *Media, Culture and Society* 21:601; Sage Publications (<http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/21/5/601>) p619

⁸⁰ Freund G (1980)*Photography and Society*; David R. Godine, Boston p83

talent, harboured a deep resentment toward the invention that reduced their income.⁸¹

An increased body of academic literature coming from both art history and sociology as well as from artists themselves, has attempted to demystify ideas of individual genius and an autonomous system of artistic merit by locating ‘art’ firmly within the sphere and market place of capitalist production and as a form of ‘work’. While the idea of ‘art’ as ‘work’ has been central to much twentieth century avant-garde practice the notion of *artistic labour* as being distinct from, and less alienated than other forms of waged labour has nonetheless persisted.

Dona Schwartz studied with Bourdieu at the Sorbonne during the 1970s. Schwartz’s ethnographic work follows Bourdieu in her examination of the ways by which art photographers distinguished themselves from camera club members.⁸² Whilst this may at first sight appear to be a simple division between ‘serious professionals’ and ‘hobbyist amateurs’ much of this empirical data remains relevant to the field of social relations under examination here. Although camera clubs were an important area of study for Pierre Bourdieu they do not feature significantly in this thesis. Nonetheless, Schwartz’s ethnographic account of artistic self-consciousness, or *habitus* as the embodiment of ideas about the nature of ‘art’, is helpful towards understanding the relationship between artist photographers and other interpretive communities, who in different ways are all working commercially in the field of photography.

Schwartz, herself a practising photographer, carried out ethnographic research in Philadelphia. She joined the Miniature Camera Club for a period of 30 months and conducted extensive interviews with 10 of the most active club members who were aged between 50 and 70 years old. In addition to this, she

⁸¹ Ibid p82

⁸² Schwartz, D (1986) Camera Clubs and Fine Art Photography: The Social Construction of an Elite Code; in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 1986 15: p165

attended every photography exhibition opening night (private views) held at various Philadelphia art galleries as a participant observer. Later, she carried out informal interviews with a sample of 20 Philadelphia art photographers who she had selected through a referral process. Art Photographers were referred to her by the editor of *Philadelphia Photo Review* (who was also an art photographer) and by her former photography teacher. Each interviewee was also asked for additional referrals. Schwartz noted: “a considerable overlap in the list of names I compiled providing further evidence of the existence of an art network.”⁸³

There are of course some issues of methodology that could be questioned here – given the age of the members of the camera club at the time of research there may be little surprise that they seemed to share a respect for and emulate what has later come to be described and sometimes dismissed as the ‘pictorial’ work of photographers such as Steiglitz, Steichen, Adams or Weston who had all achieved substantial ‘art world’ notoriety by this time through an emerging historical and aesthetic photographic canon. Likewise, when research is geographically limited there may be little surprise about the identification of a local ‘art network’. As with any research performed as a strategic case study, there are difficulties involved with linking the particular to the general – and much more so in any attempt at universalising specific themes.

Despite this, the ways by which ‘artist’ photographers described themselves in her study are worth noting and seem to have longevity as a social, cultural and historical form. Photographers integrated within art world practises (in Schwartz’s study) linked their activities to those of artists working in other media and “explicitly disavow the identity of ‘photographer’”⁸⁴ seeing themselves as artists first and foremost for whom the use of photography as a

⁸³ Ibid p168

⁸⁴ Ibid p171

medium was often understood as incidental to a primary artistic identity. Schwartz quotes from one participant:

I am an artist, not a photographer. I don't know what a photographer thinks like. I don't think of ways to go out and record reality, it's not my way of working[...] I don't think of myself as a photographer. Photography is an aspect of what I'm doing.⁸⁵

Inclusion within established artist groups was also important to the legitimisation of artistic status, and again citing her participants Schwartz notes:

My closest friends are painters, writers (my closest friend is a writer), and film makers. Maybe it's because of jealousy among photographers. My friends are people involved in art, not photographers.⁸⁶

Art photographers were also concerned to emphasise the idea of a distinct and individualised “vision”. Schwartz notes that photographs were described as being documents of processes of *personal* “investigation” and “discovery”:

[Art] photographers “reveal” or “illuminate” hidden insights obscured by surface appearances. These terms proclaim that artists' photographs are not simply there for the taking; their pictures do not record reality, but serve as metaphors for the artist's experience; the richer and more diverse the experience, the more complex and rigorous the metaphor.⁸⁷

An important aspect of Schwartz's study revealed a relationship between economic capital and the pursuit of *personal* investigation whether this was through marriage to a high earner or by carrying out ‘commercial’ work – explicitly rejected as being either *artistic* or *creative* jobs.

⁸⁵ Ibid p172

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid p177

Art photography therefore is an emotional and cognitive vehicle that conveys *ideas*: connotation, as a vehicle for the emotive, trumps denotation.⁸⁸ As Rosler's statement on the antagonistic relationship between perceptions of 'art' and 'non-art' photography above argues and as this thesis will go on to examine, *significant conceptualisation*, often reflexively commenting on the medium of photography itself, is today likely to be the main criteria for judging fine art photography. Here "imitation" is frowned upon and "innovation" is lauded even though this is often paradoxically accomplished by borrowing and imitating techniques derived from vernacular photography. Use of the 'snapshot aesthetic' and family 'DIY' photographs, as with Richard Billingham's photographs of his 'dysfunctional' family in *Ray's a Laugh*⁸⁹ and employing technically unsophisticated equipment have now become incorporated into art world photographic practise and its intellectual or scholarly rhetoric where it gains a new symbolic power. Notable also is the use of the Polaroid from Ansel Adams, Walker Evans, Andre Kertesz, Andy Warhol and David Hockney for example.

Today we can add the digital camera phone and the much debated 'Hipstamatic app' to the above list. The 'Hipstamatic app' developed by Apple for *I-phone* users offers software filters, a selection of 'lenses' 'flashes' and 'films' to produce square images with an 'old fashioned' look, simulating the hand tinted 'vintage' colour photographs of the early 19th century. In the words of its advertisers, "Digital never looked so analogue!" There has been some debate however about the use of this medium by photojournalists such as Damon Winter and David Guttenfelder who have published their work using this app on social networking sites such as *Flickr* or *Instagram*⁹⁰. Some see the app as debasing photojournalism's indexical capacity for objectivity; others argue that

⁸⁸ Ibid p179

⁸⁹ Billingham, R (2000)*Ray's a Laugh*; Scalo

⁹⁰ Campbell, D; *David Campbell's Visual Story Telling: Creative Practice and Criticism Blog*; www.davidcampbell.org 21/9/12

it is rather a question of it being a tool of choice in which the photographer's vision remains paramount.

Simultaneous with this modern technique for the production of faux-vintage, it is worth noting the revival of older photographic techniques within art world photography. This residual technology is used by an emergent culture that can be seen as being set against, or at least alongside, all that the digital age seeks to emulate; a return to hand tinting, the use of large format plate cameras with lengthy exposure times and a recourse to a painterly language of a 'neo-classical' frontal image that can be formally divided into neat horizontal and vertical 'thirds'. The work of Simon Norfolk and others involved in what is now termed by art historians and critics as 'Late' or 'Aftermath' photography can be noted here. The 'slowness' of this production is argued to emphasise the point of hesitation, and the freedom to prolong it which is central to innovative artistic labour.⁹¹ Examples of 'Late' photography will be attended to in later chapters.

Amongst all of this, as Rosler's statement has noted above, the use of 'artistic' photographic appropriation through collage techniques and the 'ironic' or 'quotational' restaging and re-photographing of already existing painted images and photographs can be considered as in the work of Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince and in Rosler's own work.

But most significantly the production of a single, unique image most forcefully challenges a popular identification of photography's association with 'mass' reproduction and distribution (as in the work of Jeff Wall for example) recreating the 'aura' of the work of art through the very medium that Walter Benjamin considered could work to destroy it.

These examples sustain an emphasis on and legitimacy of the artist's vision irrespective of the technology employed. As Bourdieu suggested:

⁹¹ Eldridge J and Eldridge E; (1994) *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*; London Routledge p125 , for a discussion of Williams' ideas on artistic freedom.

The issue of legitimacy, a question thrown up by the photographer's relationship to an audience, therefore determines the defences of the practise rather than governing the practice itself. But the dialogue between the creator and the apparatus, also experienced in daily practice, gives rise to justificatory discourses and to a system of practical rules constituted as an aesthetic.⁹²

Moreover, Bourdieu argues that the questions which aesthetes ask themselves are not generally governed by the *actual* possibilities that photography presents but instead, are governed by the way the technology itself is socially defined and by the social conditions which emerge from this and regulate its use.⁹³ What is significant here in his statement is that in art photography the mimetic or indexical technology of the camera is no less crucial towards emphasising subjective artistic vision as it is for those who would maintain the camera as being a mechanical, objective eye: as the much quoted advertising slogan from Kodak asserted, "You push the button and we do the rest."⁹⁴

In their critique of contemporary photojournalist practises, collaborative artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin suggest that:

Politically speaking, we often talk about how war photographers are so much part of the system of conflict, and how the photographers on the front lines are kind of colluding in that system. So much of that photography – the 'Baghdad Boys', and so on – is not challenging the status quo anymore; it's part of it. And I think it's important to make pictures that are challenging. It's very clear to us that we have to come

⁹² Bourdieu, P (1965) *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*: (1990) Polity Press p137

⁹³ Ibid p138

⁹⁴ Quoted in Freund, G (1980) op cit p86

either before or after the fact. We consciously avoid that moment of action.⁹⁵

Broomberg and Chanarin do not make it clear *exactly* how depiction contributes causally to the continuation of wars, genocides, state organised violence or other atrocities. It is simply ‘taken for granted’ as a casual form of ‘common sense.’

Other critics of photojournalism have outlined the ‘complicit’ relationship between the photojournalist and the continuation of war in explicitly economic terms. Sontag and Rosler were also critical of the photojournalist. As Rosler put it: “The photographer is sometimes seen as an interloper, “selling papers” through sensationalism or furthering the editors’ or publishers’ ideological and political agenda.”⁹⁶ For Broomberg and Chanarin, the photograph has become a main element of war fare itself; “the act of war coincides with its representation, with the act of image making.”⁹⁷ Through such objections, Broomberg and Chanarin (whose early careers began on the magazine *Colours*) have found a strategy that provides them in *theory* with an ethical, aesthetic and political distinction from the work of photojournalists. I will return to this point.

That photography is now recognised as both a fine art form and more widely as a practise worthy of academic study across a variety of subject areas is refracted by the increasing literature surrounding the topic. In much of this literature, the photograph, photography and the photographer have been conceptualised, theorised, abstracted, critiqued and philosophised to the extent that the relationship between them is now enmeshed in a thicket of understanding. This has rightly called the idea of an objective photographic ‘truth’ into question, challenging its value as empirical evidence. Dora Apel has pointed out that an

⁹⁵ <http://seesawmagazine.com/figpages/figinterview.html> (retrieved 06/02/2012)

⁹⁶ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p226

⁹⁷ Broomberg A and Chanarin O (2008) *The Day Nobody Died*; <http://www.choppedliver.org/info>

understanding of the framing process has become increasingly prevalent in the photographic theory of at least the last three decades, but at times this understanding has threatened to undermine the potential of photography to work as radical critique and as a site of visual resistance.⁹⁸ The photograph, photography and the photographer are now recognised as vehicles for the *politics* of truth.

Why War?

As previously noted, this thesis aims to untangle some of the politics of this discourse by directing attention to images of war. The representation of damage to the human body is the site in which ethical, political, and aesthetic questions appear in their most concentrated form. Yet “War Photography” is untidy as a descriptive term, conjuring up all sorts of images of military action and its consequences; images of glory and defeat; of triumphant or exhausted soldiers; of mutilated bodies and devastated, shattered communities inhabiting demolished cities and scarred landscapes. Photographs of war clearly include this, and worse. The political and moral efficacy of such images has been challenged and as such ‘war photography’ is now increasingly ‘looking elsewhere’ and away from the dominant codes of visual practices suggested above.⁹⁹

Moreover, the technology of photography and the photographic image have become increasingly incorporated within the practice of warfare itself. Technological advances have not only transformed the representation of war but have dramatically altered the way wars are fought.

⁹⁸ Apel, D (2012) *War Culture and The Contest of Images* Rutledge University Press p2

⁹⁹ Kozol, W (2014) *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing*; Minneapolis The University of Minnesota Press p7

Whilst early war photographers such as Robert Fenton or Matthew Brady could *only* photograph its aftermath due to their cumbersome equipment, fragile plates and complicated development procedures, contemporary photographers are able to capture the action as and when it happens. This ability led the photographer Robert Capa to claim, “If your pictures aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough!”¹⁰⁰

With the advent of man-made flight, aerial photography soon became realised as a central tool of warfare, allowing deeper penetration into enemy territory. “The camera – once mounted in an airplane – offered the means to monitor the movement of opposing armies in a systematic fashion.”¹⁰¹ By the First World War, remotely piloted aircraft were tentatively in use. By the Second World War, assault drones were in place and in Vietnam unmanned aerial vehicles were in regular use. Today, modern warfare may be carried out by drones who offer “near real-time video feed back to remote operators” in a bid to offer ‘precision strikes’ that prevent civilian casualties. The documented failure of this process to prevent civilian casualties has led to protests that connect ways of seeing to a technologically defined culture; killing at such a distance becomes too casual – modern warfare is played out like a video game.¹⁰²

The advancement of technologies in photographic practise – from the pocket Leica, and later instamatics which offered a more ‘immediate’ relationship between photographer and image, to digital pixilation – do incorporate different relationships within the total production of an image. Technology has the capacity to increase and alter opportunity to explore and examine many new and often disparate versions of social reality in all types of circumstances. The Kodak ‘Vest Pocket Camera’ was marketed at soldiers during the First World War and was supplied with a military case that could be attached to a belt. By

¹⁰⁰ Becker, H (2007) *Telling About Society* University of Chicago Press p188

¹⁰¹ Heiferman, M (2012) *Photography Changes Everything*; Aperture foundation, Smithsonian Institution p196

¹⁰² Gregory, J (2011) *From a View to a Kill: Drones and Late Modern War; Theory, Culture and Society* 2011: 28:188 Sage Publications

1918, as American participation in the war increased, almost two million had been sold – this was despite a stringent policy outlawing the use of cameras by soldiers in the theatre of war.¹⁰³

Photographs taken by soldiers themselves remain contentious. As the images of tortured prisoners at Abu Ghraib made clear, mobile phone-camera technology has had an unprecedented impact on the documentation of social life. This is both in terms of limitations on what can be photographed as much as towards increasing the potential audience via interaction with other distributive technological media. News broadcasts of New York's Twin Tower explosions (9/11) and the later London underground bombs made substantial use of 'eye witness' photographs of the disaster scenes that were captured on mobile phone cameras to be sent optimistically and hopelessly into the ether.

However, for Bourdieu, 'technology' alone is an unstable category for study. As Sterne puts it, technology is better treated as an extension of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* which allows for a discussion of "embodied subjectivity or 'practical knowledge.'" This embodied subjectivity is, in turn, argued to be stratified across different societies and historical epochs, connecting *habitus*, as the "organised base of physical movement" to the use of specific tools and instruments.¹⁰⁴

This connection prevents a narrative of a technologically determined, autonomous historical development of photographic practise since technology, and its uses, remain firmly embedded within social and cultural spheres of practice. As Bourdieu's study made evident, technology alone does not account for the changing practices and uses of photography. However, technological advancements cannot be ignored in any social and historical account of photographic practise.

¹⁰³ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers' Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p26

¹⁰⁴ Sterne, J (2003) Bourdieu, Technique and Technology in *Cultural Studies* 17 (3/4) 2003 p370

Lisle has argued that:

Photographic images of war, conflict and atrocity have always troubled the foundational distinction between photography as either an objective technology of representation (ie, recording the world faithfully and accurately) or as a means of aesthetic expression (ie, creating beautiful and unique images). There is often great beauty in the documentary photojournalism of war (eg, Roger Fenton's images of the Crimea, Robert Capa's D-Day shots, Don McCullin's Vietnam photographs), just as there is technical and scientific mastery in the aesthetic photographs of war (eg Jeff Wall's "Dead Troops Talk", Alistair Thains's "Marines", Victor Sloan's "Explosion").¹⁰⁵

The photograph and its narratives offer a critical site of cultural analysis through exhibiting that which Raymond Williams termed as a 'structure of feeling'. 'Structure of feeling' is a mediating term, operating between "an historical set of social relations, the general cultural and ideological modes appropriate to them, and the specific forms of subjectivity (embodied not least in artefacts) in which such modes are lived out."¹⁰⁶ For Williams, the idea of structure of feeling represented the subtle conjunction between the individual and the social. Photography is then, as Robert Hariman points out, "not simply a way of recording the world, but a way of being in the world."¹⁰⁷ In drawing from a range of photographic practices and narratives, I am interested to explore these 'ways of being in the world' more fully, specifically in terms of their *subjective* position taking. In turn, this affords enhanced clarification of Bourdieu's field of struggles.

¹⁰⁵ Lisle D (2011) The surprising detritus of leisure: encountering the Late Photography of War; *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 2011, volume 29 pp875-876

¹⁰⁶ Eldridge J and Eldridge L (1994) *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*; Routledge p140

¹⁰⁷ Hariman, R *Watching War Evolve* in Kennedy, L and Patrick, C (2014) *The Violence of the Image; Photography and International Conflict*; I.B. Taurus, London. New York; p154

On Theory and Practise: Photography as an Exercise in Serendipity

Photographic theory and photographic practise are changing. This thesis draws substantially from C W Mills' ideas on Intellectual Craftsmanship.¹⁰⁸ For Mills, intellectual production involves the maintenance of a file, in his words – “a curious sort of ‘literary’ journal”. It starts out as an array of compartmentalised subjects and problems; facts and ideas arranged according to particular endeavours. However, Mills goes on to say that over time this changes. Categories are both added and dropped and are no longer dominated by any single master project. A *disciplined* playfulness encourages the expansion of the categories used in thinking which in turn act as an index of intellectual progress and breadth. Mills wrote:

As you rearrange a filing system, you often find that you are, as it were, loosening your imagination. Apparently this occurs by means of your attempt to combine various ideas and notes on different topics. It is a sort of logic of combination, and ‘chance’ sometimes plays a curiously large part in it. In a way, you try to engage your intellectual resources, as exemplified in the file, with the new themes.¹⁰⁹

Mills made further and more rigorous demands of his beginning students, reminding them that, “the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community you have chosen to join do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dislocation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other.”¹¹⁰ For Mills, this type of reflexive scholarship was not simply a choice of career but it was also a choice about how to live and the construction of a character in which the qualities of craftsmanship and the cultural worker were present. For Mills, personal

¹⁰⁸ Mills, C W (1959) *The Sociological Imagination* Oxford University Press p201

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ ibid p195

experience and professional activities could be conjoined in a controlled way, encouraging the idea of capturing ‘fringe thoughts’. These might consist of a number of by-products from everyday life – snatches of conversations overheard or even dreams may lead to more systematic thinking and lend intellectual relevance to more directed experience.¹¹¹

This practise offers a useful guide to study in general and to interdisciplinary study in particular. It was an approach favoured by Raymond Williams who wrote across a number of disciplines; literature, drama, philosophy, politics, art, sociology. He did not distinguish between his academic writing and his creative writing, seeing these equally as ‘work’ that held a common purpose towards the construction of a participatory democracy.

In their nascent period both photography and sociology were interested in looking at social life and as having a benefit for this. Brunet notes Arago’s speech to the French parliament:

One of the most telling aspects of Arago’s speech [...] was that, far from dwelling on the scientific origins, interpretations or uses of photography, it adopted a non-specialised stance – a layman’s discourse, which posited photography as universally accessible, an addition to culture rather than to science. [...] Bewilderment at the magic of the daguerreotype, combined with the urge to make the idea of photography as generic and accessible as possible, explain Arago’s recourse to literary references and devices in a speech celebrating photography’s modernity.¹¹²

The photograph has continued in its tradition as a site and economy of literary production. The photographer is not simply the producer of images, but

¹¹¹ ibid

¹¹² Brunet F (2009) *Photography and Literature*; Reaktion Books, London p21

simultaneously, and very often posthumously the photographer is unwittingly the producer of texts.

John Berger's essay on "The Suit and The Photograph" acknowledges Benjamin's writing on the work of August Sander in that the corpus was more than a picture book – it was an atlas of instruction. Berger makes use of a photograph of three young peasants on a road, going to an evening dance. While there is much descriptive information in the image, Berger is concerned with the suits worn by the trio. In what can be termed as a layering of discourse, Berger provides a sartorial analysis in which the suits, far from disguising the young men's class position actually serve to emphasise it. Berger writes "Their suits deform them. Wearing them, they look as though they were physically misshapen. [...]We look at bodies which appear coarse, clumsy, brute like. And incorrigibly so."¹¹³

Berger echoes something of Bourdieu's analysis of peasant life in his own rural Béarne and the 'awkward bachelors' who would hover at the edges of the dance floor at country balls. Les Back suggests that :

The bachelors are condemned because they inhabit an embodied culture that is out of step with the rhythm and style of the city. Trapped in their 'empeasanted bodies' and rooted through their ties to the land it is impossible for these men to appear attractive to women: 'a consequence of the differential penetration of urban cultural models among the two sexes, women judge the men folk by criteria that leave them with no chance'.¹¹⁴

In Sander's image, the suits restrict and deny the men their normal dignity. Berger's 'punctum' here, to borrow Barthes' term, may not be what Sander had in mind as the maker of the image. Yet it is a valid and worthwhile analysis.

¹¹³ Berger J (1980) *About Looking; Writers and Readers* p3

¹¹⁴ Back, L (2009); Portrayal and Betrayal: Bourdieu, Photography and Sociological Life; *The Sociological Review* 57:3, p475

Importantly, Berger's considerations do not undermine Sander's own intentions regarding this work. Sander offered his images as a visual record of German people and German society. Berger writes *with not over* Sander.

The importance of *writing with* brings me back to the title of this thesis and its second clause 'An Exercise in Serendipity'. This puts forward the idea that the photograph can be usefully explored as a key site of unintended social and cultural consequences. The photograph in this sense can be said to retain the status of the 'found object' so beloved by surrealist artists. The photograph as found object is seen to be fit for a new purpose, and sometimes it is.

Yet at other times these consequences appear to risk ignoring the conditions of production (including the intentions of the photographer) and the original context of an image, or its specificity, whereby photographs are used to illustrate ideological positions for which they were not made. This is not to deny either the ambiguity of the photograph or to suppress "the social function of subjectivity"¹¹⁵ but it is to suggest that the photographer's subjectivity can sometimes be dismissed when a photograph is used simply to *illustrate* an argument. The 'found' object then privileges the viewer over the author.

While photographs, like all images, are open to interpretation this does not mean that all interpretations are equally valid. Mills noted the use of playfulness in his articulation of cross classification, but the word *disciplined* is an important qualifying prefix. What can be said of and about a photograph has to be understood as being parenthesised by a number of factors, not least by the intersections of history and biography which draw attention to the context and the intentions of the photographer as much as they can illuminate the viewer's anachronistic response to an image.

The concept of serendipity and its location as a component within theoretical and methodological pursuits has been most significantly outlined by the

¹¹⁵ Berger J (1980) *Another Way of Telling*; Writers and Readers p100

sociologist Robert Merton. Merton had a certain and enduring preoccupation with the word.¹¹⁶ Although serendipity is often equated with a lucky find and an element of chance, it also requires the sensitivity to understand why the chance, or ‘found’ element might be relevant. The concept of serendipity has some bearing on this dissertation after a chance find that fell out of a filing cabinet whilst clearing it – a photocopy of a photograph of the sociologist Norbert Elias taken by Gisele Freund in a Paris park, dated 1933. Elias encouraged Freund’s PhD thesis, in which she combined knowledge of her photographic practice with a structural analysis of society; so he recommended Freund to Walter Benjamin as a candidate for supervision. Her thesis was later published as *Photography and Society*.¹¹⁷ In Freund’s photograph, Elias is standing on a chair and his hands are cupped around his eyes as though he is taking a photograph himself. The photograph suggested a connection between sociology and photography as mutual forms of picturing society which might be fruitful to explore. According to Merton:

Fruitful empirical research not only tests theoretically derived hypotheses; it also originates new hypotheses. This might be termed the serendipity component of research, that is the discovery, by chance or sagacity, of valid results which were not sought for.¹¹⁸

The serendipity component, for Merton, was a useful way of making sense of and referring to “the fairly common experience of observing unanticipated, anomalous and strategic datum which becomes the occasion for developing a new theory or for extending an existing theory.”¹¹⁹ This allows for the *active* role of theory within the research process as much as the *active* impact of empirical observation on sociological, or any other theoretical statements, be they literal or visual. It allows for the interpenetrating links between theory and

¹¹⁶ Merton, R and Barber, H (2011) *Travels and Adventures in Serendipity* Princeton University Press

¹¹⁷ Freund, G (1980) *Photography and Society*; Boston, David R Godine; Publisher

¹¹⁸ Merton R (1968) *Social Theory and Social Structure*; New York Free Press p261

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*

practise to be more fully explored, and as Merton observes, both provide points of stimulus to provoke curiosity in the face of inconsistency. In attaching Merton's concept to this thesis the aim is to think through some of the inconsistencies which surround the theory and practise of photography - to explore not just the photograph as a visual form of representation but to eavesdrop on written representations of the photograph across a range of disciplines as productive meta-narratives that generate their own social and cultural consequences.

To explore photography fully is to explore what is said and written about photography - this is not just an artistic or literary exercise but it is also and necessarily a sociological enterprise. The practise of photography and its unfolding, changing narratives are human activities carried out in the interplay of history and biography. The photograph and its narratives are the result of real human relationships, of production and consumption existing at a macro level of social institutions – of technology and capital for example. But equally, the photograph and its narratives bear witness to the micro occurrences of the ordinary and the 'everyday' associations of human agency as a site of resistance, disruption and integrity.

The integrity of the photographer, either as artist, documenter or photojournalist has been at stake within certain quarters of photographic criticism. By employing Bourdieu's concept of *field* as a tool for analysis, the hierarchic structure of photographic institutions perceived according to their proximity to the commodity form can clearly be objectively mapped out in institutional forms. However, as I will demonstrate, the institutional story is not the whole story – as Simmel's and Weber's sociology makes clear. It is equally important to examine what individuals do within those institutions and to this extent the figure of the craftsman can be put to work.

An attention to craftsmanship moves away from thinking in binary terms about photography as being ‘art’ and ‘not art’, subjective or objective, without reducing the argument to one of pictorial relativism. Putting the concept of the craftsman to work allows for a deeper examination of the interpenetration of theory and practise. How do theory and practice operate across the field of photography as a form of public production? The idea of craftsmanship will be discussed and offered as a coda for this thesis. Craftsmanship will be considered there as a concept that not only binds certain practices of documentary photography, photojournalism and fine art photography together, but at the same time, brings sociology into a renewed relationship with photography.

2.

WORDS AND PICTURES

That photography is now regarded as a discipline at home in scholarly culture including, but not limited to art history, is reflected by the increasing volume of literature on the subject. This chapter argues that the essay offers an important form for writing about photography as a “dynamic mode of apprehension rather than a series of static pictures.”¹²⁰ In turn, the essay becomes a critical site for cross referencing, between different disciplinary interests and in relation to wider theoretical claims (such as Bourdieu’s) about the production and reception of photography.¹²¹ In making use of the essay form, I want to set out something of the nature of the struggles that take place within the field of photographic production in terms of differences and overlaps between and within practices. The aim is to demonstrate that the field here is more complex than Bourdieu suggests and that the subjectivities of the agents involved are worthy of fuller consideration.

As Geoffrey Batchen has noted, since the invention of photography was announced in 1839, “Scholars have struggled to find an appropriate way to write a history for it.”¹²² Batchen offers an historical overview of the practice: in the 19th century, photographic narratives were either driven by nationalist claims or were organised around technological developments and improvements. It was not until the early 20th century that histories of photography appeared which largely took the form of photographers’ biographies. In the 1930s art historical accounts of photography began to emerge. Beaumont Newhall provided a linear history that was first issued in

¹²⁰ Batchen, G (2008) *Snapshots in Photographies*, 1:2 (p127)

¹²¹ Exemplified for example in Williams’ *Keywords* and Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*

¹²² Batchen, G (2008) *Snapshots in Photographies*, 1:2, (p121)

1937 as an exhibition catalogue by the Museum of Modern Art, New York¹²³ and later that year appeared under the title *Photography: A Short Critical History*. While this was pioneering work, Batchen argues that this linear form of history writing soon became the dominant mode of photographic narrative “with its narrow emphasis on avant-garde practice and aesthetics” be this in the form of books or exhibitions.¹²⁴ Batchen puts it that:

One result has been that photography – a sprawling cultural phenomenon inhabiting virtually every aspect of modern life: from birth to death, from sex to war, from atoms to planets, from commerce to art – is consistently left out of its own history (for only a few, select photographs qualify for inclusion into an art history of the medium).¹²⁵

Thus in general, Batchen describes early art historical accounts of photography as celebrating singular achievements and their origins as unique and individual events. The assumption behind this, for Batchen, is that such a discourse aims to present itself as an aesthetic, social and political model for transgressive action in the present.¹²⁶ Batchen is extremely critical of this approach:

It’s a comforting illusion, but I’m afraid I’m no longer convinced by this argument or this kind of historical emphasis. A normative history that privileges avant-garde practice, even those practices that at some point contested the establishment of their own time, is still a normative history. It merely feeds an art world economy for whom such dead avant-gardes are only so many commodities, intellectual and otherwise. What I’m suggesting here is that we need an avant-garde approach to history, not another obedient history of the avant-garde.¹²⁷

¹²³ Newhall, B (1937) *Photography 1839-1937*; Museum of Modern Art, New York

¹²⁴ *Ibid* p125

¹²⁵ *Ibid*

¹²⁶ *Ibid* p125-126

¹²⁷ *Ibid* p126

Batchen reminds us of the difficulties in writing about photography as a field that escapes easy definition and whose boundaries are fluid and unstable. As a practice that is built on the principle of reflection, is it possible, he asks, to separate photographic representation from the context of its subsequent and continuously unfolding receptions? More than this, Batchen confronts the difficulties in speaking from a local position in light of photography's now global reach and its "multiple expressions of cultural difference."¹²⁸

Batchen's questions are significant. They alert us to the pitfalls and limitations of 'the single story' of photography as being either a technical, aesthetic, cultural or political narrative. But, it leaves another question in its wake. If photography's boundaries are unstable, how are we to resist the disintegration of our attention into increasingly fragmented fragments that never add up to the sum of their parts? This is not necessarily to advocate a nostalgic return to a totalising account of photography. Instead, it is to suggest that the connections between each fragment are worthy of study; that at times, connecting these fragments might enable us to develop a picture of the photographic imagination that adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

Exploring the essay, as form and as method is one possibility for this practice.

The photograph and the essay: towards a methodology

With the exception of the monographs and collected histories of photography addressed by Batchen, the essay is an important and overlooked form of writing about photography. Notable examples of the essay form are found in Benjamin, Kracauer, Berger, Rosler, Sekula, Tagg and Sontag. These writers are not alone in using the essay as a literary form as a mode to work through particular

¹²⁸ Ibid p126

questions about the relationships of power between photographs, photographers and photographed in different ways.

Although a sustained interest in photography has been much slower to develop in sociology as opposed to anthropology, the language of photography as metaphor nonetheless permeated sociological writing, as it moved away from its positivist beginnings in Comte and through Durkheim towards the interpretive understanding of ‘science’ through Weber and his concept of ‘*verstehen*.’

Weber’s concept of *verstehen* emphasised the importance of understanding the meanings that people attach to their actions.

Between 1900 and 1903, Georg Simmel published a collection of seven essays in the Munich journal *Jugend*. These were given the title “*Momentbilder sub specie aeternitatus*”, which is translated by David Frisby as “Literally, snapshots viewed from the aspect of eternity.”¹²⁹

At that time, *Momentbild* was the word in use to describe snapshots. It still retained the literal meaning of a fleeting or momentary image or picture. But interestingly enough, the literary ‘snapshots’ are not accompanied by actual snapshots since *Jugend* was firmly committed to *Jugendstil*. Simmel’s contributions are surrounded by *Jugendstil* designs, and other graphics that belong to an aesthetic movement which sought to preserve individual creativity against the reproducibility of new art forms thrown up by capitalism, such as photography.¹³⁰

Frisby suggests that the title of these pieces serve to illuminate Simmel’s approach to his subject matter and summarise a perspective that sought to seek out the simultaneity of the fleeting, transitory moment and the enduring social forms in which it occurs.¹³¹ Simmel has been described as the first sociologist of modernity and specifically of modes of *experiencing* modernity in urban and

¹²⁹ Frisby, D (1992) *Sociological Impressionism: Georg Simmel’s Social Theory*; Routledge p102

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Frisby, D (1992) *Sociological Impressionism: Georg Simmel’s Social Theory*; Routledge p103

metropolitan life.¹³² Frisby points out that for Simmel, the key theme of modernity is that social reality is in a constant state of flux and is therefore experienced in fleeting and fragmentary ways.

Simmel's writing is against any totalising account of society based on the analysis of its larger institutions. Such "macroscopically perceptible special structures and functions" are for Simmel, unable to reveal the real or "the nexus of life". This revelation can only result from examination of the countless microscopic interactions "taking place between the smallest elements" or individual actors that until this point "had not been revealed as the genuine and fundamental basis of life."¹³³ In this sense, Simmel is reluctant to 'read off' the micro from the macro – he is not content that structural analysis alone can produce "insight from these into social life in its totality."¹³⁴ For Simmel:

The fact that people look at each other and are jealous of one another, that they write each other letters or have lunch together, that they have sympathetic or antipathetic contacts, quite removed from any tangible interests, that one person asks another for directions and that people dress up and adorn themselves for one another – all the thousands of relations from person to person, from which the momentary or enduring, conscious or unconscious, fleeting or momentous, from which the above examples are taken quite at random, continually bind us together. On every day, at every hour, such threads are spun, dropped, picked up again, replaced by others or woven together with them. Herein lie the interactions between the atoms of society, accessible only to psychological microscopy, which support the entire tenacity and

¹³² Frisby D (1988) *Fragments of Modernity*; Polity Press p39

¹³³ Frisby D and Featherstone M (Eds) (1997) *Simmel on Culture*; Sage Publications p110

¹³⁴ *ibid*

elasticity, the entire variety and uniformity of this so evident and yet so puzzling life of society.¹³⁵

The real life of society could only be provided by experience and could “certainly not be constructed from those large objectivised structures that constitute the traditional objects of social science.”¹³⁶ This way of seeing society was in danger of simply falling apart - of fragmenting into ever increasing systems without thought for the “diverse and complex cellular processes” which might bind the institutions together, or indeed, might work to undermine them.¹³⁷

David Frisby has commented on Simmel’s use of the essay which is almost never accompanied by footnotes or source references. In Simmel’s writing:

The essay form takes up the anti-systematic impulse of intellectual creativity that proves to be annoying to orthodox members of the scientific community. It is more suited to a different companion of sociology[.....] loosely described as ‘sociology as an art form’.¹³⁸

For Frisby, the use of the essay as a methodology allowed Simmel “the shifting form of the philosopher, the sociologist, the psychologist and the aesthete.”¹³⁹

D’Agata notes that, “From the Middle French *essai* – “a test”, “a trial”, “an experiment” – the essay is the equivalent of a mind in rumination, performing as if improvisationally the reception of new ideas, the discovery of the unknowns, the encounter with the “other””.¹⁴⁰ The concept of the essay as a playground for exploration is contrasted with other forms of writing – in particular with the article, which can be described as having “no room for personal experience,

¹³⁵ *ibid*

¹³⁶ *ibid*

¹³⁷ *ibid*

¹³⁸ Frisby D (1984) *Georg Simmel*; Ellis Horwood Ltd p17

¹³⁹ Frisby, as above p16

¹⁴⁰ D’Agata J (Ed) (2009) *The Lost Origins of the Essay*: Graywolf Press p9

personal thought, or personal voice of the essayist” and thus as being “out of touch with human concerns.”¹⁴¹

The essay has been perceived as being set apart from theoretical, scholarly or journalistic discourse. Against these forms, the essay evokes “naturalness, openness and looseness as opposed to the methodical quality of conventional non-fiction” and further as “a mode of trying out ideas, of exploration rather than persuasion, of reflection rather than conviction.”¹⁴²

It can be noted that many essays on photography have been written by photographers themselves linking practice with idea in order to establish their rationales within, and often against, the intellectual mode of the moment. The work of Martha Rosler can be noted as an example here. As I will demonstrate, Rosler has engaged with Bourdieu’s theoretical project, the status of art, its exclusions and the issue of representation itself.¹⁴³ The essay here, combined with her visual production becomes both a route to knowledge and to self-realisation through its sense of experiment, questioning and provisionality. Bourdieu is cautious about relying solely on the role of ‘motivations’ for social research. The use of motivations alone for social theory is, for Bourdieu, a reductive or ‘vulgate’ discourse: “nothing but a disparate enumeration of the reasons or rationalisations halfway between everyday talk and scientific statement.”¹⁴⁴ This may give the illusion of revealing truths, but in reality remains bound only to the surface of things.¹⁴⁵ This is as Bridget Fowler notes, a problem in Bourdieu’s writing which puts him “in danger of committing the

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Klaus C and Stuckey-French N (2012) *Essayists on The Essay: Montaigne to our Time*; University of Iowa Press pxii

¹⁴³ See Hooker et al: *Bourdieu and the Art Historians* in Fowler, B (ed) (2000) *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture*; Blackwell Publishers, London (p216)

¹⁴⁴ Bourdieu, P (1965) *Photography; A middle brow art*: p15

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

‘intentionalist fallacy’ himself: artists’ motives are understood in terms of a self-serving delusion.¹⁴⁶

Motivations are nonetheless powerful and necessary indicators of position taking. As noted in chapter 1, when Bourdieu was photographing in Algeria, this was a place of insecurity and danger. It was a war zone. In the quote below, Bourdieu’s testimony about his own motivations in Algeria could be mistaken for the testimonies of any number of photojournalists who try to recount *consciously*, and explain their motives for putting themselves, deliberately, in harm’s way:

The total engagement and disregard for danger owed nothing to any sort of heroism, but, rather, was rooted, I believe in the extreme sadness and anxiety in which I lived and which, with the desire to decipher a conundrum of ritual, to collect a game, to see an artefact (a wedding lamp, an ancient coffer or the inside of a well preserved house, for instance) or, in other cases, the simple desire to observe and witness, led me to invest myself, body and soul, in the frenzied work that would enable me to measure up to the experiences of which I was the unworthy, disarmed witness and which I wanted to account for at all costs. It is not easy to describe simply, as I lived through them, situations and events – perhaps adventures - that have profoundly shaken me, to the point some times of coming back in my dreams.¹⁴⁷

Given the personal voice associated with the essay, it can be argued that the essay itself provides a route into thinking through Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* as the subjective internalisation of objective conditions and equally towards thinking through transformations within *habitus* and *field*. The essay in turn has participated in the restructuring of the academic *field* itself and the struggle

¹⁴⁶ Fowler, B (1998) *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory*; Sage Publications, London (p96)

¹⁴⁷ Puwar, N (2009); Seeing a post-colonial Bourdieu: An introduction; *The Sociology Review* 57:3 (2009)

between the orthodoxy of established conditions and the heretical challenge of new modes of cultural critique.

As noted at the outset of this thesis, my intention is to make use of the essay form as a methodology that engages with the intellectual and aesthetic ideas of the photo-essay. Photographers have not only used the written essay form to present the rationales behind their practice. Photographers, within and between the interpretive communities of art, documentary or photo-journalism have used collected images to produce ‘visual essays’ that move beyond the idea of a photograph as a single ‘heroic’ image and to explore and illuminate competing interests and representations as a means for promoting dialogue and shared ground. This thesis is informed by the possibilities that the photo-essay as methodology can offer.

The Changing Status of the Essay

As with the artistic status of the photograph, the intellectual status of the essay has not always enjoyed approval. In the mid-20th century, the status of the essay form is perhaps best described by Adorno. According to Adorno, the essay form had been much neglected in and by German academic society.

Despite the weighty perspicacity that Simmel and the young Lukacs, Kassner and Benjamin entrusted to the essay, to the speculative investigation of specific, culturally predetermined objects, the academic guild only has patience for philosophy that dresses itself up with the nobility of the universal, the everlasting, and today – when possible- the primal: the cultural artefact is of interest only to the degree that it serves

to exemplify universal categories, or at the very least allows them to shine through – however little the particular is illuminated.¹⁴⁸

For Adorno, the essay had been resisted in Germany because it served as a reminder of an intellectual freedom imagined during the Enlightenment that had never fully emerged, “not even under the conditions of formal freedom.”¹⁴⁹

Adorno’s bitterness about this is made evident as he notes that:

The person who interprets instead of unquestioningly accepting and categorising is slapped with the charge of intellectualising as if with a yellow star; his misled and decadent intelligence is said to subtilize and project meaning where there is none to interpret. Technician or dreamer, those are the alternatives.¹⁵⁰

The essay form was not something that could be prescribed:

Instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done. The essay mirrors what is loved and hated instead of presenting the intellect, on the model of a boundless work ethic, as *creation ex nihilo*. Luck and play are essential to the essay. It does not begin with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to discuss; it says what is at issue and stops where it feels itself complete – not where nothing is left to say.¹⁵¹

Because of this form, Adorno classed the essay as an ‘oddity’. Its conceptual categories are not formulated by recourse to an *a priori* proposition which is then brought to a closing, final principle. Instead, for Adorno, the essay is guilty of over interpretation and going beyond the intended meaning of a text.

¹⁴⁸ Adorno, T (1958) The Essay as Form; *New German Critique* no 32 (Spring – Summer 1984) p152

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid* p152

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

According to Adorno, “Nothing can be interpreted out of a work without at the same time being interpreted into it.”¹⁵²

W J T Mitchell puts it that because of similarities in form there is good reason to connect the photograph and the essay. This is not simply because the essay has been the preferred companion to photography in magazines and newspapers but more than this, “the presumption of a common referential reality: not “realism” but “reality”, “nonfictionality”, even “scientificity” are the generic connotations that link the essay with the photograph.”¹⁵³ Furthermore, Mitchell notes that there is:

an intimate fellowship between the informal or personal essay, with its emphasis on a private “point of view”, memory, and autobiography, and photography’s mythic status as a kind of materialised memory trace embedded in the context of personal associations and private “perspectives.”¹⁵⁴

Finally, in the same way that single photographs may be “necessarily incomplete” due to the imposition of the frame, Mitchell discusses the sense of the essay as ‘partial’ – as an “incomplete attempt” and “an effort to get as much of the truth about something into its brief compass as the limits of space and writerly (*sic*) ingenuity will allow.”¹⁵⁵

In the context of Mitchell’s as much as Adorno’s discussion of the essay form, John Berger’s insistence on placing the role of experience, and of speaking of experience in simultaneously individual and collective terms, are central to his

¹⁵² Ibid p153

¹⁵³ Mitchell WJT (1994) *Picture Theory*; The University of Chicago Press pp288-289

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

mode of social critique.¹⁵⁶ Experience, for Berger, embodies the dual capacity to be both immediate and reflexive. As E. P Thompson put it:

Experience walks in without knocking at the door and announces deaths, crises of subsistence, trench warfare, unemployment, inflation, genocide. People starve, their survivors think in new ways about the market.....in prison, people contemplate new ways of thinking about the law.¹⁵⁷

The literary essay, like the photograph is both a fragment of something far bigger than itself and yet it is also complete within the bounds of its own frame.

Language and Power

Sociological accounts of photography are rightly not exempt from criticism. Simon Watney is highly sceptical towards what he sees in sociology to be an exaggerated view of the role of social institutions towards cultural production, which he argues is found for example in the work of Gisele Freund. Although sociology has been more readily criticised for an over concern with the consumption of commoditised cultural goods, Watney understands sociological accounts of culture as attempting to privilege ‘production’ over ‘reception’ which in turn he sees as being distinct from ‘consumption’. According to Watney, the sociology of photography is beset by two main problems:

Firstly, it is caught inexorably in the grip of descriptive categories of production – documentary, photojournalism, and so on – which interrupt our understanding of how the various discursive formations of photographic practise are articulated. In searching out the institutional

¹⁵⁶ See for example Berger, J and Mohr, J (1975) *A Seventh Man* London, Verso

¹⁵⁷ Thompson E P (1981) *The Politics of Theory*; in Raphael S (ed) *Peoples' History and Socialist Theory*; London, Routledge Kegan & Paul p406

sources for these categories, they are effectively naturalised, legitimated, and hence reinforced. Secondly, the ‘social’ emerges as a force working through photographers or subject matter into photographs. This in turn pre-empts our understanding of the semiotic processes without which we could never produce any images at all, or read them. What is missing from the sociological approach is any awareness of the specific power which institutions possess to define and organise the rhetoric of photography.¹⁵⁸

These remarks are questionable and to my mind miss the critical point of sociological enquiry. As C W Mills insisted, sociology explores the relationship between the individual and the social, between history and biography and grasps their interconnections.¹⁵⁹ As Bourdieu’s empirical work on reception¹⁶⁰ makes clear, this cannot be and is not done without recourse to the real human relationships of power on which particular socially recognised institutions are built. This is then necessarily about the production, reception *and* consumption of material cultural goods as a way into a fuller understanding of the processes of political, cultural and social exchange. For Bourdieu, as with Raymond Williams it was precisely the power of institutions to define and organise definitions and rhetoric of all types, whether art, philosophy, sociology or cultural studies, that preoccupied them. Language itself was always potentially an act of power.

As Bourdieu noted, any speech act or discourse was at all times an encounter between the linguistic habitus (or the set of dispositions that make the speech act, and the ability to use this strategically, possible) and the linguistic market. The linguistic market consisted of a system of forces imposing themselves as

¹⁵⁸ Watney, S (1986) *On The Institutions of Photography* in Evans J and Hall, S (eds) (1999) *Visual Culture: A Reader*: Sage Publications in association with The Open University (p149)

¹⁵⁹ Mills, C Wright (1959) *The Sociological Imagination* add date and page number

¹⁶⁰ Bourdieu, P (1992) *Distinction*, London Routledge

particular sanctions and/or censorship which thereby fashion linguistic production in accordance to the ‘price’ that the discourse might pay. This is clearly not simply an economic price, although that cannot be ignored, but is also a symbolic price; the tension between habitus and market sets the terms in which discourse is ‘more or less’ censored, internally and externally. As Bourdieu notes, this can at times be to the point of annulment, “as in the silence of intimidation.”¹⁶¹

If we delve deeper into Williams’ analysis, we find that the types of institutional categories as lamented by Watney are themselves the subject of much critique and questioning. Williams’ *Keywords*¹⁶² and *Culture and Society*¹⁶³ are notable examples. Here we see that such institutions as art, class, industry, democracy and culture occupy changing territory, taking on their most normative and specialised meanings in the process of the industrial revolution.

Of special interest here is Williams’ examination of the term ‘art’ as a cultural practice. In its earliest usage ‘art’ was linguistically employed to describe a set of *general* human skills and attributes and shared its meaning with ‘industry’.¹⁶⁴ Both terms were to undergo significant changes in their use and meanings in the period now commonly referred to as ‘the industrial revolution’, refracting both the development of new forms of specialised labour and a new form of social organisation. Whereas ‘industry’ came to represent a new social order based on organised mechanical production, ‘art’ designated creative and imaginative production through which notions of a special kind of truth, *imaginative truth* and ideas of *genius* as distinct from *talent* emerged. The artist was thus distinguished as a *special* kind of person.

¹⁶¹ Bourdieu P and Wacquant L (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* : Polity Press, Cambridge (p145-146)

¹⁶² Williams, R (1983) *Keywords* Glasgow Fontana

¹⁶³ Williams, R (1961) *Culture and Society 1780-1950* [1988] Harmondsworth: Penguin

¹⁶⁴ Williams, R (1976) *Keywords*, Glasgow Fontana: pp 32-34

Once we realise the ways in which meanings are negotiated and shared, or not, we can see more clearly what kinds of power relationships are involved. As Williams considers, language itself is an arena where all sorts of shifts and balances of power take place. This division between art and industry certainly provided an obstacle for the development of photography as an artistic form. The long standing debate over whether photography should be considered as ‘art’ is testament to this. Writing in *Modern Painters* Roger Scruton forcefully defended the realm of art against photographic imposters:

Photography is here to stay, and will always call forth the most vigorous protests on behalf of its aesthetic pretensions. And it is not difficult to see why. Photography is democratic: it puts into the hand of everyman the means to be his own recorder. To defend its artistic pretensions is to make everyman an artist. To attack them is to imply that the ability to create, to appreciate, to resonate – the ability to stand back from the world and record its meaning – is the property of the few. Such a thought will always be greeted as deepest heresy, in an age which builds its institutions and its monuments on the myth of human equality.¹⁶⁵

Scruton was challenged in the following issue of *Modern Painters* by Michael Weaver’s review on “The Art of Photography”. Weaver noted that “There is nothing inherent in any medium that guarantees its value as art. As mediums, painting and sculpture are no more art than photography.”¹⁶⁶

As Becker has stated, “How objects and activities are named almost always reflects relations of power.”¹⁶⁷ So, the categories of ‘documentary photography’, ‘art photography’ or ‘photo journalism’, which I examine in this

¹⁶⁵ Scruton R ((1989) *But Is It Art?* in *Modern Painters*, Vol 2, Number 1, Spring 1989, published quarterly by Fine Art Journals LTD, London, p65

¹⁶⁶ Weaver, M (1989) *The Art of Photography* in *Modern Painters*, vol 2, Number 3, Autumn 1989. Publishing details as above, p59

¹⁶⁷ Becker, H (2007) *Telling About Society*; The University Of Chicago Press (p226)

thesis, are not free from interest led ideas. However, as Max Weber made clear, collective categories when used in an undifferentiated way may be misleading and serve to obscure the underlying complexity of the collective concept. They may be obstacles that muddy the waters rather than illuminate social research; blurring the boundaries between “material interests such as the desire to maximise profits, and ideal values such as the intrinsic belief in a particular way of life regardless of economic gain.”¹⁶⁸ The distinction is not always clear cut. As Becker has argued, there can be moral consequences from accepting pre-established definitions – in the case of the above, these consequences concern the politics of truth.¹⁶⁹

Gombrich has suggested in *Art and Illusion* that a picture cannot be true or false in itself – these terms can only be applied to statements or propositions – the possibility of truth in an image being reserved for the caption or label.¹⁷⁰ This point was observed by Susan Sontag, who noted that during the wars in former Yugoslavia, the same image of dead children was used by both Bosnians and Serbs, each claiming the children as their own in order to show what the ‘other’ had done.¹⁷¹

Similarly Freund recalled that her own photograph of the Paris stock exchange, and a particular broker there, was used to illustrate the rise of the market and the ‘fabulous prices’ of shares. Later, the same image was used to epitomise collapse of the market – “panic at the stock exchange!” Freund noted that:

The two publications had used my photographs in opposite ways, each according to its purpose. The objectivity of the photograph is only an

¹⁶⁸ Eldridge, J (1972) *Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality*; Michael Joseph London pp25-26

¹⁶⁹ Becker, H (2007) *Telling About Society*; The University Of Chicago Press (p226)

¹⁷⁰ In Goffman, E (1976) *Gender Advertisements* The MacMillan Press, p14 n.13

¹⁷¹ Sontag, S (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others* Penguin Books p9

illusion. The captions that provide the commentary can change the meaning entirely.¹⁷²

The political significance of this was highlighted in December 1956. The weekly publication *l'Express* ran a series of identical images but with different captions in an attempt to show how various government run television stations might make use of the photographs to construct contradictory yet apparently truthful versions of the same event.¹⁷³

An engagement with this has provoked new directions for constructive and politically informed media analysis which seeks to locate news production *and* reception within the field of power.¹⁷⁴ Much of this work has demonstrated the economic and political constraints under which news media is produced, which has in turn, as I will explore, impacted in specific ways on the activity of photo-journalism.

New work in contemporary media analysis has also produced useful empirical data on the processes through which audiences may accept or reject particular media messages. 'Direct effects' models which understood the audience as homogeneous, as cultural dupes, accepting media messages without question, have now been discarded. Theories of a more 'active audience' have also been questioned since they suggest at times that the media are benign and have no power at all in shaping audience beliefs. Against both models, audiences are now understood as accepting or rejecting media messages according to existing beliefs and experience. This is not to say that 'preferred readings' or intended meanings are not understood and recognised by an audience but this is not the same thing as a direct effect producing 'belief'. The preferred reading is not always unconditionally accepted.

¹⁷² Freund, G (1980) *Photography and Society* : David R Godine, Publisher, Boston p162

¹⁷³ *ibid*

¹⁷⁴ See Glasgow University Media Group or Birmingham Centre for Cultural and Critical Studies for example

This is a critical point when it comes to photographic theory which oscillates between direct effects models – for example the idea that photographs from Vietnam actively changed public opinion about American involvement there – and active audience models. The latter model suggests that the photograph has no fixed meaning at all; the photograph is mute, and thus open to multiple and unending interpretations. The photograph’s ‘reality’ is then subject to only the individual interpretation applied to it. As the above examples from Sontag and Freund make clear, just as the interpretations supplied by captions can be empirically wrong – the ‘reality’ or ‘truth’ of a photograph is not *only* that which the viewer accords to it.

However, as Erving Goffman comments, in a great number of instances, photographic images are not captioned and stand alone to be read and interpreted as presenting some kind of claim about social reality.¹⁷⁵ To this extent, the context in which the image is seen may be all important. However, photographic images do not exist in a vacuum and processes of logical deductions regarding the validity of a visual statement can be made. Becker discusses this saying:

“We may base the judgement on evidence in the photograph, recognising that we have seen such things elsewhere, so that their existence is not in question: the photographer may show us things we already know. The photograph may have been taken in a place so public and accessible to independent checks that we reason the photographer would not fake something whose phoniness could easily be discovered. We may rely on the established reputation of the journal the photographs appear in, being sure that *Life* would not risk its reputation for accuracy just for the sake of this one picture.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Goffman, E (1976) op cit p14

¹⁷⁶ Becker, H (2007) *Telling About Society*; the University of Chicago Press p 67

In terms of the institutions in which photography operates, the sociological interest lies in the particular codes of conduct as outlined by its members who operate within them. These can be seen as more or less subtle forms of self-censorship. For Williams, cultural goods are not only produced as some kind of second order super-structural entity but they are in themselves also culturally productive and may, at certain times, have an effect on the economic base.¹⁷⁷ This was an essential aspect of Williams' own concern for and struggle towards the construction of a participatory and democratic society.

Transgression or departure from the rules of the game can sometimes lead to institutional changes, but at other times may lead to loss of status or respect – for example in the case of Magnum photography. The photographer Martin Parr (who only attained Magnum membership by one vote) caused outrage amongst fellow Magnum members when he undertook a series of advertising commissions. This type of activity which Goffman has called 'hyper ritualisation' did not sit comfortably with the photojournalistic and documentary identity of Magnum and the credibility of the group.

Yet in contrast to this, the reputation of photographer Sebastiao Salgado does not seem to have been significantly damaged although he has undertaken advertising work for *Volvo* cars and for *Lilly Coffee* for example. Salgado trained as an economist, photography came later. It is notable that Salgado re-invests much of the revenue generated from this kind of work, as well as from 'art world' sales into environmental and politically Left movements in South America. This offers a good example of Williams' outline of the complex relationship between base and superstructure. The ethics of Salgado's photographic practice have however been criticised on aesthetic grounds. He is accused of making poverty, starvation and global inequality "too beautiful."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Williams, R (1980) *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London Verso

¹⁷⁸ See Linfield, S (2010) *The Cruel Radiance* for example, Stallabrass (REF) or Cohen S (2001) *States of Denial*, Polity Press

The 'work' of Raymond Williams

Although Williams was not 'formally' a sociologist his work on language and literature through analysis of the term 'culture' directly confronted relationships of power. Williams has had an enormous impact on the sociology of culture - and more so in terms of the emergence of 'Cultural Studies' as an academic discipline in its own right. Williams' analysis of culture was three-fold and included examination of the social, the documentary and the ideal. The *ideal* posits culture as a state or process of human perfection and suggests timeless and universal values. If this definition is accepted, its analysis involves "the description in lives and works, of those values which can be seen to compose a timeless order, or have a permanent reference to the human condition."¹⁷⁹

The *documentary* posits culture as the "body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded." This type of analysis depended on criticism "by which the nature of the thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention in which these are active, are described and valued."¹⁸⁰

Finally, the *social* element of culture involved the analysis of "certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour."¹⁸¹ This involves the clarification of meanings in a particular way of life, "the organisation of production, the structure of the family, the structure of the institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate."¹⁸²

Through this Williams further distinguished between dominant, residual and emergent cultures. The residual referred to the continuation of earlier values,

¹⁷⁹ Williams R (1961)*The Long Revolution*; Harmondsworth: Penguin in Harrison C and Wood P (eds) (2001)*Art and Theory 1900-1990*; Blackwell Publishing p712

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

¹⁸¹ Ibid

¹⁸² Ibid p713

beliefs and practises which at times could work against or offer an alternative to any dominant culture. Eldridge and Eldridge use the example of rural life in opposition to industrial urban capitalism. In contrast, the emergent culture represented the development of new meanings, values and practises – such as they occurred in the new working class movements of the 19th century – which challenged and opposed the dominant culture.¹⁸³ Williams was however, most centrally concerned by the way in which a dominant capitalist culture had the capacity to incorporate both the residual and the emergent. Nonetheless, he argued that this was never a case of total incorporation:

What has really to be said, as a way of defining important elements of both the residual and the emergent, and as a way of understanding the character of the dominant, is that *no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention.*¹⁸⁴

This is an important point to be reckoned with in the literature surrounding photography. As I hope to clarify, the ‘boundaries’ that are set around certain institutions – art, documentary and photojournalism- are not fixed. These institutions are nevertheless often understood to be homogeneous categories described by such generalities as ‘*The Art World*’, ‘*The Documentary Movement*’ or ‘*The Media*’. They are instead better described and understood as *processes* being dynamic, liquid and porous.

Williams challenged ideas of mass and minority culture through exploring communication processes. Communication, in a democratic society, should belong to the whole society and is dependent on maximum participation by the individuals within it. Since communication, for Williams, was the record of

¹⁸³ Eldridge J and Eldridge L (1994) *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*; Routledge p96

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

human growth it should necessarily be “varied and dispersed across of a number of independent systems each of which must be secure enough to maintain itself.”¹⁸⁵ But, importantly for the arguments presented in this thesis, Williams added:

It has to get rid of the idea that communication is the business of a minority talking to, instructing, leading on, the majority. It has finally to get rid of the false ideology of communications as we have received it: the ideology of a people who are interested in communications only as a way of controlling people, or making money out of them.¹⁸⁶

This is not to say that money making and profiteering interests are not central to much contemporary photographic communication from art to advertising. As Williams argues further, when profit is the main concern there may be a pressure to concentrate on “things already known and safe, with never enough effort given to the much longer and more difficult job of trying new things and offering new ideas and experiences.”¹⁸⁷ This criticism has been levelled at photojournalists, as I will discuss.

As Eldridge and Eldridge explain, “It becomes easy to identify the culture of the masses with that which is popular, indiscriminating, vulgar and inferior – low culture.”¹⁸⁸ Moreover, they note that in the expression of this contrast, lies an implicit fear that ‘high culture’ as ‘the great tradition’ will be taken over and undermined by ‘mass culture.’ Eldridge and Eldridge suggest that:

The crux of Williams’ argument is that we need to reconsider the role of ‘the great tradition’ in social life. Rather than see it as the exclusive property of elite groups in society, we should see it as a common

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*

¹⁸⁶ Williams R (1976) *Communications* cited in Eldridge J and Eldridge L (1994) *Raymond Williams: making Connections*; Routledge p100

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸⁸ *ibid* p101

inheritance which, through education and communication, should be made as widely available as possible. Not only this; the great tradition is a living, developing activity and need not be confined to the minorities of the privileged.¹⁸⁹

Mass communication in the senses raised above is then not necessarily antithetical towards increased democracy but nonetheless, certain blockages to the process could be identified. For Williams, the categories of high and low culture, and the distinction between mass and minority culture were not helpful towards this development, moreover: “They are, indeed, part of the problem.”

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Although Bourdieu has been subject to some criticism, Williams’ analysis has not been extensively used within art history. Williams and Bourdieu have much in common through their shared interest in the stratification of culture yet they move away from each other in important ways. Whilst Bourdieu was interested in identifying the processes of cultural ‘reproduction’, Williams’ interest was in identifying processes of cultural ‘reformation’ - identifying where the possibilities for a movement towards socialism might emerge within a capitalist culture. This allowed him to identify ‘resources of hope’ against an increasingly pessimistic Marxist interpretation, such as that of the ‘culture industry’ promoted by the Frankfurt School, and their perceived relationship between the individual and society.

A strand of this pessimistic discourse runs through much photographic literature. Susan Sontag and Martha Rosler have at times exhibited a great deal of scepticism about photography and its uses towards social change. John Tagg’s critique of documentary photography placed it as being almost exclusively an agent of liberal state power; a deliberate cultural strategy by

¹⁸⁹ ibid

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

which social and national cohesion, loyalty and responsibility could be imagined and reproduced.¹⁹¹

Susie Linfield has pointed out that in comparison to other forms of criticism, photography critics can sometimes display little in the way of love for the medium.¹⁹²

They approach photography – not particular photographs, or particular photographers, or particular genres, but photography itself – with suspicion, mistrust, anger, and fear. Rather than enter into what Kazin has called a “community of interest” with their chosen subject, these critics come armed to the teeth against it. For them, photography is a powerful, duplicitous force to defang rather than an experience to embrace and engage. It’s hard to resist the thought that a very large number of photography critics – including some of the most influential ones – don’t really like photographs, or the act of looking at them at all.¹⁹³

In the theory and critique of photography, ‘common sense’ ideas do at times appear to have taken hold. Photographers of violence are perceived as being complicit with violence; suffering is said to be aestheticised; viewers of those images are further implicated as prolonging and continuing that violence, their gaze being purely voyeuristic. In particular, photography’s political and ethical potency is perceived to be impaired, not least by the quantity of violent images in contemporary life that dulls the qualitative capacity for public and political response.

In considering the possible effects of photography it is useful to return to an earlier argument put forward by Walter Benjamin. This was about the

¹⁹¹ See Apel, D (2012) *War Culture and the Contest of the Image* Rutgers University Press p4

¹⁹² Linfield, S (2010) *The Cruel Radiance*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p5

¹⁹³ *ibid*

contributing role of photography towards the construction of democracy. The photograph and its infinitely reproductive capacity for Benjamin was a means for public accessibility to objects and images that had once been the preserve of the elite's gaze. The growth of the internet has certainly extended the possibility for increasing public vision of the world. As Golding notes, this carries an "attractive expectation of an enriched and enhanced democracy by generating a more informed and engaged citizenry". However, as Golding also argues, there is nothing inevitable about this path.¹⁹⁴

Private troubles: Public Issues

Photography has become the medium *par excellence* by which C W Mills' concept of the private trouble can become a public issue and this has spurred new moral and ethical debates surrounding both the production and consumption of the photographic image. Photography continues in its primary function to solemnise occasion – from private moments to intentional public displays and every configuration of their interstices

What we do with our reception and consumption of these images is another matter and one that demands further attention. What effects do photographs have? As I will explore, much has been said about the *possible* effects of photography, in its role as both 'news' and as 'art' on an audience. However as Raymond Williams pointed out in reference to the positive contribution which sociology has made towards understanding media effects, "At the same time in non-sociological cultural studies, as in much general writing, the question of effect is commonly raised but without much evidence and often by simple and casual assertion."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Gripsrud J (Ed) (2010) *Relocating Television: Television in the Digital Age*; Comedia, Routledge p207

¹⁹⁵ Williams R (1981) *Culture*; Fontana Paperbacks p20

There is nonetheless a body of literature that now seeks to move beyond this. Writers such as Azoulay, Company, Hariman, Kosol, Linfield, Lucaites and Möller are just a handful of names in an emerging scholarly movement who cross disciplinary boundaries and who stand on the side of photography as a resource of hope by confronting and interrogating the complexity of seeing as an historical, cultural and political encounter. They are enabled and enlivened in this endeavour by the changing practices of photographers themselves. The practices of these photographers are simultaneously not oblivious to the challenges that theories of photography have presented. Here an understanding of the literature about photography is explicitly called upon as a vehicle for legitimising photographic practice.

As Hariman has thoughtfully put it:

War is changing, and photography is changing. Neither claim can explain the other, but the relationship remains important. Photographers and those who think seriously about photography are providing important resources for confronting how war is changing and how those changes evade or exploit norms of visibility. As they do so, the spectator can become more capable of a profound engagement with the human condition, the terrible price we pay for moral failure, the specific character of violence in our time, and perhaps even the action needed to advance peace rather than to acquiesce to war. Any gains are to be had only for a limited time, however. War can never be seen entirely, and it takes the long view.¹⁹⁶

Hariman's statement explicitly suggests that an engagement with the theory and practice of representing war merits continued examination. In the following chapter I continue to explore the relationship between words and pictures and

¹⁹⁶ Hariman, R *Watching War Evolve* in Kennedy, L and Patrick, C (2014) *The Violence of the Image; Photography and International Conflict*; I.B. Taurus, London. New York; p159

their powerful, combined role within the production of belief as a ‘magic system.’

3. *PHOTOGRAPHY: BETWEEN ART AND SCIENCE*

The Photograph by Thomas Hardy

The flame crept up the portrait line by line
As it lay on the coals in the silence of night's profound,
And over the arm's incline,
And along the marge of the silkwork superfine,
And gnawed at the delicate bosom's defenceless round.

Then I vented a cry of hurt, and averted my eyes;
The spectacle was one that I could not bear,
To my deep and sad surprise;
But, compelled to heed, I again looked furtive-wise
Till the flame had eaten her breasts, and mouth, and hair.

"Thank God, she is out of it now!" I said at last,
In a great relief of heart when the thing was done
That had set my soul aghast,
And nothing was left of the picture unsheathed from the past
But the ashen ghost of the card it had figured on.

She was a woman long hid amid packs of years,
She might have been living or dead; she was lost to my sight,
And the deed that had nigh drawn tears
Was done in a casual clearance of life's arrears;
But I felt as if I had put her to death that night! . . .

* * *

- Well; she knew nothing thereof did she survive,
And suffered nothing if numbered among the dead;
Yet--yet--if on earth alive
Did she feel a smart, and with vague strange anguish strive?
If in heaven, did she smile at me sadly and shake her head?

As Thomas Hardy's poem above suggests, although photographs are based in scientific and mechanical processes, they are not neutral or unproblematic objects. They are vehicles of and receptacles for meanings; a place of encounter and transportation, generating enchantment and wonder. Photographs can illuminate, but they can also manipulate, mystify, distort and deceive. In this sense, photography can be described as something of a 'magic system'.

Photography: The Magic System

Despite, or perhaps because of, photography's characterisation as a realist medium, this chapter aims to explore photography and its relationship with particular ideas about 'magic' and illusionism. For Don Slater, "Its [photography's] basic character has always been understood to be given by its precise, mechanical and impersonal rendering of the appearance of objects."¹⁹⁷ Nonetheless, prior to the announcement of his photographic process, Daguerre himself was well known as a master of fantasy and mystery. Working firstly as a scene painter for the Paris Opera, Daguerre made use of spectacular lighting tricks and backdrops to "simulate dramatic and moody events" such as starlit scenes or storms.¹⁹⁸ Such 'realistic spectacles' could sometimes overshadow the performances of the actors themselves. By 1800, Daguerre began to operate panoramas: "circular sky-lighted buildings lined with immense murals of cities, battlefields and historic events."¹⁹⁹ By 1822, he had progressed to the height of theatrical illusion in the diorama. Slater observes that the diorama not only offered the three-dimensional qualities of the panorama but also added the illusion of transition and movement:

¹⁹⁷ Jencks C (Ed) (2002) *Modern Vision* London Routledge p220

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid* p220

By painting different scenes on the front and back of a huge screen, Daguerre could alter the lighting to dissolve from one scene to the next. The dissolve – much like the cinema fade – could be experienced by the audience as both magical and technological, a wonder of scientific know-how which could transport the audience realistically from one place to another. The technology was a commercial secret: mysterious science producing spectacular magic.²⁰⁰

As Slater convincingly argues, the diorama, as with photography is “a demonstration of a technical power to transform the material of the world into representation.” Slater observes that:

What we experience in successful magic is a sense of the power of technique over appearances, the ability to transform the material world, (both representations and material objects) into a new reality. Yet in a final twist, the technical achievement of realistic illusions itself mystifies technique: the magic show (or the diorama) is a demonstration of technical power, but not an explication of it. Two simultaneous senses of wonder are invoked; wonder at the experience of being transported to a fully realised unreal world; and wonder at the (incomprehensible, hidden) technology which makes it all possible.²⁰¹

And certainly, in the earliest newspaper review of Daguerre’s discovery, the writer from *La Gazette de France* (January 6, 1839) describes the process in somewhat ‘magical’ terms:

M. Daguerre shows you the piece of bare copper, *he puts it in his apparatus before your eyes*, and at the end of three minutes – if the summer sun is shining, a few more if autumn or winter weakens the

²⁰⁰ ibid

²⁰¹ Ibid p219

strength of the sun's rays – he takes out the metal and shows it to you covered with an enchanting drawing of the object towards which the apparatus was pointed. It is only a matter of a short washing operation, I believe, and there is the view which has been conquered in so few minutes, everlastingly fixed, so that the strongest sunlight can do nothing to destroy it.²⁰²

Furthermore, in a later review on the occasion of the announcement of Daguerre's process to the Academy of Science *The London Globe* (August 23, 1839) reported that: "The sheet is now exposed to the vapour of mercury, and when it has been heated to a temperature of sixty degrees of Reaumur, or one hundred and sixty-seven Fahrenheit, *the drawings come forth as if by enchantment.*"²⁰³

For Slater, the mechanistic and scientific character of photography ties it to 'modern vision' in which vision itself is a 'vehicle of knowledge and truth' embedded in an empiricist culture. As he notes, this means that the typical debates surrounding photography's aesthetic status as an 'art' rest on "the distinction between scientific and artistic vision, fact and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity."²⁰⁴ Slater suggests that in photography "Science and art come together in a rather different technical accomplishment –*artistry*: technique deployed both to transform material, but also to signify the power to transform material; knowledge of appearances (positive science) used to transform appearances into realities."²⁰⁵ Rather than positioning photography as a space that renders the above distinctions as problematic, Slater wants to show that

²⁰² Newhall B (1981) *Photography, Essays, Images* London Secker and Warburg p17 (my emphasis)

²⁰³ *Ibid* (my emphasis)

²⁰⁴ Jencks C (Ed) (2002) *Modern Vision* London Routledge p220

²⁰⁵ *ibid*

photography is the site where false dichotomies can be exposed; as demonstrating “all too clearly a kind of unity between these opposites.”²⁰⁶

The diorama displays a use of realism to transcend the real, and efface its boundaries with the unreal; to produce magic, yet a magic which is known to be the accomplishment of science; to transform science into the cultural form of magic. Photography looked at as an extension of the diorama [...] can be understood as a sort of contradiction in terms which modernity is constantly producing: it is ‘natural magic’.²⁰⁷

The sub-title for this chapter is borrowed from Raymond Williams’ notable essay, “Advertising: The Magic System.”²⁰⁸ With this title, Williams invoked the power of the capitalist system and the domination of commercial interests within a society where selling had become central. Eldridge and Eldridge comment on this:

Public relations become more professionalised: it is not only goods that are sold in a particular kind of economy but people are ‘sold’ in a particular kind of culture. But why a magic system? Because he sees it as a highly organised, professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions functionally similar to the role of magic in simpler societies.²⁰⁹

Of course, Williams was not the first to make the connection between capitalism and magic as Marx’s passage in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1883) makes clear. In Marx all sorts of images and metaphors for illusionism and haunting appear:

²⁰⁶ ibid

²⁰⁷ ibid

²⁰⁸ Williams R (1980) *Problems in Materialism and Culture* London Verso

²⁰⁹ Eldridge J and Eldridge L (1994) *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*; Routledge p37

Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, society that has conjured such giant means of production and exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.²¹⁰

Williams' historical overview is a reminder that advertising precedes the emergence of photography by several centuries, and that since this entails "the process of taking and giving notice of something – it is as old as human society, and some pleasant recollections from the Stone Age could quite easily be devised."²¹¹ However, modern advertising is more complex than this, having developed from "the simple announcements of shopkeepers and the persuasive arts of a few marginal dealers into a major part of capitalist business organisation."²¹² As Williams notes, advertising has now become the main source of finance for a whole range of communications. Moreover, advertising is involved in the teaching of personal and social values; and nor has the world of politics has not escaped its reach either.

Advertising for Williams is the 'official art' of a modern capitalist society in that it surrounds us in our streets, in our newspapers and our magazines, our television and cinema, and to this we can add the internet. Advertising, he states, now commands the largest organised body of artists and writers within society. As Eldridge, Kitzinger and Williams point out, many of those involved in advertising companies are the products of scholarly culture and are "well versed in the language of signs, codes, signifiers and symbols having read the work of authors like Barthes, Eco and Baudrillard. They may well be graduates in media studies, cultural studies or public relations, seeing their practises as

²¹⁰ Tucker (ed) (1978) *The Marx and Engels Reader* New York Norton p478

²¹¹ Williams R (1980) *Problems in Materialism and Culture* London Verso p178

²¹² *ibid*

part of a post modern world”.²¹³ In this sense, as Mitchell notes, commercials may now also use a counter-strategy of negative value transfer, addressing themselves to the “sophisticated viewer, perhaps one who has read Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School on the creation of ‘false needs’ by the culture industry.”²¹⁴

It is worth mentioning again the work of Sebastiao Salgado. Although he is more notable for his documentary work he has also provided photographs for coffee adverts and for Volvo. While this seems to have had little effect on Salgado’s reputation as a documentary photographer which extends to *some* quarters of the art world, Ron Haviv, again celebrated for his photojournalism and humanitarian documentary work has been heavily criticised recently after one of his photographs appeared in an arms advertisement. In a response to the heated debate that took place mainly across the internet world of photography bloggers, Haviv produced a statement on his own website declaring that:

I draw a strict line between my photojournalism and commercial campaigns and feature examples of both on my website where they are clearly labelled for what they are. [...]My commercial agent sold the landscape image as stock to Lockheed Martin, *which exercised its right to add smoke and text.*²¹⁵

As David Campbell has noted on his blog,²¹⁶ the controversy raises important questions on the relationship between photographers and commercial agents. Haviv was also a member of the agency VII which prides itself on its humanitarian interests and as such, in turn, raises political questions on the

²¹³ Eldridge J, Kitzinger J and Williams K (1997) *The Mass media and Power in Modern Britain*; Oxford University Press p105

²¹⁴ Mitchell WJT (2005) *What do Pictures Want?* Chicago, University of Chicago Press p78

²¹⁵ <http://ronhaviv.wordpress.com> (italics are my emphasis)

²¹⁶ www.davidcampbell.org

relationship between copyright, ownership and control of the photographic image. Clearly, problems in the use and appropriation of a photograph extend well beyond the relationship between artist photographers and photojournalists.

Photography has become a dominant currency within the field of modern advertising. For Pierre Bourdieu, art and advertising endure an antagonistic relationship and belong at separate ends of a spectrum that is the field of cultural production:

At one pole, there is the ‘anti-economic’ economy of pure art. Founded on the obligatory recognition of the values of disinterestedness and on the denegation of the ‘economy’ (of the commercial) and of ‘economic profit’ (in the short term, it privileges production and its specific necessities, the outcome of an autonomous history.²¹⁷

This production is usually ‘long term’ production. ‘Short term’ production on the other hand is that which moves increasingly closer to the commercial by producing goods for a market that respond to “*pre-existing demand and in pre-existing forms*”:

So one finds [...] enterprises with a *short production cycle* aiming to minimise risks by an advance adjustment to predictable demand and benefitting from commercial networks and procedures for marketing (advertising, public relations, etc.) designed to ensure the accelerated return of profits by a rapid circulation of products which are fated to rapid obsolescence; [...] ²¹⁸

Nonetheless, as John Berger has noted in his essay on publicity, there is a continuity between the language of publicity photography and the language of

²¹⁷ Bourdieu P (1996) *The Rules of Art* Cambridge Polity Press p142

²¹⁸ Ibid

oil painting or art.²¹⁹ In the first place, publicity often makes reference to well known works of art. By quoting in this way, two goals are achieved. Since art “belongs to the good life” it can be “quoted as a sign of affluence”, as part of “the furnishing which the world gives to the rich and the beautiful.”²²⁰ The second goal surrounds the suggestion of cultural authority, “a form of dignity, even of wisdom, which is superior to any vulgar material interest; an oil painting belongs to the cultural heritage; it is a reminder of what it means to be a cultured European.”²²¹ The quotation of the art work within publicity implies two contradictory things for Berger – wealth and spirituality are juxtaposed with a proposed purchase that is both a luxury and a cultural value.

Beyond this aspect of publicity’s quotation from art, Berger suggests another point of continuity between the medium of oil painting and the medium of photography. This is to do with their signifying roles, “at the level of the sets of the signs used.”²²² Gestures, poses (such as gendered stereotypes of women as ‘serene mothers’ or the man as knight become motorist) and the uses of nature are among such sign sets.

These have been subsequently and systematically explored by Erving Goffman.²²³ Goffman has considered these distinctive social relations in terms of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, noting ritual forms of subordination cast through pose, gesture, touch, size and function ranking. Goffman identifies an asymmetrical relationship occurring between males of differing status and males and females. “Females are equivalent to subordinate males, and both are equivalent to children.”²²⁴ Such images are not blueprints for living or fantastical whims designed by advertisers, they are instead the standardisation

²¹⁹ Berger J (1988) *Ways of Seeing* British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books p140

²²⁰ *Ibid* p135

²²¹ *Ibid*

²²² *Ibid* p138

²²³ Goffman, E (1976) *Gender Advertisements* The MacMillan Press,(p14)

²²⁴ *Ibid*

of the characteristic rituals that are the resource of all of us who participate in social situations. Commercial photography conventionalises are conventions, “our own colourful poses” and plays them back to us for the purposes of selling.²²⁵

While oil painting was a ‘celebration of private property’ showing what was already owned by a particular person in a specific time and place, the publicity photograph through the emergence of cheap colour photography performs a similar task:

Such photography can reproduce the colour and texture and tangibility of objects as only oil paint had been able to do before. Colour photography is to the spectator-buyer what oil paint was the spectator-owner. Both media use similar, highly tactile means to play upon the spectator’s sense of acquiring the *real* thing which the image shows. In both cases his feeling that he can almost touch what is in the image reminds him how he might or does possess the real thing.²²⁶

Yet they do so differently. As Berger has considered, the publicity photograph, rather than showing the spectator /owner what he has in the present or has had in the past, instead shows a spectator/buyer what s/he could be in the future. This involves the generation of feelings of envy and dissatisfaction with a current way of life by showing an improved alternative that can be achieved with the purchase of a particular item.²²⁷ Raymond Williams articulated this “organised fantasy” very clearly, arguing that while advertising advertises “the good things of life” as consumers, we are paradoxically not materialist enough. To this extent he is worth quoting at length:

²²⁵ *ibid*

²²⁶ Berger J (1988) *Ways of Seeing* British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books p141

²²⁷ *ibid*

It is impossible to look at modern advertising without realising that the material object being sold is never enough; this indeed is the crucial cultural quality of its modern forms. If we were sensibly materialist, in that part of our living in which we use things, we should find most advertising to be of an insane irrelevance. Beer would be enough for us, without the additional promise that in drinking it we show ourselves to be manly, young in heart, or neighbourly. A washing machine would be a useful machine to wash clothes, rather than an indication that we are forward looking or an object of envy for our neighbours. But if these associations sell beer and washing machines, as some evidence suggests, it is clear that we have a cultural pattern in which the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings which in a different cultural pattern might be more directly available. The short description of the pattern we have here is *magic*; a highly organised and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies, but rather strangely coexistent with a highly developed scientific technology.²²⁸

There is more than a nod to Marx here who outlined the concept of commodity fetishism in *Capital* ([1867]:

The form of wood, for instance, is altered by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, as soon as its steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and

²²⁸ Williams R (1980) *Problems in Materialism and Culture* London Verso p185

evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than “table turning” ever was.²²⁹

As Bill Nichols comments in a review of Berger’s *Ways Of Seeing* :

Advertising constructs a view of the world that is at once ‘mad’ and yet irresistible. It constructs mystique-laden objects that threaten to occupy our future, to provide the target for our desire. Advertising constructs the subjectivity that sustains such desires inside of us. This is no mere documentation but an active process of fabrication, if not of physical objects then of a production of meanings and values, concepts and orientations to surround them. Such fabrications propose specific forms of social relation with distinctive places for men and women, rich and poor, First and Third World, black and white. The connotations and assumptions that result occupy our imagination and become fundamentally part of a mental landscape even as we retain the potential to qualify, contest, subvert, or overthrow this particular regime of the visible. “Reality” is ours for the making.²³⁰

The antagonistic relations that Bourdieu identifies between art and advertising can be compared with Emile Durkheim’s concepts of the ‘sacred and profane’. In *The Functions of Ritual*, Durkheim observed that:

Sacred beings exist only when they are represented as such in the mind. When we cease to believe in them, it is as though they did not exist. Even those which have a material form and are given sensory experience depend in this way upon the thought of the worshippers who adore them; for the sacred character which makes them objects of the

²²⁹ Tucker (ed) (1978) *The Marx and Engels Reader* New York Norton p320

²³⁰ Nichols B (1991) *Representing Reality*; Indiana University Press p11

cult is not given by the natural constitution, but is superimposed upon them by belief.²³¹

Importantly, Durkheim points out that ‘sacred beings’ are the product of group life. If they had no need of men to continue, he says, then “the representations expressing them would remain the same.”²³² Stability of this type is impossible since group life is itself essentially intermittent.

There are two important points to be made about this in relation to art as occupying ‘sacred’ terrain. The first is to acknowledge with Durkheim (and Bourdieu) that ‘art’ as the collective expression of a distinctive set of beliefs and values is socially and culturally constructed and accounts for art as a dynamic process that may be subject to periods of weakening and even crisis. Arnold Hauser (1968) explored the rise of the ‘artist’ as an ‘inspired genius’ – no longer the collective guild worker or craftsman, the artist was perceived as the sole creator or producer of a work.²³³ In the same way, Williams traced the changing meanings within the use of the term ‘art’ and ‘artist’ and the accompanying introduction of the terms *aesthetics* and *aesthete*. The changing meanings were, for Williams as for Hauser, a mode of tracing changes in social organisation and modes of production.

Durkheim was interested in the way that the expression of collective beliefs in the form of the sacred is at its greatest intensity when “men are assembled together and are in immediate relations with one another, when they all share the same idea and the same sentiment.”²³⁴ Should the assembly break up then the expression of the beliefs loses its original energy. However, paradoxically it

²³¹ Durkheim, E; in *Selected Writings* (1972) edited by Anthony Giddens, Cambridge University Press p234

²³² Ibid p235

²³³ Wolff J (1983) *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*; George Allen and Unwin, London p 13

²³⁴ Durkheim, E (1972) *Selected Writings* edited by Anthony Giddens, Cambridge University Press p235

is through the emotions created by moments of crisis that the realm of the sacred is restored and renewed:

The only way of renewing the collective representations which relate to sacred beings is to retemper them in the very source of religious life, that is to say in assembled groups. Now the emotions aroused by these periodical crises though which external reality passes induce the men who witness them to assemble, to discover what should be done. But by the very fact of uniting, they find mutual reassurance; they find the answer because they seek it together. Common faith becomes quite naturally revived in the heart of this reconstituted group; it is reborn because it again meets the very conditions in which it was created in the first place. After having been restored, it easily triumphs over all the private doubts which may have arisen in individual minds. The image of sacred things regains enough strength to resist the internal or external causes which tended to weaken it.²³⁵

Secondly, this enables an understanding that all images are products of distinctive sets of social relations and modes of social organisation and are as such historically contingent. As the artist Hans Haacke also points out, “products which are considered ‘works of art’ have been singled out as culturally significant objects by those who at any given time and social stratum wield the power to convey the predicate ‘work of art’ unto them; they cannot elevate themselves from the host of man-made objects simply on the basis of some inherent qualities.”²³⁶ The production of belief through the organised labour of art critics and art historians that Bourdieu noted is then clearly important to recognise. But it is equally important to recognise the role of

²³⁵ Ibid p236

²³⁶ in Harrison C and Wood P (Eds) (2002) *Art in Theory 1900-1990* Oxford Blackwell Publishing p904

capital and corporate finance within museum sponsorship and its ability to transform and eliminate a conception of art as social critique.²³⁷

For Marx, the internal logic of the capitalist system with its inherent laws of competition (between capitalists themselves and workers themselves) meant that these relationships were constantly in a state of flux:

Constant revolutionising of the means of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.²³⁸

W J T Mitchell offers a reconsideration of the ideas of both Marx and Durkheim through consideration of ‘*idolatry*’ and ‘*iconoclasm*’ as forces for change within a discussion of “the peculiar tendency of images to absorb and be absorbed by human subjects in ways which look suspiciously like those of living things.”²³⁹ In a discussion of the images of the cloned ‘Dolly the Sheep’ and images of the destruction of the World Trade Centre, Mitchell considers that while one image – Dolly the sheep- may seem benign, the clone may represent for some people the complete destruction of life itself and the natural order. To some eyes, the image of the cloned sheep is “no less a horror than the catastrophic image of terrorist destruction,” Mitchell points out that “the creation of an image can be just as deep an abomination as its destruction, and in each case there is a kind of

²³⁷ See for example Richard Bolton, (1993) on Richard Avedon in *The Contest of Meaning* MIT Press pp261-286

²³⁸ Tucker (ed) (1978) *The Marx and Engels Reader* New York Norton p476

²³⁹ Mitchell WJT (2005) *What do Pictures Want?* Chicago, University of Chicago Press p2

paradoxical “creative destruction” at work.”²⁴⁰ Iconoclasm is however much more than the simple the destruction of an image. Mitchell understands it to be ‘creative destruction’ since through the act of disfigurement or vandalism a secondary image of defacement is created simultaneously with the moment the ‘target’ image is attacked.²⁴¹ Thus for example, the very public destruction of Saddam Hussein’s statue in Baghdad during the second Gulf War was designed for maximum iconic status. Questions regarding the best mode of humiliation – either decapitation or wrapping the head in an American flag – demonstrate that “iconoclastic calculations were part of a conscious media strategy for the American Military.”²⁴²

As Mitchell makes clear:

The ancient superstitions about images – that they “take on lives of their own”, that they make people do irrational things, that they are potentially destructive forces that seduce and lead us astray – are not quantitatively less powerful in our time, though they are surely so in a qualitative sense. They have taken on radically new forms in the context of new scientific and technical possibilities, new social formations, and new religious movements, but their deep structure remains the same. That structure is not simply some psychological phobia about images, nor is it reducible to straightforward religious doctrines, laws and prohibitions that a people might follow or violate. It is, rather, a social structure grounded in the experience of otherness and especially in the collective representation of others as idolaters. Accordingly the first rule of iconoclasm is that the idolater is always someone else.²⁴³

Ernst Gombrich also remarked on the ‘magic’ of an image:

²⁴⁰ Ibid p16

²⁴¹ Ibid p18

²⁴² Ibid

²⁴³ Ibid

Suppose we take a picture of our favourite champion from today's paper – would we enjoy taking a needle and poking out the eyes? Would we feel as indifferent about it as if we poked a hole anywhere else in the paper? I do not think so. However well I know with my waking thoughts that what I do to his picture makes no difference to my friend or hero, I still feel a vague reluctance to harm it. Somewhere there remains the absurd feeling that what one does to the picture is done to the person it represents.²⁴⁴

Something of this 'vague reluctance' and 'absurd feeling' lies behind Thomas Hardy's poem, *The Photograph*, first published in *Moments of Vision* in 1917. Hardy describes his feelings as, whilst in the process of clearing old papers, he finds and burns a photograph of a former lover. As Hunter has put it, "Clearly the photograph's magical identity with its subject ran deep in Hardy."²⁴⁵

And just as surely although more sinisterly, we can refer to the photograph below that serves to introduce two web based photo essays; *Blood and Honey* (2000) by Ron Haviv, and *Uncertain Paths to Peace* (1996) by Gilles Peress. Both of these essays take the war in former Yugoslavia as their subject of study

²⁴⁴ Gombrich E (1995) *The Story of Art* London Phaidon Press p20

²⁴⁵ Hunter J (1987) *Image and Word: The Interaction of Twentieth Century Photographs and Texts* Cambridge Massachusetts Harvard University Press p167



Ron Haviv, *Blood and Honey*, 2000



Gilles Peress: *Bosnia: Uncertain Paths to Peace*, 1996 (published by *New York Times on the Web*)

The original photograph was found by the daughter of the Muslim family pictured here and was the only item remaining on returning to their Sarajevo home which had been occupied by a Serbian family during four years of conflict. “The occupiers had stolen almost everything – the furniture, appliances, sinks and even the window panes. The defaced photograph was the sole item left behind.”²⁴⁶

An ordinary family snapshot has here become a graphic symbol of ethnic and nationalist conflict. Faces are scratched to the point of obliteration and bodies appear wounded by long vertical scores that, bayonet-like, pierce through them. Pierre Bourdieu understood the family photograph as affirming family identity.

²⁴⁶ Sliwinsky S A Painful Labour in *Visual Studies* vol 19 no 2 Oct 2004 p304

For Bourdieu, the family photograph solemnises and immortalises the high points of family life, “reinforcing the integration of the family group by reasserting the sense that it has of itself and of its unity.”²⁴⁷ Furthermore, “photography affirms the continuity and integration of the domestic group and reaffirms it by giving it expression.”²⁴⁸

Drawing, in part, from Bourdieu, Marianne Hirsch notes that, “the camera and the family album function as instruments of a familial gaze”, a gaze that “situates human subjects in the ideology, the mythology of the family as institution and projects a screen of familial myths between camera and subject”.²⁴⁹ Pedri continues this thought:

As an apparatus whose “social functions are integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family”, photography is instrumental in inscribing the individual subject within a family group. It also exerts a forceful influence on how society thinks about the family, one of its most valued and fundamental social groups. In short, photography is implicated in the proliferation of sameness and the constraint for assimilation.²⁵⁰

The family in the found image above have been stripped of their identity in an act of physical and symbolic violence; ethnic cleansing performed on, within and beyond the frame of the photograph itself. There is no sign of Gombrich’s ‘vague reluctance’ here. It brings us up short not only because of the deliberate defacement of the family image but also because we know that whole families like this from all ethnicities which that war sought to ‘identify’, were subject to unimaginable acts of brutality: real bodies suffering real pain.

²⁴⁷ Bourdieu P (1965) *Photography: A Middle Brow Art* (1990) Polity Press p10

²⁴⁸ *ibid*

²⁴⁹ Cited in Pedri N (2008) Photographic interventions; *Poetics Today* 29:1 Spring 2008 p16

²⁵⁰ *ibid*

While ethnicity was not the underlying cause of the war, it took on heightened significance in a struggle over social and economic resources and was played out in horrific ways. Rape camps were not only imagined; they were actively realised and functioned as a method of ethnic cleansing. This was not simply about progeny, whereby children are thought to take the ethnic status of the father – although this mattered – but it was also about exiling women and subsequent children from their communities through the stigma of rape.

As Sliwinski comments, “In the hands of the occupiers, the photograph became an emissary of destructive effect, a canvas for the expression of sadistic desires.”²⁵¹

Yet even in this blatant erasure of family identity Bourdieu’s observations remain pertinent – the very act of disfiguring this everyday photographic object also bears witness to the idea of family unity, albeit that here it is the ‘family unity’ of those who performed such wilful destruction as a mode of preserving some sense of their own imagined ethnic identity. Paradoxically, it was the socially and culturally institutionalised concept of ‘the family’, of insiders and outsiders that was held in common and became the vehicle through which difference might be articulated and represented. As Mitchell also points out:

The symmetry between iconoclasm and idolatry explains how it is that acts of “creative destruction” (spectacular annihilation or disfigurement) create ‘secondary images’ that are in their own way, forms of idolatry just as potent as the primary idols they seek to displace.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Sliwinski S (2004) *A Painful Labour* op cit p 305

²⁵² Mitchell WJT (2005) *What do Pictures Want?* Chicago, University of Chicago Press p21



Anthony Haughey, 'Class of '73' (found image) Installation

Similarly, Anthony Haughey has used a found, disfigured photograph as the basis for his installation work, "Class of '73". Haughey found the image in the ruins of an Albanian school in Kosovo that had been used as temporary headquarters by Serbian troops mobilised against independence fighters in 1999.

Not having been torn up, as had been the fate of the other photographs found on the site, the image was subject to repeated and violent abuse from a Serbian (?) soldier who scratched out each one of the thirty – eight children's and their female teacher's faces. A result of idleness as much as of hate for the other, these systematically disfigured faces evoke practises that from witchcraft to iconoclasm, presuppose that the image, consubstantial with its model, is no longer merely a representation obstructing reality. Much more than a substitute, it has become the reality. Especially when a photograph is involved. For the author of these alterations, the act is evidently akin to a kind of ethnic cleansing.²⁵³

²⁵³ http://anthonyhaughey.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Semaine-26.09-no.200_new2.pdf

The class photo is, as Hirsch and Spitzer point out, an “unremarked genre of vernacular photography” yet in its uniformity and its formulaic representation the class photo can “dramatize the struggle between singularity and ideological interpellation.”²⁵⁴

Taken by commercial photographers, with seemingly few artistic aspirations and little desire to deviate from formulaic representation, class photographs share in the same general characteristics. A group of students, standing or sitting on benches or by their desks (or standing outdoors, in rows, near the school building) all face forward and look at the photographer. The group is usually photographed head-on, generally through a wide-angle lens.²⁵⁵

Hirsch and Spitzer note that class photos differ from other institutional group photos since the school students are always arranged around a teacher whose presence, alongside that of the photographer, acts as “disciplining force”. The presence of the teacher ensures that the children “assume postures and gazes that demonstrate their acquiescence to the group identity imposed through their membership of the class.”²⁵⁶ However, it is not just their common identity as members of the class that is constructed here. Hirsch and Spitzer suggest that although the school might not be fully visible in the class photo, since it is accredited by the state or municipality, the school plays a key role:

Schools are the institutions that teach children to read and write, and which provide them with elements of a national literary and scientific culture and its versions of history. They are also the sites that instruct them in rules of acceptable behaviour and morality, tutor civic responsibility, and instil respect for authority and the established

²⁵⁴ Hirsch and Spitzer: About Class Photos www.nomadikon.net/

²⁵⁵ *ibid*

²⁵⁶ *ibid*

economic order. While aided in this task of ideological inculcation by other institutions – the family, law, the media and the arts – they are primary agencies in shaping and reinforcing values, outlooks, beliefs and myths that constitute citizenship in the society where they are located.²⁵⁷

In this way, they argue that class photos also function as a “form of certification” – testifying to participation within a particular process of socialisation in which citizenship and national belonging are defined. Uniformity is imposed whilst difference is discouraged, and even, according to Hirsch and Spitzer, punished. The most successful class photos “are the ones that record the most uniform deadpan look on all the faces.”²⁵⁸ For all their artlessness and sameness, class photos have an enormous popularity. They adorn the pages of family photograph albums (copies may also be sent to relatives) and they appear in communal histories and memoirs.²⁵⁹

Hirsch and Spitzer’s account of the school photograph offers a useful point of return to Bourdieu’s argument about the role of education in the system of cultural reproduction. While state education may be accessible to all, for Bourdieu the school’s ‘hidden’ curriculum reinforced rather than diminished social differences.²⁶⁰ The culture transmitted by the school was largely that of the dominant classes and as such rewarded levels of knowledge created in the informal learning process of the family as ‘natural’ talent and superiority.²⁶¹ In the case of aesthetic dispositions, the school is argued to promote culturally sanctioned or state approved works of art with which the children of the middle classes already had familiarity. The school is thus regarded as a site of cultural

²⁵⁷ Ibid

²⁵⁸ Ibid

²⁵⁹ Ibid

²⁶⁰ See also Ivan Illich (1971) *Deschooling Society*: New York, Harper and Row.

²⁶¹ Bourdieu, P (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production*; Polity Press, Cambridge, (p23)

assimilation and an attachment to a specific way of life and, by extension, national membership.²⁶²

Both of these ‘found’ images noted above have been used by their finders as a means to reinstate a concept of identity that is dynamic rather than fixed and static. For Haviv and Peress, the photo essay becomes a medium for exploring fragmentation, alienation and the precariousness of establishing post-war peace and reunification. For Haughey, reinstating the lost identities of the class and their teacher and attempting to relocate them in historical memory was paramount. As Hatt puts it,

Anthony Haughey’s *Class of ’73* is also the result of collaboration work, in this case taking place outside of the frame, but which is still an integral part of the work. Seeking not just to document the conflict but also re-ignite forgotten memories, Anthony Haughey relied on staff from the school to drive a process of remembering. Some preserved archives were explored and the class photo was circulated amongst the local population. Names and faces were soon reattached to these anonymous silhouettes. This process of remembering is evoked here through the fragmented presentation of blown-up details from the original picture. These close-ups of faces individualise the characters whose identities were twice denied through belonging to a group and through the alterations that were made to the picture.²⁶³

I have drawn attention to these images since they show explicitly how photography is enmeshed in the everyday performance, construction and representation of identity. Photographic images are not simply contemplated in

²⁶² It is interesting to note that artistic groups often make use of the group or ‘class’ photograph, for example in the surrealist movement, although these became variously abstracted in Duchamp’s use of ‘equivalences’.

²⁶³ http://anthonyhaughey.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Semaine-26.09-no.200_new2.pdf

art galleries or hastily scanned in newspapers: the political import of the photograph is often to be found in photography's 'everyday' culture.

Photography: towards a culture in common

Ariella Azoulay argues that the photograph provides a space where citizenship can be performed through the development of a 'civil gaze', in and through photography.²⁶⁴ Azoulay distinguishes between a 'political imagination' and the 'civil imagination' through the concept of citizenship itself. As she notes, citizenship and the political imagination that sustains this are based on a shared notion of the state as being formed by the will of the people – a notion inherited from the revolutions of the eighteenth century. Yet, Azoulay argues that contemporary citizenship no longer limits the power of the state, "preventing its sovereign power from untrammelled frenzy and circumscribing the will of the people so that the latter does not supplant the place of the citizenry of its citizens."²⁶⁵ Instead of what she sees as an "emaciated citizenry" which has become "devoid of imagination" Azoulay argues for the reinstatement of a humanism that moves beyond the horizon of the nation state. This must take account of, and *imagine* what it means not to have citizenship. For Azoulay this 'emaciated citizenry' is the result of a structural failure that inverts the relationship between citizen and power as the basic feature of a democratic sovereignty: "instead of power being subject to citizens, citizens are now subject to power." The photograph is a key site for overturning this process, not through a political imagination but through a civil imagination.²⁶⁶ Azoulay writes that:

²⁶⁴ Azoulay, A (2012) *Civil Imagination* London New York Verso; p9

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶⁶ *ibid*

Civil discourse is not a fiction. It strives to make way for a domain of relations between citizens on the one hand, and subjects denied citizenship on the other, on the basis of their partnership in a world that they share as men and women who are ruled. It seeks to isolate potential factors in the real world that might facilitate the coming into being of such relations of partnership, instead of the power of the sovereign that threatens to destroy them.

To achieve this requires an act of imagination.²⁶⁷

In her writing on photography, Azoulay examines images of the Israeli occupation of Palestine; her conclusions have a wider relevance. The performance and craft of citizenship, for Azoulay, is bound up within an ethics of spectatorship that considers the encounter between photographer, photographed subject and camera. Every photograph is perceived to bear involuntary traces of this meeting. The photograph and its meaning are an unintentional effect of this encounter in which none of the participants has the power of sovereignty or the capacity to determine the sole meaning of the photograph. Her work is an attempt to escape the constraints of “a photographic theory that has, over the decades, insisted in allocating the dominant role to the photographer over and above the role of the photographed person (or even place) – who serves the photographer as an object, to be appropriated and possessed”. As Azoulay states:

It’s true that in many cases this description is close to the power relations existing in a photography situation. But even this then is only a partial description, one that misses other dimensions of the situation, in particular, photography’s civil space, which is wide-open, dynamic and fluid, and not subordinated to a pole of sovereignty. It’s true that

²⁶⁷ Ibid p3

imagination is needed for distinguishing this space, for enlarging the horizon of citizenship in a world where citizenship is constantly considered in relation to the state and sovereign power. But from the moment you distinguish it, I think it becomes impossible not to see its potential and to be tempted to actualise it.²⁶⁸

Azoulay pays tribute to John Berger and Jean Mohr's exercise in locating photographic meaning.²⁶⁹ Mohr selected a number of photographs and offered them up not to photographers or professional critics but to 'ordinary' members of the public. The responses and the interpretations of the photographs were extremely varied. Mohr writes:

Was it a game, a test, an experiment? All three, and something else too; a photographer's quest, the desire to know how the images he makes are seen, read, interpreted, perhaps rejected by others. In fact in face of any photo the spectator projects something of her or himself. The image is like a springboard.

I often feel the need to explain my photos, to tell their story. Only occasionally is an image self-sufficient. This time I decided to allot the task of explanation to others. I took a number of photographs from my archives and I went out to look for those who would explain them.²⁷⁰

By doing this, Azoulay argues, the photographer's position of 'knowing subject' is relinquished. Azoulay remarks that, "In most cases what they saw in the photo was not what the photographer saw or was about to include in the final frame."²⁷¹ Whilst others have lamented the instability of meaning contained within the photograph – that it is always open to interpretation and therefore

²⁶⁸ Azoulay, A; Interview January 22, 2009 www.rorotoko.com

²⁶⁹ Berger J and Mohr J (1982) *Another Way of Telling*; Writers and Readers Co-operative Publishing Society Ltd

²⁷⁰ Ibid p42

²⁷¹ Azoulay, A (2012) *Civil Imagination* London New York Verso; p85

limited in its communicative powers – “such platitudes, turning the photograph into an unreliable source that is given to manipulation, are disappointed with it or find fault in its failure to fulfil the fantasy of a sovereign source. It is exactly this failure that turns photography into a civil medium and a priceless source.”²⁷²

Azoulay sees this space of photographic ambiguity as offering a resource for hope:

The “new way of viewing” is characterised by the effort to link the photograph to the situation where it was taken. Linking the photograph to the situation in which it was taken does not mean ignoring what John Berger describes as an abyss “between the moment recorded and the present moment of looking at the photograph”, on the contrary, it means not giving up on the urgency of restoring and re-establishing as many links as possible between the photograph and the situation in which it was taken. The aim of this effort is to enable us as spectators to reposition ourselves in relation to the disaster we are watching and to let us be engaged with its happening, with its victims, our fellow citizens, and with its lingering effects on its victims and on its perpetrators, as well as on its accomplices – us, the spectators.²⁷³

This is a powerful argument for restoring the production of an image to its original context, which as John Walker observes has become increasingly challenged by an ideology of individualism.²⁷⁴ This ideology challenges the concept that *the* meaning of an image can be found, that since everyone interprets images differently and uniquely “there are as many meanings as there are human beings.”

²⁷² Azoulay A (2010) *What is a Photograph? What is Photography?* C: Intellect Symposium English Language doi:101386/pop.1.1.9/7

²⁷³ Azoulay, A (2012) *Civil Imagination* London New York Verso; p86

²⁷⁴ In Evans J (Ed)(1987) *The Camerawork Essays*; London Rivers Oram Press p52

Taken to an extreme this argument seemed to imply that every photo had potentially billions of meanings. But if an image had so many meanings, did this not render it meaningless? The argument denied the fact that consensuses are reached regarding the denotation and implied/intended meanings of images, that humans are social beings, who, in many respects are similar to one another and who share many experiences.²⁷⁵

In her argument against the sovereignty of the photographer Azoulay is not suggesting that the photographic image is forever open to any interpretation or that all interpretations are equal. Instead she asks that the photograph be understood as a space of possibilities which can generate alternative meanings. The photograph thus becomes the space of an event – an encounter framed by a number of factors which are external to the image but nevertheless can be accessed through the image. The photograph is then not a transparent window on reality but offers itself up as a bordering mechanism, as both bridge and door. Kemple has discussed Simmel's essay *Bridge and Door* (1909):

From the standpoint of everyday experience, the door is a threshold for negotiating intimacy and anonymity, a material boundary between public and private domains, and a feature of domestically regulated and habitable space. The bridge likewise reveals the ordinary limits and separations of social and natural realms – a town and a river, a road and an embankment – but at the same time it gathers them within a common form of life. From the perspective of eternity – *sub specie aeternitatus* – we can see that the door enables formless limitation to take shape while also providing a threshold for stepping out of this limitation into freedom, and that the bridge both connects and separates points in space to allow a singular living entity to “reach out over itself”. The bridge

²⁷⁵ Ibid

and door expose an essential aspect of human being: its capacity as the ‘bordering creature’ whose situated embodiment shapes and is shaped in every dimension by the spatial and temporal boundaries of existence.²⁷⁶

Azoulay’s aims for the photograph as a space where citizenship can be crafted are laudable and reflect the aims of early documentary photographers. Yet there are, as Williams noted, many blockages and obstacles that stand in the way of developing a culture in common. The use of photography as a force for social change has historically been a central motivation within documentary practice, as in the early pioneering work of Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, The Worker’s Film and Photo League and in the later work of Martha Rosler for example. In the following chapter, I examine the *idea* of documentary photography and respond to its critique through Rosler’s work.

²⁷⁶ Kemple T (2009) ‘*Sub species aeternitatis*’: *The social-Aesthetics of snapshots from Georg Simmel to Jeff Wall*; SocioAesthetics; A Symposium on aesthetics, culture and social life Aug 23-25 2009 <http://socioaesthetics.ku.dk?speakers/kemple> (last accessed 22/06/2014)

4. *Working-out the idea of Documentary:*

A slow reach again for control



“We underestimate the properly political power to change social life by changing the representation of social life and by putting a modicum of imagination in power.”²⁷⁷ “The clarification of vision is a first step to reasonably and humanly changing the world.”²⁷⁸

“Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat his ignorance and write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the courage to write the truth when the truth is everywhere opposed; the keenness to recognize it although everywhere it is concealed; the skill to manipulate it as a weapon; the judgment to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the cunning to spread the truth among such persons. These are the formidable problems for writers living under fascism, but they exist also for those who have fled or been exiled; they exist also for writers working in countries where civil liberty prevails.” (Brecht, from Galileo)²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Bourdieu P (1977), “Donner la parole aux gens sans parole.” In Waquant, L [Ed] (2005) *Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics* ; Polity (p10)

²⁷⁸ Rosler, M. (1979) *For an Art Against The Mythology of Everyday Life*; in Rosler, M. (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions*, An October Book, the MIT Press (p.8)

²⁷⁹ Cited in Bourdieu P and Haacke H (1995) *Free Exchange* Cambridge Polity Press

Working out the idea of ‘culture’ was, for Williams, a critical and strategic manoeuvre. The word *culture* itself, he explained, was one of the most complicated terms in the English language. It ranged from its earliest use as a *noun of process* implying growth and tending, to become a metaphor for general ideals of human development and perfection; from this to a set of activities as in the arts and learning, and finally, in terms of a whole way of life.²⁸⁰ Williams insisted on the political, social and cultural urgency of their conjunction.

In this project²⁸¹, he argued that the use of term ‘culture’ had become ‘hijacked’ by an educated and cultural elite to designate a specific set of practices collectively referred to as ‘the arts’ that was both narrow and restrictive in its definition and use. Williams was motivated by an acknowledgement of his own Welsh rural and working class upbringing that he set against his experience as a student and later, a teacher at Cambridge University. Through his experience, he consciously reflected on the creative and critical practices to be found in everyday life; from ship building, the political critique offered by folk music, to raising a family. In this sense culture as ‘creative’ was both ordinary and extraordinary. What was really required to *actively* recognize this, Williams argued, was the development of a *common culture* through an educated participatory democracy. This common culture was not a homogeneous, undifferentiated culture that came from ‘above’ in a patronising form; rather its aims were about having a culture in common, to be awakened by recognition of the struggle for collective endeavour. As Eagleton puts it:

Williams’ notion of a common culture is thus inseparable from radical socialist change. It requires an ethic of common responsibility, full

²⁸⁰ Williams, R (1983) *Keywords*, Glasgow, Fontana Press (pp87-93)

²⁸¹ Williams, R (1983) *Keywords*, and also *Culture and Society* (1958) are just two examples of this project that exemplify the use of literary cross-classification

democratic participation in all levels of social life, including material production, and egalitarian access to the culture fashioning process.²⁸²

Thus a common culture was not about ‘sameness’ but instead engaged with a collaborative acknowledgement of the plurality of cultural experience. It becomes then a *whole way of life*, that is continuously made and remade by the collective practice of its members rather than being shaped by the values of a few to be “taken over and lived passively by the many.”²⁸³ Working-out the idea of culture offered Williams “a slow reach again for control.”²⁸⁴

The need for an urgent ‘working-out’ of an idea runs through the work of Martha Rosler. Here, it is the idea of documentary photography as a practice of political, cultural and social critique as a force for change that sustains her point of focus. Rosler’s review of documentary photography was an attempt to define, redefine and reclaim control of what she understood to be a lost, but vital critical tool.

This chapter examines Rosler as a significant figure in both the theory and practice of photography. Rosler’s written and visual work, connecting idea with activity, offers a useful example to explore questions about her *subjective* approach to the *objective* set of relations within the field of cultural production set out by Bourdieu. In theory and in practice, Rosler engages with many of the challenges outlined by Bourdieu – most specifically in terms of the difficult construction of a ‘popular’ or democratic art.

While Rosler’s attention to the history of documentary photography can be argued to be uneven, she certainly paid attention to critical social theories, including those of Bourdieu. Her knowledge of theory has since become an artwork in itself, exemplified in the touring exhibition of Rosler’s personal

²⁸² Eagleton, T (2000) *The Idea of Culture*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers (p119)

²⁸³ *ibid*

²⁸⁴ Williams, R (1958) *Culture and Society*; p285

library as an ‘installation’ project. She has, despite, or perhaps because of her reservations about the institution of art now become a consecrated voice in the ‘canon’ of art photography and its critique.

During the 1970s, Rosler became known for her use of video although her output has not been limited to film and photography – she has worked with a variety of media including sculpture, performance and installation work and has an impressive exhibition history across Europe and America. She has taught in a number of universities, including the Stadelshule, a contemporary fine arts academy in Frankfurt, at Rutgers University and on the Whitney Independent Study Program. She lectures widely and is a prolific writer. Her essays have been published extensively in magazines and catalogues. Rosler has been the recipient of a number of prestigious awards: the Oskar Kokoschka Prize (2006), the Spectrum International Prize for Photography (2005) and more recently, Rosler was honoured by the Guggenheim Foundation (2010):

Today, Rosler stands as a paragon of aesthetic, political and ethical practice, and as an inspiration to generations of artists over the past 40 years. It is for these reasons that we proudly present her with this lifetime achievement award.²⁸⁵

The discussion surrounding documentary photography almost invariably makes reference to Rosler’s essay *In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)*.²⁸⁶ This essay has, to an extent, come to *stand for* Rosler and at times this can misrepresent her complex theoretical and political position on documentary photography. The theoretical ideas which permeated her practice have also, to an extent, become embedded within a conception of ethical documentary practice resulting, at times in a *mannerist style* rather than active

²⁸⁵ www.guggenheim.org/index.php?option=com_content

²⁸⁶ Rosler, M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books pp151-206

critique. Both of these points are recognised by Rosler herself.²⁸⁷ Because of this, I explore Rosler's essay within the extended context of her collected writings²⁸⁸ and within the context of her biography. The reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly the politics and uses of the essay as an important form of writing about photography can be further examined. Secondly, a focus on Rosler's life and work exemplifies some of the difficulties in navigating Weber's distinction between material values, as "the desire to maximise profits", and 'ideal' values, as "the pursuit of a way of life which is felt to be intrinsically preferable to another even though the individual may be worse off in an economic sense in consequence."²⁸⁹ In many ways, Rosler offers a useful illustration by which to think through Bourdieu's ideas about the field of cultural production and the place of photography within it.

Documentary photography: in theory and practice

Acknowledging his debt to Williams' *Keywords*, Brian Winston notes that in the English language, the adjective 'documentary' did not appear until 1802 and that its source word, 'document' as 'something written, inscribed etc., which furnishes evidence or information' dates from 1727. Both words are derived from *documentum*, 'a lesson', which enters the language with that meaning by 1450. Furthermore, 'document' in its sense of something written, comes to replace '*muniment*' (itself derived from the Latin for *fortification*) which in the late Middle Ages described 'a title deed preserved as evidence of rights and privileges.'²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; p374

²⁸⁸ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books

²⁸⁹ Eldridge, J (1972) *Max Weber: The Interpretation of Social Reality*; Michael Joseph London pp25-26

²⁹⁰ Winston B (1995) *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations*; British Film institute p11

‘Document’ speaks to the modern growth of legal rights grounded in contracts rather than rights arising from status. It also speaks of the swamping of the emerging industrial world in paper. The old particularities, ‘muniment’, ‘affidavit’, ‘charter’, ‘memorandum’, ‘brief’, ‘writ’, ‘note’, (also originally a legal term), ‘letter’, etc., are all subsumed in the new generic term ‘document’. This whole group of words comes largely from the legal realm and binds writing and what is written to the common law, specifically to evidence before the law in both the pre modern and the modern periods.²⁹¹

Clearly, the photograph as Fox Talbot described it – as the pencil of nature inscribing itself - makes the photograph as document an attractive ideal. Suchar has suggested that “An implicit assumption behind defining the documentary photograph as proof or evidence in support of a putative fact is that it contains information that is, potentially at least, responsive to questions that can be put to it by someone interested in that particular information.”²⁹² As Suchar notes, this need not imply anything about the subject matter of a photograph, nor does it mean that photographer and documentarian need be the same person. This is an important point. It allows for the idea that all photographs portray and betray information that the photographer herself may not necessarily have been *consciously* documenting. The documentary photograph, in this broad sense, then holds matter within and without its frame and can be called upon to offer what Bill Nichols has usefully termed a ‘delayed reveal’²⁹³.

However, locating the information that the photograph is said to ‘betray’ is not straightforward. As I will explore below, Rosler’s account of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine’s practice risks superimposing a *structure of feeling* on them that is

²⁹¹ Ibid

²⁹² Suchar C (1989) The sociological imagination and documentary still photography: The interrogatory stance, *Visual Sociology*, 4:2, 51-62 (p52), DOI: 10.1080/14725868908583637

²⁹³ <http://www.doc.org> (last accessed May 2014)

more properly located in the anxieties and ethics of her own time. It is not my intention to make a relativist argument, suggesting that ethics should be exempt from criticism; ‘ethics’, despite arguments that advocate transcendent and philosophically ‘pure’ readings, are nonetheless put into practice in historically and culturally contingent forms. My intention is to understand the *idea* of documentary photography, and its narratives as a space in which the contingency of ethical codes of practice, in terms of what is understood to violate or preserve another’s humanity at a given time, can be explored in relation to the social, historical and culturally dominant representations of the time.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau has pointed out that in the broadest terms, all photographs are documents:

....one could argue that insofar as any photographic image expresses an indexical relation to whatever appeared before the lens at the moment of exposure, that image is a document of *something*. From this expansive position, no photograph is more or less documentary than any other.²⁹⁴

This theoretical relativism places the intentional ‘fine art photograph’ as being no less of a document than the productions of photojournalists. The fine art photograph documents and contains information about the artist’s structure of feeling; her way of seeing the world; her choice of photography as a medium to represent it; her place, position and power in the art world and the construction of an art world in which her photography is accepted and consecrated as a legitimate art form.

Solomon-Godeau remarks that the idea of ‘documentary photography’ as a specific genre is a recent historical and cultural development, and that prior to the 1920’s, with the exception of those photographs clearly instigated within the

²⁹⁴ Solomon-Godeau A (1991) *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices*; University of Minnesota Press p169

category of ‘art’, “the expression would have seemed tautological”.²⁹⁵ Since the photograph was associated with a mechanical and thus an ‘objective’ representation of reality from its very incarnation, artist-photographers were at pains to demonstrate the subjectivity of the eye behind the camera. The ‘subjective eye’ had to be emphasised in order for the photograph to be accepted as an aesthetically charged and legitimate vehicle for art above and beyond the merely technological. As Bourdieu argued, the technological and indexical nature of the photograph made this so. The development of the *artistic* subjective eye is a defense of a particular practice which works on and with this technology.

The broad definition of all photographs as documents, while denying the *specificity* of photographic practices does however point towards different ideological *uses* of photographs.

Solomon-Godeau argues then that the *genre* of Documentary Photography is discursive rather than conditioned by anything essential to the medium of photography itself. Moreover, she argues that this genre could only have emerged in the wake of certain artistic movements such as Expressionism or Symbolism. Yet in placing documentary practice as a form *deriving from* fine art practices, Documentary Photography as a *movement* and its political grounding in the *vernacular* practice of photography, as ‘indexical’ practice and as having a specific, ‘objective’ and oppositional *use-value* is here overlooked.

In New York, the Workers’ Film and Photo League emerged in 1930. Its aims were “to struggle against and expose reactionary films” and to “produce documentary films reflecting the lives and struggle of American workers.”²⁹⁶

Nonetheless, tensions existed within the group over the exact nature of the kinds

²⁹⁵ Ibid

²⁹⁶ Tucker, A; *Modernism and the Left: Paul Strand and the Workers’ Film and Photo Movement*; in Ribalta, J (ed) (2011) *The Worker Photography Movement [1926-1939]* Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. Madrid p374

of films that members should be making. Some members became dissatisfied with a ‘journalistic’ or news reel approach and its aesthetic restraints; new aims regarding the theory of documentary practice and its potential for dramatic forms of social analysis began to emerge.²⁹⁷ In 1936, the group split over these issues. Film makers continued to act under the original group title whilst the ‘still photographers’ reformed as the Photo League. Under Paul Strand’s presidency, the Photo League’s discussions involved “the degree to which a photographer was compelled to and capable of making images both socially significant and personally expressive.”²⁹⁸ This tension, as I will discuss, persists in Rosler’s work.

In her address to the group in 1938, Elizabeth McCausland emphasized what she saw to be its progressive role:

Now documentary photography most emphatically does not mean all the ugliest spots in town. It means reality. If reality is peace and beauty, documentary photography means peace and beauty. *But*, if reality is war, slums, starvation, then documentary means war, slums, starvation.²⁹⁹

While the Photo League failed to develop a mass membership in Britain, it nonetheless set its sights on developing a proletarian aesthetic. The ‘documentary tradition’ in Britain and later John Grierson’s documentary film movement attempted to document ‘facts’ about social life in ways that disavowed a bourgeois pictorial gaze. It too emerged as a reaction to the economic depression of the 1930s. Grierson understood both film and

²⁹⁷ *ibid*

²⁹⁸ *ibid* p327

²⁹⁹ McCausland, E; Lecture delivered at the Photo League, New York, July 27th, 1938; cited in Ribalta, J (ed) (2011) *The Worker Photography Movement [1926-1939]* Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. Madrid p339

photography as being powerful tools for education and his involvement with adult education is worth noting.

As Kevin Williams has pointed out, the writers, journalists, photographers and artists involved in this British project were largely middle class and there was a certain shock in their realization of the extent and reality of poverty and starvation in the North, West and the Midlands of Britain. This shock spurred a desire to uncover more about “the ‘foreign communities’ that existed outside the cosy confines, and the ivory towers of south-east England.”³⁰⁰ Most of the participants in the documentary movement were left wing, many were members of the Communist Party; their efforts aimed to cross the class divide that had become so rigidly established in Victorian and Edwardian Britain and the visual image became central in this endeavour. “Realism and naturalism were central to the form, rooted in the belief that the camera never lies. They saw their work as a political statement and act – in other words to report is to condemn.”³⁰¹

The middle-class position of those involved in documentary work has not been ignored in its critique, and results at worst in its ridicule. As Kevin Williams has suggested, “there are a number of questions that can be raised about the movement’s representation of the working classes, their relationship with government and their audiences.”³⁰² The movement has been criticized for being trapped in an ambiguous ‘middle class’ perspective of the working class that is simultaneously romantic and ‘othering.’ In turn this work has been deemed as patronizing, condescending and ‘sneering’.³⁰³ Likewise, Williams recognizes the problems of state patronage that surrounded much of Grierson’s production. As one film maker put it:

³⁰⁰ Williams, K (1998) *Get Me a Murder a Day!* London, Arnold (p116)

³⁰¹ Ibid

³⁰² Ibid p118

³⁰³ Ibid

The truth is that if we engaged in real social criticism to any extent, we would have immediately been without sponsorship and our whole experiment, which artistically a fine one, would have been finished. So we compromised.³⁰⁴

Williams usefully points out that, despite their limitations, such images nonetheless had “a profound impact on their audience.”³⁰⁵ They were an emergent and radical departure from the dominant images of their day to the extent that in the case of documentary film, working class viewers who “unused to depictions of ordinary life, their lives at work and at play, would sometimes break out into spontaneous applause.”³⁰⁶ The work may have been compromised, but the direction, at least, was right.

Similar questions of power and the authority to speak inform Rosler’s critique of the history of documentary photography in America.

While all photographs are documents that are simultaneously objective and subjective, they carry differing weights of balance of this within their structure of feeling. Yet Winston’s examination of the emergence of the term document as a form of *fortification* is most explicitly recognized and criticised in terms of the genre of ‘social documentary photography’ – in other words, photography intentionally *made for and used as evidence* to strengthen the ‘rights and privileges’ accorded (or not) by particular modes of social organization. In this sense, the idea of the document as a social contract grounded in *rights* rather than status that Winston notes above is not something that the photograph as material object can ever fully represent. It is instead implicit and only recoverable in the photograph through examining the encounter between the photographer, the photographed and the audience.

³⁰⁴ Ibid p118

³⁰⁵ Ibid

³⁰⁶ Ibid

As Rosler observed:

It is true of course that all forms of representation call forth questions of responsibility and perhaps of descriptive accuracy, but those evoked by photographic representation are unique. The apparent truth value of photography and film has made them powerfully effective vehicles for reportage and commentary. Of all photographic practices, social documentary – the self-professed truth teller, implicated in modernity and part of its ‘life world’ – is the one in which the underlying issues of social power are accessible to contestation.³⁰⁷

Martha Rosler: The critique of documentary

Rosler belongs to a generation who were amongst the first to engage seriously with an emerging, but as Batchen observed, not impartial history of photography. Rosler’s seminal essay on documentary photography, *In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)* was written over three decades ago and provided a site specific accompaniment to a series of photo-text works, *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*.³⁰⁸ In that context, the essay offers some explanation of the aesthetic, ethical and political positions from within which her photo-text work emerged. This was namely that photography, and especially the documentary photography of human poverty, suffering and social marginalisation, exemplified the power and agency of the photographer over and above her or his subjects. This resulted in a secondary victimisation through the camera’s lens, serving to perpetuate and reinforce an already existing asymmetry in the differentiation of social power.

³⁰⁷ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p209

³⁰⁸ The essay was originally published in *Martha Rosler: 3 Works*; Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of art and design, 1981.

The concept of documentary photography as providing direct evidence of differential social organization is the paradigm understood to underpin the photographic work of Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis:

In contrast to the pure sensationalism of much of the journalistic attention to working class, immigrant, and slum life, the meliorism of Riis, Lewis Hine, and others involved in social-work propagandizing argued, through the presentation of images combined with other forms of discourse, for the rectification of wrongs.³⁰⁹

That they made representation of this in differing forms designed for the specific audiences they hoped to influence should not underestimate the strength of a shared structure of feeling between the two men. Nonetheless, Rosler makes a distinction between the two on aesthetic grounds which are equally perceived as being symbolic of their relationships with their photographic subjects.

It is Riis who comes to bear the full weight of Rosler's critique. In Rosler's account, Riis apparently had no concern for the aesthetic quality of his pictures, "for he saw them as evidentiary" and he "hardly considered the transaction between himself and his photographic subjects; he saw them as symptomatic – representatives of the ill-housed urban poor, many of them newly arrived immigrants and his interest did not extend far beyond that role."³¹⁰ It is the difference in the *aesthetic* presentation of evidence that concerns Rosler. In his attempt to counter the idea of poverty as synonymous with moral decay, Riis is positioned as "portraying his poverty stricken subjects as victims of an impossible situation unprotected by the law." According to Rosler:

His appeal was to the law, routed through the consciences and judgements of the new modernising elites, on the assumption, (not

³⁰⁹ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p177

³¹⁰ *Ibid* p219

unjustified) that poor immigrants, and native-born blacks, could not themselves effectively mount such appeals.³¹¹

In contrast, Lewis Hine is argued to have a more sophisticated photographic practise. Riis was purely self-taught whilst Hine had formal training. Yet like Riis, he is also concerned with legislative changes, this time relating to employment and child labour. Rosler suggests that Hine's documentary practise is concerned with an aesthetic practise which is in turn already "married to ethical concerns." Tagg has argued the reverse; Hine was a photographer first and learnt sociology later, whereas Riis puts the photograph to work for an already existing social conscience.³¹²

But both men made aesthetic and political appeals to the law. Yet for Rosler, it is curiously the *formal* qualities of Hine's photographs that are argued to be central to their persuasive power; "He never treated his subjects merely as representative ciphers." Rosler writes that:

Even under difficult circumstances (he frequently lied his way into factory situations, from which he was otherwise excluded by the owners and managers), in researching child labour he took the time to learn the names of those he photographed and to ascertain their occupations, their ages, and other pertinent information, information that often figured in the essays and articles accompanying his photos. Unlike Riis, Hine also attempted to engage in a transaction with the subjects that resulted in a dignified yet responsive pose.³¹³

Tagg reflects that Hine drew from a social history of aesthetic posture and the "language of gesture" and from Le Brun's treatise on expressions to produce a

³¹¹ Ibid

³¹² Tagg, J (1979) Notes on Photography, History and Representation; in Dennett, T and Spence, J (eds) *Photography and Politics; One* (London, Photography Workshop)

³¹³ Ibid p219

carefully composed and elaborate code of heroism and a sentimental view of working people.³¹⁴

But while both photographers attempted to link the moral order to the political order, neither one could promise “the direct utility of his project to the person before the lens.”³¹⁵ Nonetheless, both Riis and Hine’s projects *did* participate in direct social changes that can be assessed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Rosler differentiates between the two photographers on aesthetic grounds and reads their politics and ethics directly from this.

The reform associated with Riis was, according to Rosler, nothing more than an appeal to the security of ‘polite society’ – that “the threats of disease, crime, immorality, and prostitution would awaken the self-interest of the privileged.”³¹⁶

Here Rosler is altogether too dismissive of Riis. By the time of his death in 1914, Riis was celebrated as being amongst the greatest of humanitarian reformers. Between 1870 and 1910, the use of the term ‘reformism’ was a new word coined in the controversy within the socialist movement at that time about the nature of change in a capitalist society. As Raymond Williams notes, “The issue was whether capitalist society could be changed, or was indeed changing itself in gradual, local and specific ways, or whether such reforms were trivial and illusory, either masking the need for the replacement of capitalism by socialism, or actually intended to prevent this replacement.”³¹⁷ Rosler clearly sees Riis as operating in the latter terms. As Owens described it, “The

³¹⁴ Tagg, J (1979) Notes on Photography, History and Representation; in Dennett, T and Spence, J (eds) *Photography and Politics; One* (London, Photography Workshop) p190

³¹⁵ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p220

³¹⁶ *Ibid* p177

³¹⁷ Williams, R (1983) *Keywords*, Glasgow Fontana, p264

photographer inevitably functions as an agent of the system of power that silenced these people in the first place.”³¹⁸

However as Edward O’Donnell has noted:

Very quickly after his death, Riis nearly disappeared from public memory. So too did his writings and photographs. Although some historians mentioned him in the context of tenement reform, none made more than a passing mention of his pioneering photographs that made him famous in the first place. Indeed a lengthy biography of Riis in 1938 barely mentions his work as a photographer (“photography” is not even in the index) and two histories of American photography published that same year omit Riis entirely.³¹⁹

In 1947 Riis made a re-entry into public consciousness. Alexander Alland Sr. mounted an exhibition of a long missing collection of Riis’s photographs at the Museum of the City of New York.³²⁰ In the new context, contemporary appraisals of Riis’s photographs were positive. Not only was Riis seen to have avoided sentimentality in his ‘gritty realism’ but his work and its narrative were noted to differ significantly from the dominant writing on poverty in his time. In contrast to overtly essentialist notions of ‘the dangerous classes’, Riis had argued that the poverty and the harsh environment of the slum itself, rather than any genetic immorality, was the chief cause of social problems. This was against the prevailing sentiment; a version of social Darwinism that saw the poor as responsible for their own misery.

Rosler’s review of Riis can be situated within a critical culture emerging in the 1970s. O’Donnell describes the terms of this discourse:

³¹⁸ Owens, C (1985) *The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Post-modernism* in Hal Foster (ed) *postmodern Culture*: London, Pluto press p68

³¹⁹ O’Donnell E (2004) Pictures versus Words? Public History, Tolerance and the Challenge of Jacob Riis; *The Public Historian* Volume 26 Number 3 (Summer 2004) p13

³²⁰ Ibid

the primary function of *How the Other Half Lives* was to identify and strengthen a wall of difference separating the native-born middle class from the immigrant working classes [...] they charge Riis not merely with providing his audiences with ‘voyeuristic’ tours of Lower East Side vice and sin, but also with providing them reassurance, via his technique of “photography as surveillance”, that although dangerous, the immigrant working class could be socially controlled. Essential to this was Riis’s labelling, categorising and objectifying of his quarry, which allowed the middle class to assert power and superiority over them without ever entering the slum.³²¹

Much of this discourse should be more properly aimed at the way Riis’s images have become incorporated in to the museum and by extension an art world history of photography, rather than at Riis himself. Through Alland’s exhibition, aided by Grace Mayer who was the curator of prints at the Museum of the City of New York, Riis became viewed as a ‘first class artist’ although he had always protested that he was not.³²² Alland made stunning reproductions from Riis’s negatives which were exhibited with selected captions from his book. Riis’s images were further transformed in Alland’s 1974 publication *Jacob Riis: Photographer and Citizen*. The book contained 82 high quality prints which reworked, cropped and adjusted exposure and contrast. The book, and Riis’s transformation to ‘artist’ was completed by a preface by Ansel Adams. Adams was enthralled by the images and ‘the intimate gaze’ of their subjects:

They did not realise that they were looking at you and me and all humanity for ages of time. Their postures and groupings are not

³²¹ Ibid p15

³²² Granbeck, B; *Doubly Material Rhetoric* in Biesecker, B and Luciates, J (eds) (2009) *Rhetoric, Materiality and Politics* Peter Lane Publishing p144

contrived: the moment of exposure was selected more for the intention of truth than for effect.³²³

Moreover, Adams was drawn into the effects and mastery of Riis's photographic technology, which he saw as displaying 'competence and integrity.'³²⁴ Thus, Granbeck points out the ways in which Riis, and his work have become subjected to "a rolling politics of re-articulation, sometimes integrated into his biography and often cut free from its particular features."³²⁵

Whilst Rosler has acknowledged that much social reform at this time was influenced by "a matrix of Christian ethics" the exact nature of the merger between religious and secular ideologies has been explored in greater detail by Gregory S. Jackson. This requires going beyond his appropriation by the 'art world', the newspaper articles and Riis's published book, which at the time of publication did not include the full composite of photographs associated with it today. Instead, many of the photographs in book form and newspapers were reproduced as engravings due to the limitations and costs of publishing at that time. The wood engravings did not reproduce the tonality or the detail of the photographs. As Harper points out, often the engraver would highlight particular individuals and de-emphasise the backgrounds which were the essential and *sociological* contexts, or conditions of the images.³²⁶ Jackson turns his attention to the ways that the images circulated as lantern slides in the context of the lecture tours undertaken by Riis. Here Riis certainly simulated excursions into New York's tenement slums:

Projecting images on wide screens in darkened halls, Riis recreated New York tenement neighbourhoods for his rapt audiences in ways that allowed them to explore urban despair and translate social knowledge

³²³ Adams, A cited in Granbeck, B op cit p144

³²⁴ Granbeck, B; (2009) *Doubly Material Rhetoric* op cit p144

³²⁵ Ibid p154

³²⁶ Harper, D (2012) *Visual Sociology*, London, Routledge, p25

into personal experience liberated from their fear of crime, contagion, and other perceived ghetto hazards.³²⁷

In the era of the diorama that was yet to be overtaken by cinema, the intense visual power and drama of Riis's virtual tours cannot be underestimated. Riis would base his tours around the life story of a particular person, often a young boy referred to as 'Tony'. Tony's story took different paths for different audiences. Always beginning as a 'lad of promise', the child's potential was rarely fulfilled.

Rather than dismiss this as the use of a 'representative cipher' it could instead be described as the use of "the specified generalisation"³²⁸ Becker has referred to this idea with reference to Berger and Mohr's photographic essay *A Seventh Man* first published in 1975.³²⁹ Here, the conditions producing migrant labour and the *experience* of the migrant labourer are explored. Becker notes that the analysis is put forward through a number of expositions ranging from general Marxist theories of capitalist development, statistics on migrant labour, poetry and photographs all within "a narrative of 'He', an archetypal migrant labourer."³³⁰ The photographs are of groups and individual labourers although they are not captioned or analysed in the text. Although a list of illustrations detailing place is supplied at the back of the book, Becker sees this as a distraction that does not especially help the understanding of the argument. Becker writes:

Photographs, as Berger insists, are irredeemably specific. The image is always of someone or something specific, not an abstract entity or a conceptual creation. You cannot photograph capitalism or the Protestant

³²⁷ Jackson G S (2003) Cultivating Spiritual Sight: Jacob Riis's Virtual Narrative and the Modernisation of Protestant Homiletics; *Representations* Volume 83 Number 1 (Summer 2003) p128

³²⁸ Becker H (2002) Visual Evidence: *A Seventh Man*, the specified generalisation, and the work of the reader; *Visual Studies*, 17:1,3-11 (accessed 19/01/2011) p5

³²⁹ Berger, J and Mohr, J (1975) *A Seventh Man* London, Verso

³³⁰ *Ibid* p4

Ethic, only people and things who, it might be argued, exemplify or symbolise or embody these ideas.³³¹

In this way, Becker demonstrates that the use of images here are not about a ‘general idea’ such as ‘the dignity of man’ or indeed of labour, but instead Mohr’s photographs and Berger’s text specify and embody a ‘general argument’ that is connected and coherent:

The images, then, are evidence. They are specific instances of the general argument. They do not “prove” the argument, as we might expect a scientific proof to do, but rather assure us that the entities of the abstract argument, the generalised story, really exist as living people who come from and work in real places. This is not evidence as “compelling proof”, but rather as what is sometimes called an “existence” proof, a showing that the thing we are talking about is possible.³³²

There is a clear link to the sociology of Simmel in Berger and Mohr’s work which constantly connects the individual with the general, or differentiation with integration and is therefore an aesthetic endeavour. Simmel observed that:

We conceive of each man – and this is a fact which has specific effect upon our practical behaviour toward him – as being the human type which is suggested by his individuality. We think of him in terms *not only* of his singularity *but also* in terms of a general category.³³³

These themes can also be found in Riis’s photographs. The charges of unadulterated voyeurism as much as those of ‘social distance’ levelled at Riis are difficult to sustain within the context of Riis’s own biography; as an

³³¹ Ibid p5

³³² Ibid

³³³ Cited in Kemple, (2009) ‘*Sub species aeternitatis*’: *The Socio-Aesthetics of snapshots from Georg Simmel to Jeff Wall*; SocioAesthetics; A Symposium on aesthetics, culture and social life Aug 23-25 2009 p2

immigrant with personal experience of this life, and in terms of his commitment to the Calvinist tradition in American Protestantism and to Social Gospel ideology. Arriving in New York City in 1870, Riis's first three years there were hard and he was no stranger to the police lodging houses that were later to become immortalised in his photographs.

Jackson convincingly argues that understanding Riis's appeal to late 19th century audiences requires "that we expand on questions of race, class and politics that are of concern to recent critics, to include the dynamics of sentimentalism in American religious history. Riis emerged as a product of, and catalyst for late-nineteenth-century Social Gospel activism, and his lectures, delivered across the nation, drew directly on long standing pedagogies of Protestant homiletics."³³⁴

The homiletic preaching style invites a location of Riis's work within an earlier framework of meaning surrounding the term 'documentary' that is closer in connection to its source word 'documentum' or 'lesson'.

Jackson offers an historical overview of the homiletic tradition, in which:

18th and 19th century preachers summoned vivid imagery to crystallise moral issues, illustrating metaphysical abstractions through the use of allegory and employing spatialised conceptions of logic and mnemonic organisation to help audiences conceptualise and engage a kind of virtual experience. Breaking with conventions based on the clerical imparting of moral knowledge, homiletic practitioners sought not just to educate but to motivate.³³⁵

Where Rosler understands Riis's subjects to be merely 'representative ciphers', Jackson sees them as powerful allegorical narratives that were not simply about

³³⁴ Jackson G S (2003) Cultivating Spiritual Sight: Jacob Riis's Virtual Narrative and the Modernisation of Protestant Homiletics; *Representations* Volume 83 Number 1 (Summer 2003) p127

³³⁵ Ibid p128

illustrating a particular text, time and place. They were instead, representative of human universal experiences, “religious meta-narratives and biblical typologies – with realities and consequences both within and without historical time.”³³⁶

Through this, individuals might *imagine* possibilities for personal intervention and also as *communities* of action. Thus, homiletic texts “denied readers the role of passive onlooker, presenting instead a virtual reality that demanded their narrative participation and volition in moral choices.”³³⁷ Riis employed visual technology to stimulate ‘spiritual vision’ as a doubling of an ‘other-worldly second sight’ into this-worldly living. This, for Jackson, presents Riis’s photographs as the ‘aesthetics of immediacy.’³³⁸

If the ‘aesthetic’ is understood to be about perception through the senses then it is clear that Riis, whilst not interested in attaining a role for himself as an artist, had some notion of the affective aesthetic possibility contained in his images. Of his work, Riis said:

The work is bearing fruit. On the East side, the young rise in rebellion against the slum; on the West side, the League for Political Education has built a ball ground[...] when we fight no longer for the poor but with the poor, the slum is taken to the rear and beaten already.³³⁹

Riis was clearly interested in constructing a class *for* itself.

Against Rosler’s claim that Riis’s photographs neglect the structuring forces of society, it can be argued that the combination of words and pictures actually present an informed and sophisticated critique of capitalism. Riis makes visible a dual city that is spatially marked by class, gender and ethnicity. He wryly

³³⁶ Jackson G S (2003) Cultivating Spiritual Sight: Jacob Riis’s Virtual Narrative and the Modernisation of Protestant Homiletics; *Representations* Volume 83 Number 1 (Summer 2003) p130

³³⁷ Ibid p131

³³⁸ This is well illustrated in Paul Gaugin’s *Vision after the Sermon*

³³⁹ Cited in Granbeck, B; *Doubly Material Rhetoric* in Biesecker, B and Luciates, J (eds) (2009) *Rhetoric, Materiality ad Politics* New York, Peter Lane Publishers p154

notes a rise in the status of second and third generation Irish immigrants in the wake of an increasingly diverse and hierarchically received immigrant community to the United States. He drew attention to exploitative landlords and to sweat shops, noting, unusually at that time, the position of women's labour as seamstresses. This was made more difficult for urban women because of the same labour taking place for lower wages within a more lucrative rural subsistence economy. Moreover, Riis advocated schemes which would enable the tenement dwellers to be pro-active agents in improving their conditions. Riis's critique of capitalism and his 'appeal to the law' which sustained it go well beyond simple moralising and the internal (bourgeois) class discourse implied by Rosler. His work aimed to connect image and idea.

As WJT Mitchell has commented, whilst Riis's photographs cannot be entirely removed from the world of 'surveillance' photography nor their sometimes violent production ignored, the combination of Riis's text and his images is critical. The text draws attention to the dilemma between the use of the image complete with its 'shock value' and the political power of the photograph:

Riis's joining of an inconvenient, disruptive text foregrounds this dilemma, draws us into it. A resistance arises in the text-photo relation; we move less easily from reading to seeing. Admittedly, this resistance is exceptional in Riis, whose general practice is to assume a straightforward exchange of information between text and image. But its emergence even in this relatively homogeneous photo-essay alerts us to its possibility, its effect and motivations.³⁴⁰

Mitchell notes then that Riis's work highlights the tensions between the ethical and the political, the aesthetic and the rhetorical. As he argues, "by and large photo essays have been put at the service of a progressive reform" but yet "the

³⁴⁰ Mitchell WJT (1994) *Picture Theory*; The University of Chicago Press pp288

best of them do not treat photography and language simply as instruments at the service of a cause or institution. Nor are they content to advertise the fine moral or artistic sensitivities of their producers.”³⁴¹

It is useful to consider Riis’s photographic work in terms of Kemple’s account of the ‘sociological allegory’ which combines “the traditions of sociological thought and allegorical narrative in innovative ways.”³⁴² Kemple puts it that just as sociology emerged in the interstices of empirical science and the literary arts, “so allegory occupies a kind of intermediate space between the figurative and the descriptive, the metaphorical and literal tasks of communication.” In this way, Kemple argues that allegory operates on two levels that mutually reinforce each other – denotation and connotation allow for literal meaning and symbolic significance to interpenetrate each other. Kemple suggests that:

Each of these levels or ‘registers’ must cohere within a specific time and place of understanding, however remote or near, fantastic or real they may seem. But when we also consider how an image or a narrative might be recited in a different cultural setting or taken up in another time period beyond its original expression or reception, we are confronted with yet a third dimension of allegorical meaning at the level of *performative signification*. Here the general sense conveyed at the metaphorical or symbolic level is ‘applied’ or ‘respecified’ in a new frame of reference.³⁴³

Rosler’s charges against Riis’s perceived lack of relationship with his photographic subjects and his “lack of concern for the aesthetic” become a little more tendentious in the light of this context. However, Rosler was working

³⁴¹ Ibid

³⁴² Kemple T (2009) ‘*Sub species aeternitatis*’: *The Socio-Aesthetics of Snapshots from Georg Simmel to Jeff Wall*; SocioAesthetics; A Symposium on aesthetics, culture and social life Aug 23-25 2009 p4 <http://socioaesthetics.ku.dk?speakers/kemple> (last accessed 22/06/2014)

³⁴³ Ibid

against the appropriation and “conversion of photographs that once did ‘work’ into non-instrumental expression.”³⁴⁴ I will now turn to the ‘new frame of reference’ in which she worked.

Situating Rosler’s critique

I have argued above that Rosler’s criticism of Riis is overly harsh and does not fully clarify her affection for Hine, whose work could be interpreted as verging on pastoral through the stillness and calm of his posed subjects. On this point, Rosler suggests that Hine’s work can be elevated above Riis because of “his straightforward involvement with the struggles for decent working hours, pay and protection, as well as for decent housing, schooling, and social dignity, for the people who he photographed and the social service agencies intending to represent them, and whose [Hine’s] dedication to photography as the medium with which he could best serve those interests.” Riis’s photographs, in contrast to this, “were at best an adjunct to, and a moment in, a journalistic career.”³⁴⁵

The distinction she makes between the two photographers is a central aspect of her wider critique of documentary practices which could often become ‘lumped together.’ As Edwards puts it, Rosler aimed towards critical singularity; “She was for Hine, but not Riis; she valued Robert Frank and Lee Friedlander, but has been highly critical of Diane Arbus and Garry Winogrand.”³⁴⁶ The unqualified and blanket use of documentary as a term served, for Rosler, to cover up distinctions in practice and the specificity of a social documentary form that was rooted in materialist theories of cultural development. “In America,” Rosler argued, “such blurring amounts to a tactic.”³⁴⁷ This tactic, for

³⁴⁴ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p42

³⁴⁵ Rosler, M, *ibid* p197 (n3)

³⁴⁶ Edwards, S (2012) *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*; Afterall; MIT Press p82

³⁴⁷ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p196

Rosler, was particularly visible in the emergence of the art museum's growing acceptance and display of photography as 'art.' As Sekula put it:

A curious thing happens when documentary is officially recognised as art. Suddenly the hermeneutic pendulum careens from the objectivist end of its arc to the opposite, subjectivist end. Positivism yields to a subjective metaphysics, technologism gives way to auteurism. Suddenly the audience's attention is directed toward mannerism, toward sensibility, toward the physical and emotional risks taken by the artist.

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Phillips places this process as beginning in America with the development in 1940 of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; a process which had been garnering strength throughout the 1930s. By bringing photography into the museum, a disparate and scattered practise became subjected to the transfiguring gaze and the retrospective order of art's "institutional guardian."³⁴⁹ As Batchen noted, Beaumont Newhall's involvement in this process was key.

Newhall came from an extremely privileged background: "My mother was a photographer, and a pretty good one, too. Her gods were Gertude Käsebier and Clarence White. When father built the house – he was a physician and had a very large house – he built a studio on the third floor. The studio was for mother. It had a skylight and a darkroom fully equipped."³⁵⁰ Newhall trained as an art historian at Harvard University. His own interest in (and practice of) photography was primarily invested in those artists and painters who were experimenting with the medium at that time, such as Moholy-Nagy or Man Ray.

³⁴⁸ Sekula, A (1979) *Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary* in Dennett, T and Spence, J (eds) *Photography and Politics; One* (London, Photography Workshop p173

³⁴⁸ *ibid*

³⁴⁹ Phillips, C (1993) *The Judgment Seat of Photography* in Bolton, R (ed) (1993) *The Contest of Meaning* The MIT Press p17

³⁵⁰ Cited in Hill, P and Cooper, J (1994); *Dialogue with Photography*, Manchester, Cornerhouse Publications p297

Newhall reflected that “both of these were painters first and photographers second.”³⁵¹

The relationship between photography and painting was central to his work at MoMA. In the 1939 exhibition, *Photography: 1839-1937* the approach of photography’s centenary year offered a useful reason for a broad historical overview of the medium. This was outlined as a succession of technical innovations and entailed a connoisseurial assessment of their aesthetic merit. Here, the photographer’s ‘personal expression’ was championed. As Phillips puts it, any social or historical residue was neatly rechanneled as ‘nostalgia’ for a ‘vanished past’.³⁵² The process continued with an exhibition in San Francisco set up by Ansel Adams with Newhall’s assistance in 1940. This offered a modernist re-reading of photographs by Timothy O’Sullivan, William Henry Jackson and Jack Hillers for example in which formalist analysis was central. More than this, Phillips draws attention to Newhall’s contributory catalogue essay *Photography as Art*. Here Newhall expanded the boundaries of art photography to include Matthew Brady’s images from the American Civil War. Acknowledging that these images did not necessarily have aesthetic *intent*, they were nonetheless “tragic and beautiful” and “they specifically prefigured the latter- day documentary stylists like Walker Evans and Berenice Abbott.”³⁵³

Newhall left MoMA in 1940 for military service, working abroad in the post of aerial photo-interpreter. In his absence, his wife Nancy (who, by Newhall’s own admission had been a significant colleague and collaborator in facilitating his career) took over the running of the department which she did with much success. However, when Newhall returned, since the museum had strict policies against a husband and wife working together Nancy was the one to resign. On rejoining the museum Newhall recounts that “there then came a blow.” This was

³⁵¹ Ibid p208

³⁵² Phillips, C (1993) op cit p20

³⁵³ Ibid p22

the news that Edward Steichen was to become the Director of Photography at MoMA:

This was completely over my head. It had never been discussed with me. I thought I was head of the department that Ansel, David (McAlpine), Nancy and I had founded. No, I was to work with him, as curator. He would bring glamour and a lot of money and they thought that Kodak would give \$50,000 a year. I was to be the intellectual and Steichen to be the leader. I could not take this so I resigned.³⁵⁴

Newhall's approach nonetheless survived. Moreover, it survived the interventions of Edward Steichen who was far less interested in developing photography as a peripheral fine art. Under Steichen's stewardship, the 'cult value' of the fine print was aggressively undermined. While this afforded a wide popular following and respite from the charges of 'snobbishment' levelled at Newhall (an important point given the museum's troubled finances at that time), Phillips suggests that this resulted in "the eclipse of the individual photographer and the subordination of his or her work to the more or less overtly instrumental demands of illustration."³⁵⁵ It was this situation that John Szarkowski inherited when he took over in 1962. The lively and eclectic displays promoted by Steichen were pared down into cool, white and sparsely hung galleries that removed photography, once again, from the vagaries of mass culture and into its own aesthetic realm.

David Campany draws attention to Szarkowski's 1964 exhibition, *The Photographer's Eye*. This was, he explains, "a show attempting to set out a scheme for the aesthetic appreciation of any photograph."³⁵⁶ The terms which

³⁵⁴ Cited in Hill, P and Cooper, J (1994); *op cit*, p301

³⁵⁵ Phillips, C (1993) *op cit* p34

³⁵⁶ Campany, D (2012) *Art and Photography*; Phaidon Press inc. p23

Szarkowski set out were based on an overarching set of criteria; the detail, the frame, time, vantage point and ‘the thing itself.’ As Company notes:

[Szarkowski] was interested in the broadest range of images but was looking to convert them into special objects rather than accept them as social or automatic signs belonging to the world.³⁵⁷

However, it was the idea of documentary photography, as Szarkowski championed it through the photography of Garry Winogrand, Diane Arbus and Lee Friedlander, that Rosler is most critical of (*New Documents*; MoMA; New York, 1967). Szarkowski claimed that:

A new generation of photographers has directed the documentary approach towards more personal ends. Their aim has not been to reform life, but to know it. Their work betrays a sympathy – almost an affection – for the imperfections and frailties of society. They like the real world, in spite of its terrors, as the source of wonder and fascination and value – no less precarious for being irrational...What they hold in common is the belief that the commonplace is really worth looking at, and the courage to do it with a minimum of theorising.³⁵⁸

As Company has pointed out, the transformation of ‘street photography’ into a ‘self-conscious art-genre’ in the museum had negative consequences, resulting in “a lapse into formalism and a move away from social engagement into privatised and obsessively subjective ‘styles of seeing’”.³⁵⁹ Company notes a tendency for exoticism which, for artists like Rosler, suggested that the potential of photography was being “squandered, marginalised or merely aestheticised.”³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ ibid

³⁵⁸ Cited in Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p189

³⁵⁹ Company D (2012) op cit p28

³⁶⁰ ibid

Rosler takes special issue with Garry Winogrand. His work “aggressively rejects any responsibility (or shall we say culpability?) for his images and denies any relation between them and shared or public human meaning.” Moreover, Rosler reflected on Winogrand’s own rationale in which meaning is said to reside solely within “the ‘four walls’ of the framing edges.”³⁶¹ For Rosler, “The denial that the meaning of photographs rests in their rootedness in the stream of social life preserves the photograph at the level of object, a mere item of value hanging on a wall.”³⁶²

Rosler accuses the work of ‘the new documentarians’ of using stereotypical and generic representations aesthetically and formally ‘designed’ for voyeurism; a freak show of “impotent rage” disguised as “snoop sociology” rather than as tools for social critique and analysis.³⁶³ In the hands of these photographers, Rosler argues that an engagement with a ‘cause’ as the defining characteristic of documentary photography had been abandoned and replaced by the “connoisseurship of the tawdry.”³⁶⁴

The issues of voyeurism, secondary victimisation and symbolic violence through the camera lens, have been remade by Solomon-Godeau and continue to be of central concern in contemporary photographic practice and its accompanying writing. Solomon-Godeau writes:

We must ask whether the *place* of the documentary subject as it is constructed for the more powerful spectator is not always, in some sense, given in advance. We must ask, in other words, whether the documentary act does not involve a double subjugation: first, in the social world that has produced its victims; and second, in the regime of the image produced

³⁶¹ Rosler (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p189

³⁶² *Ibid* p42

³⁶³ *Ibid* p189

³⁶⁴ *ibid*

within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it then re-presents.³⁶⁵

It is a critical question and one that endures particularly in the discourse surrounding photographs of war and its consequences. This will be discussed further. Rosler argues that a central problem with all documentary work has been its fascination with the ‘fallacy’ of physiognomy: “the identification of the image of a face with a character, a body centred essentialism.”³⁶⁶ As I will explore, the body as a site *upon* which particular relationships of power are performed has long been the subject of critique across a number of disciplines. Arguments from both the Left and the Right have simultaneously challenged and promoted the use of the body as an appropriate vehicle for the representation of politics as much as for the politics of representation. Notable here is Rosler’s video work, *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained*, (1977). Here Rosler ‘performs’ the social control and bureaucratic violence exerted on the female body. But it is the *passivity* of the body through its photographic appropriation, rather than its *agency in* a site of social forces that has been a consistent critical thread running through Rosler’s literary and visual work; and specifically the passivity of the viewer.

Martha Rosler: The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems.

Rosler’s seminal essay noted above and its accompanying images concentrate through *The Bowery* on the problems of representation itself: “if impoverishment is a subject here, it is more centrally the impoverishment of

³⁶⁵ Solomon-Godeau A (1991) *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices*; University of Minnesota Press p176

³⁶⁶ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p221

representational strategies tottering about alone than that of a mode of surviving.³⁶⁷

The essay and the images refract and interrupt, what was for Rosler and others, a crisis of representation. During the 1970s, Rosler was part of what have loosely been termed *The San Diego Group* along with Alan Sekula, Fred Londidier and Phillip Steinmetz who she met whilst studying for her MFA at the University of California, San Diego. For Edwards, Rosler's essay and the photo-works represent a group manifesto of sorts, advocating a shared interest in the reinvention of a committed social documentary against "the tired protocols of formalism in photography and art."³⁶⁸

On *The Bowery* as a socially constituted and negotiated space, Rosler comments:

It has been much photographed, in works veering between outraged and moral sensitivity and sheer slumming spectacle. Why is the Bowery so magnetic to documentarians? It is no longer possible to evoke the camouflaging impulses to "help" drunks and down-and-outers or "expose" their dangerous existence.³⁶⁹

Rosler suggests that images of homeless drunks or 'bums' offer no more than a "safari of images" which are exploited by the 'Nikon Crowd'.³⁷⁰ Her words here echo the language used by some early documentary photographers themselves – Grierson spoke of the dangers incurred whilst "travelling into the jungles of Middlesborough and the Clyde" whilst Charles Harrison studied what he called "the cannibals of Britain."³⁷¹ The existing photography of The

³⁶⁷ Ibid p194

³⁶⁸ Edwards, S (2012) *Martha Rosler; The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*; MIT Press,p2

³⁶⁹ Rosler M (2004)*Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p175

³⁷⁰ Ibid p191

³⁷¹ Cited in Williams, K (1998) *Give me a murder a day!* London, Arnold (p118)

Bowery, for Rosler, did nothing to expose the political economy and the manipulation of labour rates which underpins the homeless existence. Nor does it comment on the “contradictory pressures on the institution of the family under capitalism or the appeal of conscious-eradicating drugs for people who have little reason to believe in themselves.”³⁷² Rosler claimed that:

The exposé, the compassion and outrage, of documentary fuelled by the dedication to reform has shaded over into combinations of exoticism, tourism, voyeurism, psychologism and metaphysics, trophy hunting – and careerism.³⁷³

Thus Rosler aimed to produce work that refused the dominant (and for her inadequate) descriptive systems that she associated with the existing forms of photography of The Bowery. Rosler declares that, instead, she offers “a radical metonymy, with a setting implying the condition itself.”³⁷⁴

In particular, she refused to show the inhabitants of The Bowery. Rosler offers photographs of empty shop fronts, doorways, hotels and banks which range from “decrepitude to splendour”.³⁷⁵ The setting and condition then *is* Marx’s logic of capitalism; the increasingly globalised competition for financial profit, trade and commerce and by extension, its ‘invisible’ and alienated surplus labour; the surplus human lives that capitalism systematically generated.

Although these portals do not show the homeless drunks themselves they are nonetheless present through the traces they have left: empty rum and cheap rosé bottles, rubbish, cigarette stumps, or a discarded shoe serve as a reminder, as a ‘metonym.’ Rosler insists that her “radical refusal” to show the body as simply a *metaphorical sight* instead of a *structured site* of social production is not a gesture of radical anti-humanism. It is instead a work of criticism, and as Sekula

³⁷² ibid

³⁷³ Ibid

³⁷⁴ ibid

³⁷⁵ ibid

pointed out, a work of anti- ‘humanism.’ Edwards notes the significance of Sekula’s use of inverted commas, reinforcing *The Bowery* as a critique of the dominant idea of humanist photography and *not* the idea of humanism itself.³⁷⁶

In their frontal format Rosler’s black and white photographs of the Bowery echo the formality of Walker Evans. They deliberately *quote* the clap board houses and store fronts found in Evans’ *American Photographs* taken during the midst of 1930s depression. The use of quotation is explored further by Rosler in *Notes on Quotes* (1981) which formed the coda for *In, Around and Afterthoughts* but which is, somewhat ironically, less quoted. Tellingly, this essay took the earlier title *I cannot say, I can only repeat (a note on quotes and quoting)*. The concept of authorial originality is central to this essay, suggesting not only a crisis in visual representation but also an “alienated sensibility” and the failure to construct original critique:

Quotation has mediation as its essence, if not its primary concern, and any claims for objectivity or accuracy are made in relation to representations of representations, not representations of truth. The effect of this has tended to be a closure at the level of representation, which substantially leaves aside the investigation of power relations and their agencies.³⁷⁷

Rosler argues that quotation should also be understood as ‘confessional’, as betraying “an anxiety about meaning in the face of the living world, a faltered confidence in straightforward expression.”³⁷⁸ By visually quoting Evans’ use of the overlooked, the belief or confidence in the power of the single image to offer meaning (promoted by the museum handling of photography) is subverted by a critical anti-naturalism. The series of empty portals are juxtaposed with text

³⁷⁶ Cited in Edwards, S (2012) *Martha Rosler; The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*; MIT Press, p9

³⁷⁷ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p134

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*

boxes which for Sekula demonstrated a Brechtian ideological self conscious handling of image and words.³⁷⁹

The text boxes begin with descriptive adjectives and then nouns that refer to different stages of drunkenness; ‘blotto’, ‘polished’, ‘stuccoed’, ‘dead soldiers’. The words themselves are positioned so that they begin “outside the world of skid row and slide into it” in order to suggest the way that people are thought to slide into alcoholism and “skid to the bottom of the row.”³⁸⁰ Sekula described the combination of picture sequence and word panels as suggesting “the fundamental aim of drunkenness “ and “the irreconcilable tension between bliss and self-destruction in a society of closed options.”³⁸¹ Furthermore, “the attention to language cuts against the pornography of the “direct” representation of misery. A text, analogous formally to our own ideological index of names-for-the-world, interposes itself between us and ‘visual experience’.”³⁸² Many of the terms have a double meaning that refers not only to the experience of drunkenness but equally, draw attention to representation itself: ‘featured’, ‘obfuscated’, ‘out of the picture’ and even ‘pixilated’. The latter term is an uncanny precursor of pixel – once the fragment of the picture created by a cathode tube but now used ubiquitously in discussions of digital production. There are of course a number of ways by which to interpret the relation between image and text here. For Edwards this allows the photo-text work to be positioned as a radically open image.

Rosler puts it that:

There is a poetics of drunkenness here, a poetry-out-of-prison.

Adjectives and nouns built into metaphoric systems – food imagery,

³⁷⁹ Sekula, A (1979) *Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary* in Dennett, T and Spence, J (eds) *Photography and Politics; One* (London, Photography Workshop pp175-176

³⁸⁰ *ibid*

³⁸¹ Sekula, A (1979) *Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary* in Dennett, T and Spence, J (eds) *Photography and Politics; One* (London, Photography Workshop) p175

³⁸² *ibid*

nautical imagery, the imagery of industrial processes, of militarism, derisive comparisons with animal life, foreignisms, archaisms, and references to still other universes of discourse – applied to a particular state of being, a subculture of sorts, and to the people in it.³⁸³

The photographs themselves she says are, “Powerless to *deal with* the reality that is yet totally comprehended-in-advance by ideology and they are as diversionary as the word formations.” Rather than imposing a set of descriptive terms, Rosler suggests that her ‘poetics of drunkenness’ are at least “closer to being located within the culture of drunkenness rather than being framed on it from without.”³⁸⁴

Reflecting on the work, Rosler acknowledges a visual debt to earlier documentary photography but equally denies the work an ‘artistic’ status by refusing the concept of ‘self discovery’ associated with the prevailing idea of artistic habitus:

*They are not reality newly viewed. They are not reports from a frontier, messages from a voyage of discovery or self-discovery. There is nothing new attempted in a photographic style that was constructed in the 1930s when the message was newly understood, differently embedded. I am quoting words and images both.*³⁸⁵

As David Hopkins has observed, “In *The Bowery* Rosler posed a question that was paradigmatic for a subsequent generation of artists. But she also closed down on representation in a way that equated with the social nullity of her subjects.”³⁸⁶ To make use of another drinking analogy, it can be argued that the tramps are, quite literally, ‘gone’ from the start; they remain objectified by the

³⁸³ Rosler, M (2004) Op Cit p194

³⁸⁴ Ibid

³⁸⁵ Ibid p195

³⁸⁶ Hopkins D (2003) ‘Out of it’: drunkenness and ethics in Martha Rosler and Gillian Wearing. *Art History*, 26: 340–363. doi: 10.1111/j.0141-6790.2003.02603002.x (p342)

debris of their bottled vices which is juxtaposed with the fluctuating architecture of finance as it appears in the built environment. We are left, through such prompts to *imagine* this Bowery life. In this sense, it can be argued that Rosler's photographs do not necessarily challenge pre-existing stereotypes of drunks and homelessness but might instead work to reinforce them; their *invisibility* is now twice asserted by the photographer (first in the social world and secondly in the regime of the image). Rosler does not necessarily offer an alternative way of understanding homelessness or drunks, but by breaking from ideas of identification and empathy she aims to "put a premium on the *active consciousness* of the viewer."³⁸⁷

Hopkins has commented, "If the tramp or bum was in danger of becoming too auratic, Rosler got rid of him or her, leaving only the context, the detail. In a sense, *we* must inhabit the pictorial space."³⁸⁸ Hopkins argues that Rosler's work rendered images of lowlife and alcoholism problematic and hence they have tended simply to disappear.³⁸⁹ Edwards has challenged Hopkins as presenting a misreading of Rosler. Rather than the presentation of a closure, or terminus around the image of the 'victim,' Edwards maintains that absence itself is a vehicle through which the presence of the drunk remains central to Rosler's artistic consciousness, as a presence that is in turn both complex and troubling.³⁹⁰ According to Edwards:

Consciousness is here a crossroads for intersubjective dynamics of identification and disidentification, gesturing to a possible fullness of social experience and a regained unity between the sign and our shared world. In this it can be said to be an allegory[...] *The Bowery* calls on its

³⁸⁷ Edwards, S (2012) op cit p95

³⁸⁸ Hopkins, D. (2003), Op Cit (p342)

³⁸⁹ *ibid*

³⁹⁰ Edwards, S (2012) op cit p122

viewers/readers to turn outward while reflecting on their place in a re-imagined collective.³⁹¹

Still, Hopkins has argued that in Rosler's work, 'we', as viewers/readers must *inhabit* the pictorial space which does not necessarily ignore or preclude attending to the idea of both individual and collective self-reflection outlined by Edwards above. What can be said, with Hopkins, is that via the complexities by which Rosler has now herself become appropriated by an institutionalised 'scholarly culture', for better or worse, the reification of her *emergent* and *contingent* position has nonetheless presented certain theoretical and practical ramifications for later photographers. This is particularly although not exclusively relevant to those photographers aiming to work within a dynamic institutional production of 'art'. Contemporary photographers who intentionally work to produce 'art' operate within and against an increasingly complex history of photography that acknowledges the diverse social and ideological uses of the medium. In this sense, Bourdieu makes an important point by illuminating the continuity between artists and the communities who contribute to their consecration. Bourdieu notes that, in an increasing division of labour, each new definition of 'the artist' and of 'artistic work' brings the artist's work ever closer to that of the intellectual which simultaneously makes it more dependent on intellectual commentary. In turn, these commentaries, whether they are from critics, 'fellow travellers' or the leaders of a 'school' contribute to the production of work that is always part of its own commentary. In turn these commentaries contribute to the production of historical time itself. Through this, the artist does not only produce artistic work, but she also *works on herself as an artist*.³⁹²

³⁹¹ *ibid*

³⁹² Bourdieu, P (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production* London, Polity Press p109

Edwards' disagreement with Hopkins' reading of Rosler might be more realistically directed at the choice of artists that Hopkins sees as critically re-introducing and engaging with the socially, as much as the visually abandoned figure of the drunk within their own cultural fields of vision. Edwards suggests "the impasse" that Hopkins argues was generated by Rosler might be alternatively described as a "political retreat."³⁹³

Confronted with the neoliberal offensive they, along with so many others, turned away from the pressing political questions confronted during the 1970s. (There is no need to be puritanical, but bohemian tom-foolery does not circumvent the political problem.)³⁹⁴

This internal argument over the aesthetics, ethics and politics of representation is in itself not new, or even 'news'; nor is it an argument isolated within the discipline of art history. Nonetheless, it offers a useful reminder of the struggles that take place across the field of cultural production and its legitimate or 'ideal' forms.

Rosler's critique focused on the museum as institution and its power to appropriate and define art as a purely and disinterested aesthetic endeavour. It is limited in its focus on America, and to New York's MoMA in particular. There were a number of projects taking place beyond its realm, which she does not reflect on. This is despite the fact that, by Rosler's own admission, the 1960s and 70s were rich in artist-run alternative spaces. Edwards has noted the absence of attention to "Latin American Cinema, New German Cinema, neo-realism and even British sitcoms."³⁹⁵

³⁹³ Edwards, S (2012) op cit p11

³⁹⁴ ibid

³⁹⁵ Edwards, S (2012) op cit p100

Outside Rosler's institutional critique of 'art', but not unconnected to it, the work of Douglas Harper can also be noted.³⁹⁶ Harper, who was working almost contemporaneously with Rosler, seems to have found a combination of visual and narrative strategy that is close to documentary work. This offers a different view of tramp life without excluding the characters themselves. Harper shares Rosler's concerns with the power of representation and the photographer's authority to speak on behalf of another. As with Rosler, he has an imperfect and at times, an ignoble anthropological visual history to draw from.

Harper has been instrumental in the development of visual sociology as a distinctive methodology. As a student, he undertook a photographic ethnography of tramp life in America. Drawing from Robert Park's *Chicago School* of sociology and the subsequent community studies that resulted from this, his work involved lengthy, sometimes risky, participant observation in order to focus on the experiences of the tramps themselves and to demonstrate that 'the bum' had a distinctive culture of his own. This culture was expressed through long interviews with those who participated in it, and who *actively* rejected ownership and private property. It was complete with its own internal language system that served a hierarchy of homelessness and the adoption of specific behavioural codes necessary to survive there.

Harper's images and text do make visible all that according to Rosler, 'the buried text of photographs of drunks' rarely contains. He photographs tramps cooking, fighting, washing, working, drinking, grooming and riding the railcars. In this work, Harper emphasises their contradictory role as social 'outsiders' and their role in a migrant labour force that was inside and moreover *essential* to the American economy at that time. While Rosler can be applauded for her

³⁹⁶ Harper D (2006) *Good Company; A Tramp Life* London Paradigm Publishers

institutional critique of ‘art’ she neglected other combinations of written and visual critique.³⁹⁷

That we see ‘tramps’ grooming in Harper’s photographs is important - refuting common notions that these men do not take care of themselves or share in conventional standards of decorum: “When we see these men with a two-day growth of beard we should realise that means they shaved two days ago.”³⁹⁸ As such, the images and text work to challenge preconceptions of tramp life. In the end, Harper’s ‘bums’ are not “people who have little reason to believe in themselves” as Rosler argued most photographic work in the Bowery suggested. Harper’s work does not exploit its participants nor does it constitute Solomon-Godeau’s ‘double subjugation’. Harper respects, and more importantly, in the experience of what was a *collaborative* encounter he *earns* the respect of his subjects; as such he documents their independence and marginalisation as a specific way of life, “appreciating forms of deviance conventional citizens ordinarily condemned.”³⁹⁹ Through the combination of two highly adequate descriptive systems of words and images, Harper offers his ‘good company’ both human agency and empowerment.

In the following chapter I will respond to Rosler’s critique of documentary photography and the form that this takes. In particular, I want to explore her position on the tyranny of ‘authorship’; I will argue that her use of contradiction as a strategy presents its own problems. As Bourdieu and Williams both explored, the interior self is socially formed, but not always determined. Gioconda Belli elegantly expresses this point:

The Revolution absolutely does not deny the interior world of a person.
The collectivity is formed of individuals, every one of them with an

³⁹⁷ Rosler eventually acknowledges the merits of this type of visual sociology as a footnote in her Afterword in the republished and new edition of *3 Works* (2006) although she does not name Harper.

³⁹⁸ Becker, H (2007) *Telling About Society*; The University Of Chicago Press (200)

³⁹⁹ Ibid

interior world.....By the same token no one's interior world arises out of nothing; it is a product of one's social existence and, of course, it cannot be said that it only has meaning for the individual.⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ Giocondo Belli, On Revolutionary Aesthetics; cited in Parada, P; *C/Overt Ideologies* in Bolton, R (ed) *The Contest of Meaning* (1993) MIT Press, p243

5: *Reframing Martha Rosler: Lives told and Stories lived.*

The social, historical and cultural specificity of Rosler's work is often neglected and her essay and images on the Bowery continue to be cited as a source towards thinking for and against the possibilities engendered and endangered by the idea of 'documentary photography'. The images and the essay have taken on the aura of a 'definitive account' of Rosler's position on documentary photography. This has now come to have a life of its own within an established canon of photographic discourse and practice. As Rosler reflexively noted, "Quotes, like photos, float loose from their framing discourses, are absorbed into the embracing matrix of affirmative culture."⁴⁰¹ That the essay noted above has to an extent come to represent Rosler, is misleading and in this sense evidences both the value and the limitations of the essay form as much as her overall strategy; this is rooted around the idea of contradiction in her practise as a visual artist and as a writer. Rosler claims that:

One can provide a critical dimension and invoke matters of truth by referring explicitly to the ideological confusions that naturalism can only falsify through omission. A character who speaks in contradictions or who fails to manage the socially necessary sequence of behaviours can eloquently index the unresolvable social contradictions – starvation in the midst of plenty, gourmetism as a form of imperialism, rampant inflation and impoverishment alongside bounding corporate profits – that underlie ideological confusion, and make them stand out clearly.⁴⁰²

Clearly the illumination of contradiction is important but as Williams argued, there are *nameable* agencies of power and control which 'contradiction' alone

⁴⁰¹ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p137

⁴⁰² *Ibid* p7

does not do. Williams did not accept that the social contradictions outlined by Rosler were, in the final reckoning, ‘unresolvable.’ Moreover, this pessimistic discourse can be identified as an aspect of mystification and ‘disinformation’:

It is not some unavoidable real world with its laws of economy and law of war that is now blocking us. It is a set of identifiable processes of *realpolitik* and *force majeure*, of nameable agencies of power and capital, distraction and disinformation; and all these interlocking with the embedded short term pressures and the interwoven subordination of an adaptive commonsense. It is not in staring at these blocks that there is any chance of movement past them. They have been named so often that they are not even, for most people, news; the dynamic movement is elsewhere, in the difficult business of gaining confidence in *our own* energies and capacities.⁴⁰³

Yet Rosler’s seminal essay has become ‘reified’ and as with the early essays of Susan Sontag, which I shall return to, now occupies a position as a timeless oppositional narrative which at times simplistically applies progressive politics to the ‘aesthetic of refusal.’ Through this refusal the aesthetics, ethics and politics of photography continue to be read and reproduced. Eagleton puts it that:

There is nothing inherently political; about singing a Brechtian love song, staging an exhibition of African-American art or declaring oneself a lesbian. These things are not innately and eternally political; they become so only under specific historical positions, usually of an unpleasant kind. They become political only when they are caught up in

⁴⁰³ Williams R (1985) *Towards 2000* Harmondsworth Penguin p268

matters of domination and resistance – when these otherwise innocuous matters are turned for one reason or another into terrains of struggle.⁴⁰⁴

Both Rosler and Sontag are treated almost as though they are offering a transcendent *theory* of photography and its effects rather than considered, specific and, for them, *timely* interruptions. In fairness, I doubt this was their intention. Bourdieu argued that there is a need to examine the part played by language in the construction of social reality. To this extent “a theory of ‘the theory effect’ which, by helping to impose a more or less authorised way of seeing the world helps to construct the reality of that world” is required.⁴⁰⁵ It can be acknowledged that the ‘aesthetics’ as much as the ‘politics’ of refusal are complex. Bourdieu noted that the commitment to symbolic transgression can be combined with political neutrality *or* revolutionary aestheticism to offer the perfect antithesis of petit-bourgeois moralism – or what Sartre termed the “revolutionary’s seriousness.”⁴⁰⁶ In this sense, the aesthetics of refusal lead to refusals of refusals, double refusals and so on. These are, in different contexts both politically progressive and repressive. As Bourdieu argued, aesthetic displacements are only *apparent* displacements since the whole series of previous artistic acts remain practically present in the latest; “in the same way that the six digits dialled on the telephone are contained in the seventh.”⁴⁰⁷ The aesthetic act is however irreducible to any other act in the series since “the series itself tends towards uniqueness and irreversibility.”⁴⁰⁸ This point is made clear when Rosler’s own trajectory into the art world is explored, inviting reflection on the changing positions, and dispositions taken within the objective relations in the field of cultural production. Thus *because* Rosler’s Bowery work offers a considered and specific interruption and despite her stated

⁴⁰⁴ Eagleton, T (2000) *The Idea Of Culture*, Blackwell Publishers pp122-123

⁴⁰⁵ Bourdieu P (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power* Cambridge Polity Press p105

⁴⁰⁶ Bourdieu, P (1992) *Distinction* London Routledge p48

⁴⁰⁷ Bourdieu, P (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production* London, Polity Press p109

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid*

reservations against the reification of the *'auteur'*, Rosler's own subjectivity (and her cultural and educational capital made explicit in a touring installation exhibition of her personal library) is worth exploring in the context of her biography.

Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1943, Rosler gained her BA at Brooklyn College in 1965. She spent the 1970s in California, completing her MFA in 1974 at the University of California, San Diego. Here, Rosler came into contact with Sekula and Londidier, but she was also exposed to what Edwards has termed as "an intellectual powerhouse."⁴⁰⁹ Visiting staff included Jean-Luc Godard, Stanley Aronowitz, Erwing Goffman and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Herbert Marcuse taught philosophy and Frederic Jameson taught literature. San Diego was also a central site of the US military complex and the university received substantial Pentagon research funding. As a result, the university became a major site for anti-war student protest.⁴¹⁰ Rosler has reflected that this environment fostered an oppositional stance towards modern technological and institutional power. It was also instrumental in generating an artistically rich 'alternative-space' movement in the 1960s and 70s.⁴¹¹

Rosler's 'aesthetic, political and ethical practice' celebrated by the Guggenheim award, is then underpinned by extensive reading and a firm grasp of cultural theory and criticism. Rosler's work is based in a theoretical position that aimed to disturb and disrupt the politics of 'realism' and 'naturalism.' Aesthetic realism for Rosler is understood as offering a normative, 'natural attitude' to reality through a homogeneous and non-contradictory narrative in which emotional and ethical dilemmas are always given resolution.⁴¹² For Edwards

⁴⁰⁹ Edwards, S (2012) *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* MIT Press p66

⁴¹⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹¹ Rosler (2004) *op cit* p352

⁴¹² Edwards, S (2012) *Martha Rosler: The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*; Afterall Books, London (p95)

resolution is consciously avoided in Rosler's *Bowery* by its tension and a contradictory, anti-'humanist' approach to humanism.⁴¹³

As noted above, the formation of Rosler's educational and cultural capital has now become an artistic installation project in itself. Rosler's personal library has recently been touring a variety of spaces as an 'interactive exhibition': books, unlike other 'objets d'art' can be, and moreover are *permitted* to be handled. Rosler's library bears witness to an extraordinarily rich literary background. "The contents range from political theory, art history and poetry to science fiction, mystery and children's books; they include periodicals, dictionaries, maps and travel books, as well as photo albums, posters, post cards and newspaper clippings."⁴¹⁴ Almost 8000 books have travelled round America and across Europe, from store front venues in New York, to galleries in Berlin and Edinburgh.

It is also a locus of contradictions; it can be argued that examining the sources of thought and ideas in an artist's work can undermine concepts of *auteurship* by revealing the collective and cumulative social base of knowledge and cultural production. Yet Rosler's library, (a reading room rather than an active, working lending source) where private ownership is made clear by its name and temporary accessibility, is ultimately exhibited as a privileged point of access to the personal and private sphere of the individual artist, "*her* way of acquiring and combining knowledge."⁴¹⁵ The library comes to function as a self-portrait that is "the perfect embodiment of *her radical vision*" formed and found in an "archive of the marginalised American Left."⁴¹⁶ In the library exhibition, the troubled concept of 'originality' and the social construction of knowledge and acquired subjectivity are articulated.

⁴¹³ Ibid p99

⁴¹⁴ www.eflux.com

⁴¹⁵ Jonathan Jones www.theguardian.com - my emphasis

⁴¹⁶ Ibid – my emphasis

The exhibition can be usefully seen through the lens of her essay *Notes on Quotes*. In this essay, Rosler offered a firm critique of post modernism as being mannerism and style rather than a political philosophy. She sets her sights on those photographers (typically with art school educations) who constantly seek out new ‘looks’ for their work in a bid to enter the art historical canon brought about in no small measure by the “omnivorous” commodification of photography. Painting, drawing, conceptual art diagrams, advertising and all sorts of other photos are appropriated and quoted, “generally as a tactic of upward mobility, embracing the authority of the source and avoiding *socially* critical practice.”⁴¹⁷ Rosler indicates works which make use of the language of advertising for example that leaves the system of advertising un-criticised, intact and moreover such work “reproduces their power-seeking and anxiety-provoking gambits far too well.”

This *type* of work, although she does not name names, is argued as being “locked in fascination to its own material.”⁴¹⁸ As readers, we are left to infer who she has in mind and must instead absorb ourselves with intellectual guessing games. It would be unfair to accuse Rosler of being locked in fascination to her own material, however her comments do raise questions about the representational strategy of *Martha Rosler Library*.

According to E-Flux⁴¹⁹ who initiated the exhibition, “Given the *uncommon* diversity of her interests and influences, and their significance in the production of critical positions, *we deemed it relevant* to open her familiar – and often obscure – sources to readers.”⁴²⁰ Here Rosler is positioned as a rare breed of artist – perhaps even as an object of connoisseurship?

⁴¹⁷ Ibid p138

⁴¹⁸ Ibid p141

⁴¹⁹ an entrepreneurial business self described as a “long term artists’ initiative” that nonetheless has become a profitable art information distribution company

⁴²⁰ www.eflux.com (my emphasis)

For an artist who once refused to sign or date her works, seeing this as “the commoditisation of the artist” *Martha Rosler Library* – especially when spelled out in pink neon lettering (as it was in Berlin) – retains more than a curious hint of a ‘brand name’ behind it.

This contradiction where high art meets high street, can, it would seem by other authored statements, be “safely assumed to be ironic”. *Martha Rosler Library* is not a library which has made itself available as either an anonymous or named annex to public or even university libraries – although it has been displayed in university settings. It is an exhibition that is fundamentally ‘about’ Martha Rosler in a way that, for example, the emergence of the Warburg Library is not ‘about’ Warburg *directly* although it represents something significant of his life. The *Martha Rosler Library* collection is currently undergoing an extensive cataloguing process which can be accessed via the E-Flux website.

Although it occupies ambiguous ground, Rosler’s library exhibition does raise critical questions about the role and nature of ‘authorship’ and the importance of its continuing treatment as a feature within academic study and research. This is not to argue for the reification of every subjective position whereby one account is equally as good as another. It is undoubtedly a critical and evaluative task.

This evaluative task can work to facilitate the identification of a dominant culture but equally allows for an understanding of the impact of that culture upon an individual and the extent to which he or she might be shaped and directed by it. The concept of the individual was, for Raymond Williams, a liberating concept “to be set against an idea of society which controlled and directed people’s lives from above”. Yet the individual had come to be seen in restrictive terms, “the individualism of selfishness and indifference to others”. In this sense ‘the individual’ demanded to be rescued “so that it can be seen as connecting with others in an affirmative, unselfish way,” but so too, “does the

concept of society have to be reviewed in relation to its democratic possibilities.”⁴²¹ Simmel understood this as being an elemental feature of the human condition; “in the immediate as well as the symbolic sense, in the corporeal as well as the spiritual sense, we are at any moment those who separate the connected or connect the separate.”⁴²²

Ambiguity and Ambivalence

I want to indicate further the sense of ambiguity and ambivalence which is evoked through a wider reading of Rosler’s literary and visual work, beyond the singular text discussed above and its images which, as already noted, have come to an extent to represent Rosler. This task is greatly helped by a recent publication of her collected essays. Rather than offering any clarity of vision, Rosler’s collected work can instead serve to deprive the viewer/reader of a foothold, or fixity of gaze that can be directly grasped. Rosler’s work on the one hand is eclectic; it is reflexive, complex, difficult, and multi layered in its approach; yet on the other hand, through its reliance on contradiction it can paradoxically appear to be not reflexive enough.

But if there was a third hand to be had, Rosler is well aware of this. The use of the essay form, in the context of her collected writings works to objectify Rosler’s resistance to “modernist presuppositions of transcendence.” In the late 1960s Michael Fried argued against the abandonment of these presuppositions which could be supplanted only by presence (and temporality) – by what he

⁴²¹ Eldridge J and Eldridge L (1994) *Raymond Williams: Making Connections*; Routledge p82

⁴²² Kemple T (2009) ‘*Sub species aeternitatis*’: *The Socio-Aesthetics of snapshots from Georg Simmel to Jeff Wall*; SocioAesthetics; A Symposium on aesthetics, culture and social life Aug 23-25 2009 p3 <http://socioaesthetics.ku.dk?speakers/kemple> (last accessed 22/06/2014)

called “theatricality.” Rosler states: “It seemed to me he was right, but on the wrong side of the question.”⁴²³

Reading the collected essays as whole offers an insight into Rosler’s ‘situationalist’ presence in the world and her desire for “an imaginary space where different tales collided.”⁴²⁴ Her own collision of different tales is a clear illustration of the essay as the equivalent of a mind in rumination. At times, Rosler’s writing contains frustrating slippages into a post-modern rhetoric of ‘difference’ and ‘the other,’ implicitly undermining the idea that substantive social change is possible – even though by Rosler’s own admission, it is desirable. Elsewhere, Rosler produces her own stark critique of identity politics and its fragmenting and ultimately xenophobic consequences – and particularly in terms of its disruption of class politics. While she has criticised what she sees as an exploitative power relationship that is played out in the representation of ‘the other’ she has also used her position as an artist (and more so as her prominence has risen within both academia and the ‘art world’) to collaborate with and to champion people and causes which might otherwise remain marginal to full public discourse.

In an interview with the New York Times⁴²⁵ Rosler comments on her emergence in the ‘art world’:

What I didn’t realise was the efficiency with which a gallery could actually convert me into somebody people paid attention to in the larger art world.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Rosler M (2004) op cit p353

⁴²⁴ Ibid

⁴²⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/arts/design/07kino.html?pagewanted=all>

⁴²⁶ Ibid

This seems a little bit disingenuous in light of her considered institutional critique of art and the art world's ability to produce a 'star-system'. But Rosler adds that;

I'm mindful that the gallery system is a commodity exchange system, but my practise reaches in so many different ways outside the art world that I don't feel bad about that. I realised that if I made political work that was shown in galleries, it would wind up in mass newspapers and magazines. And it did.⁴²⁷

Yet just two decades before this, Rosler felt a little differently about the New York Times; "That bellwether of fashionable ideological conceits" whose readership was scathingly described as representing the "ascendant class fractions."⁴²⁸ Either something has changed in the industrial, social and cultural relations between 'art' and its subsequent dissemination or else Rosler herself has become a victim of an objective system; the subject and object of her own critique.

Rosler, as noted, has demonstrated a commitment to making works of challenging social critique. However, I am hesitant about her strategies which, through a base in contradiction simply reproduce more contradictions (some more 'eloquently indexed' than others) and remain unresolved. Of course, the resolution of the 'realist' text was antithetical to Rosler, so although she asks some difficult questions, there are certainly no easy answers from Rosler. She has acknowledged this in an interview with Jane Weinstock for the journal *October*, arguing that that hers is an interruptive discourse in which contradiction is a strategy in itself:

⁴²⁷ Ibid

⁴²⁸ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p187

I'm aware of the contradictions and I tend to assume the audience is too. That's part of my irony, asserting something yet knowing I haven't set up sufficient grounds for the assertion.⁴²⁹

It is interesting to read that Rosler feels she can 'assume' the responses of her audiences, and that they will necessarily 'get' her irony in terms of its preferred reading. Rosler knows also that "Irony, however, is not universally accessible, for the audience must *know* enough to recognise what is at stake."⁴³⁰

Furthermore, "In high culture, the pervasive irony toward cultural production is well understood as connected to a developed critique of social structure or of the conditions of human existence."⁴³¹

Rosler has stated that she sees everything as being a text of some sort. At the same time she is reluctant to accept the manner in which a pre-occupation with discourse has tended to function:

It academicises questions of everyday life, of meaning, of interaction, and social change. It fetishizes theory, and creates a relation to an audience that I don't want. When I say that I want audiences to think, it's true. But I don't want them to think about action. [...] I'm not crazy about the varieties of Freudo-Marxism now current, and I still want my work to be accessible, to avoid sliding into *recherché* theorizing that general audiences won't get.⁴³²

Given her views and extensive use of irony as social critique it is difficult to clarify how Rosler's photographic work is directed at anything other than an academic audience and thus how it challenges the maintenance of the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture that she fights against. Rosler has

⁴²⁹ Weinstock J (1981) Interview with Martha Rosler; *October* Volume 17, Summer 1981 MIT Press p95

⁴³⁰ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p136

⁴³¹ *Ibid* p137

⁴³² Weinstock J (1981) Interview with Martha Rosler; *October* Volume 17, Summer 1981 MIT Press p90

produced some erudite writing on the nature of audiences and their differential make-up. This begins from an awareness of the social production of art and the rejection of the artist as an ‘isolated genius’. To this effect, although less nuanced, Rosler has something in common with Howard Becker and the *total* division of labour necessarily required for the production of art— of makers, dealers, curators, theorists, critics, art historians, purchasers for example.⁴³³

Rejecting also the idea of art as a human universal, Rosler writes that “high art is patently wedded to big money and ‘upper class’ life in general.”⁴³⁴ Drawing from the work of John Berger and Pierre Bourdieu, Rosler makes use of empirical data to demonstrate a correlation between education, income, occupation and attitude towards the ownership of ‘high culture’. She argues that the art world audience is “limited to definable segments of the educated bourgeoisie”, usefully acknowledging the intimidation and exclusion often felt by working class audiences. As she notes (again with Bourdieu) the social value of ‘high art’ is dependent on “the existence of a distinction between high and low culture”, a distinction which is itself indebted to restricted access to complexly acquired attitudes.

Embedded in Rosler’s account is a consideration of the art world’s (and especially the art museum’s) ability to act as the ‘institutional gate-keepers’ that neutralise the political links of solidarity between artists and working class or other revolutionary groups. All traces of oppositional culture are deflected by a historical focus on aesthetic and formal concerns instead of the formative influences of larger society. Exceptions to this apparently arise when it comes to the display of Rosler’s own work. Rosler argues that:

A good proportion of artists typically aim to make their work in the thick of things, but institutional gatekeepers try to manage the political

⁴³³ Becker H (1982) *Art Worlds*; University of California Press

⁴³⁴ Rosler M (2004) op cit p12

dimension of art, blunting artists' partisanship into a universalised discourse of humanistic ideals and individualised expression. Virtually all avant-gardes and art-world insurgencies, from Constructivism to Dada to Abstract Expressionism and beyond, have suffered this reinterpretation.⁴³⁵

The political is understood to be contaminating to the concept of art as a contemplative and bourgeois activity. More auspiciously, recognising political agitation may deter any would-be corporate sponsors. This in turn is seen to create an effective economic base determining the cultural superstructure by selecting what work can or cannot enter the public arena, as well as setting the manner for its reception. Clearly, Rosler does not see E-Flux in this light despite their evident prestige and power; it appears that the free-market politics of neo-liberalism and its dismantling of a public sphere, which are often so delicately critiqued by Rosler, have not necessarily been unkind to the art world, nor to Rosler's position within it.

The problematic nature of both the 'vulgar' Marxist analysis of the ideological relationship between base and superstructure and an 'institutional critique' of art which Rosler calls forth can be further examined with reference to Rosler's own narrative account of the 'life stories' surrounding her photo-collage series *Bringing the war back home :House Beautiful*.(1967-72)

This series of works, which attempted to communicate the discrepancies of the reality of warfare and its mass representation – in this case in terms of the news media's representation of American involvement in Vietnam and the ability of television to bring war into the home as if it were part of the wallpaper. Rosler's

⁴³⁵ Rosler, M., (2004) Out of the vox: Martha Rosler on art's activist potential; *Artforum International*, Sept. 1st, 2004. www.thefreelibrary.com (August 2010)

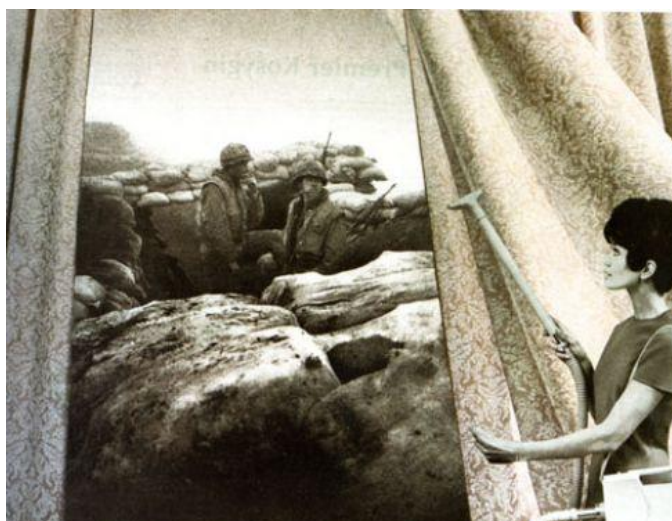
collages were not conceived of for an ‘art world’ audience, in fact, Rosler intimates that they were not conceived of as ‘art’ at all:

At the time it seemed imperative not to show these works – particularly the anti-war montages – in an art context. To show anti-war agitation in such a setting verged on the obscene, for its site seemed more properly “the street” or the underground press, where such material could help marshal the troops, and that is where they appeared.⁴³⁶

Rosler’s montages play with a variety of mass produced photographs. Images of the casualties and combatants of the war by noted war photographers are pasted alongside other magazine images that defined an idealised middle class life at home in order to produce a readable, coherent space:

I was trying to show that the ‘here’ and the ‘there’ of our world picture, defined by our naturalized accounts as separate or even opposite, were one.⁴³⁷

They do this with much success. The title of the work plays on the then current appeals to literally ‘bring the war home’ and put an end to US presence in Vietnam.



⁴³⁶ Rosler M (2004) op cit p355

⁴³⁷ ibid

Twenty years after their making, Rosler was approached by an art dealer who suggested producing a portfolio of the anti-war montages. The decision, Rosler notes, was difficult “after an allegiance to my own long-standing refusal to take part in the financial dealings of the art world.”⁴³⁸ But nonetheless, in a bid to retain a record of her work as a document and in order to present work that was “a political response to political circumstances”, Rosler agreed. This was in part because ‘the art world’ had altered greatly by the late 1980s which now operated as a flow within the nexus of gallery-museum-magazine and in which “the commodification of the art object- to which a good portion of artist’s energies had been devoted to fighting in the late 1960s and through the 1970s – was complete.”⁴³⁹

Rosler presents herself in a defeatist but still strategic mode, lamenting that without *art world* recognition there would be little chance of magazine attention. Rosler notes that the work “could only be written about after entering the art world as a commodity.”⁴⁴⁰

Rosler’s war montages played critically on the role of technology in the formation of gender identity; women are armed with vacuum cleaners whilst their male counterparts tote very different kinds of trouble-shooters and ‘cleansing equipment’. This is then a heroic report from a feminised and feminist domestic frontier; of mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and nieces, all waiting at home, refracting the gendered structure of the society in which she lived and the masculinity of front line military action as much as the dominance of male photo-journalists active in the war zone historically and at that time.

⁴³⁸ Ibid p355

⁴³⁹ Ibid p356

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid p357

There have been significant exceptions to this, in visual and literal roles such as Margaret Bourke-White and Martha Gelhorn, but women were nonetheless, and remain to this day as being exceptions rather than the rule. Rosler portrays and betrays a thematic tribute, perhaps unwittingly, to the works of earlier women artists such as Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt. Janet Wolff has described these artists as exemplars of a *would-be* 'Flâneuse' arguing that in their paintings the gendered barriers, which prevented them from full access to the public spaces of urban life, are clearly seen by virtue of windows, balconies and otherwise enclosed interior settings that circumscribe their paintings.⁴⁴¹

As with Cassatt and Morisot, Rosler successfully participates in and challenges those boundaries, suggesting that direct and critical involvement in warfare does not always or necessarily imply being publically present at the battlefield. She questions a wider 'social harm' that the dominant representation of war engenders and the potential of an oblique participation by an already gendered agency that refuses to be subordinate in assessing this. They are as much about the war at home even as they go beyond it.

Rosler has remained critical of a kind of 'masculinity' evoked by notions of heroism and bravery. She saw this in the Workers' Photo League as a macho posturing where "the brave photographer battled on behalf of society's victims."⁴⁴² She also associated this with conflict photographers such as David Burnett, Robert Capa or Don McCullin and more so when photo-journalism treads its "well worn path" to art photography:

War photography oscillates between the ideological poles of gore for gore's sake and exaggerated compassion, in which the anguish and heroism of the photographer command most attention.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ Wolff J (1995) *Feminine Sentences*; Polity Press pp34-47

⁴⁴² Edwards op cit p82

⁴⁴³ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p251

Rosler points to an article in the magazine *American Photographer* about Burnett's photographs of Chile taken in 1973 at the infamous stadium where people were detained and shot. The 1979 article contains an interview with Burnett, discussing the content of the images and his own feelings about them. These are coupled with a contact sheet with an image marked out for printing alongside an enlargement of that image. The interviewer comments on the technological practise of Burnett, his use of colour and black and white film, the types of cameras he used, their efficiency, and how these relate to the variety of the editorial needs of different publications that might publish his work. Finally, added to this is information surrounding Burnett's receipt of the Overseas Press Club's Robert Capa Award "for exceptional courage and bravery".⁴⁴⁴ As a criticism of this article Rosler asks the following questions:

What happened to the man (actually, men) in the photo? The question is inappropriate when the subject is photographs. And photographers. The subject of the article is the photographer. The name of the magazine is *American Photographer*.⁴⁴⁵

Nonetheless, it can be argued that publications like this do at the same time offer a certain transparency, specifically about conditions of production and 'news values.' The question as to where the appropriate setting in which to display documentary or photojournalist images *should* be is one that deserves to be asked. Rosler does not offer any suggestions about this, although as with Sontag she has clear reservations about the display of both documentary and photojournalist work appearing in a gallery setting.

Since Rosler argues that "when 'art' takes centre stage, 'news' is pushed to the sidelines,"⁴⁴⁶ how does she qualify the exhibition of her new set of collages

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid p315

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid p214

which accompanied the exhibition of her Vietnam works in order to protest US involvement in Iraq? If the artistic value of Rosler's work does not deny its political import and contemporary reference points, why is this assumption made about other forms of photographic practice?

Rosler has been forthcoming about her anti-war images discussed above. As noted, these works were originally circulated in pamphlet format and distributed through particular 'sub-cultural' channels which were perceived as the appropriate conduit in order to affect a relationship between maker and user. Since that time, the images have entered the art world. The montages are no longer what they once were since they have been transformed into and given new life as 'art works'. They have been much discussed and exhibited widely and as noted, spurred a new series of work seeking to deal with later conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her original political intentions have been and continue to be discussed because of this and despite this. Rosler has also read enough Bourdieu (according to her library catalogue) to understand the implications of short and long term art production. Rosler's 'feel for the game' is exemplary.

A narrative recourse to the biography of the author and the historical, social and cultural context, or the conditions of production in which Rosler's intentions were formed is unavoidable, perhaps even inevitable, if the political implications of her work are to be fully realised.

As noted above, Rosler points out that propagandist and agitational works, including now her own, are often 'recuperated' by the art museum, highlighting the photographic works from the Farm Security Association as an example of this process. The FSA work had a clear original function as an activity directed towards social and economic change. But, according to Rosler this has now been "readily recovered for art – usually in dismembered form, *auteur* by

auteur”.⁴⁴⁷ This has in turn reinforced a popular conception that confines the artist into a “positive relation to high art, to the socially elite, specialised audience.”⁴⁴⁸

This is a conjecture that is not necessarily supported by historical evidence. The FSA photographs were exhibited in 1938 at The International Photographic Salon, Grand Central Palace, New York. Written responses to the photographs were varied:

“Excellent work. Enlarge the project and take more pictures. Very fine use of public funds.”

“They could be better. Please save our tax money for something more useful.”

“If the newspapers don’t print these – can you get them before the public in some other manner?”

“Every comfortable person who objects to the present Administration’s efforts to help the poor in [the] city or country should be made to look at these splendid photographs until they see daylight.”

“Touched me to the point where I should like to quit everything in order to help these stricken people.”

“These pictures are great. They speak a thousand words to especially enlighten people who have never seen much farm life – and do not believe such conditions can exist.”

“Teach the underprivileged to have fewer children and less misery.”⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Rosler M (2004) op cit p27

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid p25

⁴⁴⁹ Guimond, J (1991) *American Photography and the American Dream*; Chapel Hill London, University of North Carolina Press p100

Such responses indicate that the photographs were received here by users who well understood the intended critical and political function of the works, but did not always accept them, despite the views of the sympathetic photography critics in attendance:

“After the usual diet of the art world – cream puffs, éclairs, and such – the hard bitter reality of these photographs is the tonic the soul needs. They are like a sharp wind, sweeping away the weariness...In them we see the faces of the American people. The American people which lives under the threat of unemployment, hunger and eviction. We see the farmers, the share croppers, the homeless migrant agricultural workers, the children who suffer from malnutrition, the whole families whose homes are part of that dreadful substandard ‘one third of a nation’”

(Elizabeth McCausland)⁴⁵⁰

“These documents told stories and told them with such simple and blunt directness that they made many a citizen wince.”

(Edward Steichen)⁴⁵¹

The FSA photographs circulated in a variety of other media contemporaneously with the exhibition so it is difficult to argue that the public understanding of these images would be subsumed by an aesthetic or ‘artistic’ discourse.

While it may be true that the photographs no longer function in terms of their original conception (and how could they?) it does not follow from this that an

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid p109

⁴⁵¹ Ibid p110

aesthetic reading of the FSA images simply wishes away or denies all other political readings. For the time being it is sufficient to note that Rosler cannot have it both ways – her insistence on the polyvalent quality of the photograph and that a photographer’s intentions are impossible to decipher from an image alone rests uncomfortably with an elitist assumption that viewers will passively accept an accompanying, ‘institutionalised’ narrative without question.

Nonetheless, it is for this reason that Rosler is reflexively aware of, and in theory if not always in practice, she is critical of what she sees to be the ‘complicity’ of ‘the artist’ functioning within the institutionalised art world. This art world exists as a purely commodity based economic system that functions relatively autonomously but nonetheless is a consequence of, participates in and contributes to a wider system of inequality regardless of the original intentions of its participants. However, Rosler denies that there is any conflict within her position that critiques and simultaneously takes part in this system; “It’s like complaining that the air is dirty whilst still breathing it.”⁴⁵²

Rosler has, in light of this, been careful in her selection of audiences. Moreover, as a counterstrategy, Rosler has actively participated in constructing new and specific demographic audiences for her work aiming to make it “accessible to as many people outside the art world audience as I can effectively reach”⁴⁵³ and on the understanding that this process is central to an overtly political and democratic art. Rosler states that:

My work is didactic and expository; it makes an argument. I tend to think of everything as presenting a text of some kind. Yet oddly enough, my work isn’t hortatory. It doesn’t insist on an avenue of action, or say “Do this!” Ultimately it’s more contemplative, in that it does not answer the questions it poses. I don’t often take a firm line.

⁴⁵² Rosler, M: Interview with Christy Lange in *Frieze* issue 95, Nov-Dec, 2005

⁴⁵³ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p8

There are vacillations, changes of direction meant to point to a panoply of ways of thinking about a question, even if they're mostly contiguous points of view. It's not so uni-dimensional and coherent that you can sum it up in a sentence.⁴⁵⁴

This may be so, but this qualification also offers a useful 'get out of jail free' card. As I have explored, the word 'documentary' is anything but self-explanatory. Attempts to define this wide ranging genre will entail potentially endless discussions about its boundaries. Rosler clearly understands the relationship between theory and practice, language and power as a force for social change, but she does this through the creative potential of ambivalence. However, she forgets that ambivalence is a privileged position, marked by its distance from necessity. It is much harder to be ambivalent about starvation when starving.

Aubert suggests that, "as an ostensible social intervention through aesthetic means, documentary has a strong built-in tendency to question its own methods and legitimacy, and its practitioners rehearse constant reappraisals of their means and ends."⁴⁵⁵ While Rosler's practice can be firmly located in the field of art, Rosler's evident re-visioning of documentary, in both words and pictures, retains the interventionism which has come to be associated with social documentary photography.

By exploring Rosler's visual and literary production alongside her biography, it becomes clear that the navigation of material and ideal interests in a capitalist economy is not easy. While the macro structures of politics, economics and technology cannot be ignored it is an equally critical task to explore the micro structures. These are the daily interactions which enable an assessment of the

⁴⁵⁴ Weinstock J (1981) Interview with Martha Rosler; *October* Volume 17, Summer 1981 MIT Press p78

⁴⁵⁵ Aubert D (2009) The Doorstep Portrait: Intrusion and performance in Mainstream American Documentary Photography; *Visual Studies* 24:1 p3

relationship between structure and agency. Rosler was a good diagnostician, but it is nonetheless vital to think collectively about solutions.

In the following chapter I examine the relationship between art and photojournalism. I will expand on Rosler's concerns about photojournalism and its display in the art gallery. Here Rosler has much in common with Susan Sontag. Sontag's writing has, like Rosler's become a major source of reference for later photographers. It is therefore timely to explore and question the persistence of their positions on photography.

6 Photojournalism: Dreadful Things Bring Dreadful Pictures



Roger Fenton (1819-69) *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855) Salted-paper print from wet-collodion negative

“Terrorism is not a war of images even though the image-world is clearly one of its propaganda arenas. Terrorist bombings are real violence causing indescribable mutilations and suffering. They leave scattered and dismembered body parts that are never imaged. In place of the ghastly horror of what even do-it-yourself explosives can do to the body we are offered iconic images of the aftermath through mangled cars, burned-out buses, collapsed buildings. I am interested to ask: what can we bear to see – as well as never see?” Griselda Pollock⁴⁵⁶

“News makes history and is part of it [...] news is not merely a core part of our culture –as important as religion used to be, until the twentieth century. It is also an artistic form that reflects, and for better or worse shapes, that culture to an extent that we do not appreciate, animating our collective experience.” Jean Seaton⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ Costello D and Willson D (Eds) (2008) *The Life and Death of Images*; Tate Publishing p209

⁴⁵⁷ Seaton J (2005) *Carnage and the Media*; Allen Lane Penguin Books p xv

This chapter examines the work of photojournalists as bearing witness. It responds to criticisms that have been levelled at this profession by both Rosler and Sontag, and more recently by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin. I do this through the lens of war photography. As stated at the outset of this thesis, the representation of war offers a context where the politics, ethics and aesthetics of photographic practice become especially strained. Bert Hardy suggested that dreadful things bring dreadful pictures.⁴⁵⁸ By this he meant that in times of war we should expect to see horrific images. Yet images of human carnage are increasingly challenged in terms of their moral uncertainty and political efficacy. Photographers at war are often seen as interlopers whose main interests are economic, vulgarly revolving around selling papers and furthering the ideological and political agendas of editors and publishers.⁴⁵⁹ While images of war's direct consequences on the human body are certainly difficult to deal with, equally troubling is the insistence that representing the other's pain is impossible.

Sontag argued that it seems exploitative to look at news images of pain and suffering in an art gallery. This is not a matter of the graphic nature of violence but instead concerns its reality within the photograph. She discusses instead Jeff Wall's *Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, Winter, 1986)* (1992). Wall deliberately constructs his large scale unique photographs using elaborate studio stage sets, actors and extensive manipulation to nevertheless produce images that 'look real.' Sontag interprets this work as an anti-war image that is exemplary in its thoughtfulness and power. Wall was never in Afghanistan. The scene is his *imagined* version of a real event that had dominated the news. We see slaughtered troops in conversation with each other. The troops are only interested in themselves – they have no interest in the living and do not seek out our gaze. And why should

⁴⁵⁸ Hopkinson, T (1975) *Bert Hardy- Photojournalist*; London, Gordon Fraser Photographic Monographs 5, p10

⁴⁵⁹ Rosler, M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions* October Books p250

they, asks Sontag, for ‘we’ will never get it because we can never understand what they went through. Sontag, who spent time in Yugoslavia during its wars, states:

We truly can’t imagine what it was like. We can’t imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is; how normal it becomes. Can’t understand, can’t imagine. That’s what every soldier and every journalist and aid worker and independent observer who has put in time under fire, and had the luck to elude the death that struck down others nearby, stubbornly feels. And they are right.⁴⁶⁰

It’s a strange ending to an implored treaty in which Sontag rigorously confronts her earlier writings on photography. And yet it isn’t. What she also confronts here is the ways in which her writing has become taken as a ‘platitude,’ an empty truism. Sontag puts it that, “It has become a cliché of cosmopolitan discussions of images of atrocity to assume that they have little effect, and that there is something innately cynical about their diffusion.”⁴⁶¹

Her point is well illustrated by the ideas of Bromberg and Chanarin. Whilst these artists do not offer the type of consistent writing offered by Sontag, they nevertheless appear in the pages of major photographic journals and they exhibit widely in prestigious galleries. Bromberg and Chanarin also give artist talks in a number of educational establishments. So their comments, even though they might appear to be throwaway media remarks should be taken seriously.

Bromberg and Chanarin argue that contemporary photojournalism from the frontlines is fully immersed in the system of conflict, and actively colludes with it. Photojournalists are simply part of the status quo rather than challenging it. Photojournalism is trapped by the notion of the document and endless debates

⁴⁶⁰ Sontag, S (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others* London, Penguin Books p111

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid* p99

about truth and authenticity. This is they confidently argue, “just a bullshit notion” since the argument over what is and isn’t real was over 60 years ago.⁴⁶²

These are indeed dreadful pictures of society. Given that as a species we are extremely capable of imagining and creating some of the most horrific ways for causing and inflicting pain on others, our collective ‘imaginative failure’ seems a difficult notion to support empirically. Neither war nor ‘war crimes’ could exist otherwise. Hooding, beating, rape, gas chambers, electro-shock, water-boarding and stripping are just some examples that suggest our ability to imagine the pain of others is extremely fertile. To evoke the ‘unimaginable’ is a political act; the Cartesian fallacy that all we can be sure of is our own subjectivity operates as a spurious and persistent state of denial.

Pace Broomberg and Chanarin, the argument about truth and authenticity is not over and can still be addressed through the important questions of whose truth, and whose reality? Gen Doy has drawn attention to Appert’s faked photographs of the Paris Communards in 1871 which were accepted as faithful recordings of actual incidents; these both exploited and negated the myth of photographic innocence and the ‘democratisation’ of its status as document. Doy argues that this “worked within limits set by the class who owned it, and was intended to further bourgeois economic and ideological aims.”⁴⁶³

Rosler perceptively argued that the denial of photography’s meaning and rootedness within the stream of daily life has resulted in the preservation of the photograph as object. This process produces, for Rosler, a cultural disjunction; as photography gains its place in the art world, its truth-telling ability and instrumentality will be more regularly attacked and more “explicitly consigned to the uncultured, the naive and the philistine serving to define them further out

⁴⁶² British Journal of Photography, August 2014

⁴⁶³ Doy, G; *The Camera Against the Paris Commune* in Dennett, T and Spence J (eds) *Photography/Politics*:1 (1979) p25

of the audience for art photography.”⁴⁶⁴ Rosler suggested that this process has also relied on continued questioning of the instrumentality of art; she calls attention to Arnold Hauser’s observation on the doctrine of art’s uselessness. For Hauser, this was the result of Bourgeois fear that after the French Revolution, the control of art would be lost.⁴⁶⁵ According to Rosler:

This cultural disjunction, made possible by commodity fetishism, accounts for the desperation with which young photographers snatch at the vulgarism that only lies are art and that the truth of photography is that it is all artful lies, constructions outside the understanding of the common mind.⁴⁶⁶

Neither Rosler nor the early Sontag were impressed by the figure of the photojournalist – and even less so when their productions are brought into the art gallery. Rosler argued that:

The movement from photojournalism to art photography travels a well worn path, but it is a difficult one to negotiate if specific information is not to fall by the wayside. It is especially difficult when the situation is not only recent, but still at issue, for as “art” takes centre stage, “news” is pushed to the margins.⁴⁶⁷

The point is perhaps more polemical rather than empirically grounded. Newhall, Steichen and Szarkowski all brought press images into the art gallery in different ways. As I have discussed with reference to Rosler, the approaches of both Newhall and Szarkowski had many similarities which demanded that the photographic object could ‘speak for itself.’ Steichen’s approach was more controversial. One of his first exhibitions at MoMA in 1947 was *The Exact*

⁴⁶⁴ Rosler p 41

⁴⁶⁵ ibid

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid p42

⁴⁶⁷ Rosler M (2004)*Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p246

Instant and contained more than 300 news photographs. These were mounted, unframed, in thematic groups tacked to the wall, and anchored by reference to their original context. Photographers' names, publications and dates were supplied. Steichen's exhibitions were designed to demonstrate the news photograph's multiple uses rather than raise it to the status of 'art object.' In 1951 Steichen curated an exhibition of *Life* photographic essays and wrote:

Photographic journalism is generally accepted as an authoritative visual source of information about our times. [...] Many of the pictures have an intrinsic value beyond the immediate purpose they have fulfilled. They often manifest new achievements in photography. On occasion they create images that reach into the nebulous and controversial realm of the fine arts.⁴⁶⁸

Steichen's use of the news photograph in MoMA underpins many of the debates that continue to surround the distinctions made between news photography and 'creative' photography. It is clear from his example that 'art' and 'news' are not necessarily the polar opposites implied by Rosler. In fact this dualism has been inherent to news photography since the inception of modern journalism which itself emerged as a product of war.

Consider War

War is a structural issue in which political, economic, cultural and moral values vie for ascendancy. Mills suggests:

Consider war. The personal problem of war, when it occurs, may be how to survive it or how to die in it with honour; how to make money

⁴⁶⁸ Gresh, K; *Edward Steichen at the MoMA*; in Hill, J and Schwartz V (eds) (2015) *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of The News*, London, Bloomsbury p213

out of it; how to climb into the higher safety of the military apparatus; or how to contribute to the war's termination. In short, according to one's values, to find a set of milieu and within it to survive the war or make one's death in it meaningful. But the structural issues of war have to do with its causes; with what types of men it throws up in its command, with its effects upon economic and political, family and religious institutions, with the unorganised irresponsibility of a world of nation states.⁴⁶⁹

In her meditative extended essay "On Violence"⁴⁷⁰ Hannah Arendt noted that "Events, by definition, are occurrences that interrupt routine processes and routine procedures."⁴⁷¹ War as "the continuation of politics by means of violence"⁴⁷² is such an event, but it is also used as both a routine process and procedure. Hariman offers a summary:

Ten years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan has killed 23,000 military personnel and 130,000 civilians, which is far fewer than the one to three million people killed in the Vietnam War.[...]in the half century before that, somewhere around 77 million people were killed by warfare, and millions more were wounded, raped, terrorised or displaced.⁴⁷³

There is a long list of conflicts across the African continent, of civil wars within African states, colonial wars, genocide, Wars of Independence, secessionist and separatist wars is a long one: Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Somalia, Uganda and Zimbabwe are all scarred by one form of war or another. 5.4 million people have been killed in Congo and 800,000 in

⁴⁶⁹ Mills C W (1950) (1967) *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford University Press, New York p9

⁴⁷⁰ Arendt H (1969) *On Violence*; Allen Lane and The Penguin Press p7

⁴⁷¹ Ibid p6

⁴⁷² Ibid

⁴⁷³ Hariman, J; *Watching War Evolve*; in Kennedy L and Patrick C (eds) (2014) *The Violence of the Image*, London I B Taurus p143

Rwanda.⁴⁷⁴ Carnage continues in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Despite the age of a global media that brings real time access to distant places, wars are brought to world attention with varying intensity. Conflicts continue, and often for the West, in relative silence.

Becker has noted that neither capitalism nor the protestant work ethic could be photographed; such things could only be imaged through things or people that are seen to best represent them. Is this also the case for photographing war? If so, how do Rosler's anxieties over secondary victimisation through the camera's lens operate here? As I will discuss, some photographers have turned away from the corporeal destruction of war offering new versions of Rosler's metonymic photography. However, the photographer Christopher Bangert points out that:

It would be too easy, unfair and inaccurate to criticise only the media establishment for not showing war as it really is. We all play apart in censorship: the photographers, the editors and the viewers. Photographs play a part in collective memory. If we leave out certain parts, then no one will remember them in their entirety.⁴⁷⁵

As Bangert's comments make clear, the representation of war and violence are subject to competing ideologies. This chapter is thus also an attempt to respond to Pollock's leading question, "What can we bear to see as well as never see?"

Consider 'violence'

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams asks us to consider *violence*. He points out that the word *violence* is difficult; its use varies in specific ways. In its general meaning of 'physical assault', violence can be easily understood in relation to

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid p142

⁴⁷⁵ Bangert, C in *The British Journal of Photography*, August 2014 p64

“the distant use of weapons or bombs.”⁴⁷⁶ Yet the word seems more often to be used, in practice, for *unauthorised* attacks, as in the violence of ‘terrorism’. In contrast, state sponsored or ‘authorised’ violence is more commonly described as ‘force’ carried out ‘in defence’ and to ‘restore order’ against unruly or threatening behaviour considered to be ungoverned and thus unauthorised. It can be added that more recently, this ‘force’ has been authorised under the rubric of ‘humanitarian intervention’. Williams offers a timely reminder of Weber’s outline of the state’s monopoly of ‘the legitimate means of violence’.⁴⁷⁷

When it comes to concerns about ‘violence in the media’, Williams considers another sense of meaning – this time ‘violence’ commonly refers to violence presented *on* television or *in* printed news but not necessarily *by* the process of mediation itself.⁴⁷⁸ Williams point here is useful; there is both bad ‘*news*’ and ‘*bad*’ news.⁴⁷⁹ As he clarifies, it has been a central intellectual gain to understand that ‘the news’ is a cultural product so that in some senses we have to approach it as if reading a novel. The term *novel* conveyed, until the early 18th century, two meanings: “‘Novelist’ in the eighteenth century, meant a newsmonger as well as a writer of prose fiction.”⁴⁸⁰ Normative ideas about ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ now come to suggest two distinct forms of narrative:

At its most confident, this assigned all novels to ‘fiction’ in the sense that the events had not occurred, but had been imagined or created [...]
Yet the worst effects were at the other end of the scale. The fact that certain events have undoubtedly occurred – have happened to people, have been observed, have been reliably reported, have been tested from

⁴⁷⁶ Williams R (1983) *Keywords*, Glasgow, Fontana pp329-331

⁴⁷⁷ Bauman, Z and May, T (2001) *Thinking Sociologically*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing p135.

⁴⁷⁸ Williams R (1983) *Keywords*, Glasgow, Fontana pp329-331

⁴⁷⁹ Williams, R: *Isn't the news terrible?* In Eldridge, J (ed) (1995) *News Content, Language and Visuals; Glasgow Media Group Reader Vol. 1* London, Routledge pp382-388

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid* p384

the evidence of participants and eye witnesses – has been used to override the fact that as they move from events to news, they are being narrated.⁴⁸¹

As participants, eyewitnesses and contributors to news, photojournalists are also part of this process and are not exempt from the longstanding problems of narration. Raymond Williams summarises these problems as being concerned with the identity of the narrator, her or his authority, their point of view and an assumed relationship with readers and viewers. Finally, there is the question of wider interests and purposes in selecting and representing the event in particular ways.⁴⁸² These points can be given heightened consideration with regard to photojournalism and war. Before addressing photojournalism directly it is useful to review the emergence of the printed press as a form of mass production and communication.

*“A War of Light Against Darkness”*⁴⁸³

Modern journalism in Britain emerged as a product of the English Civil War and the political disruptions that led up to it. The first news books or *corantos* appeared in the early 1620s. They were greeted with hostility as a ‘contemptible trade’ by the educated classes; a “dereliction, a degradation of the proper function of a writer.”⁴⁸⁴ Denunciations of ‘newsmongers’ were common in Jacobean drama. Kevin Williams draws attention to the playwright Ben Jonson who penned *The Staple of Newes* in 1625. This was directed against Nathaniel Butter and Nicholas Bourne who published the first titled news book, *The Weekly Newes*:

⁴⁸¹ ibid

⁴⁸² ibid

⁴⁸³ Stephen Spender, describing the Spanish Civil War, cited in Williams K (1998) *Get Me A Murder A Day!* London, Arnold P111

⁴⁸⁴ Williams K op cit p18

For Jonson, the writer was a teacher. Through his moral fictions he educated society whereas Butter and his ‘dishonest swindlers’ betrayed that function by paying little attention to the truth in order to supply readers with sensational news.⁴⁸⁵

This ‘new art of journalism’ was understood to be a threat against the theatre’s dominant position in mass communication at that time. While journalism was carried out under some significant restrictions, all attempts at censorship collapsed on the eve of the war and from that point the print industry expanded enormously. During the Civil War, the theatres mostly closed; in this process the journalist took centre stage.

As the battle between King and Parliament raged, domestic events began to be more regularly reported, as did ‘comment.’ These were soon accompanied by advertisements, illustrations and even, as Williams notes, an agony column.⁴⁸⁶ But it was ‘war propaganda’ that dominated the pages of the news books, from both Royalists and Parliamentarians. In this context, Milton published his defence of free speech while the Levellers petitioned Parliament to articulate the ideal of a free press. However, when Cromwell finally gained full control in 1655 those news books not sanctioned by him were actively and forcibly suppressed. This did not prevent the spread of information, but instead sent it underground in the form of hand written newsletters which circulated privately. *The London Gazette* dominated the news industry relying on and circulating amongst a number of selected sources – mainly local dignitaries and officials. As Williams suggests, news production was to be limited to ‘the right kind of people.’⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ ibid

⁴⁸⁶ ibid p19

⁴⁸⁷ ibid p21

The Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 did little to change the censorship laws. In 1662, with the introduction of the Printing Act the first Surveyor of the Press was appointed. His disapproval of the wide dissemination of news was apparent:

[...]it makes the multitude too familiar with the actions and counsels of their superiors, too pragmatistical and censorious, and gives them not only an itch but a kind of colourable right and licence to be meddling with the affairs of government.⁴⁸⁸

Kevin Williams offers an important historical overview of the changes that were to take place. As the King's popularity decreased, so too did compliance with the prevailing restrictions. Parliament had retained control over the press and began to doubt some of the regulations that Charles II demanded; the Printing Act was relaxed resulting again in a significant rise in publications. Despite attempts to quash this, the growth of the print industry continued; the system of regulation was no longer able to cope with the sheer amount of printed material and by the beginning of the 18th Century newspapers operated as an open source of commerce.

Unable to control this mass production by either force or regulation, the State's response came through the introduction of taxes and the Stamp Act of 1712. Sales taxes on newspapers saw an increase of almost 800%, effectively restricting publication to those who could afford it. Along with the introduction of libel laws, this changed the content and the form of the press. Williams highlights that the new financial vulnerability of the press made proprietors and journalists open to bribery and official payments.⁴⁸⁹ Through this, the State was able to exert considerable pressure and influence on the press. Nonetheless, the public appetite for news could not be easily suppressed.

⁴⁸⁸ Williams K (1998) *Get Me a Murder a Day!*, London Arnold, p21

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid* p25

The rise of the radical press corresponded with a growth in literacy, the emergence of trade unionism and new working class consciousness built from within. The earliest forms of the radical press refused to pay the stamp duty, or the tax on knowledge, under the banner of “Right Against Might!” This was at some significant risk – proprietors, publishers and those involved in union activity were subject to imprisonment and deportation. In this environment, the use of the magic lantern played an important and subversive role. The occupation of the ‘lanternist’ belonged in the environment of paupers and peasants – they were travelling pedlars and showmen but they were also *carriers of news*. This is artfully documented in Bill Douglas’ film *Comrades* (1987) which tells the story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs whilst simultaneously showing the transformation of the lanternist as news bringer – from shadow plays, through photography and to cinema.

In 1816, William Cobbett identified a loophole in the stamp system – by simply folding a news sheet it was no longer able to be described as a news paper and therefore was exempt from stamp duty. This in turn impacted on readership; Cobbett’s *Political Register* gained sales of up to 50,000 a week although the actual consumption of its contents far exceeded this – collective readings would take place in taverns and coffee houses. Cobbett had a literary talent for ‘plain speaking’ and was a celebrated hero amongst the working classes. The radical press continued as a source for activism for some time. They had success in exposing and contributing to the amelioration of struggles for decent housing, pay and working conditions.

What happened to the radical press? For a start, as Kevin Williams demonstrates, its ‘pauper management’ had to be suppressed. Middle class reformists, in a bid to control press ownership *and* content argued that the best way to do this was to remove taxations altogether – by 1836 advertising taxations, stamp duties and excise duty on paper were all cut back. In this new,

‘free market’ environment publications increased and at the same time effectively diluted and fragmented readership. Advertising became the new and central means for press finance. While the radical press did have strong readership numbers, their readers were not purchasers and there was little reason for commodity producers to advertise wares within their pages. The radical press were faced with either closing down or moving ‘upmarket’ and further limiting their readership to small coteries or ‘political ghettos.’⁴⁹⁰

When *the art* of news production, and mass communication in general, falls increasingly into the hands of a few ‘great capitalists’ there are reasons to be concerned. A cursory glance at Rupert Murdoch’s vast empire that includes newspapers, publishing houses, film corporations and satellite communication suggests this is not a time to be complacent about what is and is not ‘real.’ Instead, this demands exploring the effects of representing the ‘real’ on the democratic process. This was, after all, a central element in Raymond Williams’ idea of the “slow reach again for control” and the long struggle that this involved.

Press Photography: the showmanship of war

War photography is almost as old as the photograph itself. Roger Fenton (1819-69) is widely considered to be the first war photographer. His deployment to the Crimean War was not only an official government public posting but was also a private commercial venture. Gen Doy notes that:

In the days before photojournalism proper, the diffusion and marketability of “news” photographs was uncertain. In addition to his government payments, Fenton had arranged with the dealer Agnew to

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid p47

publish a portfolio of the photographs on completion of the mission. Meantime, public interest was kept alive by Agnew who sold prints to *The Illustrated London News* on the condition that their wood-engravers preserved the character of the photograph and a credit was given to Fenton. At this time, the function of photographs in the illustrated press was limited to the role of the artist's sketch as a similar basis for the production of a wood- engraving to illustrate the report of a special correspondent who provided an "eye-witness" account. The report and the illustration were intended to enhance one another.⁴⁹¹

Whilst it was possible technically to publish photographs in newspapers very few establishments actually did so due to the exorbitant costs of the new machinery required. *The Illustrated London News* was an important paper and especially so for those unable to read. The founder, Herbert Ingram was a news vendor. He noticed that copies of the *Observer* and *Weekly Chronicle* rose substantially when they carried engravings and so he decided to publish a paper that was dedicated to illustrated news.⁴⁹² The process relied on artists to draw events, but the rapid supply of pictures was not practical and in general, the illustrated press relied on 'long term' or 'institutional' subjects such as Queen Victoria's tour of Scotland in 1842.⁴⁹³ In the early context of the illustrated news, artists' engravings were understood to faithfully represent reality in an authentic and objective fashion with the authority of the 'eye witness.'⁴⁹⁴ Ingram's venture proved to be highly successful, rapidly gaining mass

⁴⁹¹ Gen Doy (1979) *The Camera Against the Paris Commune* in *Photography and Politics 1*; Photography Workshop, London p15

⁴⁹² Tucker, J; "Famished for News Pictures": *The Mason Jackson, The Illustrated London News and the Pictorial Spirit* ; in Hill, J and Schwrtz V (eds) (2015) *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of The News*, London, Bloomsbury p213

⁴⁹³ Williams, K op cit p54

⁴⁹⁴ Becker, K E; *Photojournalism and the Tabloid Press* in Dahlgren, P and Sparks, C (2000) *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London Sage. P131

readership, and as Tucker also points out, dramatically altering the way that news was both produced and consumed.⁴⁹⁵

Fenton's presence in the Crimea was in large part a way of countering written reports by *The Times* correspondent W.H. Russell whose despatches had revealed mismanagement, incompetence and corruption. *The Times* began its life in 1785 as part of the 'respectable press' through the award of a Treasury grant that was given in return for its support of the government. It operated within the law, complying with taxes and stamp duty. In exchange, it received government advertisements and the 'official news' of the day. But by 1834, as its fortunes rose, so did its independence. *The Times* regarded its own sourcing of news as being more reliable than government sources and began to reject this 'exclusive information'.⁴⁹⁶ In this context, the 'professional objectivity' of the journalist began to take shape. By the time of the Crimean War the government had become frantic about "the 'vile tyranny' of *The Times* over the conduct of public affairs."⁴⁹⁷

In vain, the military authorities had complained that Russell's despatches were gross caricatures and over-simplifications. The problem was how to expose Russell's mendacity, because even his worst critic allowed that Russell's descriptive powers were of unusual acuity. The solution was not to attempt to match Russell with the written word, but to respond with a new technology then only 15 years old – the photograph – because everyone knew that the camera couldn't lie. Thus it was that, in their first campaign, the war correspondent and the war photographer were on different sides.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Tucker, J op cit p213

⁴⁹⁶ Williams K op cit p33

⁴⁹⁷ ibid

⁴⁹⁸ Anderson D (2005) *Glass Warriors: The Camera at War*; London Collins p2

Fenton's mission was to show the British Army in a favourable light revealing nothing that might support Russell's reports. "His job was to provide visual evidence that the British Government was not mismanaging the war. He was told "No dead bodies" in no uncertain terms."⁴⁹⁹ Fenton followed this through, conscious of his privileged 'embedded' position with the military and feeling morally obliged to uphold his patriotic duties despite noting his own misgivings about mismanagement at Balaclava in his personal correspondence. However, his patriotic duties were not the only aspect shaping his selective vision. Given that his *market* would typically be returning soldiers and their families, Fenton's photographs were also constructed with this in mind. Anderson notes that:

Displayed at photographic exhibitions throughout Britain, and available as postcards and stereoscope images, Fenton's collection was designed as an antidote to Russell's critical despatches. As his correspondence shows, he often engaged in rigorous self-censorship. Popular expectations to the contrary, the camera could, and did, lie.⁵⁰⁰

The camera's truth telling properties are better put by Harold Evans, "The camera cannot lie, but it can be an accessory to untruth."⁵⁰¹ Little wonder that some journalists became sceptical of the presence of photographers. Hardt has commented:

In their search for facts and objectivity, reporters, too, recognised the capabilities of the photograph to depict reality and thus compete against them. This insight may in part, explain their hostility to the introduction of photojournalism. During the 1920s and 1930s, reporters generally considered photographers "the rogues and boors of the business, uncouth, unkempt and uncontrollable." While reporters generally

⁴⁹⁹ Gen Doy (1979) op cit p13

⁵⁰⁰ Anderson D (2005)*Glass Warriors: The Camera at War*; London Collins p14

⁵⁰¹ Evans H (1982)*Pictures on a Page*; London Heinemann LTD; unpaginated introduction

recognised the usefulness of photographs, they often focused on the potential of photographs to “mislead,” “misrepresent,” and “lie”.⁵⁰²

This reputation was damaging but in time, photographers and journalists learned to work together. Bert Hardy for example, who had made his name through magazines like *Picture Post* (1938-1957) was actively sought after by journalists like James Cameron (who accompanied Hardy to Korea) Kenneth Allsop, Ann Scott James, and Sydney Jacobson. *Picture Post* had insisted on the equality of writers and photographers and was celebrated for the consideration it showed the latter.⁵⁰³ *Picture Post* emerged from the activities of the Documentary Movement providing still photographers with a valuable home in the growing demand for moving film, but it was not immune from proprietorial intervention. In Korea, Hardy and Cameron “witnessed, wrote about, and photographed the brutal treatment meted out to North Korean prisoners.”⁵⁰⁴

These activities took place close to the UN headquarters in Seoul. The editor of *Picture Post*, Tom Hopkinson was prepared to publish but he was overruled by the proprietor, Edward Hutton. Hopkinson was sacked.⁵⁰⁵

The changing status of the photographer, as authoritative witness to events, can in part be placed in the context of the Second World War and to the liberation of concentration camps in 1945. Sue Tait argues that the role of the press, and photographs in particular were central in enabling the public “to confront the

⁵⁰² Hardt H and Brennan B (1999) “Newsworld, History and Photographic Evidence: A visual Analysis of the Newsroom in 1930” in *Picturing the Past: Media, History and Photography*; (1999) University of Illinois Press pp11-35 accessed from <http://skylined.org?hardt/tet4.htm>

⁵⁰³ Eldridge J, Kitzinger J and Williams K (1997) *The Mass media and Power in Modern Britain*; Oxford University Press p74

⁵⁰⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid*

evidence of atrocity (through being there or through photographic representation) in order to transform scepticism into belief”⁵⁰⁶:

For the press this meant articulating and responding to its limitations. Journalists expressed their inability to represent what they were experiencing in their stories; words were not sufficient for what they saw, and reporters later told of being too affected by the experience to maintain a position of detachment. Thus photographs of atrocity were run extensively, necessitating the easing of censorship restrictions, and enabling photography to assume a legitimate role within news-making.

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Yet Zelizer has observed that photographic news images after the Holocaust, especially those taken at the time of the liberation of concentration camps, have now become *symbols* of a regime of atrocity instead of retaining their specificity:

Photographs became effective ways of marking Holocaust atrocities by playing less to their effectivity as referential documents of a specific camp, in a specific place and time, and more to their effectivity as symbols in their most generalised and universal level.⁵⁰⁸

Photographs of Nazi concentration camps appeared in different newspaper reports. The same image showing piles of corpses was listed as being both Buchenwald and Ohrdruf: “The caption specifying Buchenwald was wrong but on the level of universality, the wrong information mattered little.”⁵⁰⁹ Captions, such as ‘Hanging!’, ‘Starvation!’ or simply ‘Horror!’ accompanied photographs which had no direct relationship to the accompanying texts were used to

⁵⁰⁶ Tait S (2011) Bearing Witness, Journalism and Moral Responsibility; *Media Culture and Society* 33(8) Sage publications p1226

⁵⁰⁷ ibid

⁵⁰⁸ Zelizer B (1999) *Remembering to Forget* London Blackwell p107

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid

illustrate German War Machinery so that it appeared that the events depicted “could have taken place anywhere in the Third Reich and at anytime under its reign.” Zelizer argues that:

An uneven attentiveness to the details of a given photograph at the time of its original recording has enhanced its status as symbol over time.⁵¹⁰

Hariman points out that during times of war ethical indifference can easily take hold. Events are articulated by standard narratives such as “the defence of the homeland and the march to victory.”⁵¹¹ In his essay written for *The Tribune* (September 8th 1944), George Orwell noted “a truly disgusting photograph” before him. The photograph had appeared in *The Star* the previous week and showed two women with shaven heads and swastikas painted on their faces. They are being paraded through the streets of Paris amongst a crowd of grinning onlookers:

The Star – not that I am picking on *The Star* for most of the press has behaved likewise – reproduces this photograph with seeming approval. I don’t blame the French for doing this kind of thing. They have had four years of suffering, and I can partly imagine how they feel towards collaborators. But it is a different matter when newspapers in this country try to persuade their readers that shaving women’s heads is a nice thing to do. As soon as I saw this photograph, I thought, “Where have I seen this before?” Then I remembered. Just about ten years ago, when the Nazi regime was beginning to get in its stride, very similar pictures of humiliated Jews being led through the streets of German

⁵¹⁰ Ibid p110

⁵¹¹ Hariman, J ; *Watching War Evolve* in Kennedy, L and Patrick C (eds) (2014) *The Violence of the Image*, London I B Taurus p144

cities were exhibited in the British press – but with this difference, that on that occasion we were not expected to approve.⁵¹²

Seeing suffering strategically

The representation of pain is never neutral but is always purposeful as argument and as strategy.⁵¹³ Wars, conflicts and the pain of human suffering have long been the subjects of visual imagery and the stimulus for the production of what comes to be celebrated as ‘great art’. Jean Seaton points out that homo-sapiens are unique as a species in the interest taken in the misfortunes of its own members.⁵¹⁴ Yet, importantly, she notes that this interest can be shown to vary considerably in its intensity. The rise of Christianity brought about a new relationship with suffering although it would take many centuries before scenes of the Crucifixion were depicted. These would also change; from showing Christ in “sublime acceptance of his suffering’ to being “racked in torment.”⁵¹⁵

It would take many more centuries before artists turned their gaze to contemporary events. In the early 19th Century painters such as Baron Gros and Goya are recognised as the first artists to visually bear witness to the wars of their own time. Artists of previous centuries had certainly painted war as a subject, but on the whole, as Hugh Thomas argues, they had dignified it, rarely announcing the depths of depravity in human behaviour. In his depiction of an ordinary, unknown mortal, Goya produced a new language for the atrocity image.⁵¹⁶ Of this painting, Thomas writes:

⁵¹² Orwell, G (1944) *As I Please*; Essays written for *The Tribune* 1944-48; http://orwell.ru/library/articles/As_I_Please/english/eaip_03

⁵¹³ Seaton, J op cit p84

⁵¹⁴ Seaton J (2005) *Carnage and the Media*; Allen Lane Penguin Books p 104

⁵¹⁵ ibid

⁵¹⁶ Thomas, H (1978) *Goya: The Third of May 1808* Art in Context p84

It is a brutal picture. The man in the white shirt is about to be shot. No last minute order countermanding the execution can save him, for the order to fire has evidently been given. This is the moment before the explosion.⁵¹⁷

Thomas might just as easily have been describing Eddie Adams' now iconic photograph, *General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Viet Cong prisoner in Saigon* (1968). Iconic photographs are images which come to be seen as embodying the key characteristics of an age or an era and are dependent on familiarity brought through processes of circulation and reproduction. Often, it is the sense of formal simplicity that renders them as both striking and memorable. Hariman and Lucaites comment on Adams' photograph. Published in the *New York Times* on the 2nd of February 1968, the photograph, and the execution itself "quickly became the rallying point for opposition to the war in Vietnam, and then for revisionary accounts as well."⁵¹⁸ As they point out:

Iconic photos challenge conventional wisdom about the meaning of any photograph. That meaning cannot be reduced to the simple facts of the case at hand or relegated to the photographer's intention or understanding. The facts are neither simple nor self-sufficient, but depend rather on selection, framing, depiction, contextualisation, and imaginative extension in terms of larger narratives. The significance of 'Saigon Execution' was not that it represented or misrepresented an execution, but that it embodied the moral ambiguity of violence that characterised US involvement in the Vietnam War.⁵¹⁹

Photography, as John Berger puts it, is indexical to its subjects as no other medium can be:

⁵¹⁷ Ibid p13

⁵¹⁸ Hariman, R and Lucaites J: *Street Execution of a Viet Cong Prisoner, 1968*; in Hill J and Schwartz V (eds) (2015) *Getting The Picture: The Visual Culture of The News*; London, Bloomsbury p92

⁵¹⁹ Ibid p93

What marks photography as a strange invention – with unforeseeable consequences – is that its primary raw materials are those of light and time.⁵²⁰

This fact imbues the photograph with its appearance of an unmediated, objective record of reality that has been central to photojournalism. The *cultural* power of the photograph for illusion, for magic and as a technique for appropriating appearances is put to one side. As Banks has stated:

Indeed, photojournalism relies upon the belief that photography “captures an objective record of reality.” In actuality, however, photography is equally susceptible as the written word to charges that objective reporting is a myth.⁵²¹

The ‘myth’ of objective reporting has not been ignored. Ernst Friedrich’s *War Against War* (1924) marks an early attempt to utilise devastating photographs from the First World War alongside an equally harsh critical narrative. During the First World War, “Photography was increasingly used by the military as a means for calculating the disposition of the enemy. However as a means of truth telling it was considered suspect. The photograph could be and was all too frequently manipulated for the purposes of propaganda.”⁵²² Like Riis, Friedrich believed in the evidential value of photography for political power. He used it to develop a ‘white propaganda’ of his own. Images were not left to speak for themselves, but were given new, critical texts (in four languages) and put towards the promotion of pacifism and the development of an anti-war museum.⁵²³

⁵²⁰ Berger J and Mohr J (1982) *Another Way of Telling*; Writers and Readers Co-operative Publishing Society Ltd

⁵²¹ Banks A (1994) Images Trapped in Two Discourses: Photojournalism Codes And The International News Flow; *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 1994 18:1 (Winter 1994) p119

⁵²² Jencks C (Ed) (1995) *Visual Culture* London and New York Routledge p53

⁵²³ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p161

During the Second World War, Brecht also collected photographs cut from a variety of newspapers over the course of three decades. *War Primer* was published in 1955. Brecht aimed to create a teaching manual that was offered as a critique of capitalist production and the use of press photography in a Fascist society, demonstrating the “art of reading images” by exposing the conditions of their production. Brecht placed a four line poem next to each selected image, producing an epigram; photographs in the press were social hieroglyphs to be decoded and exposed:

For it is just as difficult for the untrained viewer to read images as it is for him to read hieroglyphics. The widespread ignorance of social relations that is carefully and brutally maintained by capitalism turns the thousands of photographs in illustrated magazines into true hieroglyphics that are indecipherable to the gullible reader.⁵²⁴

As Long points out, *War Primer* stressed that “the mystifying power of the image, which easily deceives the clueless viewer, can be countered only by recourse to language.”⁵²⁵ Brecht’s demand for the continued development of visual literacy remains important.

Light and Time: What do we get to see, as much as never see?

As many writers have pointed out, mainstream press images of ‘gore for gore’s sake’ today have become few and far between. The ‘harsh realities of war’ and its corporeal consequences are often avoided, not only in terms of editorial ideas on public ‘taste’ and ‘decency’ but also due to the fact that, since Vietnam

⁵²⁴ Long J J (2008) Paratextual Confusion: Photography and Text in Bertolt Brecht’s *War Primer*; *Poetics Today* 29:1 (Spring 2008) p206

⁵²⁵ Ibid

such images are feared by governments for their capacity to lower national morale and support for war on ‘the home front.’⁵²⁶

The Vietnam War marks an important cornerstone in the narrative of media affects and effects. Although the civil war in Biafra obtained significant media attention, for many commentators, the images and reports that emerged from Vietnam gave it a precedent as ‘the first televised war’ or ‘the living room war’ which Rosler actively critiqued. News media have since been credited with actively shaping and changing public opinion on American involvement there and the outcome of that conflict. Kevin Williams notes that:

The Vietnam War is often used to demonstrate the power of the mass media to mobilise public opinion. The MacBride Report, for example, refers to the war as one of ‘the most recent examples of the press’s ability to unearth facts, to forge opinion and to encourage people to act.’ Many Americans blame the media for ‘losing’ the war. Hawks and doves, despite their different perspectives, subscribe to this view.⁵²⁷

Williams outlines arguments from both the Left and the Right which saw the media as either misrepresenting the war because of political bias and a lack of professionalism amongst the correspondents, or as showing the war as it was in a ‘vivid and unfettered picture of carnage and destruction’.

The conventional wisdom is that the mass media, by representing or misrepresenting the war, had a profound impact on public opinion, turning it against the war and thereby clearing the way for the eventual communist victory.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ Taylor J (1994) The Body Vanishes – Photojournalism in the Gulf War; *Contemporary Record*, 8:2 p291

⁵²⁷ Williams K (1993) *The Light at the End of the Tunnel* in Eldridge J (Ed) (1993) *Getting The Message: News Truth and Power*; London Routledge p 305

⁵²⁸ Ibid

This view, Williams argues, has become “firmly etched in popular memory and has become the dominant paradigm for understanding media-military-government relations in the post-war period.”⁵²⁹ For most of the war, the press and television news media followed official state briefings which in turn responded to shifting public opinion. The American public were not just media viewers but they were parents, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, siblings and friends who actively experienced losing their loved ones or having them returned from Vietnam in physically and mentally broken states. This point contributed in no small measure to changing and often disillusioned feelings about the war.

Williams’ analysis demonstrates the difficulties in measuring media effects on an audience. But the *potential* of the photograph’s capacity for direct instrumentality has certainly had its own consequences. By the time of the Falklands/Malvinos War many new press restrictions were in place. The idea of objectivity which the press and particularly TV news broadcasters aimed to professionalise was not appropriate when it came to war.

The introduction of the Lobby system as a form of censorship and news management by government had serious implications. This system gave government information to a selected group of journalists, who in turn were not allowed to breach the confidential sources of their information. It was very difficult to get written news, let alone film out of the Falklands so Ministry of Defence briefings were a central source. When film did arrive, it did not always correspond to written information – thus clear images of a UK Harrier Jet wreckage at Goose Green were used to indicate successful British bombings of the runway at Port Stanley. This was despite the fact that the roundel colours of the British Harrier jet could be clearly seen. Government pressure to stress ‘good news’ though a success theme actively impaired some correspondents’

⁵²⁹ Ibid

own ability to assess the visual evidence before them.⁵³⁰ The situation for still photographers was also difficult. As Philo et al suggest, there were certainly pictures, but the issue of what *kinds* of pictures were used to comment on the war is worth noting. Still photographs were transmitted but with varying speeds. Thus after the conflict, the Parliamentary Defence Committee set up an inquiry into how press and information had been handled. It commented:

Was it just by chance that the celebrated picture of a San Carlos villager offering a Marine a cup of tea achieved such instant currency, whilst others such as the one of HMS *Antelope* exploding suffered considerable delays?⁵³¹

Don McCullin was not included among the press photographers despite making repeated appeals to the Ministry of Defence, and with backing from the Imperial War Museum in place. He wrote a strong letter of complaint to the *Times*. Although his presence in the Falklands was met with some enthusiasm by some members of the MoD, the final decision was taken by “a high ranking military officer.” McCullin suggested that his exclusion was in no small part due to his considerable experience of war coverage which was seen as “a threat to the image that they would find comfortable.”⁵³² In the case of the Falklands/Malvinos War there were still opportunities for critical and sceptical reporting and it is worth noting that reactions in the media were not homogeneous. But, in the main, the Falklands War is not remembered as a high point for open news; only in its aftermath, government strategies of news management became the news itself. Nonetheless, this did not result in the relaxation of governmental restrictions on news management in the two Gulf wars that followed.

⁵³⁰ Eldridge, J (ed) op cit p33

⁵³¹ Philo, G (ed) (1995)*Glasgow University Media Groups Reader Vol 2: Industry, Economy, War and Politics* London, Routledge p82

⁵³² McCullin, D (2010) *Framed by War*; Jonathan Cape in association with the Imperial War Museum, p174

As David Campbell has pointed out, reporting the Gulf War of 1990-91 was constrained by a number of complex structures established by US and British authorities. In America, a 'pool system' not unlike the British 'lobby system' was in operation. In the pool system, only a small number of privileged journalists are given access to the military so that the Pentagon could restrict the flow of information by slowing down the publication of unwanted stories. Transmission times of particular events could often take several days. As in the Falklands, the system of 'embedding' journalists and photographers with the military was in place, stemming both the production and supply of information.

While images from Vietnam were unsparing, the human cost of the Gulf War was camouflaged by the technological language of precision weaponry and political jingoism. This was to be a 'hands off' war of managed and controlled 'surgical strikes.' Images and videos of 'successful' bombing campaigns dominated the press, and the conflict increasingly became presented as a *Star Wars* video game that could be played and replayed at will.⁵³³ Only afterwards was it disclosed that as few as 7-8% of the weapons used were 'smart bombs'. The rest were mostly free fall, dropped from B-52 aircraft at 30,000 feet. This included 489 napalm bombs.⁵³⁴

Photographic images of dying or dead bodies were conspicuously absent from mainstream news reports in favour of 'graphics'. John Taylor notes, "Maps of the 'theatre of war' were overlaid with drawings of tanks, and planes, blocks of colour for armies, arrows to suggest their inward movement, and graphic 'explosions' to suggest precise points of impact."⁵³⁵ And as Campbell states:

One effect of these arrangements was the almost total disappearance of the dead from coverage of the Gulf War. This sanitised environment

⁵³³ Philo, G (ed) (1995) op cit p149

⁵³⁴ Eldridge J, Kitzinger J and Williams K (1997) *The Mass media and Power in Modern Britain*; Oxford University Press pp 118-119

⁵³⁵ Taylor, J (1994) The body vanishes – photojournalism in the Gulf War; *Contemporary Record*, 8:2, p297

meant that when the body of the dead reappeared controversy ensued, such as in the case of Kenneth Jarecke's photograph of a charred Iraqi corpse still upright in his vehicle that *The Observer* published shortly after the end of hostilities. For most newspapers issues of taste and decency easily trumped the significance of this photograph and editors refused to contemplate its publication.⁵³⁶

Jarecke's image was not seen in the United States. According to Jarecke, when the photograph was processed and sent to the Associated Press, "They all made copies for themselves to show people but then they pulled it off the wire. They deemed it was too sensitive, too graphic for the editors of the newspapers that are part of the co-op, too graphic for even the editors to see, not even to let them make the decision of what the market they served could see."⁵³⁷



Kenneth Jarecke, published in the Observer newspaper, 3rd March 1991

The Observer newspaper in London was alone in publishing the image on March 3rd 1991. In response to criticism the then picture editor Eamonn McCabe said, "It offends. It should." Transgression is not an inherent quality of any photograph but this does not mean that the publication of a particular image, its relationship to other images and the context in which is viewed and read cannot present a focus for critical engagement and public debate. In the

⁵³⁶ Campbell D (2004) Horrific Blindness: Images of Death in Contemporary Media; *Journal for Cultural Research* volume 8 number 1 (January 2004) p60

⁵³⁷ Picture Power: Death of an Iraqi soldier; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4528745.stm

overwhelming context of maps and diagrams, Union Jacks and images of “Saddam Hussein as Hitler”, Jarecke’s image offered just this.

Ian Walker has noted his own reaction to Jarecke’s photograph, which he described as an image that sears into the memory. He suggests that perhaps our distaste is fuelled because we believe the image and yet it doesn’t look real, but “like a piece of desert landscape.”⁵³⁸ Walker reflected that “But I am unnerved by it because I know it is real. And I am moved because he (it?) stands for all the other dead Iraqis we don’t have images of.” Walker points out that:

This photograph escapes from that general malaise identified by (among others) Sontag: the law of diminishing returns, whereby the more atrocity pictures we see, the less they affect us.⁵³⁹

While Williams reminds us of the artistry involved in news production this does not mean that news is all ‘artful lies’: on the contrary it is this artistry that in conjunction with other forms of evidence gathering enables new ways of looking at the world and bearing witness.

Rosler and Sontag: Assumptions and Misrepresentations

In particular, Susan Sontag and Martha Rosler have produced enduring statements on the nature and role of photojournalism. For Sontag, and to an extent for Rosler, complicity lay in the photographer’s role of fuelling a demand, perpetuating an appetite for increasingly bloody and sensational images by which editors and newspaper corporations compete for sales and profit in a free market environment. Moreover, as Walker’s quote refers to, Sontag argued that the overwhelming number of images of atrocity simply results in compassion fatigue. In this sense, news photographers are perceived

⁵³⁸ Lister M (1995) *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*; London Routledge p247

⁵³⁹ *Ibid* p248

to be unable or unwilling to be reflexive about the ideological role that their work can be made to do and the weaponising effects of this. However, as noted above, Sontag later revised this early position.

Sontag argued that using a camera is incompatible with “intervention in a physical sense.”⁵⁴⁰ The act of photographing is “a form of participation” which goes beyond “passive observing”. The photographer is complicit with “whatever it is that makes a subject interesting, worth photographing – including, when that is the interest, another person’s pain or misfortune.” According to Sontag, in looking, there is only black and white and no shades of grey:

Like sexual voyeurism, it is a way of tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep happening. To take a picture is to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged....⁵⁴¹

Sontag continues:

Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention. Part of the horror of such memorable coups of contemporary photo-journalism as the pictures of a Vietnamese bonze reaching for the gasoline can, of a Bengali guerrilla in the act of bayoneting a trussed-up collaborator, comes from the awareness of how plausible it has become, in situations where the photographer has the choice between a photograph and a life, to choose the photograph. The person who intervenes cannot record. The person who records cannot intervene.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ Sontag S (1977) *On Photography*; Penguin Books p12

⁵⁴¹ Ibid

⁵⁴² Ibid

Sontag's concept of non-intervention merits some clarification. Susan Meiselas has articulated the need for self-reflexivity in her role as a photographer and as witness, and is well aware of the potential and limitations involved in this:

The other side of 'witness' is that we do intervene; and we intervene by the fact of our presence in a particular place. We change how people see themselves sometimes and how others may come to see them.⁵⁴³

As Meiselas insists, to photograph something is to intervene so that what may previously have remained hidden at the level of a private trouble can be made visible as a public issue by virtue of the circulation of images. As she notes, in the case of human rights violations this requires a careful balancing act between "the potential ethical reward for exposing the injustice visually" and the "potential ethical penalty of re-victimisation."⁵⁴⁴

Sontag considers her own experience of seeing photographs from Bergen-Belsen:

One's first encounter with photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany. For me it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau which I came to by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. Nothing I have seen – in photographs or in real life – ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴³ Cited in Lowe, P *The Forensic Turn* in Kennedy, L and Patrick C (eds) (2014) *The Violence of the Image*, London I B Taurus pp211-212

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁴⁵ Sontag S (1977) *op cit* pp19-20

Photographs may not always bring about immediate changes but they are certainly culturally productive. Sontag's own writings evidence the dual relationship between affect and effect since they remain as key touchstones within photographic discourse. As Judith Butler notes:

She rages against the photograph as she does for depicting an injustice that she does not know how best to oppose. Just as she rages against the photograph for making her feel a rage she does not know how to direct, so her frustration with the photograph frustrates her. To be as it were, a white liberal who worries the question of what one can politically do is to be self-preoccupied, guilty, introspective even narcissistic, and so once again to fail to find a way to respond effectively to the suffering of others. What she forgets is that she is writing about them and that her writing becomes one of the most honest and trenchant public criticisms of these wars. She forgets what she offers.⁵⁴⁶

Aside from this point of Sontag's practice against her theory, there are many examples of photographers who have both recorded events and made physical interventions (in Sontag's sense of the term) in the particular situations in which they have been recording. For example, Nick Ut's photograph of a child running naked towards him, with arms outstretched after being burned by napalm is only one frame in her story. Kim Phuc's life story did not stop at the production of an iconic image. Ut then bundled her into a car taking her to a nearby hospital for treatment. He assisted with her later move to Canada and she continues to have a relationship with the photographer who became fondly known to her as 'Uncle Nick'.

Don McCullin discusses his photograph of a wounded American soldier in Hue, Vietnam, and carrying him to the nearest medical compound for treatment:

⁵⁴⁶ Butler J (2007) Torture and the Ethics of Photography; *Environment and planning D: Society and Space* volume 25 number 6 April 19th 2007 p826

I photographed the man and then I told the soldiers to bring him over. They had to cross the gap which was the killing zone. They ran with him, and they fell with him. They stumbled and he fell. He had the most awful wound in the upper part of his hip. There were screams and howls, but they got him over to me. I thought this was my chance to repay them. I owed them something. I put my cameras down and told one of the soldiers to look after them and I took this wounded soldier on my shoulders and carried him away from the battle. It was tricky because I didn't want to stumble with him on my back[...] I thought at the time that I'd been taking pictures of all these people that I had a debt. And it was good for me. It had happened once before in Cyprus when I'd photographed an old woman who was incapable of walking, let alone running. I gave my camera to my friend John Bulmer and carried her. Ironically, he photographed me, and with my own camera!⁵⁴⁷

Linfield notes Robert Nachtwey, who is asked “over and over if he ever intervenes to save the people he photographs. [...] *how can he just stand there?* They wonder.”

And his answer is that he has on occasion stepped in (specifically to confront lynch mobs and take famine victims to feeding stations). But like Capa, he makes clear that he considers himself a journalist rather than an aid worker, doctor, soldier or Good Samaritan. Asked if he has ever felt “morally anguished” by photographing suffering, he answered simply “No.”⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ McCullin D (2010) *The Shape of War*; Jonathan Cape in association with the Imperial War Museum p82

⁵⁴⁸ Linfield, S (2010) *The Cruel Radiance*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London p218

Finally, Tim Hetherington is shown in Sebastien Junger's film negotiating for the life of a young medic in Sierra Leone.⁵⁴⁹ A local beer factory had been converted into a make shift clinic. A paramedic there was accused of being a spy and a gun is held to his head. Hetherington intervened, grabbing at the gun hand of the executor shouting repeatedly "Don't kill him, he's a medic." Putting himself directly in the line of fire, Hetherington managed to diffuse the situation and the medic, this time, walked away.

There are times when no other intervention then to take a picture is possible. In the oral history archives at London's Imperial War Museum, testimonies abound to this effect. For example, Albert Axell, an American civilian journalist spoke to Lyn Smith about his experiences in Vietnam and the dilemmas which photographers faced there. In particular, he notes Malcolm Browne's photographs of the Buddhist monk, Tich Quang Duc, setting fire to himself in Saigon, 1963. The images brought many comments from US observers, "far from Vietnam" on the role of journalists and photographers who were berated for not trying to prevent these acts of self-immolation. Axell, although not present at the time, spoke eloquently of a desire to prevent this act as a human being but also of the impossibility for the photographer "running the gauntlet of priests around the one taking his life", and that "it would be very hard to run and douse the flames."

The self immolation of Vietnamese Buddhist monks was not an act of impetuosity but was the culmination of a complexity of cultural, religious and political beliefs that had been meticulously prepared for through prayer and meditation. Knowledge of the forthcoming event was carefully circulated – although as it turned out, in becoming more aware of the monks' sophisticated understanding of how to use the Western media to their advantage, most of the press stayed away in the hope that the event would not take place. Malcolm

⁵⁴⁹ Junger, S (2012) *Which way is the frontline from here?* HBO; Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment

Browne was in fact the only stills photographer present. While Axell admits that the photograph did nothing to stop the war, he thought it had made an impression on the rest of the world – to at least “think about a far away war” and feel “sick at heart” about its consequences. For Axell the image is memorable and “burns into memory the horror of that war,” stemming from “a take on life to demonstrate against slaughter.”

To note these acts of intervention is not to offer conciliatory or reparative narratives. Instead they are used here as a way to think through the concept of intervention and to highlight the self-conscious moral ambiguity that photographers themselves often feel.⁵⁵⁰

Alongside documentary work, press photographs are often used without reference to the ‘structures of feeling’ that originally inhabited the production of the images - that which is subjectively experienced and made sense of by the photographers themselves in specific and difficult situations. Complex compositions, or in Bourdieu’s terms *dispositions* of practical, emotional, aesthetic and cognitive labour move into and are read through the structures of feeling of those who encounter them to become powerful abstractions and symbolic images. But they need not remain at this level. Understanding the processes through which such abstractions occur can work to generate resistance to them.

This critical and necessarily dialectical relationship between experience and abstracted images of society is addressed by Raymond Williams:

Our thinking about society is a long debate between abstraction and actual relationships. The reality of society is the living organisation of men, women and children, in many ways materialised, in many ways constantly changing. At the same time, our abstract ideas about society,

⁵⁵⁰ See Hariman, R and Lucaites, J (2011) *No Caption Needed*; University of Chicago Press pp183-188 for a full discussion of reparative images or “The Liberal Antidote.”

or about any particular society, are both persistent and subject to change. We have to see them as interpretations: as ways of describing the organisation and of conceiving relationships, necessarily to establish the reality of social life but also under continual pressure from experience. In certain periods, the interpretations satisfy experience in such a way that there is hardly any dispute at this level: the descriptions and concepts are deeply built in and accepted. In other periods, there are degrees of discrepancy: a given description is felt to be inadequate, and is disputed; or a description is accurate yet is challenged by an alternative conception of relationships.⁵⁵¹

Contemporary Structures of Feeling: Contemporary abstractions

Artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin present one such challenge by disputing the descriptive inadequacies that they see in contemporary photojournalism. In *The Day Nobody Died* the photograph's raw materials of light and time to which Berger referred have been significantly attended to. Broomberg and Chanarin travelled under the guise of 'official' war photographers with British Army troops to Afghanistan in the summer of 2008. Instead of taking the latest and most technologically advanced camera equipment with them, they took 50 metres of light sensitive photographic paper. This was transported for them by the troops in a lightproof cardboard box, which in turn was documented on film as part of the project.

From the moment of their arrival at the front line in Helmand Province, Broomberg and Chanarin were faced with the daily deaths of soldiers alongside more mundane events, such as visiting dignitaries. They knew in advance that they would be challenged, having a wealth of photojournalistic history and the

⁵⁵¹ Williams R (1965) *The Long Revolution* Harmondsworth Penguin p120

documented experiences of photojournalists (as much as their critiques) to dwell on. The subject of evidence, problems of archiving and an associated idea of photographic truth and ‘bearing witness’ has been a consistent feature of Broomberg and Chanarin’s work.⁵⁵²

The events the artists encountered in Afghanistan were ‘recorded’ by rolling out 6 metre sections of photographic paper and exposing them to sunlight for 20 seconds. They are visually beautiful; stunning abstractions and gradations of shadows and vivid colour offering dark, but paradoxically ‘light’, souvenirs from the frontline. Just as Duchamp offered some Paris air in a sealed ampoule (*50cc of Paris Air*, 1919) as his own French souvenir and Man Ray caught the imprint of a feather in his Rayograms, Broomberg and Chanarin offer the index of air, heat and light in a particular place at a particular time. These are sealed within the marks they have made on the photographic paper, which are, they suggest ‘deliberately devoid’ of the events actually occurring around them. The photograms are simultaneously both negative and print, and are, like oil paintings, ‘unique’ objects despite their photographic medium. This fact as well as their large scale removes the images from the economy of the press photograph and its unlimited potential for mass reproduction. Nonetheless, the images can be accessed through the artists’ website.⁵⁵³

The Day Nobody Died draws extensively from a photograph submitted to the World Press Photo awards in 2007 in which Broomberg and Chanarin were included in the panel of judges. The photo in question was taken by John Moore in the midst of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto which the artists suggest:

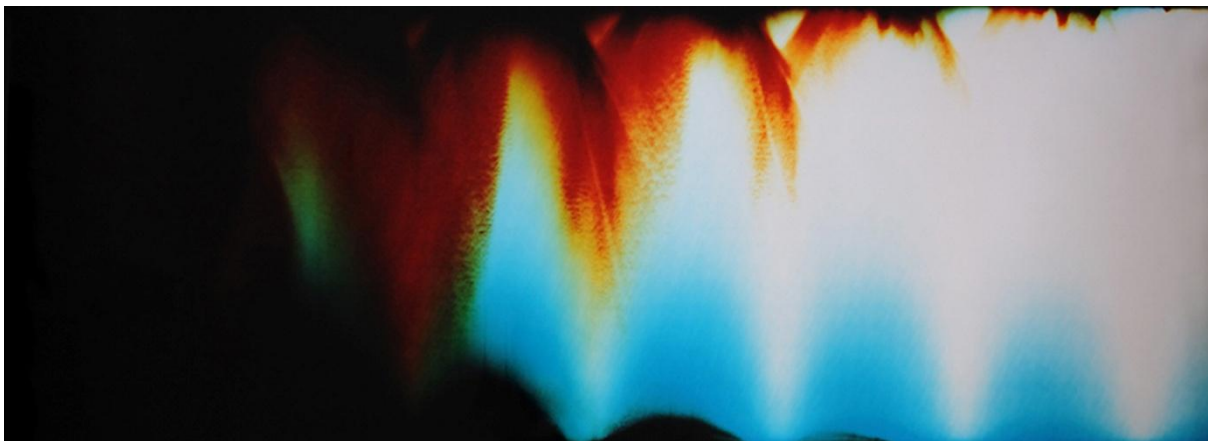
captures the essence of the photojournalistic image as it was originally conceived by pioneers like Robert Capa. Taken an instant after the

⁵⁵² See for example ‘Red House’; ‘People in Trouble’; ‘Fig’ and ‘Dodo’

⁵⁵³ <http://www.choppedliver.org/info> My discussion of this work is not based on the affects of seeing it ‘in the flesh’ and providing my own, personal aesthetic response in the face of Benjamin’s idea of the ‘aura’. I am interested instead in the conditions of its production and its conceptual rationale.

bomb detonated, at a distance of just 10 meters away from its epicentre, it is not really a photograph at all, but a blur, a piece of smudged evidence that testifies to the fact that our journalist was there, as close as he could possibly be to the lethal action, when the shutter opened and closed.⁵⁵⁴

Moore's photograph won first prize for 'spot news' although it was not used as 'evidence' in Scotland Yard's investigation of the assassination. Instead the police relied on videos taken from mobile phones. Moore's photograph led them to the idea of the 'photogram' and to dispense entirely with a lens-based image. As Broomberg and Chanarin put it, "One simple truth: the single indispensable truth about any photograph, including this one, is not its meaning but its register of time."⁵⁵⁵



Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, *The Day Nobody Died*, June 10, 2008, Unique c-type, 76.2 x 600cm.

Titles attached to the series of photograms are, like the images, abstract in their description of events – “The Fixer’s Execution”, “The Brothers Suicide”, “The Duke of York”, “The Day of The Hundred Dead” – with the exception of given dates of production. There are no place names given, nor are there any references to the names of the people who died during the events, and to an extent the images offer comment on the processes of abstraction that Rosler,

⁵⁵⁴ Broomberg A and Chanarin O (2008) *The Day Nobody Died*; <http://www.choppedliver.org/info>

⁵⁵⁵ *ibid*

Hariman and Zelizer identify. The photograms aim to mark whilst cutting out the social, historical and cultural process of the transformation of news into art whereby specific war photographs become iconic and abstracted symbols of human cruelty and suffering.

Broomberg and Chanarin explain the events that are inferred in their photograms. On the first day, a BBC ‘fixer’ was dragged from his car and killed whilst nine Afghan soldiers were killed by a suicide bomb attack; on the second day, three British soldiers died, marking the deaths of 100 British soldiers there. On the same day, a further eight Afghan soldiers were killed by another suicide attack. Day 5, shown above, was the day that nobody was reported as having died.

As with Rosler, Broomberg and Chanarin are also interested in producing a critique of authorship. They suggest that their presence as the authors of the work is “almost entirely removed from the process” since the images themselves are purely ‘accidental’. Still, Broomberg and Chanarin chose to place the paper at particular times and in particular places for specific 20 second intervals of exposure armed with full knowledge of the photographic process and the effects of light sensitive photographic paper to sunlight. They knew in advance what the potential aesthetic of the images would be – not just as art historians armed with the cultural knowledge of the Rayogram, but as anyone who has inadvertently opened the back of their camera and exposed a film to daylight would know. The images are incidental but not accidental. They are ‘instrumentally rational action’, to use Max Weber’s terms, being actions based on a clear purpose of achievement involving the systematic assessment of the means of attaining a goal and the ability to select the most efficient means of attainment. In instrumentally rational action, the action is always a calculated action.

The purpose of the ‘photograms’ was to counter the role of the embedded war photographer who is perceived by the artists as being complicit with the machinations of warfare. The criticism of photojournalists as being somehow ‘complicit’ with the continuance of war is, as Sontag later noted, fast becoming a routine cliché, and an *abstraction* of the aims of many photographers who are active in war zones. Broomberg and Chanarin reflect on the writings by San Francisco based collective *Retort* which describe how the destruction of the Twin Towers on ‘9/11’ constituted an ‘image defeat’ for America:

This spectacle was then used to justify a genocidal search for images of military retaliation, iconic enough to counter this ‘image wound’. A kind of image production arms race has ensued with both sides of the War on Terror engaging with the vocabulary of the spectacle:

Consciously and, you might say artistically staged images vie for attention: the toppling of Saddam’s statue, George Bush announcing victory on the USS Abraham Lincoln, the broadcast confessions of numerous terrorists. It is difficult to compete with these images. These images arrest us and they aim to offer the truth of violence, it is difficult to argue with them, to defy their authenticity. But images of conflict *are just images* (even if they depict someone losing their life) and they need to be critiqued like we would any form of representation.⁵⁵⁶

As Sontag pointed out, and as Pollock also argues, war is not *just* a war of images and claims for this are in fact conservative arguments in which the sense of reality itself is eroded; we live instead in the society of the spectacle. “Reality has abdicated. There are only representations: media.”⁵⁵⁷ As Sontag suggests, there is an extreme provinciality about this perspective which universalises the

⁵⁵⁶ Broomberg A and Chanarin O (2008) *The Day Nobody Died*; <http://www.choppedliver.org/info> (emphasis added)

⁵⁵⁷ Sontag, S (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others*; Penguin Books p97

viewing habits of an educated minority who have the luxury of patronising reality.⁵⁵⁸

According to Broomberg and Chanarin, their ‘photograms’ invert traditional war images since the values accorded to them such as “composition, proximity to danger” and importantly, “their value as evidence” are all undermined. The ‘undermining of evidence’ might be fun to play with in the art world, but elsewhere it can be a dangerous pursuit, as Zelizer’s work above suggests. Moreover, the recent and specific targeting of journalists and photographers in war zones should offer a cautionary reminder. Freelance journalist Matthew VanDyke was captured in Tripoli and held in solitary confinement for six months before managing to escape. Photographers Lyndsey Addario and Tyler Hicks were also abducted in Libya and abused for six days. James Foley and Clare Gillis describe their experiences of being shot at by pro-Gaddafi forces in Libya;

We thought we were in the crossfire. But eventually we realised they were shooting at us. You could see and hear the bullets hitting the ground near us.⁵⁵⁹

South African photographer Anton Hammeri was killed in the attack. Foley, Gillis and their Spanish colleague Mano Brabo were captured, beaten and detained for 45 days in various detention centres before finally being released.⁵⁶⁰ The increasing deaths and injuries amongst the press has become a routine way of undermining evidence.

Despite Broomberg and Chanarin’s claims purporting to a denial of evidential quality and the role of authorship in the photograms, they have clearly found the

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid pp98-99

⁵⁵⁹ Allan S; *Photo-reportage of the Libyan Conflict* in Kennedy, L and Patrick C (eds) (2014) *The Violence of the Image*; I B Taurus p169

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid

lure to provide evidence of their activity in Afghanistan through more traditional documentary forms to be irresistible. The production of a film documenting their performance and the production of the photograms was a critical aspect of the project.

The film records the movements of the army troop with whom they were embedded, and the soldiers' handling of the box of photographic paper from the artists' studio and then between military stations in Helmand Province. The artists suggest that the box of film becomes the proxy for the embedded photographer. Broomberg and Chanarin's preconceived ideas of a convergence of the moral viewpoint of the embedded photographer and the military is shown as a metonym, and directly addressed in the artists' testimonials:

When you look at these photographs and you watch this film, it becomes impossible to forget that they were made during an embed; whereas a traditional photojournalistic image attempts to obscure this fact. Being embedded is a contradictory experience. The army is responsible for your safety yet each day they are transporting you closer and closer to the field of danger. They offer unprecedented access to the war, but in return they have unprecedented access to you. At the end of the day, memory cards are scrutinised, and throughout the embed there is an agreement about what can and what cannot be represented. Injured soldiers, dead soldiers, the morgue, the results of enemy fire...the list goes on. The word collusion rather than journalism may better describe this kind of reporting.⁵⁶¹

What else is to be seen in *The Day Nobody Died*? As with the closure presented in Rosler's work on *The Bowery*, Broomberg and Chanarin's 'anti-naturalism' and 'anti-figurative' strategy also represents a shutting down, or closure of the

⁵⁶¹ Broomberg A and Chanarin O (2008) *The Day Nobody Died*; <http://www.choppedliver.org/info>

documentary ambition of photojournalism. In their use of the box of paper as metonym for the figure of the embedded photographer they deny photographers as being thinking and feeling subjects who respond and act in the world; they are not inanimate objects. The film and photograms ironically expose (to an extent) the operations involved in an embedded environment but these abstractions also prohibit and restrict looking at what they purport to represent. As such they risk simply repeating and operating as further collusion with the structures of military and media censorship that they seek to critique.

Broomberg and Chanarin do not see their work necessarily as an alternative to traditional forms of photojournalism. Although they confess to having “real problems with role of the professional observer we do believe that suffering demands a witness.” Nonetheless, as recognised artists and thus professional observers themselves they have stated that they do harbour a desire to see a more “reflective” or “intelligent” photo-journalism that is “analytical about our world, the world of images and the place where these two worlds collide.”⁵⁶² As Meiselas’ statement above makes clear, this kind of self-reflexivity is a central aspect of photojournalism; even as it responds to the immediacy and instantaneity of reportage it is not devoid of critical detachment in its refusal to take up the luxury to look away.

As with every other example of war photography the content and meaning of Broomberg and Chanarin’s photograms depends entirely on context; on time and place, but perhaps most specifically on the photographic *habitus*, and a distinctive combination of the forms of capital that Bourdieu outlined; social, cultural, economic and educational. Their photograms demand a sophisticated level of restricted reading codes drawn from a scholarly culture in order to fully interpret them. Broomberg and Chanarin quote Tod Papernage, “If your pictures are not good enough, you’re not reading enough” arguing:

⁵⁶² Broomberg A and Chanarin O (2008) *The Day Nobody Died*; <http://www.choppedliver.org/info>

Perhaps this reworking of Capa's oft repeated mantra offers a clue towards a new language in photojournalism – one that presents images that are more aware of what they fail to show; *images that communicate the impossibility of representing the pain and the horror of personal tragedy.*⁵⁶³

Berger offers the reminder that, “A photograph, while recording what has been seen, always by its very nature refers to what is not seen.”⁵⁶⁴ Seeing the unseen in a photograph is also dependent on the work of the spectator and for this reason, Berger argues that the photograph has a crucial role to play in ideological struggle: “Hence the necessity of our understanding a weapon which we can use and which can be used against us.”⁵⁶⁵

According to Broomberg and Chanarin:

We have always struggled with the problem of representing trauma. We have found images that are constructed to evoke compassion or concern, pathos or sympathy – often the measure of a successful image – increasingly problematic. The act of looking becomes cathartic, a celebration of the sublime, but nothing else. It is a passive and quite worthless act.⁵⁶⁶

This point merits attention. It is a useful indicator of the kind of casual assessments that Raymond Williams argued are made about audience reception but yet with very little evidence to support them. It also implicitly suggests that the generation of compassion or sympathy is the main aim of photojournalism. In the following chapter I will examine audience reception studies of visual

⁵⁶³ Broomberg A and Chanarin O (2008) *The Day Nobody Died*; <http://www.choppedliver.org/info> (my emphasis)

⁵⁶⁴ Berger, J (1968) *Understanding a Photograph* in Dyer, G (ed) (2013) *Understanding a Photograph: John Berger*, London, Penguin Books p20

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid* p21

⁵⁶⁶ Broomberg A and Chanarin O (2008) *The Day Nobody Died*; <http://www.choppedliver.org/info>

images of war. These suggest that the act of looking *is* cathartic, but also that the production of empathy is neither passive nor unproductive and remains as an important contribution towards generating political and critical engagement with conflict and its causes.

Don McCullin reflected that as a young man, he felt strongly that photography could “turn people’s minds and even change situations.” Yet he continues:

I was naive. I’ve looked back and seen the repetition of events that get worse and worse. They never get better. The photographs may have helped shape attitudes, but they certainly have not turned things around. If I ask myself if I have done any good or changed anything, I actually don’t believe I’ve changed anything at all. On many occasions I’m ashamed of humanity.⁵⁶⁷

McCullin was after more than pity and compassion from his audience. In seeking out the worst atrocities, and as Rosler later came to understand it, “His point was not the framing of the spectacle, it was the obsessive need to create and to re-create the one telling image, the one that would finally do the work.”⁵⁶⁸ This cannot be done without some recourse to the generation of empathy – the photographer’s and the viewers’: some kind of sensuous understanding is necessary towards the production of feeling, for cognitive reflection and collective responsibility. Max Weber demands this in his concept of *verstehen* or understanding the meanings that people attach to their behaviour as a way to counter the petrification of imagination. There is an art to this production that is not only found in the institutionalised production of Art. Instead, as Maya Angelou notes, it requires a living art, created to encourage people to “hang on, stand up, forbear and continue:”

⁵⁶⁷ McCullin, D (2010) *The Shape of War*: Jonathan Cape in association with the Imperial War Museum, p82

⁵⁶⁸ Rosler, M op cit p257

I suggest that we must be suspicious of censors who say they mean to prohibit art for our own welfare. I suggest we have to question their motives and tend assiduously to our own personal and national health and our general welfare.[.....] We need art to live fully and to grow healthy. Without it we are empty husks drifting aimlessly on every ill wind, our futures are without promise and our present without grace.⁵⁶⁹

In, Around and Afterthoughts (on photojournalism)

Whether or not it can really be said that ‘traditional’ photojournalism attempts to obscure the fact that it is the product of an embedded encounter is debateable. It is difficult to see the work of Tim Hetherington (1970-2011) as being the result of anything but an embed. Hetherington was keen to understand how all sorts of wars are connected – how do young men see themselves at war and why? How are they, and their gendered identities informed by images of young men in other wars in some kind of feedback route? The war machine is not “just technology and CNN” but it is about men (and in his photos it is only men) coming together and exhibiting a process of bonding that produces a group who will kill and be killed for each other. This was clear to Hetherington during his work undertaken in the civil war of Sierra Leone as much as it was during interstate war in Afghanistan.⁵⁷⁰ It was also clear to him in Libya where he eventually lost his life. Hetherington died as the result of mortar shrapnel whilst on an independent assignment in Misrata alongside his fellow photographer Chris Hondros (1970-2011).

It should be noted that Hetherington was reluctant to describe himself as *only* a photojournalist. Hetherington saw himself as an image maker. Junger says of

⁵⁶⁹ Angelou, M (1997) *Art for the Sake of the Soul in Even the Stars Look Lonesome*; New York, Bantam Books pp132-133

⁵⁷⁰ Junger S “Which Way is the Frontline from Here?” (2013) HBO Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment (dvd)

Hetherington, “He felt he told stories with images, and he wanted those stories to be heard, to be seen, to be read.”⁵⁷¹ As Allan points out, “Hetherington was acutely aware of the pressing need for professional photographers to fashion new strategies of story-telling, particularly in light of the challenges posed by ‘amateur’ or ‘citizen’ photojournalists.”⁵⁷² Hetherington was not necessarily against these practices noting that they added to the layers of understanding and meaning; nor was he interested in ‘objectivity:’

I think it’s got to come from yourself, first of all. That’s the most honest place to be coming from. If I started saying that it came out of a desire to change the world, that’s very suspect. Can’t it come out of a place of curiosity? A desire to locate myself in the world and also have some utility?⁵⁷³

In Afghanistan, Hetherington was embedded with a US patrol group on a remote outpost in the Korengal Valley that became known as ‘Restrepo’, named after the platoon medic who had been killed during the first two months of deployment there. But it could have been any war, he says. Hetherington was interested in the truth of the soldiers’ experiences rather than the ‘truth’ of Afghanistan. Their concerns were to survive, to get home alive – not war and not politics. He described Restrepo as a ‘Man Eden’ operating outside the usual social norms of the male psyche – a sense of equality, the opportunity for unconditional love and the display of a depth of emotion made this a profound place to inhabit.

Hetherington undertook a series of portraits that were part of a wider interdisciplinary and multi-media project crossing photojournalism, documentary and fine art photography. This included the production of press

⁵⁷¹ Meyer M (2011) Q&A: Sebastien Junger on Tm Hetherington; *Columbia Journalism Review* http://www.cjr.org/critical_eye/qa

⁵⁷² Allan, S; *Photo-reportage of the Libyan Conflict* in Kennedy, L and Patrick C op cit p172

⁵⁷³ Ibid

photographs; the Oscar nominated film *Restrepo* that documents war in collaboration with the eloquent testimonies and the difficult return to civilian life from soldiers themselves; against this Hetherington offers a book of photographs, *Infidel*, that unashamedly bears witness to the physical beauty of the male human body and by extension, the universal waste of its destruction in war. Beauty here does not aestheticise the political but is used actively towards the development of a social conscience. These projects come together in the art gallery installation *Sleeping Soldiers* that marks an attempt to reach across different and diverse audiences from an interstitial position.

The photographs of ‘Sleeping Soldiers’ were taken on what Junger describes as a hot, boring day when there was no work to do, no combat, and soldiers had a rare opportunity for sleep. Hetherington shows them stripped down, in ways that perhaps only their mothers would understand. The photographs are a long way from the images of soldiers usually presented to the public. Here they are vulnerable boys, “just kids” and as such represented for Hetherington the continuity of all wars; “sending off young men to die.” The photographs were part of an installation project shown in the 2009 New York Photo Festival. They were exhibited on a large three panelled screen and layered with video footage of combat scenes. Duganne describes this as providing a critical space where the brutalities of war are seen from the position of ‘closeness’ and yet offer a more distanced and critical reflection on its emotional complexities.⁵⁷⁴



Tim Hetherington, (2008) *Sleeping Soldiers*⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁴ Duganne, E; *Uneasy Witnesses: Broomberg, Chanarin and Photojournalism’s Expanded Field* in Hill, J and Schwartz V (eds) *op cit* p276

⁵⁷⁵ <http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ALID=2K1HRG77RYJ8>

Hetherington's project has been criticised since it remains visually tied to the conventional imagery of war photography that focuses on the military and the job they do, leaving the embedding system itself unchecked. Nonetheless, rather than closing down on photojournalism's witnessing potential, Duganne argues that *Sleeping Soldiers* successfully blurs the boundaries of the photojournalism/art binary and "explores what it might mean to expand photojournalism's field of operation so that photography's witnessing potential still persists but in a different form."⁵⁷⁶

There are of course many problems surrounding the ability of the photographer to record events whilst embedded. State military rules on picturing the dead and wounded, as noted above, are in place but the forming of close bonds and friendships with soldiers is also important to note here. In conversation with Julian Stallabrass, photographer Ashley Gilbertson had this to say:

I think you have to be very conscious of what you are doing when you're embedding. I mean I feel that I've embedded with pretty much every one of my subjects over the years [...] we are living, breathing, and eating and sleeping with them. You gain so much trust that way and you actually start seeing the intimate moments of people's lives. So I don't think that's anything different to what we normally do. The reason for an embed is for that reason, for the access, for that intimacy, to see what they see, to feel what they feel, although the Pentagon has put rules on what we do and how we work[...]I'm obviously furious about it. I think that it's actually denying the historical aspect of what's happening there. I mean, they're trying to gentrify what's a very, very ugly thing to be involved in.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid p277

⁵⁷⁷ Stallabrass J (2008) *Julian Stallabrass and Ashley Gilbertson in Conversation*; Brighton Photo Biennial; www.courtauld.ac.uk/people/stallabrass

Only once did Gilbertson find that this level of intimacy generated through embedding prevented him from taking an image, “and I have been very careful never to let that happen again.”⁵⁷⁸

Yet images of the kind that Broomberg and Chanarin describe as being restricted during an ‘embed’, can and do appear. Notable in this instance is Julie Jacobson’s photograph of fatally injured Marine, Lance Corporal Joshua Bernard taken whilst she was embedded with his unit in Afghanistan. As with the publication of Jarecke’s image of the Iraqi soldier, Julie Jacobson’s photograph also provoked some fury, especially in America. The image shows a young US marine, Joshua Bernard, being helped by two others. Bernard’s leg has just been blown off by a rocket-propelled grenade. He later died from the injury he sustained. Jacobson and the Associated Press, who released the photograph were much criticised. American Defence Secretary Robert Gates accused the AP of lacking both compassion and common sense.⁵⁷⁹ Bernard’s family had requested that the image should not be published. Of the image, Jacobson said:

The media ground rule was that you couldn’t photograph a military casualty in a way that meant they could be identified, but I could see Bernard’s hand reach out to his weapon, his face turned towards me. So I shot nine frames over two and a half minutes.

Making that decision was a public act. I got a lot of flak. Bernard later died, and people said that I didn’t give him dignity, that I should have helped him. But I couldn’t help him. For me, to turn my back, that’s disrespectful.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid

⁵⁷⁹ lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/05/assignment-8

⁵⁸⁰ www.theguardian.com/.../2011/jun/.../war-photographers-special-report



Julie Jacobson, Afghanistan 2009; Associated Press

Clearly the publication of this image transgressed the dominant values of the military in terms of what should or should not be publically shown alongside the values of Bernard's family who did not want to see their son's death become a media spectacle. This suggests that there is some difficulty in identifying the existence of state and military censorship as 'total' or that embedded photographers cannot be critical of the events they witness and experience. Jacobson's image is hardly heroic. In fact, as MacIntyre points out, "There is something mundane about Bernard's death, on a dusty bank in a foreign field – a single frozen moment in which the nature of war itself, in both its heroism and its horror, seems to be localised and symbolised."⁵⁸¹

When they are faced with new restrictions, embedded photographers must learn to adapt their work to the new situation and to respond creatively within it. In this way, Hetherington's work embodies the serendipitous approach favoured by Robert Merton. The sleeping soldiers are 'happened upon' and generate through Hetherington's curiosity a new way of representing the relationship between the process of embedding itself and military experience. This does not imply support for war or its glorification but it does negotiate the difficult and humanist path for understanding soldiers themselves; how aspects of gender and

⁵⁸¹ MacIntyre B (2009) *Pictures of war that can carry more moral meaning than thousands of words*; The Times 20/02/2009 www.almendron.com/.../pictures-of-war-can-carry-more-moral-meaning- than-thousands-of- words

also class, formed in the wider structures of social life feed into and are exploited for military action.

This contrasts substantially with the critique of photojournalism engaged with by Broomberg and Chanarin. Theirs is a narrative that refracts elements of photojournalism in times of war, but it is based on a *misconceived* idea of the social and cultural relationships involved in the actual practise of photojournalism. Broomberg and Chanarin say of their photograms:

And finally, and most importantly for this discussion it is work that recognises that photojournalism, like any public art, cannot be transgressive or critical.⁵⁸²

This is a difficult position to justify and one which, empirically, is hard to support in light of Jacobson's, Jarecke's and Hetherington's work. In damning photojournalism as an uncritical *public* art, Broomberg and Chanarin privilege the *privatised* world of 'art' through a focus on collusion that places the news media as being nothing but the handmaidens of the military state.

On the eve of UK wide protests against embarking on the second Gulf War, The Guardian dedicated its G2 section to photographs from the first Gulf War that had not previously been published in the press. This offered a critique of media and news management in and by news media itself. The main newspaper and the G2 section came with a label warning readers of the content inside. The photographs were accompanied by a short text from Don McCullin. He concluded that:

I have only ever considered myself a photographer – nothing more, nothing less. I went to war and thought of people and pain, not exhibitions and awards. [...] Photography is not just about photographs; it's about communication. It's not about you. It's not

⁵⁸² Broomberg A and Chanarin O (2008) *The Day Nobody Died*; <http://www.choppedliver.org/info>

about art. You're there to record. Sometimes, all too rarely, what you record is acts of human decency, of kindness and compassion – I have seen men cradling dying comrades and weeping. But that's the only side of war you will see that is beautiful.⁵⁸³

Wars are not metaphors in which carnage can be neatly wrapped in cellophane and presented for public consumption – they have real and human consequences. In the early 1980s Harold Evans noted that an increasing and necessary scepticism about what we see has led to a “disturbing passion for ‘creativity’ in photography” which he felt had set back photojournalism:

John Szarkowski, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, has told us recently that, the more public kind of statement has been replaced: ‘Many photographers now are working with their private understandings, observations and sensibilities.’ And Gerald Rosenkrantz, librarian of the great Magnum agency, comments: ‘Photography has shifted from the external to the internal environment’. Photographers are suckers for this kind of narcotic. Some of them may be inspired to imaginative explorations; but it will be a pity if concern with technique and the externalisation of inner fantasies suborns the value of content.⁵⁸⁴

In a similar vein, Christy Lange comments:

According to Sontag, ‘real wars are not metaphors’ and if this is the case then perhaps they shouldn't be treated as such. When artists apply an all-too constructed or allegorical framework to the first-hand accounts of suffering or violence in war, they also risk undermining the possibility of any truth at all. At some point we have to turn our

⁵⁸³ www.theguardian.com/world/2003/feb/14/iraq.features11

⁵⁸⁴ Evans H (1982) *Pictures on a Page*; London Heinemann LTD; unpaginated introduction

attention to what the photographs depict. ‘Let the atrocious images haunt us,’ wrote Sontag. By the nature of the atrocities they show, they will always be conflicted images – but it would be worse not to see them at all.⁵⁸⁵

Against the stream and flow of moving images deliberately designed to promote continued viewing, still photographs remain a significant source for recollection and contemplation. At times still photographs offer a combination of reportage, humanism and advocacy that is dismissed at our peril.

This is not to say that photographs are not involved in the apparatus of propaganda. But through an understanding of framing processes, photographs can be reconceptualised and help to offer an understanding of how propaganda works making us more alert to it, perhaps even more capable of resisting it.⁵⁸⁶

The charge of complicity levelled at photojournalists is overly simplistic. Junger speaks eloquently on the idea of complicity by reflecting on being part of something that is hurting other people and the feeling of shame that this brings. Deep trauma, he says, is not necessarily one’s ‘own’ trauma that comes from being subjected to ‘physical’ violence but also comes from witnessing the pain and trauma of others.⁵⁸⁷

The following chapter explores the idea of complicity further through a focus on critical photojournalism in contrast to photographs of torture in which the production of the photograph actively collaborates with the torture itself. I examine the re-presentation of these perpetrator photographs in the context of newspapers and gallery exhibitions, returning to Rosler and Sontag and their anxieties about the context of display. Because of their motivations and

⁵⁸⁵ Lang C (2010) Shooting Gallery; *Frieze Magazine* issue 132 June –August 2010 ; www.fireze.com/issue/article/shooting_gallery

⁵⁸⁶ Eldridge J, Kitzinger J and Williams K (1997) *The Mass media and Power in Modern Britain*; Oxford University Press p83

⁵⁸⁷ Junger, S (2012) *Which way is the frontline from here?* HBO Kaleidoscope Home Entertainment

intentions, these images have created new moral uncertainties about looking which will be further addressed.

7. *Complicity, Accountability, Affect:* *Between the Articulate and the Silent*



American soldiers rarely get a chance to study a dead Madhi fighter. The insurgents usually duck in and out of soldiers' lines of sight. The soldiers are curious to see the human face of their enemy, especially when they're dead. In accordance with army policy, dead are left in the street for Iraqi's to recover and bury. "They clean up their own" said the soldier.

Ashley Gilbertson⁵⁸⁸

*And so we put him up against a wall
A mother's son, a man like we had been
And shot him dead. And then to show you all
What came of him, we photographed the scene.*

Bertolt Brecht⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁸ Gilbertson, A (2008) *Whiskey, Tango, Foxtrot :A Photographer's Chronicle of the Iraq War*: University of Chicago Press (caption here taken from www.ashleygilbertson.com)

⁵⁸⁹ Brecht B (1955) (1994) *War Primer*; London Libris epigram 12

As discussed in the previous chapter, main stream news coverage of the Falklands/Malvinos war and the later Gulf Wars was not ‘open news’ but was narrated in particular and specific ways. These generated blind spots for public knowledge of those wars; as with Fenton’s images of the Crimean War, there were, with few exceptions, ‘no dead bodies.’

This has, as noted, led to charges of complicity and collusion between the media, the military and the state. In this chapter I will pursue the argument that this seductive charge is too simplistic and forestalls full critical analysis. It does not take account of the more subtle critical strategies that photographers may use or how later, they may circulate their images with alternative narratives and in new contexts. Nor does it take account of changing factors within the economy of news production and the variety of political pressures that actively work to inhibit accessing information itself. These are far more worrying than the idea of collusion. Secondly I further the argument against the charge that ‘empathy’ is a futile and worthless response. This charge takes little account of empirical audience reception studies.

As I detail below, examining audience reception of visual images from Israel and Palestine demonstrates a number of different responses, including empathy. Empathetic responses were not always unproductive and at times actively worked to generate further interest in understanding the *causes* of this decades-long conflict leading to the adoption of increased political and critical positions. This is an important point; the understanding of *cause* and competing histories is central towards developing new responses for change. Privileging the critically reflexive position of the art photograph as distinct from documentary and photojournalistic images suggests that these latter forms of image, typically with much wider circulation, cannot be disseminated, received and interpreted critically.

Finally, I will argue that the charge of complicity or collusion positions the critical photojournalist in an uncomfortable proximity to what has now been termed ‘perpetrator photography’ since the implication is that photojournalists contribute to the continuation of warfare as part of its apparatus. There are clearly important distinctions to be made here.

It can be acknowledged that when a nation state is at war, its own national press coverage is restricted for a number of reasons. As I have demonstrated this includes the extremely dubious aspects of maintaining public morale and support for military campaigns in the bid to maintain the state’s legitimate control of violence. There are also security reasons, some of which may be accepted by the news media and as such assist in processes of self-censorship so that military, civilian, or for that matter, journalists’ own lives are not put in unnecessary danger through breaching those conditions.

Rosler rightly comments that the state control of images and information *is* dangerous to the polity and the idea of a public sphere. However, some caution should be applied before accepting that ‘the press’ simply positions itself as an “unabashed conduit for government pronouncements and positions, as it always does in war time [...]”⁵⁹⁰ This does not explain the constraints that surround coverage of wars that are not ‘our own wars’ which I examine below.

As Richard Hoggart noted, ideas of complicity and collusion reflect a ‘low’ form of conspiracy theory: that what is or is not shown as ‘news’ is politically and directly determined by the state. These pressures do exist but there are also attempts to intervene in this process and thus as an explanation of what actually happens “this is woefully lacking.”⁵⁹¹ In contrast, the ‘high’ conspiracy theory is more subtle. Here news agendas are framed by more hidden forces: “there are

⁵⁹⁰ Rosler, M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions* October Books MIT Press p294

⁵⁹¹ Eldridge, J (ed) (1995) *News Content, Language and Visuals; Glasgow Media Group Reader vol.1*; London, Routledge, p9

firm, even if unspoken assumptions about how topics like strikes, ‘race’, or Northern Ireland are to be treated. When there are implicit controls operating around agenda-setting, direct pressures are rarely needed.”⁵⁹² These implicit controls carry the full weight of culturally normative structuring devices, which as Bourdieu demonstrated delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle depending on their position, to either change it or preserve its existing form.⁵⁹³

But as Hoggart maintained, neither the ‘low’ or ‘high’ form of conspiracy theory nor indeed their combination can tell the whole story “because even when they carry some weight, the controls are not complete.”⁵⁹⁴

I will now give three empirical examples of this. The first is Ashley Gilbertson’s image that opens this chapter; the second is an example of an audience reception study; finally, I address Katy Parry’s visual content analysis in which she demonstrates how photojournalism can work to demystify aspects of its own working apparatus and actively challenge dominant state narratives. These examples are also helpful in marking the distinction between critical photojournalism, citizen journalism and perpetrator photography which are addressed here.

An Empirical Example (1)

Ashley Gilbertson’s photograph and caption that open this chapter illustrates Hoggart’s point very well. The combination of Gilbertson’s image and text operate critically on a number of levels through multiple layers of framing and

⁵⁹² ibid

⁵⁹³ Bourdieu, P and Wacquant, L (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* Blackwell Publishers p17

⁵⁹⁴ Eldridge J (ed) (1995) op cit p9

representation. Through Gilbertson's frame, two American soldiers are shown as they photograph a dead 'insurgent.'

We can see what (who) the soldiers are looking at, but not the image produced on their digital cameras. We might never see it; it may have been deleted or perhaps it has become one of thousands of soldier photographs now circulating on web sites across the internet. We don't know if these men are the soldiers who actually killed the man lying dead on the street, or why they would necessarily take a picture; maybe for personal curiosity; as a trophy; as citizen journalism or maybe for 'intelligence' purposes. For some military personnel, taking such photographs is integral to their role and is 'legitimately' bound up with monitoring activities. For others, photography offers a material way to communicate to friends and family about the experience of military life, or is used for future memory purposes.⁵⁹⁵

But despite all that we do not know from the image, the photograph still has critical things to say. The skewed angle of the photograph highlights and troubles the idea of a fixed 'perspective' on the events taking place, for the soldiers, the photographer and now for the viewer. There is a disparity between the protective armour worn by the American soldiers who photograph the exposed body of the dead 'insurgent'; his loose black shirt is open allowing his chest wounds to be clearly visible. He lies with arms outstretched, bare feet together in the manner of a crucifixion. The soldiers' faces are obscured resisting the possibility for the viewer to identify with them as individuals. They are generic 'types' doing something typical.

The practice of soldiers' photography is not new. In her fascinating study Janina Struk demonstrates the historical and cultural dimensions of the practice.

According to Struk:

⁵⁹⁵ Woodward, R and Jenkins, K N (2012) *Soldiers' Photographic Representations of Participation in Armed Conflict* in Gibson, S and Mollan, S (2012) *Representations of War and Peace*, London, Palgrave Macmillan p107

Of the thousands of pictures and hundreds of photo albums I looked at, I discovered that, as long as it has been technically possible for soldiers to take pictures at war, the same subjects reoccur time and time again – touristy pictures, pictures of colleagues and social occasions, a fascination for indigenous peoples, military brutality and the dead.⁵⁹⁶

In one short caption, Gilbertson offers viewers and readers a critical fragment that incorporates the arbitrary language used to ‘legitimate’ state violence; “The *insurgents* usually duck in and out of *soldiers*’ lines of sight” offers the idea of an unrecognised ‘other’. That the ‘*human*’ face of the *enemy* is a point of curiosity emphasises the soldiers’ own unknowingness of the situation they are in as much of the people they are fighting against and in turn points to our own uneasy witnessing of distant wars as they are mediated. At the same time, we are offered an insight into the nature of power – to leave the Iraqi dead in the street, that “*they clean up their own*” is official American army policy.

In the space between the articulate and the silent here, Gilbertson offers a visual rejoinder to Butler’s arguments on grievability. Butler has written that,

[...] specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost unless they are first recognised as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense.⁵⁹⁷

Gilbertson’s image thus offers an excess of information through being permeated by a visual language of ‘us’ and ‘them’. In this way, the polarised concepts of ‘peace’ and ‘conflict’ as being separate activities become unstable, and the idea of a continuum of experience is brought into focus. As Woodward and Jenkins point out, ideas and values generated in the experience of civilian

⁵⁹⁶ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p xv

⁵⁹⁷ Butler, J (2010) *Frames of War*; London, Verso, p1

life interconnect in complex ways with the responsibility invested in soldiers by the state to execute ‘legitimate’ violence.⁵⁹⁸

Gilbertson carried out this work whilst embedded in Iraq. The criticism is subtle but powerful and calls to mind the practices of John Heartfield and Georges Grosz. Both of these artists were line soldiers during the First World War and they regularly sent each other postcards. These were “small, satirical montages whose point, not being verbal, was easily overlooked by the military censors.”⁵⁹⁹

Not all of Gilbertson’s images made their way into the press at the time but the later publication of the book offers a thoughtful and critical reflection on the experience of the embed itself. As with Hetherington’s work, there is an anthropological and sociological desire here to understand war in Mills’ terms; with what types of men are thrown up into its command, with its effects upon economic and political, family and religious institutions, and with the unorganised irresponsibility of a world of nation-states.⁶⁰⁰

Gilbertson’s work can hardly be described as ‘complicit’ but instead, as with Simmel, he begins with the detail as a critical way to illuminate the larger scene; this *Momentbild* now includes the viewer of the photograph.

As Wolff argues, the mediation of any image has a tripartite structure that includes the ethics of or in the production of a photograph; the ethics of the critic through which the photograph is brought to public attention (sometimes they are one and the same) and finally by a viewer or reader whose reading may or may not be through the ethical position of either the producer or the critic and takes its own form. Wolff suggests that the intersections of the political, aesthetic and ethical at this third level should be the focus of reception theory

⁵⁹⁸ Woodward, R and Jenkins, K N op cit p117

⁵⁹⁹ Hughes R (1991) *The Shock of the New*; London Thames and Hudson p71

⁶⁰⁰ Mills, CW (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*; Oxford University Press p9

and perhaps more usefully, through empirical reception studies of these wider audiences.⁶⁰¹

An Empirical Example (2)

I will now draw special attention to Philo and Berry's empirical research into British and American news coverage of Israel and Palestine in order to argue that whilst there are clear and significant problems with news production these should not, in the last instance, be taken as the final word on the matter.⁶⁰² The research was carried out by firstly addressing the competing histories of this conflict so that the appearance of both Israeli and Palestinian explanations in news media could be examined quantitatively through content studies. Over a three year period beginning in 2000, television news broadcasts were recorded and transcribed and compared to other media forms, such as the printed press. The research then made use of questionnaires in order to establish focus groups and finally, the research made use of individual interviews. Focus groups incorporated members of the public from a variety of social and economic backgrounds but also included journalists from the BBC, Channel 4 News, Channel 5 News and STV (Scottish Television) News and were carried out with assistance from the independent film maker, Ken Loach.

As Philo and Berry demonstrate, changes in news production are most clearly marked in the "ultimate visual medium" of television coverage of war, but are not restricted to it. All focus group participants agreed that their main source of information about current affairs came from television news. Here problems of time and the commercial pressure to supply a constant *flow* of news items

⁶⁰¹ Wolff, J (2008) *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty* Columbia University Press p140

⁶⁰² Philo G and Berry M (2004) *Bad News from Israel*; London Pluto

directly limit what kind of journalism is delivered. One participant in the study who was himself a professional photographer noted:

Part of the problem is just the way the news medium works nowadays – where you are geared up to having 24 hour news, you get the feeling that some of the journalists on the spot are spending more time in front of the camera because they have to do 15 different TV programmes and four different radio programmes, than they are actually finding out what’s happening in the story, and that means we don’t get enough analysis, as much colour, as much depth in what’s going on. You get moment-by-moment repetition.⁶⁰³

A lack of context and the competing histories of both Palestinians and Israelis was identified in TV news coverage which instead favoured recounting the last things that had been done or said. However, although the mainstream news had been charged with being pro-Palestine, the research demonstrated that Israeli explanations and accounts of the conflict dominated news broadcasting. This was in a large part due to vast Israeli economic resources and the ability to construct a powerfully efficient public relations machine. This contrasted with the difficulty of obtaining news from Palestine; restricted access to the world’s media, mostly based in Jerusalem, was itself a consequence of the occupation. Israeli dissent against the occupation was rarely reported. In the UK, the press secretary for the Israeli Embassy was quoted in the *Independent*:

London is a world centre of media and the embassy here works night and day to try to influence that media. And, in many subtle ways, I think we don’t do a half bad job, if I may say so..... We have newspapers that write consistently in a manner that supports and understands

⁶⁰³ Philo G and Berry M (2004) *Bad News from Israel*; London Pluto Press p244

Israel's situation and its challenges. And we have had influence on the BBC itself (21 September, 2001).⁶⁰⁴

Aside from such powerful lobbying, the BBC correspondent Keith Graves wrote in the *Guardian* that journalists working in the occupied territories are routinely intimidated when they are deemed as being 'unfriendly' towards the Israeli government.⁶⁰⁵ Philo and Berry comment further:

Organisations such as the Foreign Press Association in Jerusalem and Reporters Sans Frontiers have accused the Israelis of deliberately targeting gunfire at journalists, noting that eight had been wounded [...] A recent programme on Channel 4 television gave a detailed account by journalists of what they regarded as the deliberate killing of a colleague by Israeli security forces, when he had been filming the bulldozing of Palestinian homes.⁶⁰⁶

Reporters who aim to write critically about Israel have been subject to harassment and accusations of being anti-Semitic. Mass organised letter writing campaigns have grown enormously with the development of email, and are further facilitated by the construction of websites offering ready-written letters for users to send which target specific journalists with personal 'flak.'

Audiences themselves can often be amongst the most powerful of those lobby groups in terms of censorship. In America, the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, and the *Miami Herald* have all been on the receiving end of mass protests and threats of audience subscription withdrawals as much as the loss of advertising revenue for being perceived as carrying anti-Israeli comments.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid p248

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid p247

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid

On the 6th of May 2002, the *New York Times* carried two photographs of a pro-Israeli parade that took place in Manhattan. Both showed the parade in the background whilst a group of anti-Israel protesters featured prominently in the foreground. Writing in *The Nation* Michael Massing noted:

The paper, which for weeks has been threatened with a boycott by Jewish readers, was deluged with protests. On May the seventh the *Times* ran an abject apology. That caused much consternation in the newsroom, with some reporters and editors feeling that the paper had buckled before an influential constituency. ‘It’s very intimidating’ said a correspondent at another large daily who is familiar with the incident. Newspapers, he added are ‘afraid’ of organisations like AIPAC⁶⁰⁷ and the President’s Conference. The pressure from these groups is relentless. Editors would just as soon not touch them.⁶⁰⁸

As noted in the previous chapter, the issue of ownership and control of communication industries has a significant impact. Rupert Murdoch, whose empire includes *Fox News*, the *Sun*, the *Times* and the *Sunday Times*, not only has a close friendship with Ariel Sharon but also has heavy financial investment interests in Israel. In 2001, the editor of the *Times*, Sam Kiley, resigned and made his reasons public. Kiley wrote of the restrictions which were placed on journalists. For example, describing Israeli violence in terms such as ‘assassinations,’ ‘extra-judicial killings’ or ‘executions’ were not permitted:

Murdoch executives were so scared of irritating the media mogul that when [Kiley] interviewed the Israeli army unit responsible for killing a twelve-year old Palestinian boy, he was asked to file the piece without mentioning the dead child (*Guardian*, 5 September 2001).⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁷ American Israel Public Affairs Committee

⁶⁰⁸ Philo and Berry op cit p254

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid p255

As Philo and Berry make clear, “the pressure of organised public relations, lobbying and systematic criticism together with the privileging of Israeli perspectives by political and public figures can affect the climate in which journalists operate.”⁶¹⁰ This is not a case of simple collusion or of complicity. Instead, the study highlights the difficulties for journalists and photographers to give clear accounts of particular situations. Importantly, the research also noted the affects of this on audiences.

Philo and Berry demonstrated that their audience samples often made decisions about news images based on ideas of universal or common values. These included a concern for human suffering in general, oppression and the abuse of power but these were applied in different ways depending on how the events were narrated. For those with little knowledge of the context of the conflict, critical narratives were constructed emotionally through the images. This was shown through the use of the ‘news game.’ This mode of qualitative research was developed by the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) and works by presenting participants with uncaptioned news photographs from which they create their own ‘news stories.’ Participants were given a set of 16 photographs including scenes of fighting, stone throwing, the aftermath of a Palestinian suicide bomb, the burning of an American flag and Peace Talks between Yasser Arafat, Bill Clinton and Ehud Barak. The news stories that were constructed all showed a clear ability to reproduce dominant forms of news language and explanations but participants were also often critical of it. This demonstrated that audiences well understood dominant framing processes but they did not always accept or believe them:

Some groups argued that images of tanks against poorly armed Palestinians would necessarily result in identification with ‘the under-dog.’ But it was also pointed out that in other circumstances such as

⁶¹⁰ Ibid p256

Northern Ireland, images of troops versus crowds of stone-throwers did not result in audiences identifying ‘against’ the soldiers.[....] The Israelis could be seen as ‘bullies’ or their actions could be understood as emanating from their own ‘vulnerability’. The image of a Palestinian fighter in a mask with a gun might be seen as a fearful icon of terrorism or as symbolising heroic resistance against an illegal occupation – the mask might appear as sinister or simply as a necessary precaution against arrest.⁶¹¹

Yet, as noted the narratives that had originally accompanied the images stuck in the participants’ minds – even from those who maintained they didn’t pay much attention to the news. A good example of this came from responses to an image of the 12 year old Palestinian boy, Muhammad al-Durra, who is being sheltered from gun fire, in vain, by his father. In their content analysis, Philo and Berry point out that the image was predominantly narrated through Israeli terms of father and son being caught in ‘crossfire.’ The Palestinian view that this was an act of deliberate targeting was rarely featured.⁶¹² The language of ‘crossfire’ was regularly repeated in the focus groups. Despite being able to repeat this narrative, many participants were sceptical about its ‘truth.’ The role of empathy that some of the images produced could at times work to generate increased attention and commitment to understanding the causes of the conflict. In the case of the image above, one male participant said:

When that boy and his father were shot by Israeli soldiers, unfortunately the British TV cut the pictures, but even so it’s still fairly shocking and that re-energised, reawakened my interest, just because that brought it home to me as a parent. If I was in that situation with my son....that did

⁶¹¹ Ibid p257

⁶¹² This image has sparked considerable controversy since including allegations of ‘stage management’ and of falsifying or ‘doctored’ film footage. For an overview of this see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_al-Durrah_incident

make me realise just what it must be like (Middle class male group, London).⁶¹³

In the main, participants acknowledged but were able to ‘see through’ cultural differences and here the use of strong images was particularly affective: “suffering is suffering” as one woman put it.⁶¹⁴ This was not the case for all participants; others questioned the amount of images and noted the emotional exhaustion felt. This is not to make the argument for compassion fatigue, as Sontag did. There was not a lack of empathy but instead participants described feeling a lack of control about the possibilities for change. One dimension of this was a low level of understanding about *why* the events were occurring. The key findings of the study suggested that audience interest in conflict news increases the more people understand questions of history, origin and causes of events which were largely missing in relation to TV news reports this conflict, although this was not always the case in the print media. Philo and Berry note that a lack of audience understanding of these issues in turn led to a feeling of detachment and powerlessness when watching or looking at terrible events with which they could not engage or relate to.

The obverse of this was that when there was a strong commitment to a set viewpoint this led to “an inability to see information that contests the preferred viewpoint or violates a preferred view.”⁶¹⁵ Although this was by no means a dominant reaction, one participant found it extremely difficult to ‘see’ the visual information in front of him, suggesting that all the photographs offered a pro-Palestinian perspective. The authors reflect that:

We pointed out that the photographs had been carefully chosen. They did in fact include a picture of the aftermath of a suicide bombing,

⁶¹³ Philo G and Berry, M op cit p215

⁶¹⁴ Ibid p234

⁶¹⁵ Ibid p257

which showed an Israeli ambulance with the Star of David on the side. They also included an image of a dead Israeli soldier being thrown from the window of a Palestinian police station. But the participant focussed his attention very largely on an image of an Israeli tank in a Palestinian area and expressed his concern about what people would think of this.⁶¹⁶

In offering this account of audience reception studies to visual news material it becomes possible to argue that in fact, news visuals are not in themselves necessarily the problem, and at times worked critically to undermine dominant narratives. Instead, it is the accompanying narratives that require attention. These often presented the world as an ‘inexplicable mess.’ Philo and Berry conclude that:

Of course a greater understanding does not necessarily mean that something can be easily done by viewers to solve the problem. But in principle, to see events as having causes can be a first step towards understanding possibilities for change and to engaging with what is shown and to having opinions about it.⁶¹⁷

As Berger suggested in 1972, “The next step should be for us to confront our own lack of political freedom. In the political systems as they exist, we have no legal opportunity of effectively influencing the conduct of wars waged in our name. To realise this and to act accordingly is the only effective way of responding to what the photograph shows.”⁶¹⁸

Philo and Berry’s example points out the problems of making generic statements about both news production, visual effects, and about what people do

⁶¹⁶ Ibid p251

⁶¹⁷ Ibid p239

⁶¹⁸ Berger J (1972) *Photographs of Agony* in Dyer, G (ed) (2013) *Understanding a Photograph: John Berger* London, Penguin Books p33

with, or understand through pictures. As they demonstrate, audience reception is complex but not necessarily uncritical. However, criticality varied depending on access to other forms of information, on levels of education, and experience such as family and cultural connections. Nevertheless, a clear majority of the participants agreed that their interest increased when they understood more, and at times this resulted in the reversal of initial attitudes and beliefs. Many participants stayed on after the focus groups to ask further, extensive questions. “In two groups it was suggested that they might meet again as informal discussion groups. Other participants told us that they had spoken for long periods with friends about the issues raised, and others told us that they would now watch the news with more interest.”⁶¹⁹ That the study also generated *critical* visual literacy which then gains social currency through daily interactions may be a filtered effect but it is not a negligible effect and marks the continued importance of this type of public sociology.

As Philo and Berry remark, a key factor in the resolution of conflict is not the provision of ‘objective’ or ‘impartial’ reporting but demands instead the provision of clear, and accurate information including attention to the perspectives of all those involved in it: “The dust-storms of propaganda, which are created by those seeking to defend their ‘own side’, will in the end do nothing more than prolong the conflict and agony that the people of the Middle East are having to endure.”⁶²⁰

An Empirical Example (3)

I will turn now to the work of Katy Parry. Parry undertook a detailed empirical study of UK press coverage of the 2003 Iraq War. She focused on the visual

⁶¹⁹ Philo G and Berry M (2004) *op cit* p260

⁶²⁰ *Ibid*

framing of war imagery in seven national newspapers (*Sun*, *Mirror*, *Mail*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Times* and *Telegraph* as well as their Sunday equivalents) in order to examine a mix of quality (broadsheet), mid market and tabloid titles. The surveyed sample provided 4400 Iraq related images in a 33 day period (17 March - 18 April 2003). On average, each paper displayed 19 photographs per day which were coded in terms of newspaper positioning and content. This included camera angle and distance; sex, age and gender of subjects and the size of the photograph on the page. Parry's research took a key exploratory theme of 'Humanitarian Motivations' for war that was central to the coalition's dominant narrative.

Parry noted sharp distinctions between each publication. Across the entire sample, 14.5 per cent of the photographs were allotted a 'humanitarian' frame code with the *Telegraph* being most likely (20.7 per cent of pictures) to print images of aid delivery, liberation and celebration, refugees or hostile civilian reactions. In the case of the tabloid papers who were largely pro-war, the discourse of humanitarian motivation was most in evidence; the *Sun* displayed the dominant coalition theme of humanitarianism in 90.3 per cent of its photographs. The *Guardian* and *Independent* were the least likely to use positive images of humanitarianism, being left of centre and for the most part anti-war, these publications engaged a more sceptical tone on the matter. Parry points out that overall, positive imagery dominated yet there were extreme pictorial variations including examples of destabilisation and dissonance. Examples of this from the *Mirror* and the *Independent* are worth noting. Both papers made use of a photograph of aid delivery. Taken from a high angle under the headline "AID RAGE", the *Mirror* photograph looks down on Iraqi men scrambling and grasping for boxes from the back of a truck. Below this is a smaller image showing the photographers and cameramen in their position on top of the truck:

This extreme high angle places the Iraqis beneath our feet, scrambling for aid as we look down on them from a position of supreme safety, above the scrimmage. This is an example of how a possibly convenient and useful camera positioning for the photographers contributes to a representation of the Iraqis' plight in which we are cast as their superior saviours. These images are disconcerting: they are hardly positive portrayals of the humanitarian efforts of the coalition and neither do they humanise and dignify the Iraqis who are desperate for food after a full week of war. The *Mirror's* second image throws the spotlight back on to the cameramen (and they are all men) with their armed marine escort.⁶²¹

For Parry, the image serves to present an "alternative point-of-view to the favoured form of representation through both visual and verbal framing choices."⁶²² The images used here served to offer a transparency of production by illuminating the relationship between viewer and viewed. The *Independent* also used a similar photograph displaying the same "three levels of human activity but this time in a direct-angled shot: hands grasp from the bottom of the frame; boxes are distributed from the back of a truck in the centre; and, above, cameramen capture their favoured shot."⁶²³ As Parry notes, and as Goffman also noted, in iconological traditions, the hierarchical composition of relative height positions can easily and imaginatively relate to a cultural hierarchy and notions of power. Parry observes that:

Photographs such as this, while appearing to enact such differences, may be used to critique the usual god-like perspective offered in other newspapers' photographs. By photographing the other photographers,

⁶²¹ Parry K (2011) Images of Liberation? Visual Framing, Humanitarianism and British Press Photography during the 2003 Iraq Invasion; *Media Culture and Society* 33(8) Sage Publications p1193

⁶²² ibid

⁶²³ ibid

this meta-coverage can demystify and expose the one-sided nature of the much-repeated view-points offered in other press photographs that do little to humanise Iraqis and even perpetuate colonial-era perceptions. The inclusion of such photographs can also lead us to reflect on our own positioning as viewers of the spectacle of war that is presented to us in such pre-arranged photo-opportunities.⁶²⁴

The image comes with the headline “Embedded journalists were taken to record the delivery of food aid in south Iraq.” It is interesting to note here that the embedded position of journalists is made clear, particularly against earlier comments by Broomberg and Chanarin who suggest that embedding is a more surreptitious procedure.

Taken together, the three examples used above suggest that the production and reception of news photographs is much more complex than either Rosler, Sontag or Broomberg and Chanarin acknowledge. These examples challenge accusations of complicity and collusion and the idea of ‘total’ control.

Citizen Journalism

With the construction of *War Primer* Brecht aimed to offer a teaching manual that would generate public literacy about the visual and literary economy of the news press. As Philo and Berry’s study makes clear, the importance of a critical viewing public remains vital if democracy is to flourish. In the age of the internet however, the challenge of this project has dramatically increased.

The decreasing financial viability of printed newspapers (and TV news) has been simultaneous with the expansion of the internet which in turn, has had significant effects on print photojournalism. Established news agencies are less

⁶²⁴ Ibid p1194

able to maintain permanent foreign correspondents, relying more and more on a network of wire services. These wire services are not infallible however. As Philo and Berry noted, these may simply provide ‘preconstructed’ narratives of events for the purposes of public relations. This environment has brought a marked turn towards the use of ‘citizen journalism’ and amateur film footage.

That citizen journalism, and freelance photography is economically effective despite publishing rates for photographs falling, has led some newspapers to disband their staff photography departments entirely. For example, in May 2013, the Chicago Sun-Times called its photographers in for a short meeting. In less than a minute, 28 people found they had been made redundant. Writing in the *New York Times*, Lawrence Downes noted that “decades of experience and skill” had been excised including that of Pulitzer Prize winner, John H White. White was one of the first Black photographers to rise to prominence, his work focused on Black Chicago throughout the 1970s. White’s photography is collected in books as well as being hung in galleries.⁶²⁵

In protest against a perceived attack on professionalism through a growing reliance on mobile phone imagery, the use of images from security cameras and social network sites, the prominent Paris newspaper, *Libération* printed an issue of its daily edition without photographs. Instead there were only the blank spaces where the images should have appeared. Oliver Laurent reported:

To coincide with Paris-Photo’s opening, French newspaper *Libération* has chosen to remove all images from its 14th November issue in a bid to show the power and importance of photography at a time when the industry is facing unprecedented challenges, say the editors.⁶²⁶

The move aimed to provide a “visual shock.” In place of the photographs the newspaper offered only “a series of empty frames that create a form of silence;

⁶²⁵ takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/.../do-newspapers-need-photographers

⁶²⁶ www.bjp-online.com/.../french-newspaper-removes-all-images-in-support-of-photographers/

an uncomfortable one.”⁶²⁷ The photographs appeared in a separate supplement, this time showing the images as they would have appeared on the pages but without the accompanying written text.

‘Citizen Journalism’ and amateur film footage are abundantly available through *Flickr, YouTube, Facebook* and *Twitter* and offer an alternative to official forms of reporting. Such images are nonetheless dependent on the idea of the camera’s witnessing potential; unguarded by the ethical guidelines of professional photojournalists, these images are understood as being ‘artless’ and thus more authentic, closer to ‘the truth.’ As Rosler suggests, here the apparatus is privileged over the operator, its testimony is seen as unimpeachable, “home video-tapers are assumed not to be invested with the skill, or the wherewithal to alter the material”⁶²⁸ It can be noted however, that when the American government refused to publish the photographs of Osama bin Laden’s dead body, the internet had no shortage of photographic pranksters who simply constructed their own versions.

Much was made of citizen journalism during Middle Eastern uprisings, which have now been categorised by the media as ‘The Arab Spring’ and alternatively claimed by social media sites themselves as ‘The Twitter Revolution.’ In Libya, the activities of foreign journalists were forcefully restricted. At one stage, the foreign press were escorted to the Hilton Hotel, “for their own safety.” In response to their objections journalists found themselves locked in by pro-Gadaffi forces.⁶²⁹ As such, the citizen journalist took on a powerful role in providing the majority of information about the situation there. These images provided both the focus for the news stories as well as illustrating existing information. They also served as news in their own right due to the particularly

⁶²⁷ ibid

⁶²⁸ Rosler, M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions* October Books p298

⁶²⁹ Allan, S (2014) *Photo-Reportage of the Libyan Conflict* in Kennedy, L and Patrick, C (eds) *The Violence of the Image* (2014) I B Taurus p177

graphic way in which history was being recorded. While amateur material is certainly affective, it is also problematical in terms of the idea of accountability. As Stuart Allen points out, images were variously described as ‘purporting to be’ or ‘is said to show’ expressing the uncertainty of verification. So there was a re-mediation of mediation by the mainstream press. Verbal warnings were offered prior to some visual footage and on internet news sites, viewers were required to ‘click’ in consent to what they would see might be ‘disturbing.’⁶³⁰

Events in Libya unfolded quickly and violently, culminating with graphic film and still photographs of Colonel Gaddafi’s brutal death and the subsequent treatment of his corpse. This was presented in a number of ways across the world press. The images of Gaddafi’s body raised serious problems for established news broadcasters; to show or not show also incorporated questions of how to show. The *Guardian* offered a selection of front pages on its website that make for interesting comparison.⁶³¹

Tabloids were mostly vengeful. The *Sun* carried a full page picture on its front page, exclaiming amongst other things, “That’s for Lockerbie!” In the UK most newspapers including the *Times* and the *Guardian* made use of an image of a barely alive Gaddafi. Only the *Mirror* showed his dead corpse. Across the board, all of these publications became subject to further criticism. Editors were damned if they did and damned if they didn’t. Within the media this involved internal arguments of press standards, taste and decency. For the wider public, the images were criticised through the discourse of ‘family values’. Australian and French coverage seemed to show more restraint, preferring to show archive photos of his carefully managed, living public image. Others opted for a combination, using small inserts of the more gruesome pictures, further emphasising the rise and fall of a now iconic brutal dictator.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid* p180

⁶³¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/media/gallery/2011/oct/21/gaddafi-dead-front-pages>

The use of citizen journalism has blurred the boundaries between both professional and amateur photographers as much as it has narrowed the distance between media producers and consumers. This results at certain times in news becoming a kind of meta-coverage of communication strategies rather than explanation of specific events and stories. The images of Gadaffi are a form of soldier witnessing, which as suggested in the discussion of Ashley Gilbertson, is a common practice with historical longevity. As Allan points out, “the repurposing of soldier imagery within journalistic conventions signals the uneven, evolving ecology of reportorial truth telling.”⁶³² This point was never more relevant than when the photographs from Abu Ghraib appeared. This was not just a case of soldier witnessing, but represented something far more macabre in the relationship between image and action.

Perpetrator Photography

Boris Groys notes that the relationship between art and war, or art and terrorism, is historically ambivalent:

True, art needs peace and quiet for its development. And yet time and time again, it has used this quiet, of all things, to sing the praises of war heroes and their heroic deeds. The representation of the glory and suffering of war was, for a long time, a preferred topic for art.⁶³³

Within this traditional relationship between art and war, there was, he suggests, a clear division of labour albeit one of mutual dependence – the warrior did the fighting and the artist represented this by narration or depiction and both parties were glorified in the process. However, as noted above many artists have also been soldiers themselves; Heartfield and Grosz alongside Otto Dix and Fernand

⁶³² Allan, S (2014) *op cit* p187

⁶³³ Groys B (2008) *Art Power*; Cambridge MIT Press; p121

Leger saw nothing glorious about war. Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon also offered damning indictments through their poetry.

Boris Groys points towards the ways by which terrorists and warriors are beginning to “act as artists” specifically in the use of video and photography as a weapon of choice wherein consciously staged events appear, each with their own “easily recognisable aesthetics”:

Here we have warriors who do not wait for an artist to represent their acts of war and terror: instead, the act of war itself corresponds with its documentation, with its representation. The function of art as a medium of representation and the role of the artist as a mediator between reality and memory are here completely eliminated.⁶³⁴

Groys suggests that today’s warriors no longer need artists in the same way since their fame can now be bestowed by the contemporary media which, at the touch of a button, are at their disposal: “Every act of terror, every act of war, is immediately registered, described, depicted, narrated and interpreted by the media.” According to Groys, this process requires neither individual artistic intervention nor any artistic decision to be put in motion.⁶³⁵ This is clearly misleading at a level of practice, since as I have demonstrated, in the movement from event to news, narrative strategies are complexly bound up with political, ethical and aesthetic decisions.

Still, Groys points towards an “uncanny aesthetic similarity” between the videos and images from Abu Ghraib and the alternative and subversive European and American art and film making of the 1960s and 70s:

In both cases the goal is to reveal a naked, vulnerable, desiring body that is habitually covered by the system of social conventions. But of

⁶³⁴ Ibid

⁶³⁵ Ibid p 122

course, the strategy of the subversive art of the 60s and 70s had a goal to undermine the traditional set of beliefs and conventions dominating the artist's own culture. In the Abu Ghraib art production this goal was, we can safely say, completely perverted. The same subversive aesthetics is used to attack and to undermine a different, other culture in an act of violence, in an act of humiliation of the other (instead of self-questioning including the self-humiliation) – leaving the conservative values of the perpetrator's own culture completely unquestioned.⁶³⁶

This is not however the whole story of the images from Abu-Ghraib prison – in fact, the publication of these images has led to an enormous amount of critical, cultural self-questioning. Groys' main concern revolves around the idea that it is the types of images discussed above which have become the staple icons for the contemporary collective imagination:

The terrorist videos and videos from the Abu Ghraib prison are impregnated in our consciousness or even sub-consciousness much more deeply than any work of any contemporary artist.⁶³⁷

Susan Sontag was one of many who offered a critique of the images. In *Regarding the Torture of Others* that appeared in the *New York Times* she made a powerful connection between the photographs from Abu Ghraib and lynching photographs mentioned above:

If there is something comparable to what these pictures show it would be some of the photographs of black victims of lynching taken between the 1880s and the 1930s, which show Americans grinning beneath the naked mutilated body of a black man or woman hanging behind them from a tree. The lynching photographs were souvenirs of a collective

⁶³⁶ Ibid

⁶³⁷ Ibid p123

action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done. So are the pictures from Abu Ghraib.⁶³⁸

David Campbell points out that lynching photographs resulted from public occasions which often generated a festive atmosphere. These public rituals would be advertised in advance, and as a public occasion, the photographs furnished its status as an historical event that would outlive its victims' deaths.⁶³⁹ For Campbell, the photographers who produced these images were not simply spectators to a killing but instead were integral to the lynching, to its public status and its social meaning. The photographs appeared in newspapers as well as being made into postcards – either for the photographers' own business use or as calling cards – which were sometimes used as a warning to potential victims. As such, the photographs functioned as “icons of white supremacy” for a social order in which “blacks were terrorized, white women were vulnerable, and white men were on top, invulnerable and free.”⁶⁴⁰

There is however a significant distinction between the two sets of images. The photographs of lynching were consciously made for a wide public consumption whilst clearly those soldiers who photographed their own acts of torture in Abu Ghraib did not intend their work to be seen outside of private, selected audiences. “It was this aspect, perhaps more than any other, that appeared to give them the power to disturb”, says Struk.⁶⁴¹

In her article, Sontag refers to photography's “insuperable power to determine what we recall of events”, and particularly how photography contributes to the ways in which important conflicts are judged and remembered. For Sontag, it also seemed probable that the Abu Ghraib photographs would become the

⁶³⁸ Sontag S (2004) *Regarding the Torture of Others*; New York Times May 23rd 2004
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/15/23/magazine/23PRISONS.html> accessed 25/08/2010

⁶³⁹ Campbell D (2004) Horrific Blindness: Images of Death in Contemporary Media; *Journal for Cultural Research* volume 8 number 1 (January 2004) p56

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid p57

⁶⁴¹ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers' Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p5

“defining association of people everywhere” of the United States’ war with Iraq. Sontag suggests however, that these images can and do offer a particularly painful and challenging route into a self questioning of what Groys calls “the conservative values of the own culture”. Indeed, she was criticised for suggesting that “Considered in this light, the photographs are us.”⁶⁴²

Sontag discusses the embarrassment that the Abu Ghraib photographs caused to the then Bush administration – although the American president’s response was one of both shock and disgust this was aimed more at the existence of the photographs themselves rather than about what they contained, “as if the fault or horror lay in the images, not in what they depict.”⁶⁴³ Struk notes that after the eleven soldiers had been court-martialled and found guilty for their participation in the Abu Ghraib photographs, one fellow soldier who had served there was to comment “with incredulity” that “it seemed as though they had been found guilty, not for torturing prisoners, but for taking pictures.”⁶⁴⁴

To publish the Abu Ghraib photographs in the news media was put forward as being decidedly unpatriotic, “un-American”. Visitors to the CBS website (CBS had been the first to broadcast the images) were scathing in their comments suggesting that publication was on the verge of ‘treason’ in a time of war; that it was of no help to serving soldiers in Iraq; publishing the photographs was ‘tantamount to inciting a riot’ and served no public interest. A Kuwaiti newspaper, *Al-Watan* described the photographs as being “a gift to Islamic fundamentalists.”⁶⁴⁵ Sontag commented that:

To acknowledge that Americans torture their prisoners would contradict everything this administration has invited the public to believe about the

⁶⁴² Sontag S (2004) *Regarding the Torture of Others*; New York Times May 23rd 2004
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/15/23/magazine/23PRISONS.html> accessed 25/08/2010

⁶⁴³ Ibid

⁶⁴⁴ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p14

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid p17

virtue of American intentions and America's right, flowing from that virtue, to undertake unilateral action on the world stage.⁶⁴⁶

The dissemination of the Abu Ghraib photographs was largely dealt with in terms of limiting a “public relations disaster” from which the word ‘torture’ was conspicuously absent. Sontag states that “The prisoners had possibly been the objects of “abuse”, eventually of “humiliation” - that was the most to be admitted.”⁶⁴⁷

Judith Butler noted that how these images were named had distinct consequences for the perpetrators:

The question of whether governmental officials called what is depicted in the photos “abuse” or “torture” suggests that the relation to international law is already at work; abuse can be addressed by disciplinary proceedings, but torture is a war crime, actionable within international courts. They did not dispute that the photographs are real, that they record something that actually happened. Establishing the referentiality of the photographs was, however, not enough. The photos are not only shown, but named; the way that they are shown, the way that they are framed, and the words used to describe what is shown, work together to produce an interpretive matrix for what is seen.⁶⁴⁸

The photographs showed “brutality, humiliation, rape and murder” for the purposes of retrieving ‘information’ and as such could only be defined as representing torture.⁶⁴⁹ Elaine Scarry offers a long meditation on the nature of pain and the structure of torture, exploring the manner by which “The prisoner’s body –in its physical strengths, in its sensory powers, in its needs and its wants,

⁶⁴⁶ Sontag S (2004) *Regarding the Torture of Others*; New York Times May 23rd 2004

⁶⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁴⁸ Butler J (2010) *Frames Of War* London Verso p79

⁶⁴⁹ *ibid* p78

in its ways of self delight, and finally even [...] in its small and moving gestures of friendship toward itself – is, like the prisoner’s voice, made a weapon against him, made to betray him on behalf of the enemy, made to be the enemy.”⁶⁵⁰

Torture has a tripartite structure that Scarry sets out: firstly, the infliction of pain; second, the objectification of the subjective attributes of pain and finally, the translation of the objectified attributes of pain into the insignia of power.⁶⁵¹

The events at Abu Ghraib, notes Sontag, were designed to be photographed:

Looking at these photographs, you ask yourself, how can someone grin at the sufferings and humiliations of another human being? Set guard dogs at the genitals and legs of cowering naked prisoners? Force shackled, hooded prisoners to masturbate or simulate oral sex with one another? And you feel naive for asking, since the answer is self-evidently, people do these things to other people.⁶⁵²

Sontag argues that these images invite not only a questioning of military structures, of hierarchies of power and the nature of policies which make such acts likely, but more than this they invite a deeper cultural gaze into the ways in which every day violence has become increasingly normative, surrounded by silence.

Susie Linfield also points out that photographs of this type, in which “photography becomes a handy appendage to the bureaucratic manufacture of death” have a long pedigree. They include those pictures taken by Nazi photographers, soldiers and civilian supporters, or the photographs of prisoners

⁶⁵⁰ Scarry E (1985) *The Body In Pain; The Making and the Unmaking of the World*; New York Oxford, oxford University Press p 48

⁶⁵¹ Ibid p51

⁶⁵² Sontag S (2004) *Regarding the Torture of Other*; New York Times May 23rd 2004

awaiting execution taken by Stalin's police in Moscow's Lubyanka prison, "Their faces peer out at us in sadness, fear and bewilderment."⁶⁵³

While they may have historical longevity, perpetrator images are certainly more numerous in our time: images of torture such as those from Abu Ghraib; the videoed beheadings of journalists like the Wall Street Journal's Daniel Pearl, and civilians such as Ken Bigley alongside his colleagues Eugene Armstrong and Jack Hensley; the 55,000 photographs taken which documented the deaths of 11,000 Syrian detainees in Assad's secret prisons; the beating to death of Colonel Gaddafi as he is pulled from a hole in the ground; the hanging of Saddam Hussain; the twelve US platoon members who called themselves the 'Kill Team' in Afghanistan - high on drugs and alcohol, they systematically conducted heinous murders of civilians, mutilating corpses and taking body parts and photos as trophies.

In the age of the Internet, as Struk points out, there is a "glut" of soldiers' photographs which are freely available for anyone to view on line - through the personal websites of 'milbloggers' (military bloggers who have been inspired by the idea of 'citizen journalism') as well as commercial ones - even Struk notes, on pornographic websites.⁶⁵⁴ While these have not attracted the same attention as the images from Abu Ghraib - since the question here was as much to do with the 'legality' of what the pictures showed rather than *what* they showed - many of them are just as, if not more, graphic. The web sites aimed to provide a more *authentic* account of a soldier's life at war than that provided by news media and the embedded photojournalist. Nonetheless, one American website gained significant notoriety. *Nowthatsfuckedup.com* which was subsequently closed down began its life as a pornographic website. Here serving soldiers could swap pictures of 'wives and girlfriends'. When it became clear to the site

⁶⁵³ www.nytimes.com/2014/01/28/opinion/advertisements-for-death.html

⁶⁵⁴ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers' Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p19

owner that some service personnel were having difficulty paying the ten dollar fee, Chris Wilson offered them free access in return for their own snapshots of war.⁶⁵⁵ The images were not to include any ‘illegal’ behaviour such as that occurring at Abu Ghraib. A number of the photographs were particularly gory and as such were given their own section on the site, indicating the nature of the pictures. The pictures themselves attracted all sorts of racist, lewd and derogatory comments. Struk notes that “any opposition to the gruesome picture posts was often greeted with a tirade of angry responses.”⁶⁵⁶ Hilary Roberts has also noted that many of these responses not least from the producers/distributors of the material justified their activities as bearing witness to the reality of war. The owner of the site himself claimed that, “I think everyone should see them. This is a side of war that is shown from the soldiers THEMSELVES. Where else can you go see that?”⁶⁵⁷

Writing in *The Guardian* Andrew Brown stated that this kind of material – including the material from Abu Ghraib – demonstrated a central point. It showed that “modern armies are full of people with digital cameras who will document everything they see, no matter how shaming it might be in the outside world.” Brown continued by saying, “Some of these pictures are far worse than anything that came out of the prison, but they show us the same lust for flesh, power and killing.”⁶⁵⁸

The majority of the photographs from Abu Ghraib have an explicit sexual theme which for Sontag is “part of a larger confluence between torture and pornography: a young woman leading a naked man around on a leash is classic dominatrix imagery.”⁶⁵⁹ How much of this, she wonders, is inspired from or

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid p162

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid p164

⁶⁵⁷ Roberts, H (2012) *War Trophy Photographs: Proof or Pornography?* In Batchen G (Ed) (2012) *Picturing atrocity: Photography on Crisis* ; London Reaktion Books p203

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid

⁶⁵⁹ Sontag S (2004) op cit

aims to emulate the now vast repertoire of pornographic imagery available via the internet? Sontag perceived a growing acceptance of brutality in American life, manifest in the “easy delight taken in violence” – from video games to “the hazing rituals of physical brutality and sexual humiliation in college fraternities and on sports teams.”⁶⁶⁰

Sontag was not alone in making the connection between the torture images and pornography. Joanna Bourke’s article *Torture as Pornography* appeared in *The Guardian* on May 7th, 2003⁶⁶¹ and a year later in the same publication Katherine Viner continued the assertion that a pornographic culture had influenced the behaviour of the soldiers:

It is hard not to see the links between the culturally unacceptable behaviour of the soldiers in Abu Ghraib and the culturally accepted notions of what happens in porn.⁶⁶²

Likewise, the historian John Keegan echoed the point, noting that video pornography was a clear influence, “It’s what the soldiers watch in the bar and the barracks room that I think gave them the idea.”⁶⁶³

Beyond Pornography: Masculinity and the Military

Judith Butler extends her cultural analysis beyond the contribution of pornography. In taking account of the deeper structural issues underpinning the construction of gender and sexual identities, the pornography industry is not used as a convenient scapegoat by which to ‘explain’ or at least account for the photographs. She is careful to avoid any kind of easy causal relationship

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid (it can also be noted that these ‘hazing rituals’ occurring between soldiers themselves appear in some of Hetherington’s photographs (see *Infidel* noted above)

⁶⁶¹ Butler J (2010) *Frames Of War* London Verso p86

⁶⁶² Viner, K cited in Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p4

⁶⁶³ Keegan, J cited in Struk, J op cit p4

between looking at pornography and carrying out acts of sexual violence or rape. This has been a common argument throughout feminist criticism and it is not unfounded. I want to emphasise that my argument here is not a justification of pornography which is arguably a product of a hegemonic masculine identity. Nonetheless some care should be used in terms of the context and extent to which images and testimonies of sexual violence can be mobilised in order to support arguments against pornography.⁶⁶⁴

Instead of figuring torture through the consumption of pornography, Butler offers an account of the Abu Ghraib photographs as being framed specifically by a normative, heterosexual and homophobic military gaze. Picking up from Sontag's comments on the 'official' response to the photographs by President Bush, Butler explores the use of the term 'disgusting' that Bush employed. It is not clear for Butler whether he was "referring to the homosexual acts of sodomy and fellatio or to the physically coercive and psychologically debasing conditions and effects of the torture itself."⁶⁶⁵

Indeed, if it was the homosexual acts that he found "disgusting", then he clearly missed the point about torture, having allowed his sexual revulsion and moralism to take the place of an ethical objection. But if it was the torture that was disgusting, why did he use that word, rather than *wrong* or *objectionable* or *criminal*? The word "disgusting" keeps the equivocation intact, leaving two issues questionably intertwined: homosexual acts on the one hand, and physical and sexual torture on the other.⁶⁶⁶

More than this, Butler exposes the ways in which the US soldiers in the photographs exploited the Muslim prohibition against nudity, homosexuality

⁶⁶⁴ See for example Hesford W (2004) Documenting Violations: Rhetorical Witnessing and the Spectacle of Distant Suffering; *Biography*, no 1, volume 27 (Winter 2004)

⁶⁶⁵ Butler J (2010) *Frames Of War* London Verso p87

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid

and masturbation as a way of demolishing “the cultural fabric that keeps the integrity of these people intact.”⁶⁶⁷

This definition of pornography evacuates the photographs of the specific brutality of the scenes involved. There are examples of women torturing men, of men and women forcing Iraqi women, Muslim women, to bare their breasts, and Iraqi men, Muslim men, to perform homosexual acts and to masturbate. The torturer knows this will cause the tortured shame; the photograph enhances the shame, provides a reflection of the act for the one who is forced into it; threatens to circulate the act as public knowledge and so as public shame.⁶⁶⁸

Against this, Butler argues that the soldiers themselves have their own feelings, mixing aggression with “erotic shame and fear”. In both Gulf Wars, Butler notes that the bombing and maiming of Iraqis was figured through the act of sodomy – American soldiers inscribed their missiles with phrases such as “Up Your Ass” thus symbolically inflicting the shame of sodomy on those who are bombed. This has inadvertent connotations also for those who Butler describes as ‘ejaculating’ those missiles. Given that sodomy involves two people, Butler suggests that the soldiers are hereby securing their own positions as being dominant in the “fantasised scene” participating in the “active and penetrating position” which she says “makes them no less homosexual for being on top.” Butler continues:

That the act is figured as murder, though, suggests that it is fully taken up in an aggressive circuit that exploits the shame of sexuality, converting its pleasure into raw sadistic form. That the US prison guards continue this fantasy by coercing their prisoners into acts of sodomy suggests that homosexuality is equated with the decimation of

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid p89

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid

personhood, even as it is clear in these cases that it is the torture which is responsible for that decimation. Paradoxically, this may be a situation where the Islamic taboo against homosexual acts works in perfect concert with the homophobia within the US military.⁶⁶⁹

WJT Mitchell would agree. He refers to the comments of racial profilers like Raphael Patai – who provided guidance to American military and their treatment of Iraqi prisoners. Patai informed them that “‘The’ Arab male is extremely insecure about his masculinity.” Against this, Mitchell says, “But it turns out the *American* male is too, and what better way to secure one’s masculine superiority than forcing another male to submit to domination by women, or to be thrown into piles of anonymous, headless, ‘homosexual ‘ bodies?’”⁶⁷⁰

The emphasis of a hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity in the American military is often apparent in its representation. This was underlined by the US Defence Secretary Robert M Gates. Gates delivered a statement of reassurance after Specialist Zachary Boyd was photographed participating in combat wearing his protective body armour and helmet over a red t-shirt, pink boxer shorts bearing the message ‘I ♥ NY’ and flip-flops. The photograph, taken by Associated Press photographer David Guttenfelder (2009) appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*. Boyd, who was stationed in Afghanistan at that time, feared that should the President see the image, then it would be the end of his military career. Boyd is described as having apparently been enjoying a well earned sleep when his patrol in the Korengai Valley came under ‘enemy attack’. Grabbing his rifle, Boyd had leapt into his defensive position without fully dressing. Gates concluded that:

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid p90

⁶⁷⁰ Mitchell W J T (2008) *Cloning Terror* in Costello D and Willson D (Eds) (2008) *The Life and Death of Images*; London Tate Publishing p196

Well let me tell you, the next time I visit Afghanistan I want to meet Specialist Zachary Boyd and shake his hand. Any soldier who can go into battle against the Taliban in pink boxers and flip flops has a special kind of courage...I can only wonder about the impact on the Taliban. Just imagine seeing that: a guy in pink boxers and flip flops has you in his cross-hairs. What an incredible innovation in psychological warfare.⁶⁷¹

Ideas of normative gender roles were also present in terms of ideals of femininity. When the photograph of Lynndie England holding a 'leash' attached to the neck of a naked Iraqi man appeared, the question of her gender was also emphasised; she is seen to deny all that is 'feminine' about being a woman:

She became the focus of newspaper headlines that described her as cruel, savage and lacking in morality: 'America's Shame', 'The Destruction of Morality' and 'Shocking Image that Spells Disaster for the U.S in Iraq' were but a few. She was depicted as 'a global hate figure' with a 'taste for cruelty'. In an article that asked "What turns a woman into a savage?" she was described as displaying a sadism that "denies the virtues of womanhood."⁶⁷²

According to England herself, the picture is nothing to do with her and the Iraqi, but was in fact much more about her relationship with fellow soldier Charles Graner with whom she was having an affair. Graner had asked her to hold the strap and to pose for a picture which she then described as "showing that he has power over me, and he wanted to demonstrate that power. Anything he asked, he knew I would do it."⁶⁷³ Nonetheless, this type of framing followed the official discourse about the Abu Ghraib photographs and military culture – that this was the case of 'a few bad apples' rather than anything deliberately

⁶⁷¹ www.david-campbell.org/wp.../Framing_the_war_in_Afghanistan

⁶⁷² Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers' Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p2

⁶⁷³ Ibid p8

organised or sanctioned. Struk notes that many of the images were cropped in the majority of their subsequent publication, including the one of England discussed above. In the original image, fellow soldier Megan Ambuhl can be seen standing at the edge of the frame. Struk suggests that the cropping of her presence from scene can be understood because “presumably she is considered inconsequential to a scene that appeared to be about England’s abuse and humiliation of an Iraqi.”⁶⁷⁴

‘Peace’ and ‘Conflict’: Complex Interconnections

As Gordon has demonstrated, a persistent feature of the US military prison is its sharing of personnel with US civilian prisons.⁶⁷⁵ Prior to his active service in Iraq, Graner had been a career prison officer working in Pennsylvania’s State Correctional Institute at Greene, (SCI-Greene). He became well known to prison activists, specifically the Pennsylvania Abolitionists as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Both have documented the growing number of instances of prisoner abuse occurring at SCI-Greene. Graner was repeatedly implicated in these acts of violence. Before his employment at SCI-Greene, Graner had worked for six years as a prison guard at Fayette County prison, from which he was given a “good riddance” according to a former colleague. At Fayette County prison, guards were accused of routinely beating and humiliating prisoners, yet Graner was never criminally prosecuted for any of these offences despite the numerous accusations against him. The reasons for this, says Gordon, are because of the “utter normality of exceptional brutality.”⁶⁷⁶ The abuse of power and torture is common. Gordon observes that, “Torture, humiliation, degradation, sexual assault, assault with weapons and

⁶⁷⁴ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I. B Taurus p8

⁶⁷⁵ Gordon A (2006) Abu Ghraib: Imprisonment and the War on Terror; *Race and Class: A Journal on Racism, Empire and Globalisation* Volume 48 July-September 2006 Number 1

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid* p48

dogs, extortion, blood sport have always been part of US prison culture and behaviour:

The FBI interviewed almost everyone involved in policing at Abu Ghraib. Not one initially claimed that they had seen any behaviour that could be construed as mistreatment, much less torture as defined in international law. What they witnessed was acceptable prison guard behaviour. And they were right. The Abu Ghraib photographs did not expose a few ‘bad apples’, or an exceptional instance of brutality or perversity. The Abu Ghraib photographs exposed the dehumanisation that is the *modus operandi* of the lawful, state-of-the-art prison.⁶⁷⁷

Butler has constructed a sustained critical narrative on the content of the Abu Ghraib photographs and like other critics, she is struck particularly by the “banality of evil” contained in the images. In every photograph the camera’s gaze is uninterrupted, the field of vision is clear. No attempt to intervene is captured on film here, “The camera itself is ungagged, unbound and so occupies and references the safety zone that surrounds and supports the persecutors in the scene.”⁶⁷⁸ Nobody approaches the camera in order to stop the photographer, in fact the torturers themselves seem eager to make sure their faces are registered, their smiles referencing their thanks to the photographer for memorialising the triumph. A number of the photographs prior to their cropping for publication show, in the corners of the frame, other soldiers taking other pictures:

For example, the iconic photo of a hooded Iraqi prisoner standing on a box with wires attached to his arms includes at the right edge of the frame a soldier looking at the screen of his digital camera – presumably

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid p49

⁶⁷⁸ Butler J (2010) *Frames Of War* London Verso p84

doing what most of us do after taking a digital snapshot: checking to see whether it is a “keeper” or whether to trash and reshoot it.⁶⁷⁹

It is difficult, as Butler points out, to understand why these images “failed to be alarming”, or rather did not become alarming until they were seen, “too late”, by those outside the scenario of war and imprisonment.⁶⁸⁰ Yet Woodward and Jenkings note that soldiers’ photographs always possess a tension between the fact that military personnel act within the broader conventions and expectations of social norms and the fact that, by being required to internalise in-theatre rules of engagement and ultimately being required to kill, they specifically do not.⁶⁸¹

Perpetrator images do not appear to us in an unmediated way. Because of this, perpetrator images of terror and their display are not exempt from aesthetic analysis and critique. To do this is not, as Groys is at pains to argue, to work without any moral sense of the empirical fact of the documented event. Instead, it is to acknowledge the symbolic value of the image as it is circulated through media networks and as such it can become “subjected to an art criticism as every other image.”⁶⁸² This can very usefully take place through the language of theoretical critique, as has been demonstrated above by reference to Sontag’s and Butler’s writing about the Abu Ghraib photographs. However for Groys, successful critique can and must also take place by “the means of art itself” and that the goal of this criticism “should be a double one”.⁶⁸³ Not only should the critique be against all forms of censorship which suppress and prevent any confrontation with the reality of war and terror - often legitimated by the defence of moral values and family rights – but also there is a need for criticism that analyses the use of violent images as “the new icons of the political

⁶⁷⁹ DeTurk S (undated) *Imag(in)ing Abu Ghraib: Daniel Heyman’s Detainee Portraits*; in *Afterimage* 39 1&2 p68

⁶⁸⁰ Butler J (2010) *Frames Of War* London Verso p91

⁶⁸¹ Woodward, R and Jenkings, K op cit p107

⁶⁸² Groys (2008) *Art Power* Cambridge MIT Press p127

⁶⁸³ Ibid

sublime” and the “symbolic competition, of even commercial competition for the strongest images.”⁶⁸⁴

For Groys, the art world context is the most appropriate place for this criticism to take place. While the art world may appear to be small, closed and “even irrelevant” in comparison to the power of contemporary media markets, the diversity of the images circulating in the media is perceived by Groys as being much more limited than those of the art world. This is in part, argues Groys, because in order for media images to be effectively exploited and propagated, such images must be easily recognisable for a broad target audience. This is I think to underestimate the level of craftsmanship within certain examples of photojournalism as much as the critical capacity of audiences themselves.

Groys argues that the media can display only “what is happening now”. This is not strictly true. The past is often recalled and re-represented as a narrative template to frame contemporary events in news media. Notable here are the many images that showed Saddam Hussein, by cropping his moustache, as Hitler. Katy Parry also observed that Bush’s declaration of war in 2003 coincided with the 15-year anniversary of the Halabja chemical attack, ordered by the Hussein regime. *The Mail*, *Mirror* and *The Telegraph* all republished photographs of the dead families, who had been killed in the attack, as an attempt to emphasise the “evil nature of the Hussein regime” and to “reignite collective memories of an earlier atrocity that the coalition were only too willing to memorialise at this particular time.”⁶⁸⁵ While this is indicative of the ways in which the media use the past to support the dominant state narrative in order to legitimate and sanction war, this can also work in oppositional ways.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid p128

⁶⁸⁵ Parry K (2011) Images of Liberation? Visual Framing, Humanitarianism and British Press Photography during the 2003 Iraq Invasion; *Media Culture and Society* 33(8) Sage Publications p1187

As discussed in the previous chapter, 12 years after the first Gulf War, the *Guardian* published many previously unseen and unsparing photographs – a publication timed to coincide with the global anti-war marches taking place the following day. One of the images used was Kenneth Jarecke’s photograph of the charred Iraqi soldier. Campbell writes:

[...] Kenneth Jarecke’s photograph demonstrates the potential (through its publication 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. 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*’.⁶⁸⁶

The *Guardian*’s publication also worked to demystify news reporting of war by publically announcing the constraints under which news media works. In this way, the publication of the unseen images was an indictment *in and by* the media, *of* the media itself by making visible a war that had been previously hidden from view.

In contrast to what he perceives as immediacy in the site of the mass media, Groys, perhaps somewhat romantically, claims that art institutions alone allow for historical comparison between past and present, “between original promise and contemporary realisation of this promise” and for this reason offer themselves as places carrying the means and possibilities for effective critical discourse:

Given our current cultural climate the art institutions are practically the only places where we can actually step back from our own present and compare it with other historical eras. In these terms, the art context is

⁶⁸⁶ Campbell D (2003) Cultural governance and pictorial resistance: reflections on the imaging of war; *Review of International Studies* (2003) 29 p73

almost irreplaceable because it is particularly well suited to critically analyse and challenge the claims of the media-driven zeitgeist. The art institutions are a place where we are reminded of the egalitarian art projects of the past, of the whole history of the critique of representation and of the critique of the Sublime – so that we can measure our own time against this historical background.⁶⁸⁷

Likewise, Broomberg and Chanarin single out the space of art and the figure of the artist as occupying a privileged critical position. They claim that, “despite the burden of images in our time – the previews, thumbnails and jpegs, compressed, uploaded, ripped, squeezed, reformatted, re-edited and authorless – history it seems, demands icons, and it calcifies around certain images. Photo-journalists, caught up in the supply chain, make photographs that arrest us and that are hard to argue with. But they cannot help us demystify the results. It is the role of the artist to interrogate and challenge this system.”⁶⁸⁸

It as though an effective and critical media analysis has never existed...

The artistic critique of visual news media has a long history and this has not always been under an institutionalised politics of inclusion or of equal aesthetic rights such as Groys describes them. Raymond Williams has pointed out that it is essential to distinguish between the variable relations between ‘cultural producers’ and recognisable social institutions and on the other hand, the ways in which ‘cultural producers’ have been organised or have organised themselves as *formations*:

This is a working distinction, to make possible some variety of approach to the question of the effective social relations of culture. It is not intended to imply that there are no significant or even causal relations between institutional and formational relationships; indeed[...]

⁶⁸⁷ Groys B op cit p128

⁶⁸⁸ <http://m.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/oct/13/photojournalism-broomberg-chanarin>

these will often and perhaps always be present. But if we deduce significant cultural relations from the study of institutions alone, we shall be in real danger of missing some important cases in which cultural organisation has not been in any ordinary sense, institutional. In particular we may miss the very striking phenomenon of the cultural ‘movement’ which has been so important in the modern period [...]⁶⁸⁹

The art world and its institutions are not exempt from competing and contradictory ideological interests. As Wolff points out, “It is no longer necessary to point out the many ways in which the ethical and the political participate in, sometimes intrude into the arts and the aesthetic sphere. They are manifest in the composition of boards of trustees and the role of trustees in, for example, making decisions on gallery acquisitions, in questions of the return of treasures to their place of origin, in the selection of reviewers for books and exhibitions. Each of these practises has had its scandals and controversies in recent years.”⁶⁹⁰

It is then difficult to see why Groys should single out the space of art institutions as offering a privileged site of contemplation since they are not necessarily immune from the ‘claims of a media driven zeitgeist’. Nonetheless, Groys is right to point out such spaces as being *spaces of possibilities*. As has been previously discussed, art galleries and museums have been identified as both suitable and unsuitable contexts for ‘ethical looking’ when it comes to images of violence and suffering, and this context remains as a point of controversy.

⁶⁸⁹ Williams R (1981) *Culture*; Glasgow Fontana p35

⁶⁹⁰ Wolff, J (2008) *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty* Columbia University Press p141

“*Made you look: Made you stare*”

Judith Butler has outlined the distinct contexts in which the Abu Ghraib photographs have circulated and functioned:

as an incitement to brutality within the prison itself, as a threat of shame for the prisoners, as a chronicle of a war crime, as a testimony to the radical unacceptability of torture, and as archival and documentary work made available on the internet or displayed in museums across the US, including galleries and public spaces in a host of venues.⁶⁹¹

Amongst the first of these was Brian Wallis’s *Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Abu Ghraib*.⁶⁹² The images were also displayed as part of Julian Stallabrass’s *Memory of Fire*.⁶⁹³ In both cases the formal display of the images is worth noting. Struk describes the ICP event. Here the images were downloaded from the Internet and then after being photocopied, in the style of Steichen’s displays, they were attached with drawing pins “as casually as possible” to the wall. This formally casual procedure worked to distinguish the photographs from the work of the professional photographer. As Struk puts it :

To display the work of a well known photographer in this way, without the conventional window-mounts and frames, would have been regarded as a mark of disrespect. Clearly these were not intended to be seen as war photographs.⁶⁹⁴

Certainly for Don McCullin the manner by which his works are displayed is of great importance, but this is less to do with his own need for respect as a photographer. Mark Haworth-Booth, curator of McCullin’s 1981 exhibition at

⁶⁹¹ Butler J (2010) *Frames Of War* London Verso p92

⁶⁹² 2004-5, International Centre for Photography, New York

⁶⁹³ Brighton Photo-Biennial; 2008

⁶⁹⁴ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I B Taurus p6

the Victoria and Albert Museum, commented that during his conversation with McCullin it was clear that “the procedures of mounting and framing the photographs, of having an installation designed, were all valid because they underline the dignity of the subjects of his photographs. They were extensions of his own care in making the prints, in taking the pictures.”⁶⁹⁵

At *Memory of Fire* in Brighton the use of a ‘casual’ display tactic was also in evidence. Here the images were flat mounted on a large, free standing display board. These were set alongside work by both ‘embedded photo-journalists’ and also ‘unilaterals’ being those photographers who work without any military protection. A computer screen also showed “pastiche or re-cyclings” of the photographs from Abu Ghraib with a further series of pictures copied and pasted from the website Albasrah.Net. These were juxtaposed with ‘official’ military photographs of US soldiers handing out sweets to children “and gazing out into the future beside military hardware.”⁶⁹⁶ All of this was intended to comment on “a war carried out in the half-light cast by an atrophied media” – a point further emphasised by an enormous wall projection of the bombing of Baghdad.⁶⁹⁷

There are clearly ethical dilemmas present in placing these photographs in an art gallery context. For Edwards, some of the choices made about how to display some images were questionable. For example the use of frames for some images whilst leaving others “as low-grade images pasted on to grids directly on the wall was peculiar because so many of the framed images are modern copy-prints from digital files.”⁶⁹⁸ Retaining the low-grade status of those images made with phones, I-pads or cheap digital cameras was clearly an aesthetic and political decision taken to remind visitors of the distinctive contexts in which

⁶⁹⁵ Durden, M (2012) *Documentary Pictorial: Luc Delahaye’s Taliban 2001* in Batchen G (Ed) (2012) *Picturing atrocity: Photography on Crisis* ; London Reaktion Books p241

⁶⁹⁶ Edward S (2009) *Apocalyptic Sublime; Historical Materialism* 17 p92

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid

images of war are produced and circulated. Interestingly, Edwards also remarks on the problems of the politics on display here for attracting sponsorship, suggesting that at times, the curatorial decisions taken by Stallabrass “give the viewer too much of a moral steer at the cost of reducing the ‘war of images’ to one-dimensional ‘propaganda’”.⁶⁹⁹

The Abu Ghraib images were not the only ‘trophy’ pictures in the exhibition. Janina Struk was troubled by the use of some recognisable images from *nowthatsfuckedup.com* which were included in the construction of Thomas Hirschhorn’s *Incommensurable Banner* (2007):

The artist Thomas Hirschhorn said the banner was about ‘truth’ although he did not say whose ‘truth’ that was. None of the pictures were credited to soldiers, and NTFU was not mentioned. In the context of the art gallery the ‘gory’ pictures had in effect been transformed into an artwork, abstract horror, with no other apparent purpose than to shock. To make that message clear, the exhibit was screened off behind a large glass panel, and at the entrance eager attendants were on hand to warn visitors of the explicit nature of the images.⁷⁰⁰

Struk’s main contention here is that visitors to the exhibition would have no idea about who took the original images or why. Struk has also explored some of the reasons for the production of these images and offers a more complex account than a simple lust for the gruesome. For some soldiers, taking photographs became a way of materialising and memorialising experiences that could not necessarily be explained at the time. Taking a picture offered one possible way of sharing the unreality of this experience with those outside the theatre of war, or to make some ‘sense’ of it to themselves at a later point. For others, taking a photograph was an attempt to counter the sanitisation of war

⁶⁹⁹ *ibid*

⁷⁰⁰ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I B Taurus p168

being proffered by governments and news media. This was at least, Struk suggests, knowledge that could be gained from visiting the original website.

In a seminar which also took place in the gallery setting, Struk comments that the argument on the ethics of showing such graphic images was not much different from the arguments that took place on the NTFU website; “Opinions were polarised between those who thought the pictures were too shocking to display publicly and those who thought they should be displayed because they represent the ‘reality’ of war – although no one asked whose ‘reality’ that might be.”⁷⁰¹

Nonetheless, many visitors to the exhibition were moved to give comments. These varied between the appreciative and the down-right dismissive:

This exhibition shocked me to the core [...] never has an exhibition affected me more. It felt confusing to be looking at these images in the same way you might stand before a Jeff Wall, examining details, whilst wanting to turn away I felt compelled to look at the act of turning away, felt representative of what many of us do when we see stories in the Middle East in the news. I came away with a sense of utter depression and helplessness. What to do? What to do? (03/10/2008)

Bold and uncompromising, if a little obvious. This is just one truth, the framing of an exhibition in that most liberal of cities distorts the message of the piece to bend it purely to one end of the political spectrum. Where are the Al Quaida victims in this picture? Very provoking piece, though, expertly realised. (03/10/2008)

⁷⁰¹ Ibid

I find this really upsetting and unnecessary. Now I just feel morose and miserable. Why why why? (03/10/2008)⁷⁰²

Other comments noted the banner as being “a gallery of gore” dependent on the “dark, voyeuristic” nature of human beings and as being disrespectful to the dead, questioning how we would we react if these were pictures of our own loved ones:

Would we pace up and down it in respectful silence, contemplating all the evil in the far flung corners of the world, brought to us safely and anaesthetised through the medium of our televisions and the omni-net? NO. We would fall to our knees and we would wail.⁷⁰³

Edwards has also commented on the exhibition of the banner which seemed to be “intended to be carried on some monstrous parade of the damned.”

Hirschhorn makes his gruesome display from photographs of heads without bodies and bodies without heads; torn flesh; splattered brains; one image depicts a man with his heart ripped out; there is a picture of a head in a bucket and what seems to be a flayed human skin hanging over a barrier on the wall. Images of this type spread out across an expanse invoking the idea of unending atrocity.⁷⁰⁴

Stallabrass has reflected on his curatorial role and the difficulties of arranging the exhibition:

There is a danger here that some of the objects that we wish to show may, especially in a gallery setting, be taken as art works which have been recommended by some power of intellectual and aesthetic

⁷⁰² <http://2008.bpb.org.uk/2008/blog/3265/comments-books/>

⁷⁰³ As above

⁷⁰⁴ Edward S (2009) *Apocalyptic Sublime; Historical Materialism* 17 p98

authority. So the aesthetic is both unavoidable and perilous, and it is best to be conscious of it, to highlight it and declare it openly.⁷⁰⁵

As to Hirschhorn's banner, Stallabrass had this to say:

This is a protester's banner writ large, which (like Brian Haw's display in Parliament Square) contains a collage of corpses torn apart by modern weaponry. Such weaponry has been developed, not merely to kill, but to destroy the body, and the horrific remains are left as a lesson for those tempted to further resist. The subterranean circulation of these images, online and in disreputable magazines, has a similar function to the publication of what took place in Guantanamo Bay, or the placement of torture chambers by the Latin American dictatorships in the centre of cities: that the consequences of opposition should be known by all without being broadcast.⁷⁰⁶



Thomas Hirschhorn: *The Incommensurable Banner* (2007) (photograph by Julian Stallabrass)⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁵ Stallabrass J (2009) *Rearranging Corpses, Curatorially*; www.courtauld.ac.uk/people/stallabrass

⁷⁰⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁰⁷ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/slowkodachrome/5911900058>

For Stallabrass, the work resists any easy reading as an ‘art’ object because of its rough and ready assemblage; “its lack of finish, its overtly cheap materials and spatchcocked construction, which always reveals its own methods – would seem to blunt the aesthetic.” This sets the work and its politics apart from the “carefully made and polished art objects that are sold out of galleries” as yet another one of the “domestic accoutrements of the rich.”⁷⁰⁸

Edwards is supportive of Hirschhorn’s work and comments on the nature of the assembled images – while they could “easily be grabbed from some horror-movie, we instinctively know they are not.” Edwards continues that:

There is a prevalent criticism of Hirschhorn for his seemingly naive belief in the critical power of images of horror and violence. It is fair to say that the liberal Left is quite hostile to any work that foregrounds violence and body-parts, but particularly so towards Hirschhorn, often scattering around terms like ‘pornography’.⁷⁰⁹

Cohen also comments on the critique against so-called “over-acknowledgement” in the work of artists, journalists and photographers who create representations of suffering and become subjected to a form of ‘folk ridicule’:

To cynical conservatives, they are the ‘bleeding heart liberals’. To smart-arsed radical sociologists they are voyeurs of suffering, pornographers of violence, exploiters of exploitation, merchants in misery. To smart-arsed psychoanalysts they are sublimating, projecting,

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid

⁷⁰⁹ Edward S (2009) *Apocalyptic Sublime; Historical Materialism* 17 p99

repressing, masochistic and, of course, ‘in denial’ about their own immersion in suffering. Theirs is not a happy time.⁷¹⁰

Hirschhorn’s strategy is evocative of Ernst Friedrich’s “*Krieg dem Kriege*” or “*War against War!*” which was first published in 1924 in outrage against the human cost of the First World War.⁷¹¹ However, of central importance to Friedrich’s work is in his accompanying text which opened up the social and structural relationships of war and its causes which he claimed was essentially about the possession of wealth. Friedrich was a committed pacifist who compiled not only a book of photographs depicting the brute horror of warfare but also used these and other objects to create an anti-war museum. The images, as with Hirschhorn’s banner, are not credited – they come from a number of sources; from the press, from soldiers themselves and from military archives and are accompanied by a harsh commentary. The book shows emaciated bodies lying in trenches; executions; a raped and mutilated female soldier; mass graves; medical photographs of the most appalling facial injuries are interspersed with photographs of monarchy, church and state. In his opening pages, addressed “To Human Beings in all Lands” and translated into four languages Friedrich is clear about his aims:

In many books have many words been written for and against this most diabolical, this meanest and lowest of all crimes of the State. The bourgeois poet in his strength glorified this war in verse and the proletarian writer wrote in glowing wrath against this mass murder. But of all the treasury of words of all men of all lands suffices not, in the present and in the future, to paint correctly this butchery of human beings. Here however, in the present book, - partly by accident, partly intentionally – a picture of war, objectively true and faithful to nature,

⁷¹⁰ Cohen S (2001) *States of Denial*; London Polity Press p260

⁷¹¹ Friedrich E (1924) (1901) *Krieg dem Kriege (War Against War)* Frankfurt am main; Zweitausendeins

has been photographically recorded for all time. The pictures in this book from page -- (*sic*) to the end show records obtained by the inexorable, incorruptible photographic lens of the trenches and the mass graves, of “military lies”, of the “field of honour” and of other “idylls” of the “Great Epoch”.⁷¹²

Friedrich pre-empts the kinds of criticism he knows the book will bring forth; “And no one comes and says: “Oh how frightful that such images should be shown!””⁷¹³ Instead, Friedrich saw his work as a way to “tear off the mask” of the ‘field of honour’ and ‘international swindle.’ The book was dedicated to all ‘war profiteers and parasites’ and to ‘all war provokers’ – to “the ‘kings’, generals, presidents and ministers of all lands”. It was also dedicated as a ‘War Bible’ to the Priests who carried out blessings on weapons of war. Should there be anyone left who still believed in the righteousness of war after seeing the pictures, Friedrich suggests they be locked up in a ‘mad-house’:

It may well be that the nationalists and war-provokers, the kings and the generals, may wish to carry on their war among themselves, on their own account and at their own risk, and that they force no man to join against his will! Such a war would indeed be welcomed by every pacifist and every proletarian! Then all the war enthusiasts would at last of their own free will exterminate one another.⁷¹⁴



Images from Ernst Friedrich, *War Against War* (1924)

⁷¹² Ibid pp22-23

⁷¹³ Ibid

⁷¹⁴ Ibid p23

Friedrich makes a special plea to women that they should protest against the state and not to allow them to take their sons and husbands so as to “prove that the bond with the husband is stronger than an army order”; a mother should not sing soldier’s songs to the baby in her arms. Fathers should not give their children war toys of guns and soldiers; “the toy soldier is the Judas that you yourselves bring into the house” which mobilises children for war. Finally, in what can only be termed as an exposition on the craft of citizenship, Friedrich asserts that it is the children who are brought up and “educated in love and solidarity” and “respect unconditionally the inviolable sanctity of human life” who will “most certainly be unfit for arms and war service.”⁷¹⁵

At the end of the book, Friedrich makes a new appeal to ‘all human beings in all lands’ to place more pictures at his disposal alongside other information – war reports, speeches, army orders - in order to form a complete and comprehensive pacifist archive and to extend his anti-war museum in Berlin which he had established in the 1920s.⁷¹⁶ It was a short lived project; “on 17th February 1933, a month after the National Socialists took power and on the night that the Reichstag was burnt down, Nazi storm troopers broke into Friedrich’s museum, destroyed the images and closed it down.”⁷¹⁷ Clearly then, as now, harnessing the *potential* power of images was a matter of grave importance.

Production, Reproduction and Reformation

The Abu Ghraib photographs have not only been produced and encountered as photographs in their original form and context as well as in new contexts, but

⁷¹⁵ Ibid

⁷¹⁶ Ibid p265

⁷¹⁷ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I B Taurus p161

they have also acted as a stimulus for the production of new images. Notable here is Colombian artist, Fernando Botero and his *Abu Ghraib* paintings (2006) which he began to work on as a ‘not for sale’ project after reading the investigative journalism of Seymour Hirsch in conjunction with seeing the original photographs in the news press. Likewise, Daniel Heyman’s *Detainee Portraits* were produced between 2005 and 2008 as he accompanied American lawyers collecting detainees’ depositions for use in civil cases against the US. Hans Haacke’s *Stargazer* (2004) is also derived from news media images. Haacke shows a man in an orange jumpsuit – synonymous with news images of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay - with a hood constructed from the stars of the American flag. Of this image WJT Mitchell has written that, “The hood as an instrument to produce the faceless anonymity and blindness of the torture victim has been synthesised with the emblem of American sovereignty, summarising the American ‘war on terror’ as the self-destructive process it has been.”⁷¹⁸

Wendy Hesford has also pointed out some of the popular renderings to which the original images have been put:

The hooded figure, a reminder of US domination, has been appropriated by artists and protesters for anti-war demonstrations around the world: An Iraqi artist painted a mural in a street in Baghdad based on the US Statue of Liberty and the photograph of the hooded detainee, highlighting the conjoining of executioner and victim. In Barcelona, on the eve of the first anniversary of the publication of the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, members of Amnesty International dressed in hoods and shackles staged a protest against the mistreatment of the prisoners by the US Military. Outside the Supreme Court in Washington, DC, an activist dressed as the hooded Iraqi detainee

⁷¹⁸ Costello D and Willsdon D (Eds) (2008) *The Life and Death of Images*; London Tate Publishing p206

protested the appointment of the new US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales.⁷¹⁹



Fernando Botero; *Abu Ghraib* (2006)



Daniela Heyman; *Detainee Portraits* (2005-2008)



Hans Haacke; *Stargazer*: 2004



Sallah Edine Salat; *Baghdad Mural: Hooded Man and Statue of Liberty*



Ashley Gilbertson: *A soldier takes his first short break in thirty-six hours inside an Iraqi home. He and his squad had just searched more than 1,000 homes in southern Samarra.*⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁹ Cited in Dauphinee E (2007) *The Politics of the Body In Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery*; *Security Dialogue* Volume 38(2) Sage Publications p148

⁷²⁰ Gilbertson, A;:op cit p144

There is an uncanny resemblance of critical meaning between Haacke's and Gilbertson's photographs above.

Although the appropriations of images from Abu Ghraib have been met with a variety of responses, through the re-appropriation of these acts, the original photographs have, as Butler puts it, travelled outside the original scene; "have left the hands of the photographer" and in doing so have perhaps turned against the photographer by "vanquishing any pleasure" that the initial act of taking the pictures may have produced.⁷²¹

This is an important point that, to an extent, counters Sontag's qualms about the exploitation of viewing another's pain. Clearly exploitation is dependent on the way that images of pain are contextualised and what type of surplus value is produced. The exhibitions discussed in this chapter were not designed to produce 'disinterested pleasure' or indeed any other kind of pleasure. That is not to say that some viewers *might* enjoy looking at damaged bodies or that some viewers *might* see the violence of war as being morally justifiable, but these views would not be brought into being purely by the exhibitions. That viewers *might* however just possibly be altered by it may be a risk worth taking. The exhibitions offer one space in which public discourse might be opened up. In an impact review of *Memory of Fire* it was noted that:

There is evidence [...] to show that these various audiences were led to revise their understanding of the historical events depicted, and the significance and power of particular forms of representation. This had a social impact in having viewers reassess modes of media representation in contemporary conflicts.⁷²²

⁷²¹ Butler J (2010) *Frames of War* London Verso p92

⁷²² Impact case study (ref 3b) Research Excellence Framework 2014 impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.

Butler argues that the public display of the original photographs in other contexts can perform a countering strategy since the new context “gives rise to a different gaze.”⁷²³ Butler has written that the photograph itself “neither tortures nor redeems but can be instrumentalised in radically different directions, depending on how it is discursively framed and through what form of media presentation it is displayed.”⁷²⁴ Butler refers specifically to Brian Wallis’s exhibition of the photographs at the International Centre of Photography in New York, and later shown at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh; here the photographers’ names were not documented, only the names of the newspapers who had agreed to publish them were recorded since it was through them that the images were brought to public attention and scrutiny. By not naming the photographers, Butler argues that this leaves them as being ‘part of the scene’ in which their complicity remains exposed. Butler further argues that :

In this sense, the exhibition of the photographs with caption and commentary on the history of their publication and reception becomes a way of exposing and countering the closed circuit of triumphalist and sadistic exchange that formed the original scene of the photograph itself. That scene now becomes the object, and we are now not so much directed by the frame as directed toward it with a new critical capacity.⁷²⁵

Nonetheless, appropriation of the images has not stopped at their incorporation into art works and/or as images of protest. Struk observes that they have also become used as commercial vehicles, for example to market a board game in the USA called ‘Battle to Baghdad: The Fight for Freedom’ and to promote the fashion industry. Struk describes a series of photographs which appeared in *Italian Vogue* (summer, 2006) and carried an unambiguous reference to the Abu

⁷²³ Butler J (2010) op cit p92

⁷²⁴ Ibid

⁷²⁵ Ibid p96

Ghraib images. In doing so the images of torture are “translated into consumer products....In our current moral state of emergency, torture has become fashionable.”⁷²⁶

In a similar vein, a current TV advertisement for a well known high street optician presents the veteran news journalist Sir Trevor McDonald. He tells us earnestly and authoritatively of all the horrors he has witnessed until the advert cuts, with continued voice over from McDonald, to iconic clips of film footage of war and famine: “We are defined by what we see. I’ve witnessed moments that are beyond any descriptive power.” The advertisement was produced by Lightbox, founded by award winning documentary maker Simon Chinn who won an Oscar for *Man on Wire* and *Searching for Sugar Man*. They were approached by the company in order to produce an advert that had the look and feel and the production values of a feature documentary. This is, according to the advert, “Vision. Taken seriously.”

While such commercial uses are clearly at odds with a critical position on the role of images within war some commentators have remained steadfast that there is *no* ethical way by which to view the photographs from Abu Ghraib. This is primarily because the photographs were integral to the process of the torture itself and so by looking at them it is argued that we continue and participate in this process. In the following chapter, this ethical and political position will be examined.

⁷²⁶ Struk, J (2011) *Private Pictures: Soldiers’ Inside View of War*; I B Taurus p6

8. Re-viewing Painful Images: Reflection and Vision



Goya: Yo Lo Vi (I saw this); from *The Disasters of war*

*When the Nazis came for the Communists,
I remained silent;
I was not a Communist*

*Then they locked up the social democrats,
I remained silent;
I was not a social democrat*

*Then they came for the trade unionists,
I did not speak out;
I was not a trade unionist*

*Then they came for the Jews,
I did not speak out;
I was not a Jew*

*When they came for me,
there was no one left to speak out for me*

Martin Niemöller (1976)⁷²⁷

⁷²⁷ Cited in Pugh J (Ed) (2009) *What is Radical politics Today?* London Palgrave MacMillan p23

As Peggy Phelan has observed:

After several decades of analysing the structure of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, Hollywood's male gaze, the imperialist colonialist gaze, the racist gaze, we are now accustomed to accepting the idea that looking is often a mode of violence, an act embedded in regimes of power.⁷²⁸

This is of course often the case, but where there is power there is also resistance to power. The act of looking - and to keep looking - becomes essential if any resistance to the manipulation and violence meted out by the powerful on the powerless is to take shape. It is a necessary part of bearing witness. As Niemöller's poem makes clear, to bear witness requires both representation and response and through this, the act of bearing witness has the potential to produce communities of action.

Patricia Williams acknowledges that resistance through looking is not always easy; "It's a difficult task, this re-viewing of violence, this striving for reflection rather than spectacle, for vision rather than voyeurism, for study rather than exposure."⁷²⁹ But it is not impossible. It can be done, as discussed in the previous chapter by exploring the frame that seeks to delimit and contain the scene and to show "that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognisable."⁷³⁰

In the preceding chapter, I examined the circulation and critique of soldiers' photographs of torture from Abu Ghraib and in particular their re-presentation in the context of the exhibition. Audience comments at *Memory of Fire* clearly demonstrated that viewers did not simply respond aesthetically to the variety of photographic images on show but made ethical and political decisions about the

⁷²⁸ Batchen G (Ed) (2012) *Picturing atrocity: Photography on Crisis* ; London Reaktion Books p55

⁷²⁹ Apel D (2003) On Looking: Lynching Photographs and Legacies of Lynching after 9/11; *American Quarterly* Volume 55 Number 3 September 2003; John Hopkins University Press p460

⁷³⁰ Butler J (2010) *Frames Of War* London Verso p9

content of the exhibition. As noted, the impact report from the exhibition suggested that it was successful in providing a critical environment where questions of representation were discussed and challenged. The polarised concepts of the aesthetic and the political that Rosler identified between ‘news’ and ‘art’ are not in evidence here.

Much has changed in museum practice since Rosler wrote. Museums are no longer only repositories for ‘art’ (although they include that) but they have evolved into interactive spaces for critical projects (such as the exhibition of Rosler’s own work mentioned previously) and can at times work as a form of public sociology.⁷³¹ Nonetheless, Sontag noted that much scepticism still surrounds the display of work by ‘photographers of conscience’; even in the traditional gallery setting there could be no guarantee of the ‘reverential conditions’ necessary to be fully responsive to them:

So far as any photographs with the most solemn or heart-rending subject matter are art – and this is what they become when they are hung on walls, whatever the disclaimers – they partake of the fate of all wall-hung or floor-supported art displayed in public spaces. That is, they are stations along a – usually accompanied – stroll. A museum or gallery visit is a social situation, riddled with distractions, in the course of which art is commented on. Up to a point, the weight and seriousness of such photographs can survive better in a book, where one can look privately, linger over the pictures, without talking.⁷³²

For some authors however, there is no space that is appropriate for viewing the photographs from Abu Ghraib, since the act of photographing here was central to the torture. This chapter examines and critiques this proposal as it is put forward by Elizabeth Dauphinée. She is not alone in taking this stance. Rebecca

⁷³¹ See *Memory of Fire* although the content of this was not always displayed in existing ‘gallery’ settings.

⁷³² Sontag, S (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others* ; London Penguin books p109

Adelman has also argued that despite the purest of intentions to condemn torture and to argue for social justice, re-representation merely privileges the Westerner, who in her condemnation simply demonstrates ethical superiority by offering penitence for a wrong.⁷³³

The Art of Looking Away

Elizabeth Dauphinée offers an exceptionally thoughtful argument. Dauphinée is concerned to expose the complexities involved in representing, looking at and empathising with the pain of another, both for those individuals perceived and theorised through a concept of ‘Cartesian subjectivity’ but equally for individuals within a theory of intersubjectivity.⁷³⁴ In many ways, this continues the themes set out by Rosler and Solomon Godeau concerning the double subjugation of the photographed body in pain.

Dauphinée opens with the claim that the experience of the body in pain defies attempts at visual representation. In the first place, an image can never wholly or unproblematically communicate “the complexity of a lived reality”. Unlike other emotional states, pain has no object, but nevertheless, the visceral experience of pain simultaneously encourages and complicates attempts to represent pain, to understand or to ‘make sense’ of pain since this practice operates “within the logic of a culture and a politics that rely for their ethical bearings on the verifiability associated with the visual”.⁷³⁵ Nonetheless, the image of the body in pain has given rise to a diverse spectrum of political activities including torture, military intervention, anti-war activities and critical social science scholarship. In her acknowledgment of this, Dauphinée remains

⁷³³ See Kozol, W (2014) *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing* University of Minnesota Press p158

⁷³⁴ Dauphinée E (2007) The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery; *Security Dialogue* 38(2) Sage Publications pp139-155

⁷³⁵ *Ibid* p139

alert to the fact that it is no easy task to judge the ethics of how the image of the body in pain is used based on the intentions of the user alone since “many of these practices rely on a techno-logic of the visual to validate their respective projects, and many rely on the circulation of abject imagery to illustrate and support their political claims.”⁷³⁶ Dauphinée suggests that:

In turn these practices fetishize pain in their drive to make visible what is essentially *unimaginable* – that is, the spectrum of experience associated with the body in pain. The body in pain is thus produced as an aesthetic visual image, a symbolic icon that stands in for itself as the referent object of political violence.⁷³⁷

The stated aim of Dauphinée’s article is to suggest that while pain is “essentially unimaginable”, this essential interiority does not mean that it cannot be accessed or responded to. Still, she does want to argue that the drive to visually represent the body in pain ultimately works to further the rupture between the Cartesian self and other:

I want to pose that the imperative to make pain visible through contemporary technologies of visual representation actually works to contain and delimit the experience of pain by locating it so firmly in the distant and disconnected bodies of others that our ability to engage is relegated to that of observation, which severely limits the possibility of making response.

Dauphinée continues:

The drive to repetitively circulate the icon of the tortured body for ethical academic and praxis-oriented projects is to risk the same logic of verifiability that animated the production of pain in the first place – that

⁷³⁶ Ibid

⁷³⁷ Ibid

is the appropriation of others' bodies through photography and their objectification toward the service of a particular kind of politics.⁷³⁸

Following *some* parts of Elaine Scarry's extensive discourse on the body in pain, Dauphinée discusses the idea of the inexpressibility of pain; that pain is both world and language destroying. Because of this, the options for representing pain "are limited to a range of visual practises that can only ever point to some trace – some visible *cause* that might point to the presence of pain in another (ie the emaciated body in starvation, the torn and bleeding body in war, the contorted face of the prisoner at Abu Ghraib)." ⁷³⁹ In doing this, Dauphinée argues that there is a flattening out of the experience of pain through a politics of representation that translates into the development of an aesthetic of pain-causing phenomena or expressions of pain. This "iconography of symbols" thus comes to stand in for pain and becomes "the representational alibis for actual pain." ⁷⁴⁰

In the imaging of pain-causing phenomena and of bodies in pain, the specificity of the interior experience of pain, and of the subject that experiences it, is elided, or even entirely evacuated. People become representatives of their plights.⁷⁴¹

Scarry argues that one's own pain can be distinguished from the other's in the following manner: to *have* pain is to have certainty yet to *hear* about someone else's pain is to have doubt since the pain of the other cannot be felt in exactly the same way and thus confirmed.⁷⁴² Because of this the possibilities for the accurate or meaningful expression of pain, are according to Dauphinée, "always

⁷³⁸ Ibid p140

⁷³⁹ Ibid p141

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid p142

⁷⁴¹ Ibid

⁷⁴² Scarry E (1985) *The Body In Pain*; New York Oxford, Oxford University Press p13 (my emphasis)

subject to the ever present threat of their negation.”⁷⁴³ Nonetheless, she suggests that both the doubt and certainty of the experience of pain lies behind the drive to image the pain of others who, Dauphinée argues are then consequently encountered as “generalities of bodies – dead, wounded, starving, diseased and homeless....In their pervasive depersonalisation, [they appear as an]anonymous corporeality”⁷⁴⁴

The re-inscription of individual identity is often suggested to act as a salve against the violence of depersonalisation, abstraction and the generic, as Anthony Haughey did with *Class of '73*. In the case of the Abu Ghraib photographs this strategy cannot be applied unproblematically. Peggy Phelan observes the use of hooding in the pictures:

The photographs simultaneously invite and reject the usual association between the face and subjectivity. Over and over, the prisoners' faces are covered in hoods. We see both the visibility of the body and the absence of the subject.[...]The prisoner's subjectivity is put under erasure by both the hood and the stillness of the action; the photograph marks the hollowing out of the proprietary relationship between body and self.[...]He lacks the capacity to witness his own collapse. His subjectivity, in other words, is already removed from the image.⁷⁴⁵

Butler has also commented on the anonymity of the prisoners and the problem of reconstructing their “humanity” noting that even when faces are not shrouded in the act of torture, in their publication the faces and genitals of the prisoners are routinely pixilated to deliberately obscure identity and protect ‘privacy’.

This results in a set of photographs of people who are both nameless and

⁷⁴³ Dauphinée E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery*; *Security Dialogue* 38(2) Sage Publications p141

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid* p142

⁷⁴⁵ Phelan, P (2012) *Atrocity and Action: The Performative Force of the Abu Ghraib Photographs* in Batchen G (Ed) (2012) *Images of Atrocity*; Reaktion Books p56

faceless. But for Butler, the obscured face and the absent name offer themselves up as the very mark of humanity.⁷⁴⁶ Butler states:

Do we lament the lack of names? Yes and no. They are, and are not, ours to know. We might think that our norms of humanisation require the name and the face, but perhaps the “face” works through or as its shroud, in and through the means by which it is subsequently obscured. In this sense, the names are not ours to know, and affirming this cognitive limit is a way of affirming the humanity that has escaped the visual control of the photograph.⁷⁴⁷

As Butler suggests, in this instance *naming* the victims *would* be to expose them further and “reiterate the crime.”⁷⁴⁸ Nonetheless, some of the detainees have since identified themselves. Some have laid claim to the identity of the tortured “hooded man.”⁷⁴⁹ Ali Shalal Qaissi was pictured and named on the front of the New York Times holding the notorious image. As Morris notes, Ali Shalal Qaissi was no longer an anonymous ‘victim’ but was now a national news story, not because he was a victim of torture but because he was in a famous photograph. The story was later retracted. Although it was not disputed that he had been at Abu Ghraib and may well have been subject to similar torture he was not ‘the man on the box.’ The evidence of this was paradoxically confirmed by close up scrutiny through photographic enlargements of the prisoner’s deformed left hand.⁷⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Dauphinée emphasises that :

The fundamental inexpressibility of pain is the unsaid hypothesis on which a range of claims about torture, war and death as primarily

⁷⁴⁶ Butler J (2010)*Frames of War* London Verso p94

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid p95

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid

⁷⁴⁹ opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/.../will-the-real-hooded-man-please-stand-up

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid

interior experiences (and thus doubtable experiences) are made possible.⁷⁵¹

By reference to both Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin the inexpressibility of pain and the poverty of its communication are further called up. Arendt had argued that the concentration camp survivor would not have been believed since the “profound and potentially limitless pain is understood to defy attempts at narration, because the capacity to express the content of that pain is understood to be severely curtailed”. In the same way, those who do eventually come to speak or write about ‘the unimaginable’ which can never be fully reported may be regarded as ‘suspect’ and worse yet, the survivor may begin to doubt his own truthfulness, “as though he had mistaken a nightmare for a reality.”⁷⁵² Didi-Huberman also comments on the problem of remembering one’s own pain with certainty through considering the written statements that concentration camp prisoners often buried in the ground, “*bottles cast into the earth*” albeit without a bottle to preserve the writing:

These writings are haunted by two complementary constraints. First, there is the ineluctable obliteration of the witness himself: “The SS often tell us that they won’t let a single witness survive.” But then there was the fear that the testimony itself would be obliterated, even if it were transmitted to the outside; for did it not risk being incomprehensible, being considered senseless, unimaginable? “What exactly happened” as Zalmen Lewental confided to the scrap of paper that he was preparing to bury in the ground, “no other human being can imagine.”⁷⁵³

⁷⁵¹ Dauphinée E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery*; *Security Dialogue* 38(2) Sage Publications p142

⁷⁵² Ibid

⁷⁵³ Didi-Huberman G (2008) *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs From Auschwitz*; Chicago London University of Chicago Press p6

Likewise, Benjamin suggested that the witnessing of war takes away the ability to speak about it.⁷⁵⁴ “It is an obvious assertion that where violence is inflicted on man, it is also inflicted on language” said Primo Levi.⁷⁵⁵ More recently John Berger has reflected on the ‘the rubble of words’ which war – in this case the Israeli occupation of Palestine - brings about:

The rubble is of houses, roads and the debris of daily lives. There’s scarcely a Palestinian family that has not been forced during the last half century to flee from somewhere, just as there’s scarcely a town in which buildings are not regularly bulldozed by the occupying army. There’s also the rubble of words – the rubble of words that house nothing anymore, whose sense has been destroyed.[.....]⁷⁵⁶

A gap between declared principles and realpolitik may be a constant throughout history. Often the declarations are grandiloquent. Here, however it’s the opposite. The words are far smaller than the events. What is happening is the careful destruction of a people and a promised nation. And around this destruction there are small words and evasive silence.⁷⁵⁷

These arguments emphasise the concept of pain as language destroying. As Dauphinée puts it, “Here we see that pain and trauma are so fundamentally inaccessible and unshareable that any attempt at recounting one’s experiences is haunted by the fact that one’s suffering will always and necessarily be received by others with radical doubt.”⁷⁵⁸ But Dauphinée evades the point here that for

⁷⁵⁴ Dauphinée E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery; Security Dialogue 38(2)* Sage Publications p142

⁷⁵⁵ Cited in Didi-Huberman G (2008) *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs From Auschwitz*; Chicago London University of Chicago Press p20

⁷⁵⁶ Berger J (2007) *Hold Everything Dear* London Verso pp7-8

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid

⁷⁵⁸ Dauphinée E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery; Security Dialogue 38(2)* Sage Publications p142

Arendt, Levi, Benjamin and Berger resisting this ‘radical doubt’ has served as an impetus in the struggle to retain language in order to at least *approach* some communion *with and of* the other’s pain, which in turn carves out a space where ‘the other’ might eventually come to speak for herself and be heard *in her own terms*. As Scarry has noted:

To witness the moment when pain becomes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language; but conversely, to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself.⁷⁵⁹

Pain can be tackled only if it is communicated. Scarry has also considered that “though there is ordinarily no language for pain, with the desire to eliminate pain, an at least fragmentary means of verbalisation is available to both those who are in pain and to those who wish to speak on behalf of the pain others endure.”⁷⁶⁰

Dauphinée holds it that the witnessing of pain can only ever be a partial, incomplete and imperfect since the interior experience of the other’s pain can never be fully experienced. ‘*Perfect witnessing*’ is not only impossible but may also be, as Dauphinée argues, “probably undesirable.”⁷⁶¹ This is not due solely to the impossibility of experiencing another’s pain but instead *perfect witnessing* harbours the risk that “the pain of others would be evacuated – through a refocus on the self – from the realm of politics.”⁷⁶² It was for similar reasons – of a self-preoccupation taking the place of reflection on the suffering

⁷⁵⁹ Scarry E (1985) *The Body In Pain*; New York Oxford, Oxford University Press p6

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid p9

⁷⁶¹ Dauphinée E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery*; *Security Dialogue* 38(2) Sage Publications p143

⁷⁶² Ibid

of others - that Sontag was faulted for her comments that in the Abu Ghraib photographs, we see ourselves: “The photographs are us.”

Dauphinée argues that given the inaccessibility of fully experiencing the pain of the other – which marks the distance between self and other – the visual representation and especially the photographic representation of pain and pain causing events is similarly constrained. Photographs, as the “visual symbolics of pain are the subject of fierce contestation.”⁷⁶³ Photographic images form and assist with “the conclusion of the narratives that come to be associated with the imagery” and as such contribute and collude with the ‘narrative stabilisation process’ through which a host of fragmented and disparate events are mobilised into a “matrix of meaning.”⁷⁶⁴ This was, she suggests, the case for media images showing the collapse of the World Trade Centre. Dauphinée argues that the use of a multitude of ‘visual effects’ - freeze framing, slow motion or repetition for example- was able to ‘extract’ the event ‘9/11’ “from chaotic temporal debris and from the affective flows of terror and disorder.”⁷⁶⁵

Yet the narratives born from positing a relationship between image and text are never fixed and stable as the changing use through the redisplay of lynching photographs for example attests. Whilst Dauphinée suggests that the multiplicity of news visuals was able to extract ‘9/11’ as a coherent event, David Company offers a different, more critical account of the media framing of ‘9/11’. He suggests that the flood of moving images resulting from the event were in themselves registered through the moving image as being *unable* to produce a stable narrative for ‘official history’. He comments on the production of a Channel 4 television programme which documented the photographer Joel Meyerowitz. Meyerowitz was given the task of creating an ‘official history’ of both the destruction and its clean-up operation:

⁷⁶³ Ibid p143

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid p144

Just about everyone worldwide with access to a television had seen the fall of the towers and the ensuing news reports, through electronic images transmitted globally and instantaneously. Lower Manhattan became the most imaged and visible of places, the epicentre of a vast state-of-the-art digital and video news production. Yet here was a report being beamed to Britain featuring a solitary man, his tripod and his forty-five pound, sixty year old Deardorff camera.⁷⁶⁶

For Company, the programme indicated, unusually, that ‘still photography’, in contrast to moving film, persisted as the preferred medium for the construction of an official body of images – by producing a television programme about the documentary power of still photography; television here was deeming itself unable to perform this task.⁷⁶⁷ As Sontag claimed, the still photograph has the “deeper bite” in the midst of nonstop television imagery: “In an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorising it.”⁷⁶⁸

Dauphinée clearly recognises the fragility of narrative. She acknowledges that the solidification of narratives which develop around an image can be subjected to an excavation process in order to demonstrate “the ways in which facts have solidified around the fragmented visual representations of the events.” In the same way, Dauphinée puts it that the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib have been “mobilized into evidence for a range of conclusive stories about what took place there.”⁷⁶⁹ As discussed at length above, the range of narratives includes those who saw the photographs as exemplifying ‘emotional release’ or a ‘college prank’; those who saw the hypocrisy of the US ‘democratic

⁷⁶⁶ Company D (2007) *Safety in Numbness* In Company, D (ed) (2007) *The Cinematic* Whitechapel London , the MIT Press p185

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid

⁷⁶⁸ Sontag S (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others*; Penguin p19

⁷⁶⁹ Dauphinée E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery*; *Security Dialogue* 38(2) Sage Publications p144

intervention’ and those who saw the photographs as testimony to a growing acceptance of brutality in American cultural life. Other commentators, such as Feldman understood the images as being a strategic component in the language of ‘shock and awe’ that framed the Iraq invasion: “hooded, faceless bodies manipulated/posed as typified ethnic specimens – mass subjects and virtualised bodies – not as people capable of discourse and confession.”⁷⁷⁰

Nonetheless, whilst the narratives above may be different, they are clearly not as mutually exclusive in terms of the ‘fierce contestation’ that Dauphinée implies. Another way of looking at the array of narratives surrounding the images is to suggest, with Phelan that contrary to the images providing the solidification of narratives, because of the contestations that the photographs from Abu Ghraib generate, they actually *resist* and deter the consolation of narrative coherence.⁷⁷¹ This is not to discount the empirical event taking place.

Photographic imagery, as I have explored, has become a significant medium for accessing the pain of others and thus bringing private pain in to the realm of the political. No matter what the political intentions are however, Dauphinée insists that there is no ethically pure way by which the Abu Ghraib images can be represented and for that reason she has chosen not to reproduce them in her own article. In a footnote, she explains that in the last two years, she had attended several seminars where these pictures have been used extensively: “Each scholar expressed the view that, because they believed the torture was wrong and because they were opposed to the war in Iraq, their use of the images towards these goals was ethically sound.”⁷⁷² According to Dauphinée, “there is no necessary politics associated with the images” which have “flattened”, if not “evacuated” their subjects, and as such the viewer must either “accept the

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷⁷¹ Batchen G (Ed) (2012)*Images of Atrocity*; Reaktion Books p54

⁷⁷² Dauphinee E (2007) The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery; *Security Dialogue* 38(2) Sage Publications p145

avoidance of politics that the photograph announces” or attempt to actively construct a politics which is then inserted into or imposed upon the photographic image:

For this reason, the ‘ethical’ use of the images of torture and other atrocities is always in a state of absolute tension: the bodies in the photographs are still exposed to our gaze in ways that render them abject, nameless and humiliated – even when our goal in the use of that imagery is to oppose their condition. The imagery of their pain is still read *by and for us*, and this requires us to interrogate both how and why we are engaged in the circulation of the photographs.⁷⁷³

Because there is no single way to read this imagery, Dauphinée asserts that neither voyeurism nor the objectification of the other’s body can be escaped and as such, even the use of the photographs for ‘ethical aims’ will run the risk of performing the same task for which the images were created, that is “the circulation of shattered bodies, in part, as specimens for political projects.”⁷⁷⁴

As Butler, Sontag and Linfield have also acknowledged, the photographic record of torture was integral to the torture itself – a point which was continually referred to in the testimonies of the detainees. Dauphinée argues that those who have defended the publication and re-presentation of the photographs do so on the grounds that there is a “significant degree of ethical separation between the torture and the imaging and circulation of the imagery of torture, and that intention is of paramount importance.”⁷⁷⁵

Against this, Dauphinée puts it that by marking the ‘pain producing event’ (in this case, specifically the torture at Abu Ghraib and generally the Iraq war) as that which happens to the ‘other’, “the photograph as visual artefact also works

⁷⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid p147

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid p148

to propose and police a boundary between worlds of pain and non-pain, creating a rupture that may be insurmountable.”⁷⁷⁶ So-called ‘ethical’ responses may simply become self-referential rather than other-regarding. In this process, the suffering of the other is appropriated and eventually by-passed in order ‘only’ to point the problem that caused it. Dauphinée’s use of the word ‘only’ seems significant, but troublesome; if the problem that causes the pain-producing event can be located by acknowledging the causal role of a ‘self’ (which is by her own admission both individual and collective) in creating pain for others then surely this offers some reflexive opportunity to at least address, if not rectify the problem. However, despite that, Dauphinée suggests self-reference produces a second problem; when the images from Abu Ghraib are used as symbols of the War on Terror they are further dislocated from the specificities of the other’s suffering body and from a vast range of other specific violent activities carried out within that war. According to Dauphinée:

The image stabilizes opposition to what took place in Abu Ghraib, partly because it stabilizes ‘what happened’ into a set of coherent narratives that can be mobilized as an iconic representation of *what this war is*.⁷⁷⁷

There is a real difficulty in Dauphinée’s argument at this point. She suggests that she is interested in the “modest enterprise of inquiring *how, why and with what effects* we are employing these aesthetic technologies in our resistance efforts, and to ask ourselves what our answers might mean for others.” We must, she argues, interrogate ourselves as both *producers* and *consumers* of this imagery.

Arguably, to not look at and to refuse to re-present these images runs the same risks associated with becoming purely self-referential. Moreover if, as

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid p149

Dauphinée suggests, we can only witness or access the other's pain imperfectly and partially then we can never be sure what pain this form of response, or indeed the lack of it, might or might not cause to the 'other.' Her self-interrogation does not necessarily remove the images from a discourse which while being ethically 'right' for Dauphinée, might yet still belong to that which she is critical of. In Dauphinée's focus on what the act of looking *might* say about viewers, she simultaneously contributes to that she aims to critique.

Phelan comments that; "The obsessive focus on what the photographs say about viewers in the United States context obscured the pain the prisoners endured. Thus the act of looking at these photographs extends and is consonant with the original failure-to-see-the-other that the photographs frame so dramatically."⁷⁷⁸

Dauphinée is resolute:

Our continuing reliance on imagery to impart an account of events – to identify the ethics either contained or called from in the image – is part of the process by which we deny our own presence in the reading and circulation of these images. In the erasure of ourselves as the authors of both the images and the readings, we are simultaneously engaged in an erasure of those who appear in the images themselves. In the process there is a fetishization taking place – a pornography [...] – a shaming and a subsequent displaying and circulation of shame. To be sure, the decision to either circulate or refrain from circulating is not an easy one – nor should it be.⁷⁷⁹

As noted already, the label of pornography can be a convenient reason to look away. Without commenting on the manner by which 'shame' itself might be,

⁷⁷⁸ Batchen G (Ed) (2012)*Images of Atrocity*; Reaktion Books p55

⁷⁷⁹ Dauphinee E (2007) The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery; *Security Dialogue* 38(2) Sage Publications p149

and has been reallocated by the circulation of the images (that is from the prisoners to the photographers and to wider social structures), the refusal to circulate the images, as Dauphinée herself has chosen, is here perceived as an ethical practice. Moreover, this is understood as an ethics that recognises that exposing the tortured and battered body of the other to the gaze of the academic community or anyone else for that matter “is not outside the economy of violence that destroyed that body in the first place.”⁷⁸⁰ As such, Dauphinée produces a classic ‘check mate’ position – there is nowhere left to go. In this logic the act of looking at any photographic representation of a body in pain can only and will always be violent. But if we look away, how will we begin to confront our own participation within the economy of violence that Dauphinée observes? At some point, another, more untidy viewer herself must be brought back into this picture.

While Dauphinée’s argument is highly theoretical, and although it may reflect her own feelings on looking at the prison photographs, it can only remain at the level of theory. There are simply too many presumptions, too many neat certainties about the affective outcome of these images and the subject/object divide. Following Bauman, Janet Wolff argues that the very possibility of moral action depends on the opening up of debate; that principled politics should be premised on uncertainty. For Bauman, it was not possible to respond to the encounter with the other, or the stranger, by recourse to a prescribed set of moral rules.⁷⁸¹

In a rather sudden *volte-face* Dauphinée turns away from a positivist and scientific humanism that has informed her debate so far. She announces that “there is, in fact, no necessary insurmountable gulf between the one who

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid p150

⁷⁸¹ Wolff, J (2008) *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty* Columbia University Press p22 also see Bauman Z *Post Modern Ethics*

expresses pain and the one who witnesses it.”⁷⁸² The gulf itself is an illusion produced by “our increasingly sole reliance on imagery” which contributes to and confirms the disconnection between self and other.⁷⁸³ This is an enormous burden to place on the photographic image, whose iconographic ambiguity is set against the visual ‘purity’ of language, paradoxically creating for language a different but ultimately weighty burden of responsibility. It is as though language somehow floats free from all the relations and structures of power in which ‘meaning’ is brought into existence. As I have already discussed with reference to the work of Raymond Williams’ work on ‘culture’, this is far from being the case.

Whilst Scarry had argued that pain is language destroying in the sense that the cries and noises which pain might produce are pre-lingual, Dauphinée refers to Wittgenstein in order to contest this. For Wittgenstein, the pre-lingual expression of pain is not ‘imperfect’ at all since it is part of the interior experience of pain itself and thus is behaviour that is part of the pain process:

If this is so then cries and expressions of pain do not point to the presence of pain, but are fundamentally part of the experience of pain itself. In other words, the one in pain does not have privileged access to that state – or to the meaning of that state – via the interiority of the self. In this understanding, there is no possibility of interior language; the expression of pain (both voluntary and involuntary) is pain, not an imperfect attempt to express what resides in the atomised body. Similarly, the lack of visual expression is still part of the mode of expression, just as we say that silence is still part of language.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸² Dauphinée, E op cit p150

⁷⁸³ Ibid

⁷⁸⁴ Dauphinée E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery; Security Dialogue 38(2)* Sage Publications p150

Sontag writes eruditely on the aesthetics of silence and its affective political use, which I will explore in the context of Late Photography.⁷⁸⁵ There is certainly a case to be made for a ‘well timed pause’ for both comedy and pathos but as the opening poem made clear, the continuation of silence can also have its own devastating results. There is a significant gulf between the silence of choice and an imposed silence, which Dauphinée ignores.

As noted earlier, in the work of Arendt, Benjamin and Berger the language destroying effects of violence and pain provided these writers with an imperative to speak and write about the pain *of, for and with* the other. In Dauphinée’s account, ‘speaking about pain’ and clearly not speaking about pain are privileged over the visual representation of pain, “for the image is often understood to speak for itself, and this is another of its dangers.”⁷⁸⁶ This point seems to contradict Dauphinée’s earlier conjecture which posits words and pictures as operating to produce *mutually reinforcing and stabilising narrative*. It may be more productive to argue instead that a politics is not simply *imposed* on to a photograph but a politics may also be *read out of* a photograph and to consider the aesthetic code in the photograph itself as operating as part of the language or as the expression of pain witnessed.

Dauphinée continues by discussing the self as a site of inter-subjectivity by which she means that the boundaries between self and other are not always clearly defined particularly when it comes to being in pain, inscribing pain or grieving for another’s pain as a witness. She states that:

The constitution of who we are is always made possible by our ties with, and not our separation from, others. In other words it is possible to access the pain of others as pain, and to have our own pain accessed by others by virtue of this relationality. This does not require us to discover

⁷⁸⁵ Sontag, S (1982) *The Aesthetics of Silence* in *A Susan Sontag Reader* London, Penguin Books pp181-204

⁷⁸⁶ Dauphinee, E op cit p151

or construct a universal expression or interpretation of pain – for example, a symbolic of pain as articulated through imagery – in order for us to recognise and respond to pain.⁷⁸⁷

I am less sure that the distinction between being ‘tied with’ and ‘separated from’ can be drawn quite so sharply, or that the discovery and construction of a universal language of pain has been brought fully into sight. The complex position of the refugee for example can be seen to be simultaneously ‘tied with’ and ‘separated from’ the known country of origin. Zygmund Bauman puts it that refugees are the epitome of extraterritoriality:

And so, increasingly, refugees find themselves in a cross-fire; more exactly in a double bind. They are expelled by force or frightened into fleeing their native countries, but refused entry into any other. They do not *change* places; they *lose* place on earth, they are capitulated into a nowhere [...] into a place without a place that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea – or [...] in a desert, by definition an *uninhabited* land, a land resentful of humans and seldom visited by them.⁷⁸⁸

This is echoed by John Berger:

Month by month millions of people leave their homelands. They leave because there is nothing there, except their *everything*, which does not offer enough to feed their children. Once it did. This is the poverty of the new capitalism.⁷⁸⁹

War is a central cause of human displacement. In Liberia the civil war which began in 1989 left more than one hundred and fifty thousand people dead and

⁷⁸⁷ ibid

⁷⁸⁸ Bauman, Z (2003) *Liquid Love* Wiley Publishing p138

⁷⁸⁹ Berger J (2006) Ten Dispatches about Place: *Race and Class* volume 48 number 1 2006 p36

another million - or half the population – homeless.⁷⁹⁰ In Rwanda, tens of thousands of refugees fled to Tanzania after genocide began in April 1994 – Hutu nationalism was pressed into the service of “a well planned campaign of politically and materially motivated slaughter” against their Tutsi neighbours.⁷⁹¹ After the war in former Yugoslavia, Croatia was no longer able to sustain increasing numbers of refugees and closed down its borders - the rest of Europe finally conceded to pressure. Ed Vulliamy notes the numbers involved here:

Germany registered 135,000 refugees, and admitted that another 65,000 had entered illegally. Hungary accepted 54,000 and then announced its border closed. Austria took 50,000, Sweden 44,000, Switzerland 17,000, Holland accepted 6,300 and plucky Luxembourg 3,200. But apart from these the doors remained largely shut. Muslim Turkey meanly took only 7,000 of its desperate co-regionalists, and Italy, a neighbour like Austria and Hungary took the same. Norway managed 2,300 and Czechoslovakia 1,700. That left France and Britain bottom of the table with 1,100 a piece.⁷⁹²

The figures are staggering. At the time of writing, Radio 4 has just announced that globally, refugee figures including internally displaced persons, through warfare amount to 51 million. Although as Cohen has argued, there is clearly a sense where sheer numbers do matter, there is also a point, “an invisible threshold” where statistics and the manner of their representation can result in “a strange moral dysfunction.”⁷⁹³ This is not, as noted in the previous chapter, to promote the idea of ‘*compassion fatigue*’. Cohen implies that, as audiences, we are nonetheless subjected to “league tables of suffering” and to image overload. Through this *quantitative* account we become increasingly numb,

⁷⁹⁰ Ignatieff M (1999) *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic cleansing and the modern conscience* London Vintage p126

⁷⁹¹ Keane F (1995) *Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey* London Viking p8

⁷⁹² Vulliamy E (1994) *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia's War* London Simon and Schuster p157

⁷⁹³ Cohen S (2001) *States of Denial* London Polity p189

inured and unable to respond to cries of help in the process. It is not that audiences *lack* compassion but rather that they feel they do not have enough emotional arsenal to cope with the overwhelming enormity of the crisis.⁷⁹⁴

It is partly because of this that in contrast to Rosler's dismissive comments on the 'myth' or "the physiognomic fallacy" – of putting a face to suffering and "the identification of the image of a face with a character" as opposed to being "a body centred essentialism"⁷⁹⁵ - putting a face to disaster can indeed be an important strategy. The use of the *specified generalisation*, as Becker suggested, can be effective. Instead of invisible 'masses' we are offered access to individuals who share a collective, general experience. Williams reminds us that there are in fact no 'masses' there are only ways of seeing masses.

As Dauphinée points out, there *is* a real imperative to recognise the *specificity of pain* of "those other human beings who face the inscription of pain, humiliation and suffering as a result of particular violent political imperatives."⁷⁹⁶ This kind of understanding, she argues, cannot take place within the assumptions underpinning the concept of the atomised Cartesian subject but is instead grounded in a sense of interconnectivity that brings about the conditions for an ethical and political framework within which the idea of responsibility might be crafted.⁷⁹⁷ This, for Dauphinée, is the recognition that self and other, while they may be mutually constituting, are also dynamic and cannot be permanently stabilised. This point is recognised in Butler's discussion of the concept of the 'human':

Let us think of the human as a value and a morphology that may be allocated and retracted, aggrandised, personified, degraded and

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid

⁷⁹⁵ Rosler M (2004) *Decoys and Disruptions* October Books p221

⁷⁹⁶ Dauphinee E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery; Security Dialogue 38(2)* Sage Publications p151

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid

disavowed, elevated and affirmed. The norm continues to produce the nearly impossible paradox of a human who is not human, or of the human as it is otherwise known. Wherever there is the human, there is the inhuman; when we now proclaim as human some group of beings who have previously not been considered in fact, human, we admit that the claim to “humanness” is a shifting prerogative. Some humans take their humanness for granted, while others struggle to gain access to it.⁷⁹⁸

Accessing the Human: Self and Other

As previously noted, Azoulay has argued that the photographic space offers itself up as a key site in which a civil discourse can take shape. This civil discourse is distinct from the political, “defined in its own right as the interest that citizens display in themselves, in others, in their shared forms of co-existence, as well as the world that they create and nurture.”⁷⁹⁹ This practice constructs a renewed human rights discourse that breaks out of the circularity of arguments in which looking at violence is always an extension of violence:

To view photographs solely from the perspective that recognises only those who have been directly violated as potential objects of human rights discourse is limited. A renewed look at the same photographs allows us to read not individual portraits of this or that person framed under the category of human rights violations, but rather traces of a discriminatory regime alongside the fundamental features of a regime-made disaster.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁸ Butler J (2010) *Frames of War* London New York Verso p94

⁷⁹⁹ Azoulay (2012) *The Civil Imagination* London New York Verso p5

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid* p243

For Azoulay, atrocity is not defined solely by the representation of violence itself. As she argues, under conditions in which only some segments of a global population enjoy rights of citizenship and even then, they may do this unequally, “the central right pertaining to the privileged segment of the population consists in the right to view disaster – to be its spectator.”⁸⁰¹ In this sense, the photograph has enormous potential for constructing and renewing collective life. As spectators, Azoulay demands that we understand the violence of regime made disaster that brings certain photographs into being. To this extent, Azoulay explores the role of Israeli soldiers’ photographs taken in occupied Palestine. Like Berger, Azoulay is deeply concerned by the silence and the small words that surround this war.

Unlike the photographs from Abu Ghraib which were intended to be kept private, dissenting Israeli soldiers have purposely exhibited and published their own photographs as evidence of the state violation of their rights *not* to be perpetrators. *Breaking The Silence* are a group of former Israeli soldiers, “in other words, citizens who were drafted for army service as adolescents straight out of high school.”⁸⁰² These soldiers had become increasingly disillusioned with the army and with what they were expected to do. Criminal acts of violence became the normative reality of daily life for many young men and women. For the last ten years this organisation has been collecting photographs and written testimonies. By displaying their photographs and sharing them with others, the soldiers were able to recognise their complicity in state sanctioned criminality and break the silence that surrounded it. It should be said, that in their exhibitions, only a few of the photographs are ‘trophy’ images although they had plenty of examples of them. Images were chosen so as to highlight the daily routine of the soldiers’ lives. Yehuda Shaul who helped to establish the group stated:

⁸⁰¹ Ibid p1

⁸⁰² Ibid p246

It is not about the extreme cases....that happens in every war. The story is about the nineteen-year-old soldier who controls people at checkpoints, who invades someone's home, confiscates car keys....these are the real stories.⁸⁰³

Struk recounts her visit to the exhibition of this work in an art gallery in Amsterdam. One particular photograph showed a cityscape of the rooftops of Hebron. It was taken from a high vantage point and seemed to Struk to show a peaceful and benign scene. Yet the picture is horrifying for what it does not show which is only articulated when the conditions of its production emerge:

It had been taken from the rooftop of a former Palestinian school. The children had been driven out and the school closed down by the IDF because it provided a good vantage point by which to see over the city. It was here that Israeli soldiers responded to Palestinian's shooting assault rifles – which apparently had little chance of reaching their target – with grenades launched from machine guns.⁸⁰⁴

The grenades were not accurate. There was often no telling where they would land despite the fact that a grenade would kill anyone within eight metres of its impact and seriously injure anyone within a sixteen metre radius. One of the members of the group discussed the matter further, reflecting on his experience. When he was first given orders to shoot from the rooftop, he was horrified, praying that no one would be hurt. Yet after a week or so, it had become a game, and “the exciting moment” in an otherwise boring day.⁸⁰⁵ This was the unseen horror of the image. Written testimonies from soldiers involved with *Breaking The Silence* appeared in *The Observer* (08/06/2014). As a marker of their tenth anniversary, members of this group read out ten hours worth of

⁸⁰³ Struk J (2011) *Private Pictures* | B Taurus p134

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid p139

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid

testimony to an audience in Tel Aviv. The testimonies described “how abuses come from boredom; from the orders of ambitious officers keen to advance their careers; or from the institutional demands of occupation itself, which desensitises and dehumanises as it creates a distance from the ‘other’.”⁸⁰⁶

Azoulay is firm in her belief that understanding the Israeli soldiers’ as victims (of a regime made disaster that transformed them into perpetrators) is not to undermine or detract from the enormity of the atrocities carried out on the Palestinians. It is not about creating symmetry between perpetrators and victims. But it is about questioning structures of authority, governance and control. The photographs worked as a form of elicitation which awakened the soldiers’ consciousness enabling them to see that the ‘acts of state’ which they had learned to perform were in fact crimes. The use of the image is here a vital tool in the emergence or rebirth of a civil language. Azoulay describes the process:

That this awakening is a belated one is not due to personal blindness or defect but results from the fact that the soldiers were impaired as citizens by their own regime: their military service has been the effect of a civic malfunction orchestrated by the regime and an instrument in its reproduction. Without the soldiers knowing or understanding it, their right to enjoy full, unimpaired citizenship has been violated. The discourse of human rights should include this kind of violation – the making of a citizen into a perpetrator – within its frame and as part of its mission.⁸⁰⁷

Against this practice set out above, Dauphinée’s theoretical account contains a curious logic. Despite her acknowledgement of the dynamism inherent in all

⁸⁰⁶ www.theguardian.com/world/.../former-israeli-soldiers-break-silence

⁸⁰⁷ Azoulay (2012) *The Civil Imagination* London New York Verso p248

concepts of self and other, Dauphinee still seems unable to imagine a point whereby both the self and the other might ethically create a *visual encounter* that allows each partner to become vulnerable to the other's trauma.

She illuminates both the Cartesian model and the model of inter- subjectivity as exposing the tensions involved in the mobilisation of violent imagery and in doing so produces an “irresolvable ethical dilemma” and a “necessary and perhaps unavoidable violence in the reproduction and circulation of imagery associated with Abu Ghraib” that sits alongside an equally urgent demand to oppose torture and war.⁸⁰⁸ Dauphinée does not offer a way out of this dilemma – it must simply be recognised and understood in any reflection about the necessities of using this imagery as an act of political resistance. In this way, Dauphinée calls for the recognition of the ways that in our attempts to oppose violence we also participate in its own logics and economies:

Images do not speak for themselves – they are made to speak for, and by and about *us*. We are asking these bodies to do political work for us that, however ‘right’, also works to reduce them to representative examples of their plights. To understand the tortured bodies at Abu Ghraib as solely illustrative and/or representative of other phenomena (i.e. militarized violence, American empire) is simultaneously to risk the erasure of those bodies in the very instants of their trauma and undoing. It is perhaps a double betrayal.⁸⁰⁹

For better or worse however, the body does not simply *represent* the site where social forces play out. To be a body, as Butler articulates it, is “to be exposed to social crafting and form” and as such the body *is* the site where the experience of social forces is played out.⁸¹⁰ The body cannot escape doing political work

⁸⁰⁸ Dauphinée E (2007) op cit p153

⁸⁰⁹ *ibid*

⁸¹⁰ Butler J (2010) *Frames of War* London New York Verso p3

since it is the experiencing product of political work which constitutes unsteady and uneven material existences and life chances.

Dauphinée concludes that, for her, there is *no* ethical way to circulate the Abu Ghraib images and that those who do must consider why, how and to what effect the imagery is used, “if we wish to minimise the traumatic impact of our own ethics.”⁸¹¹ Judith Butler offers a thoughtful riposte here by thinking through the pedagogical uses of examples of hate speech:

Such terms carry connotations that exceed the purposes for which they may be intended and can thus work to afflict and defeat discursive efforts to oppose such speech. Keeping such terms unsaid and unsayable can also work to lock them in place, preserving their power to injure, and arresting the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose. That such language carries trauma is not a reason to forbid its use. There is no purifying language of its traumatic residue, and no way to work through trauma except through the arduous effort it takes to direct the course of its repetition.”⁸¹²

The same might be said for the photographs of Abu Ghraib. To refuse to circulate them is paradoxically no less reifying than the fetishism of the image which Dauphinée extensively criticises. What becomes important in the reviewing process is the transference of ‘shame’ from the tortured to the torturers and to the social systems that have shaped them; as the matter of a shared historical moment which for all its private intentions has become, through photography a public issue. As Stanley Cohen put it:

⁸¹¹ Dauphinée E (2007) *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery*; *Security Dialogue* 38(2) Sage Publications p153

⁸¹² Cited in Apel D (2003) On Looking: Lynching photographs and legacies of lynching after 9/11: *American Quarterly* Volume 55 Number 3 September 2003 p465

In meeting the victims' need for acknowledgement, publicly organised reparation can make the symbolic link between individual suffering and state accountability. None of this can repair the deeper damages from the past. But the direction is right: victims and survivors see the ledger balanced not (or not only) by humiliating the perpetrator, but by replacing their own physical pain and loss with some political dignity.⁸¹³

Looking does not of necessity 'prolong' the shaming. Frank Möller reflects that images operate on different levels at the same time – in their fixity of a situation of suffering the images from Abu Ghraib can appear to immobilise the human subject as victim. But:

on the other hand, they also undermine reductionist victimisation by showing that the human subject is more than a victim, for example a human being with whom we, the viewers, have something albeit not everything in common. Images, therefore, are important vehicles which help us recognise one another as human beings by visualising the 'commonalities of being human.'⁸¹⁴

Stallabrass considers the statement made by Lynndie England, who was later convicted for her role in the torture at Abu Ghraib. England reflected on her nightmares which would come "on the rare occasions that I forget to take my medicine". She hears screaming – like a death scream- in the middle of the night and knows it won't go away; "I don't think it will ever go out of my head" she says.⁸¹⁵ Stallabrass remarks that:

⁸¹³ Cohen S (2001) *States of Denial* London Polity Press p232

⁸¹⁴ Möller F (2009) The looking/not looking dilemma; *Review of international Studies* Volume 35 Issue 04 October 2009 p787

⁸¹⁵ Stallabrass J , (no date) *The Power and Impotence of Images* retrieved from www.courtauld.ac.uk.

There are many things that cannot be photographed, and many more that, for all kinds of reasons, are not photographed. But Lynndie England's statement, in which the trauma of another is buttressed between a consideration of her own, points to the silence and stillness of those notorious images, to all that they do not show, but which they gesture towards.⁸¹⁶

Like all photographs the Abu Ghraib images lie in the interstices of the articulate and the silent. Pictures may not always tell stories directly but they can certainly prompt them. As discussed with reference to Groys this is not to deny the empirical event which is taking place within the prison photographs but it is also to identify, to think about and to reflect on the processes which constitute the frame of the images themselves.

Photography is now increasingly utilised as a tool for qualitative sociological research. The use of photo-elicitation with groups of former service personnel themselves has produced important results. This corresponds with the critical work of some photographers themselves – especially those, like Gilbertson and Hetherington who, through acknowledgement of the detail, endeavour to point to the larger field of social forces.

This is also the case for those more directly involved in military action. Woodward and Jenkins have noted that soldiers' photographs are central for renegotiating military experience. The participants in their study did not bring in examples of 'trophy' pictures such as those discussed above, but they had other trophies. The pictures ranged from official pictures, of passing out parades for example alongside pictures of social events. One participant reflected on an official photograph which showed him as part of 'The Champion Troop' after passing, and excelling basic training:

⁸¹⁶ Ibid

This was a great achievement for me [...] I got there from me teachers telling me I was shit, and I'd never achieve anything. Social exclusion I experienced as a kid, and violence and things. But to actually get there...⁸¹⁷

The participant expressed a range of emotions such as ambivalence, pride, anger and regret as he reflected on the military processes of socialisation and “the ways in which these had affected the young man in the photograph” in the course of his military career. Woodward and Jenkins note that, “He had been (in his own words) brutalised by his military experiences and much of the interview revolved around a tension between wanting to remember (troop reunions) and wanting to come to terms with a violent past and move on.”⁸¹⁸

There can be no moving on by averting our gaze and refusing to look. Maya Angelou puts it that we need to look at all the images of ourselves, those we like and those we dislike:

In some way that is very important to us we need to see those we dislike even more than those we like because somehow we need at least glancing visions of how we look “as in a mirror darkly.”⁸¹⁹

The silence that Dauphinée imposes around the photographs of Abu Ghraib has a repressive character. It seems to support the intentions of the photographs themselves, as not to be seen.

According to Groys, the effect of the type of image production, for example from Abu Ghraib, is to suggest that the critique of representation is now over. Whereas before, this critique had centred on exposing something ‘ugly’ or

⁸¹⁷ Woodward, R and Jenkins, K N (2012) *Soldiers' Photographic Representations of Participation in Armed Conflict* in Gibson, S and Mollan, S (2012) *Representations of Peace and Conflict* London, Palgrave MacMillan p116

⁸¹⁸ Ibid

⁸¹⁹ Angelou, M (1997) *Even the Stars Look Lonesome* Bantam Books p133

‘terrifying’ that lies behind the conventional idealised image, contemporary perpetrator images show exactly this ‘hidden ugliness’:

We see things that are as bad as we expected them to be – maybe even worse. Our worst suspicions are confirmed. The hidden reality behind the image is shown to us as being as ugly as we expected it to be. So we have a feeling that our critical journey came to its end, that our critical task is completed, that our mission as intellectuals is accomplished.⁸²⁰

The closure that Dauphinée places around the Abu Ghraib photographs cannot be sustained without also closing down on the critical journey itself and maintaining and extending the violence of the images further. If Dauphinée’s thesis is taken to the *n*th degree, which for Broomberg and Chanarin means that all photojournalism is complicit with war, this would theoretically demand a closure around looking at any images of war and by extension including fine art photography. As noted with attention to the censorship of press photography already existing in times of war, such a closure would have serious consequences for a polity of democratic citizenship.

There is nonetheless an increasing artistic and critical turn in photography which aims to avoid the violence of the image and the accusations of voyeurism that attend it. The following chapters examine the genre of Late of Aftermath photography in which photographers provide an oblique perspective of trauma through focusing on its ‘traces.’ As noted Broomberg and Chanarin have been included in this, yet while they have been interested in questioning the concept of evidence and the archive in general, others working in this field are aiming to restore the evidential role of the photograph. Here the concept of silence is embraced as an aspect of photographic language, but as Sontag has pointed out, the idea of artistic silence is never carried out to the point of final simplification

⁸²⁰ Groys B op cit p126

where the photograph is literally silent. While this chapter has considered and critiqued the politics and ethics of invoking the unimaginable, I turn now to work that, quietly demands that we listen; that we exercise imagination as an important weapon against forgetting.

9. *Fine Art Photography and Photojournalism:*

Silence and Noise



Don McCullin; *Body of a North Vietnamese Soldier*, Hue, Vietnam, 1968.

“I felt he deserved protecting. He deserved a voice. He couldn’t speak so I was going to do it for him. I shovelled his belongings together and photographed them. That’s the only contrived picture I’ve taken in war. You don’t need to contrive war pictures. Things happen very fast. People die in front of you. People scream. People claw at you to help them. There’s no need to go around arranging the still life on the battlefield.”⁸²¹

“It is indeed significant that the debate has raged most fiercely around the aesthetics of *photography as art*, whereas the far less questionable social fact of *art as photography* was scarcely given a glance.”⁸²²

⁸²¹ McCullin D (2010) *Shaped by War* Jonathan Cape in association with IWM London p190

⁸²² Benjamin, W (2006) *A Small History of Photography in One Way Street* London Verso p253

At the beginning of this thesis it was noted that artist photographers have long aimed to distinguish themselves from other photographic activities, perhaps most especially from those of the photojournalist. They stress their distance from the camera as a recording device in favour of emphasising creative ‘vision’, private understanding and sensibility. Over time, such objections have become crystallised around assumptions of normative institutional practices and so with Bourdieu, it becomes possible to bring the photographic habitus into view in relation to particular institutions. Yet, in the attempt to examine his ideas around the struggle for cultural legitimacy, I put forward the argument for consideration of the *photographic imagination*, and, as noted with reference to Max Weber, C W Mills and Raymond Williams, that there is a need to look within and between institutional frameworks in order to identify cultural formations. These formations, as Williams argued, were for the most part located in the interstices of institutional practice.

As was demonstrated with reference to the development of modern journalism and photojournalism, the concepts of objectivity and impartiality here are neither accurate nor necessarily desirable, although credibility must remain of high importance. The motivation to bear witness to war, trauma and human rights abuses has been a central aim of much photojournalism but in the acknowledgement of its normative paradigm, excessive subjectivity is often held in suspicion. It is interesting to note that both Hetherington and Gilbertson actively removed themselves from the idea of objectivity, preferring the concept of honesty instead. This has not meant that their work simply slides into solipsism or the promotion of ambiguity. Instead they combine reportage with story-telling. As Berger put it, “In reports ambiguities are unacceptable, in stories they are inevitable.”⁸²³

⁸²³ Berger, J (1982) *Stories* in Dyer, G (ed) (2013) *Understanding a Photograph: John Berger*, London Penguin Books p99

Amidst the noise and trauma of war, photojournalists often demonstrate a remarkable skill for reflexivity and creativity in which ethical, political and aesthetic decisions are active. Whilst it maybe an obvious choice, McCullin's photograph above makes this point explicit. But perhaps because of an association of art with artifice, McCullin is mindful to disassociate himself and his work with any concept of 'art':

I'm a photographer. I'm a photojournalist, or whatever you want to call me. But I don't belong to the world of art. Today I am free to wander around the English countryside, in Somerset where I live, away from wars and revolutions. Now I can indulge myself. I can call myself what I want. But an artist I'm not. I'm a photographer.⁸²⁴

As noted with attention to Martha Rosler, until the 1970s, artistic recognition for photography in the museum primarily revolved around the display of photojournalism through the efforts of Newhall, Steichen and Szarkowski at MoMA. Newhall and Szarkowski in particular, attempted to raise press images to the status of the art object through a focus on the formal qualities of press photographs, much to the consternation of some commentators such as Sontag, Rosler and Sekula. They argued that this process removed the photograph from its original conditions of production. Morel comments however that in the course of the following two decades, this practice drew considerable flak from artists on the grounds that it was *hampering* artistic recognition for the medium. The critic Michel Nuridsany declared that "photography must submit to the codes of art and not define itself through any particular characteristics – documentary ones in particular – which enable reportage photography to lay claim to the status of artworks."⁸²⁵ These ideas persist. In his review of

⁸²⁴ McCullin D (2010) *Shaped by War* Jonathan Cape in association with the IWM London p82

⁸²⁵ Morel, G (2015) *Photojournalism as Formal Paradigm* in Hill, J and Schwartz, V (2105) *Getting the Picture*. London Bloomsbury Press p269

McCullin's exhibition *Shaped by War* Mick Gidley had this to say of the photographs:

When they originally appeared they were accompanied by news reports or feature essays that *particularised* the circumstances of their making. The text to the book of the exhibition and, to a lesser extent, the videos in the exhibition itself, provide some such context, largely now more 'history' than 'memory' but not enough to prevent McCullin's pictures melding into one another; losing the specificity of their making. They become, in a sense, abstracted; a vision, a museum of atrocity.⁸²⁶

Gidley's separation of history and memory seems an extraordinary oversight given the delicate ways in which they interpenetrate one another. Berger understands and articulates this well:

Photographs are relics of the past, traces of what has happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would acquire a living context, they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arrested moments. It is just possible that photography is the prophecy of human memory yet to be socially and politically achieved. Such a memory would encompass any image of the past, however tragic, however guilty, within its own community. The distinction between the private and public uses of photography would be transcended. The Family of Man would exist.⁸²⁷

Nonetheless, in the silence afforded to those of us who are privileged to be spectators of war, on the receiving end of photojournalism, we find that this become a ready source for artistic production. As I demonstrated with reference to Broomberg and Chanarin's work, this is at times overly critical, to the point

⁸²⁶ Photography and Culture; volume 4 issue 2 July 2011 pp221-224

⁸²⁷ Berger, J (1978) *Uses of Photography* in Dyer op cit p57

where the idea of documentary ‘evidence’ itself becomes a source to be actively undermined. As Apel has argued, “The erasure of the documentary power of photography denies its links to emancipatory political struggles.”⁸²⁸ Still, even when photographic or video evidence seems incorruptible, this has not always come down on the side of right. This was the case with the footage of the Israeli shooting of 12 year old Muhammad al-Durrah which became the object of numerous court cases and libel trials regarding its authenticity. In America, the police beatings of Rodney King, despite being caught on camera, did not lead to convictions of the officers involved. Yet, what they may symbolise in juridical history should not be mistaken for what they represent in the social memory of injustice. Such images have not always gone away quietly. Ron Haviv’s photograph of Serbian soldiers kicking the bodies of dead Muslim civilians was used successfully at The Hague as evidence in later war trials.

In the field of fine art photography, amongst the noise proclaiming the failure of documentary work, there has also been a quiet return towards privileging the evidential quality of the photograph. At the same time, this work actively confronts the interconnections of history and memory and the dilemma of aestheticisation that is present between form and content in the representation of trauma. As Möller explains it:

Aestheticisation, in this context, refers to photographs of human suffering that, due to their formal structure or to what in a given situation is, culturally conditioned, understood as beauty or both, are assumed to offer ‘disinterested pleasure’ to the viewer, abstract from the sources of the depicted suffering and the conditions under which it occurred and obscure the ‘meaning and implications’ of suffering ‘while being used as resources for gratification.’ Such images are said to depoliticise the viewers by directing their attention from the depicted

⁸²⁸ Apel, D (2012) *War Culture and the Contest of the Image* Rutgers University Press p10

conditions of suffering to the quality of the image and the beauty of that what it depicts.⁸²⁹

Importantly, Wolff suggests that the concept of beauty in art need not be antithetical to political action. The idea that it is ethically wrong to provide aesthetic pleasure in the face of political or moral wrongs is in itself a moral judgement. Nor does its pragmatic assessment – that viewers become anesthetized by photographs of suffering – necessarily hold water. Wolff argues, “It seems to me that neither argument is self-evidently true – and that there is good reason to argue with both.”⁸³⁰ The point is also made by Azoulay who notes that the aesthetic value of an image, rather than being directly formulated, is instead used unreflectively to imply the negation of the political. The aesthetic and the political are misleading categories “produced as two mutually exclusive poles representing two directions of art practice.”⁸³¹

As pointed out in the previous chapters, neither photographs of ‘horror’ nor those designed to produce ‘empathy’ can guarantee the development of a social conscience however both forms of image making have at times been instrumental towards this. Kathleen Marie Higgins notes that:

Beauty seems at odds with political activism because it is not a directly practical response to the world. It inspires contemplation, not storm and fury. But politically motivated artists, I submit, have much to gain from beauty. Beauty encourages a perspective from which our ordinary priorities are up for grabs... In the first place, contemplation of beauty provides the receptive condition in which we can recognise our own moral insights. Beauty creates a space for spiritual openness.⁸³²

⁸²⁹ Möller F (2009) The looking /not looking dilemma; *Review of International Studies* volume 35 issue 04 October 2009 p784

⁸³⁰ Wolff, J (2008) *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty* Columbia University Press p18

⁸³¹ Azoulay, A (2012) *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* New York, London, Verso p32

⁸³² Cited in Wolff, J (2008) op cit p19

Much of the work that now demonstrates a return to beauty is produced by photographers who began their careers as photojournalists although they do this to different effects.

Luc Delahaye was for many years a photojournalist working in conflict and disaster zones. Between the late 1980s and the early 2000s Delahaye earned an international reputation for his work in war zones including Bosnia, Chechnya and Afghanistan. He was a member of the Magnum agency until 2004. In a review of Delahaye's work in *Frieze* magazine his photographic practice since 2001 is described as taking a 'critical turn':

Delahaye's migration from journalism to 'art photography' (a sort of exile, maybe), as a result of a crisis of belief in journalistic truth, became a framework in itself and the keystone for a reborn practice, where the constraints of information were suspended in favour of an interrogative perception of facts.⁸³³

He now produces work specifically for exhibition in the art gallery. In an interview, Delahaye reflects on this transition in conversation with Joerg Colberg:

I think that photojournalism is at its best when conceived as a series – the picture story. But I was never really interested in telling stories, I'm more into the production of individual images with strong narrative structures, and at that time there was a necessity to formalise clearly what I was standing for, some clarity, the refusal of a 'photographic style' and the mystification of reality that comes with it. Working with the complexity of the real was one thing. The other one, probably more

⁸³³ http://www.frieze.com/issue/print_back/luc-delahaye

difficult, was to work towards the restoration of the autonomy of the image.⁸³⁴

Sharing something with Cartier-Bresson's idea of the 'decisive moment' Delahaye perceives the 'autonomy of the image' as resulting from the internal coherence of a photograph whereby a number of elements work together, converging and responding to each other and as such produce 'intelligence'. For Delahaye, this formal intelligence gives the work a self-sufficiency that "doesn't rely on the outside to exist; and this is precisely a condition that makes possible an interesting relation with the outside, the viewer."⁸³⁵ The work is premised on contradictory tensions, "presence of the subject/absence to the world; proximity of witnessing/distance of the critical eye; documentary form/dramatic content" in the recognition of the ambiguity of the photograph.⁸³⁶

In his denial of the 'outside' Delahaye seems to be in pursuit of the pure, self-referential art object so dear to certain brands of modernism. Here, as Marshall Berman puts it "Modernism thus appeared as a great attempt to free modern artists from the impurities, vulgarities of modern life," and for "establishing the autonomy and dignity of their vocations."⁸³⁷ Delahaye has commented that "The press is for me just a means for photographing, for material, not for telling the truth."⁸³⁸ Instead, Delahaye privileges the idea of 'artistic truth' although as I have suggested with reference to Williams' etymological excavation of the term *novel*, these ideas cannot always be so sharply distinguished or readily dismissed.

Delahaye produces typically large scale photographs (4 x 8 feet) which are made using a Technorama or large format camera. He reflects that the large size

⁸³⁴ jmcollberg.com/weblog/.../a_conversation_with_luc_delahaye

⁸³⁵ *ibid*

⁸³⁶ Morel, G (2015) *Photojournalism as Formal Paradigm* in Hill, J and Schwartz, V (2105) *op cit* p268

⁸³⁷ Berman M (1982) *All That is Solid Melts Into Air* new York London Verso p30

⁸³⁸ In conversation with Bill Sullivan at *artnet* www.artnet.com/magazine/features/sullivan/sullivan4-10-03.asp

and scale of his photographs is important. In making use of the grandeur of the tradition of “history painting”, the distance between art and the visual economy of press photography is further accentuated. But it is also troubled by representing subject matter drawn from contemporary and newsworthy events, raising questions about the relationship between the aesthetic, the pictorial and the documentary. Durden writes that:

The tensions between documentary and the pictorial can be seen in one of Delahaye’s most contentious art pictures, which graphically details the body of a dead Taliban soldier, *Taliban*, 2001. I want to characterise this work as documentary pictorial. By this I mean that Delahaye challenges classic documentary uses of the medium in the emphasis given to the formal and aesthetic qualities of the image. In contrast to the emotionalism and rhetoric of photojournalism, his photography is more understated, more ambiguous. Using a medium format panoramic camera, Delahaye gives phenomenological weight and gravitas to his subjects. He even claims that “the absence of dignity *of* the image necessarily leads to the absence of dignity *of* the subject of the image.”⁸³⁹

Durden offers a review of the work, noting its uses of Christian iconography through its suggestion of the *Pietà*. This is not, insists Durden, used simply as an imperialist conception of death projected on to a Muslim man. Instead, this is a comment on Western art and aesthetics and the figurative tradition and the way that *photojournalists* employ this technique; “*Taliban* makes us aware what is at play in the current global conflict, how Western pageantry and power, spiritual ardour in Europe, too, is not separate from the violence on the ground

⁸³⁹Durden M (2012) *Documentary Pictorial: Luc Delahaye’s Taliban 2001* in Batchen G (Ed) (2012) *Picturing Atrocity* Reaktion Books p242

in Afghanistan.”⁸⁴⁰ But yet, Delahaye rarely offers signs or indications of the way his images should be read; accompanying captions are mostly sparse.

As Durden remarks, the photojournalist context in which the photograph was taken is important to remember. “It was taken in November 2001, while travelling on foot with a small group of Northern Alliance fighters, as they made their way into Kabul, Afghanistan, a day before the fall of Kabul.”⁸⁴¹

Consideration of this context enables Durden to argue that its pictorial qualities work to “counter the atrocities and violence of the circumstances in which this picture was made.” As such, it has a sanitising effect as a work of photojournalism as much as an art photograph.⁸⁴²

Yet it is not completely removed from the world of sensational press pictures since the soldier is readily identifiable. It remains tied to a long tradition of the news media, in which the representation of a dead body is permissible as long as it is a foreign body. However, here Delahaye aims to restore some dignity to the ‘other.’



Luc Delahaye *Taliban* (2001) C-type print from the series *History*.

In contrasting Delahaye’s image to McCullin’s image (presented at the beginning of this chapter) Durden considers the differences between the two

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid p247

⁸⁴¹ Ibid p244

⁸⁴² Ibid

plundered bodies. McCullin's close up view of the soldier, from the ground, and his personal effects, such as the snapshot of a loved one in his wallet, offer a space for empathy, humanising and individualising the dead soldier by way of 'closeness'. Delahaye, in contrast, offers a high angle from above suggesting a viewing position that hovers above the figure at a distance. No possessions have been left here – weapons and boots have been taken; even the Taliban's wallet in the top centre of the frame is empty. Yet while it offers a more dispassionate and distanced rhetoric than McCullin, Durden argues that the image remains firmly entrenched in a humanistic photojournalistic tradition, and that it is precisely its aesthetic qualities that make this so.⁸⁴³ Both McCullin and Delahaye, in the end, aim to offer the humanity of a life worth grieving for. But while McCullin offers us some prompts by which we can make connections to a life lived – through the photo in the wallet, the tin of snapshots and a medical kit, in Delahaye's photograph we have to imagine all these possible connections for ourselves by considering not only what is present, but what is absent.

Delahaye's photograph responds to a specific historical and cultural moment in which the American government especially were concerned to limit the visibility of the horrors of war. As noted however, this was predominantly a concern about limiting images of their 'own' dead. Whilst Durden perhaps overstates the case that an "explicit display of brutality" characterised the press imagery of the time (since as I have noted, dead bodies were largely absent from mainstream news), Delahaye's image can certainly be contrasted with some of the explicit images which slipped through the net of censorship. In particular Durden notes Tyler Hicks' series of images in the *New York Times* of a Taliban soldier pleading for his life before being brutally slain by Northern Alliance soldiers. Against this type of image, Durden suggests that *Taliban*

⁸⁴³ ibid

offers a space for an empathetic reading – that the pictorial qualities offer the soldier a sense of dignity, a restoration of honour and a sign of respect.⁸⁴⁴

Here, Durden makes the presumption that Hicks' photographs are not capable of producing an empathetic or contemplative reading. Nonetheless Sontag has reflected on these images:

An ample reservoir of stoicism is needed to get through the great newspaper of record each morning, given the likelihood of seeing photographs that could make you cry. And the pity and disgust that pictures like Hicks' inspire should not distract you from asking what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are *not* being shown.⁸⁴⁵

As such, Delahaye's distinction between his fine art photography and his photojournalism becomes a little more unstable and as Apel suggests, seems to be constituted only by a set of formal conventions whose meaning depends on the conditions of production and circulation.⁸⁴⁶ It may simply be that it is the conditions for viewing rather than any firm distinction between art and photojournalism that really counts here.

Michael Shapiro offers a compelling argument for an extended 'contemplation' of photojournalism in the gallery environment. He points out that the exposure to the stark images of suffering carried in news media may be altogether too brief to impact on people's sympathies in any lasting way:

In contrast, while the momentarily timely images carried by news media may be ephemeral, the genre of the exhibition, which yields an accompanying catalogue/text, is one in which what becomes effaced as a news event is restored, reflected on, and made publicly explicit for extended ethical and political negotiation. Museum exhibitions have

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid p246

⁸⁴⁵ Sontag, S (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others*, London Penguin Books p12

⁸⁴⁶ Apel, D (2012) *War Culture and the Contest of Images* Rutgers University Press p10

sufficient exposure over time to ‘frame’ and ‘reframe’ a society’s conversations. Like some other artistic genres, they make available for extended public witnessing and discussion what daily media has forgotten.⁸⁴⁷

Shapiro uses the notion of ‘slow looking’ in order to show the more enduring effects that the extended reflection afforded by the photographic exhibition might produce:

They endure to provoke both sensation and criticism, resonating with embodied memories and encouraging public reflection and negotiation over the meanings and significance of what they reveal. For example, when close-up views of the victims of war policy become available for more than fleeting instances, the aesthetic finds itself in extreme proximity to the ethico-political [...]⁸⁴⁸

Delahaye’s photograph has generated some controversy – not just because of its content and the manner of its display. The work is part of a series of eight photographs, each selling for \$15,000 alongside a limited edition artist’s book priced at \$1,000.

In conversation with Joerg Colberg, Delahaye is asked the following question:

These days people are quite used to seeing dead foreign (but not their own) soldiers on a regular basis in their newspapers, but seeing a huge print of one in an art gallery is quite a bit different. And I sense a certain uneasiness about seeing it sold for a lot of money. I am sure you have encountered this problem before. What do you say to people who confront about this?

⁸⁴⁷ Shapiro M (2008) Slow Looking: The Ethics and Politics of Aesthetics, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 2008:182

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid

Delahaye responded, “I’m avoiding these discussions.”⁸⁴⁹

Art, Money and the Alchemical Convergence of Capitals

The development of a photographic market and its contemporary value is worthy of brief consideration here. While photojournalists have become an easy target for accusations that they are merchants of misery, peddling in death and trading in trauma, Delahaye’s avoidance of discussions surrounding the exorbitant cost of his work illustrates Bourdieu’s classic statement on art and the denial of the economic world. There *is* something morally offensive and exploitative about the *price* of this work that comes at the expense of the dead, but for artists as much as for photojournalists this is not always within their control. John Berger is right to suggest that some recognition of the way that photography has come to be used by capitalism is required if a truly alternative photography is to come to life.⁸⁵⁰

As Bourdieu has pointed out, the market for symbolic goods follows its own internal logic:

The field of production *per se* owes its own structure to the opposition between the *field of restricted production* as a system producing cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods, and the *field of large scale cultural production* specifically organised with a view to the production of cultural goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods, ‘the public at large’. In contrast to the field of large-scale cultural production, which submits to the laws of competition for the conquest of the largest possible market, the field of restricted

⁸⁴⁹ jmcolberg.com/weblog/.../a_conversation_with_luc_delahaye

⁸⁵⁰ Berger, J (1978) *Uses of Photography* in Dyer (2013) op cit p57

production tends to develop its own criteria for the evaluation of its products, thus achieving the truly cultural recognition accorded by the peer group whose members are both privileged clients and competitors.⁸⁵¹

I have already discussed at length that Bourdieu saw photography as being condemned to the status of a middle brow art, and did not foresee the changes in artistic taste which have since come about.

Raphael Samuel offers an indication of this change in petit-bourgeois taste. He has charted the growth of a market for ‘old’ photographs which stemmed primarily from the antiques boom of the 1960s and an increasing interest and fashion for all sorts of ‘Victoriana’. Photographs were not initially considered as collectables – unlike Valentine cards, theatre programmes and fashion plates – but their frames were.⁸⁵² Aside from a few dealers and adventurous bargain-hunters, Samuel notes that it was only after the highly successful sale of Julia Margaret Cameron’s work in 1971 at Sotheby’s, “that Victorian portrait photography was given the accolade of recognition by fine art auctioneers.”⁸⁵³ Prior to this, Samuel outlines that the taste for *retro-chic* could be found in the novelty of the make-believe Victorian print – Cecil Beaton’s *Victorian Picnic* (1965) featured the model Jean Shrimpton, whilst a *Vogue* cover pictured the model Twiggy dressed as a “Victorian Miss” and reminiscent of a Kate Greenaway illustration. *The Beatles* cover of *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* saw them dressed in Edwardian regimentals.⁸⁵⁴ At the same time, Samuels considered the leading architects of 1960s ‘new English’ modernism who made use of 1930s socialist realist photography in a bid to give their publications “street credibility.” Old film stills presenting the stars of the silent

⁸⁵¹ Bourdieu P (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production* Cambridge Polity Press p 115

⁸⁵² Samuel R (1994) *Theatres of Memory* London Verso p337

⁸⁵³ Ibid p337

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid 338

screen were similarly mobilised “for those figures of mystery who peered out from the backdrop of such alternative clothes shops such as *Granny Takes a Trip* and *Biba*.”⁸⁵⁵ In the art world, Pop Art also engaged with old photographs. Samuel puts it that:

It called on them as an image-bank for its cut-outs; as a source of visual jokes when cocking a snoop at the Academy; an invitation to pleasure; and not least, when translated into record sleeves and posters, as a way of reaching a mass public. Old film stills, fashion ads, ‘girlie’ pictures were all grist to its mill. By treating the contemporary as memorabilia, and depicting commercial ephemera as art, it executed a dance of death on the pretensions of high culture.⁸⁵⁶

Or at least, it aimed to. Far from destroying its pretensions, pop art and now photography sit comfortably (for the most part), at the table of high culture.

The current economic conditions for photographic sales, despite global economic recession, certainly remain buoyant. The auction market for fine art photography, which has been driven mostly by contemporary photographers, saw an increase of 22% in 2013 or in real terms, from \$18.7 million to \$23 million. Total photography sales were up over all by 36% with the collected auction sales for Christies, Sotheby’s and Phillips coming in at \$50.7 million.

‘Vintage’ photography prints also saw a massive increase in their sales (125%) rising from \$7.3 million to \$16.4 million between 2012 -2013.⁸⁵⁷ The concept of the original ‘vintage’ print has become a useful market strategy by which dealers, auction houses and collectors can circumnavigate a lack of scarcity for certain photographs. John Gapper points out that there are at least 1000 prints of Ansel Adams’ *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico, 1941*. Adams continued to

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid p339

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid

⁸⁵⁷ Figures from *Art Tactic*

make prints from this negative throughout his career until his death in 1984 and thus limited the rarity of the image. However, higher prices are ascribed to those prints which were made either at the time the photograph was taken or soon afterwards.⁸⁵⁸ Gerry Badger notes that the standard time scale for the vintage print is any print taken within five years of the original negative.⁸⁵⁹ “Standard prints of “Moonrise” sell for about \$50,000 while one vintage print, dated to the 1950s or 1960s, sold at Sotheby’s last June (2009) for \$518,500.”⁸⁶⁰

In 2009, the photographic agency Magnum, founded in 1947 by Henri Cartier-Bresson and his colleagues, sold 185,000 of their vintage prints to MSD Capital (a fund founded by Michael Dell of Dell computers) in a deal valued at a \$100 million. This important collection is housed in the Harry Ransom Centre, at The University of Texas, Austin for research and exhibition purposes.⁸⁶¹

Individual photographs by artists such as Cindy Sherman or Richard Prince have commanded prices of more than \$2 and \$3million respectively.⁸⁶² As noted, contemporary art photographers (Delahaye, Sherman, Price and Wall for example) make their prints in small editions, often limited to no more than a few examples and more often as singular, unique objects, since “people shelling out that kind of money want to be reassured that their precious and prestigious purchase doesn’t keep company with too many others.” Badger continues:

In many ways, the photographic art market is a ludicrous edifice, built on snobbery and sand. Note the use of the word ‘vintage’, adding the right kind of connotation to justify the higher price. Everything must be done to indicate that the ‘fine’ print is a matter for connoisseurship.

Everything must be presented in a way which denies William Henry

⁸⁵⁸ John Gapper (2014) *How Annie Got Shot* Financial Times <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/76af3c7a-dbf2-11df-af09-00144feabdc0.html>

⁸⁵⁹ Badger G (2007) *The Genius of Photography* London Quadrille Publishing p205

⁸⁶⁰ John Gapper (2014) *How Annie Got Shot* Financial Times

⁸⁶¹ *ibid*

⁸⁶² *ibid*

Fox Talbot ever invented a medium in which potentially unlimited reproducibility was the keynote.⁸⁶³

Gapper has noted that “The division between specialist photography and contemporary art using photography still exists, with art photography fetching far higher prices. According to Art Tactic, “the average price fetched by photographs in the big auction houses’ contemporary art evening sales last year was \$259,300. The average for works in their specialist photography sales – less prestigious events held during the day instead of the evening – was \$12,100.”⁸⁶⁴

While the changing ‘fashions’ are one aspect of this ‘photographic turn’ within the art world, more importantly, for Edwards, is to consider the role of an increasing intellectualism associated with the rise of conceptual art which has, he argues, “brought photography in from the cold.”⁸⁶⁵

The relationship between the emphasis on intellectualism and the defence of the cognitive, as Bourdieu’s spheres of capitals suggest, cannot be entirely separated from the development of the market for photographic art. Although such sales as noted above represent a tiny fraction of the total auction market for art, with photography accounting for only 2% of sales in 2009, fine art photography is, according to Gapper, continuing to attract a growing investor interest⁸⁶⁶. In *Art Price’s* annual report (2013) it is noted that:

Photography is no longer a marginal affair, but has become a standard genre for collectors. Now a natural feature of prestige sales, particularly of contemporary art, it has increasingly established itself as a safe investment. In our civilisation, with its flood of images, photography is

⁸⁶³ Badger G (2007) *The Genius of Photography* London Quadrille Publishing p205

⁸⁶⁴ John Gapper (2014) *How Annie Got Shot* Financial Times

⁸⁶⁵ Perry G and Wood P (Eds) (2004) *Themes in Contemporary Art* New Haven and London Yale University Press p137

⁸⁶⁶ John Gapper (2014) *How Annie Got Shot* Financial Times

one of the most iconic media of our times, and the market has reacted accordingly.⁸⁶⁷

Collectors are clearly alert to the role that an institutionalised discourse on fine art photography plays for investment purposes:

Michael Wilson, a producer of James Bond films, owns one of the largest private photography collections in the world. He says that museums such as The Tate, which for years excluded photography from contemporary art exhibits, have now validated it. “Art is basically what a bunch of collectors and curators say it is, there is no getting around that,” he says with a chuckle.⁸⁶⁸

Photography comes in from the cold

The acceptance of photography within an art world organisation and the setting up of the necessary institutional apparatus (exhibition space, a critical discourse and the creation of an audience as much as a market for fine art photography) has been relatively slow. Writing in 1974 (five years after Bourdieu’s assessment that photography was destined to remain as a ‘middle brow art’), Christopherson undertook an ethnographic study of photographers and the difficulties they faced in their attempts at staking a claim in the institutionalised structures of the art world:

The use of the camera to create art, it seems, simply is not as freely accepted as is the use of paints and brushes to create art, and this is the essence of the fine art photographers’ struggle. If they want to use their cameras to do journalism or to make photographs for advertising, or perhaps portraits of graduating seniors, their occupation role would be

⁸⁶⁷ www.artprice.com

⁸⁶⁸ John Gapper (2014) *How Annie Got Shot* Financial Times

less problematic. It is their aspiration to the status of artist which creates the difficulties. The institutional structure of the art world is less inclined to make a place for photographers than are the institutional structures in the world of journalism or Madison Avenue or business. Photographers who claim to be artists are marginal figures existing somewhere between the technological world of cameras and chemicals and the romanticised, creative world of art.[...]The photographer-artist's role is an unexpected combination of status characteristics – an esoteric kind of thing at best and totally unheard of at worst.⁸⁶⁹

Christopherson noted that problems of status are common amongst nearly all occupations. However, within the art world this is compounded by the convergence of occupational status, aesthetic status and economic status. The most prestigious media – painting and sculpture – “dominate galleries, museums, art schools and art history” and as such, these media tend to command the highest market value in comparison with print making or indeed photography. Christopherson remarked that, “The intellectual and economic structure which supports photography as fine art is incomplete when compared to the more established media. Photography lacks the auxiliary roles and institutional structures which are vital in producing both the literary justification and the economic viability of an art form in the contemporary world.”⁸⁷⁰

As I have discussed with reference to the work of Martha Rosler, at the time of Christopherson's writing, significant challenges were being made against the dominant institutional practices of the museum and its strategies of display. Rosler and her like minded contemporaries, who as I have shown, were highly skilled theoreticians can be situated in reference to Bourdieu's cultural intermediaries as being both intellectuals and artists. Bourdieu notes that these

⁸⁶⁹ Christopherson R (1974) Making art with machines: photography's institutional inadequacies; *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 3:3 pp6-7

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid p13

intermediaries divide their interests between winning a market and widening their audience but at the same time, they retain a concern for cultural distinction. This is, for Bourdieu, marked by “a deep ambivalence which may be manifested in a dual discourse on the relations between the institution of cultural diffusion and the public.”⁸⁷¹ Such challenges are themselves now part of the unfolding history of photography as much as the history of art (in terms of being literary justifications) and the struggles which continue to take place there.

Steve Edwards has pointed out that attention from the vexing question of photography as art to a concern with *art as photography* which Benjamin’s quote at the beginning of this chapter indicated as a critical activity, has now reached an unprecedented point:

The presence of photography in major museums and exhibitions is now commonplace. Over the last forty years, photographic work has gradually moved from the margins of contemporary art to its centre.[...] The current prominence of photographic work can, in part be put down to artistic and intellectual fashion. Many young artists now produce photographs as unquestionably as they once made abstract paintings by the metre. The development of an economic market for photographic commodities has provided one important condition for this work.⁸⁷²

However, for Edwards, photography’s entrance into the art world stems more properly from the contribution which it made towards documenting ephemeral art practises – most significantly performance art and land art. Both of these genres aimed to challenge the supremacy of painting and moreover the idea of the work of art itself as “a self subsistent entity”:

⁸⁷¹ Bourdieu, P (1992) *Distinction* London, Routledge p229

⁸⁷² Edwards S (2004) *Photography out of Conceptual Art* in Perry G and Wood P (Eds) (2004) *Themes in Contemporary Art* new Haven and London Yale University Press p137

Performance artists and land artists left the confines of the gallery, producing work that could not be displayed in any conventional sense, and conceptual artists questioned the role of the artwork as a perceptual object, with its attendant connotations of visual sensitivity, connoisseurship and aesthetic appreciation.[...]Although even the most radical artists of the 1960s proved assimilable to both the market and the museum, the intention of it at least was to disrupt the commodification of art and to prevent its neutralisation as a merely aesthetic object.⁸⁷³

According to Edwards, the photograph as document and *recording* device (paradoxically in light of the critique of documentary photography carried out by artist photographers such as Rosler) became the means to prevent what were essentially transient works from simply falling silent and disappearing without a trace. “Photographs could be marketed in a way that proved difficult for events, propositions or earthworks.”⁸⁷⁴

While this may be the most straightforward of uses for photography within conceptual art, Edwards also notes that the images produced as accompaniments to these ‘happenings’ had other functions. Some of these can be identified as resulting from images staged and performed explicitly for the camera – such as Gilbert and George’s *The Singing Sculpture* (1970) which aimed to blur the boundaries between the performative aspect of art and the material form produced by this performance. Edwards suggests that in the process of staging actions for the camera, the recording process itself became the ultimate subject of the work and an opportunity for enhanced reflexivity. According to Edwards:

It can often be quite difficult in instances like this to tell if the camera was employed to document an independent event, or if that event was

⁸⁷³ Edwards S (2004) *op cit* p91

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid* 137

staged in order to become an image. We can never be certain if the artwork is the action or the image, or both.⁸⁷⁵

As discussed at length in the preceding chapters, this idea has also been extended by Groys to the use of the photographic or video image as a strategy of conflict – without implying that the videoed beheadings of the journalist Daniel Pearl or the photographs from Abu Ghraib are art, both the action of torture and the production of the image of the action have, in these examples, a similar interdependence.

From public issue to private trouble: social harm and self harm

It can be noted that some of the most significant pieces of performance art as they exist in photographic documentation and as art history have represented artists using their own bodies as a particularly subjective and site-specific form for violent social critique directed by representing their own experiences of self-inflicted pain. During the 1960s and 70s, ‘the body’ became a central site for artistic research. Julian Stallabrass offers a list of notable performance artists who have aimed to represent the other’s pain through their own experience of pain as it is willingly inflicted on their own bodies.⁸⁷⁶

In 1971, the artist Chris Burden arranged to be shot, by both gun and camera, in a bid to protest against the violence being waged in Vietnam. This performance piece aptly titled *Shoot* was carried out in a small gallery in California where the audience was made up of a small group of friends. One of his friends had been previously enlisted to shoot Burden in the arm with a .22 calibre rifle. The point here was not only to protest the war and the pain of others but it was also to emphasise the role of the viewing audience as being in a culpable and complicit

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid

⁸⁷⁶ Stallabrass J ; Performing Torture: <https://www.courtauld.ac.uk/.../stallabrass.../Regina%20José%20Galindo>.

position – torn between their citizenly duties of intervention but prevented from doing so by the institutional taboo against touching artworks.⁸⁷⁷ The event itself took place for an intentionally small audience of friends in preference to an initial idea to stage the performance more publically on a campus symposium about the work of Duchamp. This was due to ‘ethical’ decisions made by the artist in order to eliminate the risks, and the legal fall out that an ‘impromptu’ staged shooting on a university campus would incur. The documentation of the event nonetheless became wide spread through both video and still photography and certainly brought Burden to the attention of the art world. This was not quite Breton’s ultimate surrealist manoeuvre of shooting a pistol into a peaceful crowd - Burden had the choice of whether to be shot or not - but it does bear some resemblance. The video can still be viewed on YouTube.

Also in protest against the Vietnam War, the artist Gina Pane (1939-1990) climbed a ladder in bare feet. The ladder was embedded with razor blades (*Non-aesthetic climb*; 1971). Marina Abramovic has protested against the Communist tyrannies of Eastern Europe by cutting a bloody star into her skin.⁸⁷⁸

In *Performing Torture* Stallabrass reflects on his attendance as well as his role of photographer at the performance work *Confession* by Regina Jose Galindo:

Galindo has become well known for singular and what appear to be remarkably simple performances that bear directly on the human rights abuses in her native Guatemala. In *Who Can Erase The Traces?* (2003), staged in the nation’s capital, she walked from the Constitutional Court to the National Palace, leaving footprints in human blood, to object to the legal decision which had permitted former dictator and prominent architect of genocide, Jose Efrain Rios Montt, to stand for election to president. In response to government indifference to the routine murder

⁸⁷⁷ www.nytimes.com/.../chris-burden-extreme-measures-at-the-new-museum

⁸⁷⁸ Stallabrass, J *Performing torture* op cit unpaginated

and dismemberment of women in Guatemala and Mexico, she cut the word ‘perra’ (whore) into her thigh with a knife – that word being commonly found on the bodies of murdered women. She made further work about the murder of women in Guatemala by being confined in a cubicle and beating herself once for every such murder that had taken place in a six-month period (there were 279 of them), and, in another action, by having her naked body wrapped in plastic and dumped amid the garbage.⁸⁷⁹

As Stallabrass puts it, work of this type is premised on the following idea:

To mark one’s own body is the most evident way of expressing one’s pain and sense of complicity in what is protested against: it is the clearest possible sign of internalisation. It is also the mark of the guilt of the privileged, protected by status, by exile and even by the status of the work of art from the worst the state can do.⁸⁸⁰

This is clearly not unrelated to the earlier discussion on the impossibility and undesirability of ‘perfect witnessing’ where questions of self-referentiality (as Dauphinée argued) are understood to evacuate the pain of others from the realm of politics. This is not to argue that performance work of this kind *is* ‘perfect witnessing’ in the sense described by Dauphinée but suggests that the form of internalisation exhibited by this work *aims* at a ‘perfect witnessing’ by using pain as the medium of the representation of pain itself.

In reflecting on Galindo’s piece *Confession* Stallabrass is forced to confront the difficulties involved in witnessing the violence of another’s pain (even though this is here artificially constrained and no doubt “a pale imitation of what is conducted in similar cells across the globe by agents of our states and their

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid

allies”).⁸⁸¹ Galindo performed the piece in Palma de Mallorca during its celebratory annual ‘Night of Art’. The location was specific, since Palma is known to have been used by the CIA as a transit point in order to carry out ‘extraordinary rendition’ or ‘kidnap flights’. The location was chosen to highlight Palma as a precursory site of torture in detention centres such as Guantanamo Bay.

The performance consisted of the physical struggle between Galindo and a hired local bouncer who, as instructed by the artist, repeatedly forced her head into a barrel of water. “She would try to resist, and had told him not to be gentle” notes Stallabrass.⁸⁸² The performance took place in a small cellar room with a barred window, through which the audience outside could view the event. Those who could not access the window were able to witness the event courtesy of a large TV screen:

The slap of a body thrown onto a floor, though ‘slap’ does not quite capture the quality of the sound, which is composed of the impact of something soft, viscous almost, bound in a skin with the unyielding concrete, and the crack that accompanied it, as something harder (a bone, a tendon?) broke with the impact. The body at first appears to lie still, but no, the shoulders lift and fall slightly with breath, and the floor is darkened with water, spilled from the barrel during the struggle, and spattered on to the body itself. The torturer has left, a strip light starkly illuminates the small bare cellar with its barred window, and though the window faces crowd in to look down on the body.⁸⁸³

But, against the idea of the purity of language that Dauphinée celebrates, in witnessing Galindo’s performance Stallabrass struggles to describe exactly what

⁸⁸¹ *ibid*

⁸⁸² *ibid*

⁸⁸³ *ibid*

had taken place, “finding that the words that come to mind cannot do all the work I want them to.”⁸⁸⁴

The sense of performance art as bearing some kind of witness to the plight and pain of others is, for Stallabrass, constituent with the practice of photography through their shared insistence on “the social and political importance of a person’s presence and actions at a scene”.⁸⁸⁵ More than this, in performance works which actively inscribe the body with pain, within “the traces of the action” lies “a fascination with marking.” This, like photography, produces “a pattern caused by the direct action of a physical force on a surface.” Stallabrass writes:

The blade, like focused light, traces its own shape. Scars, like photographs are patterns that tie the process of mark-making to the stimulus of memory.[...]Photography and scars may stand on the side of memory against drugs, arbitrary violence and the enforcement of silence. Photography and video, aside from being the regular documentary tool of performance, have a fraught double alliance with the current regime of oppression and with resistance to it.⁸⁸⁶

Galindo’s photographs and videos are both document and artwork. They also produce a saleable and reproducible commodity that can be displayed in commercial art galleries. Galindo’s performance and an exhibition of her work were arranged by *La Caja Blanca*. Stallabrass describes the contradictions between the action and its record that are inherent in this display:

The photographs shown exhibited all the qualities of museum work. In their serene, seamless high resolution surfaces, Galindo’s often naked body underwent various abuses. One might think that there is a

⁸⁸⁴ ibid

⁸⁸⁵ ibid

⁸⁸⁶ ibid

mismatch between performance and saleable product, in which the clean lines of the artist's body and the clarity of the print take on neo-classical connotations, in a measured and restrained beauty snatched from the flux of violence.⁸⁸⁷

Such images and Galindo's resolute stoicism in the face of violence committed on her have a long history belonging to the tradition of Christian Martyrdom. As Jean Seaton has explored, the concept of the martyr has its roots in the word 'witness'. The term did not take on its overtly religious meaning until the first and early second centuries. Martyrdom was not purely a religious act but simultaneously carried political import especially in the context of the Roman Games. The Roman Games offered a microcosm of collective life which gauged the relationship between citizens and rulers – the greater the spectacle of reality violence given to the audience, then the stronger the ruler was perceived to be. Christian martyrs used and exploited these conditions. As Seaton points out:

The Christian Martyrs understood that to be seen to die in terror legitimised authority, but that to refuse to be frightened, to control the time and place of death, to die willingly, and to master the performance of death constituted an attack on death itself, and became a challenging subversion. It was a battle about meaning, carried out through performance.⁸⁸⁸

Seaton also observes that images of this type remain prevalent today, in the videos of contemporary 'martyrs' such as the suicide bomber for example.

Nonetheless the photographer as witness to war often comes under attack for a perceived martyrdom, especially when it costs them their lives. War photography is, for Rosler, marked by "increasing nihilism and sensationalism" which she described in terms of operating between 'gore for gore's sake' and

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸⁸ Seaton J (2005) *Carnage and the Media* Allen Lane Penguin Books p71

exaggerated compassion in which the photographer's heroism was paramount.⁸⁸⁹ Moreover, "One of the important messages of most photojournalism is the *assumption* by the photographer of the burden of pain, compassion and bravery that inspires but simultaneously absolves the rest of us."⁸⁹⁰

Guardian blogger Andrew Brown commented on the much publicised deaths of photographers Tim Hetherington and Chris Hondros in Misrata, Libya:

If we put them on the front page of newspapers, let's be honest that it is because we admire them, not because they show the pity or futility of war[.....]On the contrary, their deaths, as much as their lives do something to make some wars seem noble ones.⁸⁹¹

This criticism of the photojournalist's bravery is by now well rehearsed – it is their 'choice' to be there, a warzone is dangerous and to go there means accepting the necessary risks. And it is, and they do.

All deaths in war show its futility and the photojournalist is no exception to this. There are, as Butler has pointed out, hierarchies of 'greivability' in the representation of war deaths which require attention,⁸⁹² and for many photojournalists, challenging rather than reinforcing those perceptions is a main aspect of their motivation to be there. As I have suggested with reference to Weber and Bourdieu, the concept of 'choice' is never 'free choice.' Mills was clear that war is a structural issue but that it also has consequences for individuals who search out ways of responding to it through the positions they take.

⁸⁸⁹ Rosler M (2004)*Decoys and Disruptions, Selected Writings, 1975-2001*; October Books p 250

⁸⁹⁰ Rosler M (2004) op cit p254

⁸⁹¹ In Allen, S; *Photo-reportage of the Libyan Conflict* in Kennedy, L and Patrick, C (eds) (2014)*The Violence of the Image*, London, I B Taurus p175

⁸⁹² Butler, J (2010)*Frames or War* London Verso pp1-32

Yet, similar to some conflict photographers Stallabrass considers that despite the endurance of pain in Galindo's performances, she herself seems to have little belief that her work has the power to change anything. In this sense she is representative of a dominant art world ethos that is "set against the idea that art should have a use, let alone a political use" since this would "deprive both artist and viewer of creative and interpretive freedom."⁸⁹³

So what, wonders Stallabrass, do the collectors and buyers of Galindo's photographs actually purchase? Stallabrass argues that they purchase "a fragmentary reminder of their own place within that (neo-liberal) system and the structural conditions of exploitation that maintains them there."⁸⁹⁴ He suggests that this in itself is comforting, not only because their economic position allows them to be protected from contingency but because the images themselves are a reminder that "the forces of opposition seem so weak and threaten no substantial change":

They can be framed physically and conceptually, parcelled up, and hung on a living room wall – a comforting and sublime reminder, through contrast, of the safety and security of their owners, cosseted as they are by rolls of money.⁸⁹⁵

Images of torture as presented through the art world may then, it turns out, be no less of a fashion statement or status marker of conspicuous consumption than they are on the pages of *Vogue*. On the other hand it cannot be ruled out that some purchasers of this art do so in order to support the continued production of politically motivated work. Stallabrass is also concerned to point out that Galindo's work *has* effected some change:

⁸⁹³ Stallabrass, J Performing Torture op cit unpaginated

⁸⁹⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁹⁵ *ibid*

An increasingly polarised and dangerous political situation has produced a reaction even in the art world, so that Galindo's work is not isolated but takes part in a broader wave of 'political' art in which some of the dearest held and most fundamental of art-world beliefs come under pressure, in particular in the identity struggles played out in the war on terror.⁸⁹⁶

In taking this excursus into the relationship between staged but nonetheless 'real' violence and its image within performance art it is possible to unpack the relationship between the event and its representation. They are not synonymous. The image does not in this case perpetuate the action unproblematically. The image is certainly interdependent with the action, but the circulation of the image across the art world using a *standardised* symbol of 'museum photography' (large scale with high production values) allows Galindo's work to trouble art world values.

This attention to the use of *standardised* symbols in the art world can be compared with the standardised symbols of press photography; both are caught within the "fraught double alliance" to the regimes of oppression that Stallabrass observes. In their reflexive awareness of this both art and photojournalism can offer a site of critical resistance.

C W Mills offers a useful reminder:

For you cannot "possess" art merely by buying it; you cannot support art merely by feeding artists – although that does help. To possess it you must earn it by participating to some extent in what it takes to design it

⁸⁹⁶ ibid

and to create it. To support it you must catch something of what is involved in the production in it.⁸⁹⁷

The ‘taste’ for viewing and contemplating violence on the body itself can be further highlighted as contextual; what we can bear to see as well as never see is bound up in complex historical, social, political, economic and cultural factors.

In the following chapter I examine photographic work in which the human body is typically absent although beauty remains as an important political strategy in the representation of trauma. This work is significant in its recognition of method and field work and engages with both anthropology and sociology. As Paul Lowe has argued, it carries on an investigative tradition of ethnography and narrative whilst being alert to its legal force and the juridical weight of its findings.⁸⁹⁸

⁸⁹⁷ Mills, C W (1958) *The Man in the Middle* in Summers, J (ed) (2008) *The Politics of Truth; Selected Writings of C Wright Mills* Oxford university Press p183

⁸⁹⁸ Lowe, P (2104) *The Forensic Turn* in Kennedy L and Patrick C (eds) *The Violence of the Image* I B Taurus p221

10. Documentary Photography: Timeliness and Lateness



Luc Delahaye, *Patio civil, cementario, San Rafael, Malaga* (2009) Digital C-Print, 251x207.1cm (edition of 3)

*“What reconciles me to my own death more than anything else is the image of a place: a place where your bones and mine are buried, thrown, uncovered together. They are strewn there pell-mell. One of your ribs leans against my skull. A metacarpal of my left hand lies inside your pelvis. (Against my broken ribs your breast like a flower.) The hundred bones of our feet are scattered like gravel. It is strange that this image of our proximity, concerning as it does mere phosphate of calcium, should bestow a sense of peace. Yet it does. With you I can imagine a place where to be phosphate of calcium is enough.”*⁸⁹⁹

*“The art of our time is noisy with appeals to silence”*⁹⁰⁰

⁸⁹⁹ John Berger: *And our faces, my heart, brief as photographs* (1984:101)

⁹⁰⁰ Susan Sontag: *The Aesthetics of Silence* (1982:187)

Photography has been, so to speak, a ‘late’ arrival to the art world. The title of this chapter, referring to timeliness and lateness, is borrowed from Edward Said and his observations on ‘late style’. In the introduction to this ‘late’ collection of Said’s work, published posthumously in 2006 by the Estate of Edward Said, Michael Woods is thoughtful about the concept of lateness:

It’s worth pausing over the delicately shifting meanings of the word *late*, ranging from missed appointments through cycles of nature to vanished life. Most frequently *late* just means “too late”, later than we should be, not on time. But late evenings, late blossoms, and late autumns are perfectly punctual – there isn’t another clock or calendar they are supposed to match. Dead persons have certainly got themselves beyond time, but then what difficult temporal longing lurks in our calling them “late”? Lateness doesn’t name a single relation to time, but always brings time in its wake. It is a way of remembering time, whether it is missed or met or gone.⁹⁰¹

This seems appropriate given that a central topic for discussion here surrounds the emergence of a group of photographers whose work in and on conflict zones is becoming collectively referred to as ‘Late’ or ‘Aftermath’ photography. This is work that aims to confront and counter the ‘immediacy’, ‘instant gratification’ and the perceived ‘intrusion’ of the photojournalist. Indeed, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, some of the photographers acknowledged in this chapter have made a successful transition from photojournalist to fine artist and now show widely within a number of fine art establishments as well as specialist photography galleries. Luc Delahaye, Melanie Friend and Ashley Gilbertson all began their photographic careers as photojournalists. It is perhaps little wonder, given the economic pressures on news media as described earlier, that some photojournalists have looked beyond the print news media for

⁹⁰¹ Said E (2006) *On Late style* New York Pantheon Books p xi

alternative spaces to exhibit their work. However it should be noted that a number of newspapers still carry valuable gallery spaces for quality photographic work in their reincarnation on the internet.

Melanie Friend worked for a number of publications such as the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* and was a member of Panos Pictures throughout the 1980s. Friend worked in the Balkans from 1989 -1995 returning there throughout the 1990s to produce work specifically for galleries. She focussed explicitly on empty domestic interiors where gross violations had taken place and in *Homes and Gardens* (1996) the images were accompanied by oral testimony. Friend aimed to construct an alternative visual rhetoric that undermined and challenged the popular media's use of graphic images to represent mass trauma and violence by turning her attention to the ways in war is not just a matter of what happens at a visible 'frontline.'⁹⁰² In doing so, the changing nature of the ways in which wars are fought war is made visible.

Ashley Gilbertson gave up his career as an embedded photojournalist covering the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan after his own traumatic experience. He reflected on this as a guest speaker at a conference in Dublin. Having heard that a shooting had taken place at a nearby Minaret, Gilbertson asked if he could go and take photographs of the dead body present there. This was agreed and he was provided with an obligatory patrol for his protection. On arrival at the Minaret, the patrol came under fire and a young soldier was killed. Gilbertson was unable to square his role as witness with his feelings of guilt and responsibility for this death. Gilbertson's work now focuses on post-traumatic stress, of which he has his own experience, and the grieving processes which

⁹⁰² Hesford W (2004) Distant violations: rhetorical witnessing and the Spectacle of distant Suffering; *Biography* volume 27 number 1 Winter 2004 p116

are part of the ongoing aftermath of war.⁹⁰³ He has gone on to produce a series of work *Bedrooms of the Fallen* (2014). The continued presence of soldiers who did not return is made palpable through their most personal of environments, which have been left untouched by their surviving families as shrines to their memory. Here absence is not purely an aesthetic strategy and in turn, the reality of this now empty private space is he suggests transformed into a social space.

As with Delahaye these photographers all address the concepts of ‘lateness’, ‘silence’, ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ in complex and different ways and so they should not necessarily be regarded as an artistic school or homogeneous group. However all share a regard for representing the problems and dilemmas of *re-presenting* traumatic events.

It is worth pausing here to refer to Stanley Cohen’s assessment, not of this particular style of photography but of the construction of a discourse which taking its cue from “long reflections of the Nazi case, [...] has long since moved to meta-questions of representation: not to what is known, but *how* to know, remember and imagine; how to create novels, poetry and films; how to construct memorials, oral histories, testimonies and documentaries.”⁹⁰⁴ And, it can be added, how to take photographs.

‘Late’ photography shares with documentary photography in its concern for an ethnographic approach, or a ‘thick description’. It is carried out most often by way of a forensic gaze or an archaeological excavation of the changing landscape of conflict in which human beings are (mostly) physically absent, their presence only suggested by the traces they have left. As Broomberg and Chanarin described it, ‘late’ photography consciously avoids the moment of action.

⁹⁰³ Ashley Gilbertson at UCD Clinton Institute for American Studies *Medium and Message: Conflict Photography in the Digital Era* 3-4 May 2011

⁹⁰⁴ Cohen S (2001) *States of Denial* Polity Press p223 (emphasis added)

This work is formally characterised by an exaggerated stillness and a ‘slow looking’ that is implicit in the act of taking the photograph itself. ‘Late’ or ‘Aftermath’ photography makes use of the large format camera which offers a greater control over the management of the image in terms of the rendering of perspectives whilst also increasing the depth of field. They operate on a slow shutter speed that can be up to 2 or 4 stops slower than that on a 35mm camera. While all of this contributes towards a smoothness of finish and clarity of tone, it can nonetheless also create problems – for example any movement (even a gentle breeze) results in blurring – although this may not be a problem depending on the desired result.

In Simon Norfolk’s work *Afghanistan Chronotopia* for example there is a photograph of a bullet scarred apartment building. Simon Norfolk describes himself primarily as being a landscape photographer although clearly the concept of human trauma is not absent from his work. A small herd of sheep offer a blurred, almost ghostly presence in the left of the picture. Life here is precarious, short and ephemeral against the permanence of conflict in this country.

What is important in this practice is the sense of the photographer’s sense of control since this format demands a great deal manual attention to its operation (although digital versions do exist). Spontaneity and the fixing of the ephemeral – which have for so long characterised photography - are replaced by reflection and contemplation since the large format camera requires careful and deliberate use. This results in a “detailed, static and resolutely perspectival rectangle.”⁹⁰⁵

⁹⁰⁵ Company D (2007) *The Cinematic* Whitechapel London The MIT Press p192



Simon Norfolk, *Afghanistan Chronotopia* (2002)⁹⁰⁶

Some caution should also be applied in suggesting that the aesthetic strategies of ‘late’ photography are ‘new’. As noted in the chapter on photojournalism, the use of the landscape littered with and scarred by the debris of war (and notably without corpses) was the central appeal of Fenton’s work in the Crimean War. Although he *could* have photographed corpses, certain elements of his ‘aftermath’ vision were limited by his embedded position and by technological constraints. In 1866, George Barnard also surveyed the aftermath of war. *Photographic Views of Sherman’s Campaign* was not only a war chronicle but also a landscape chronicle of a devastated countryside “ravaged by battle and altered by the logistics of military advance.”⁹⁰⁷

As David Company sets out, this aesthetic similarity with a residual visual culture offers a false homology. “The similarity masks the radical changes that have taken place in our image culture since then.”⁹⁰⁸ The technology employed by these early photographers was cumbersome and slow, “both in technical

⁹⁰⁶ www.simon.norfolk.com

⁹⁰⁷ Badger G (2007) *The Genius of Photography* Quadrille Publishing p132

⁹⁰⁸ Company D (2007) *The Cinematic* Whitechapel London The MIT Press p189

procedure and social dissemination.”⁹⁰⁹ Advances in technology from the 1920s (as I discussed in the introduction) have enabled the photographer to capture events as they happened. Company writes that:

It (photography) defined implicitly what an event was: a moment, an instant, something that could be frozen and examined. Good photo-reporters were thought to be those who followed the action. The goal was to be in the right place at the right time, ‘as things happened’.⁹¹⁰

Although this was displaced by the advent of moving film, cinema and television, ‘still’ photography for the most part managed to hold its own. Publications such as *Picture Post* and *Life* offered a welcome home to the photo essay and documentary work although this security was eventually undone as more people purchased televisions. In fact, Company argues that it is precisely because of the emergence of moving images that stillness in images became “apparent, understandable and truly desirable.”⁹¹¹

This point is expanded by John Roberts who notes that photography has historically defined itself in terms of its subordinate position in relation to cinema with the exception of photography’s very early history, when the technology had no competitors. Roberts argues that:

There is no history of photographic ‘realism’, ‘truth’ the ‘symbolic’ in the twentieth century – and therefore no conception of the ‘singular event’ – without taking into account how the photographic both mediates, and rises to the challenge of the moving image. Consequently, photography’s claims to ‘realism’, ‘truth’ and the ‘symbolic’ are indivisible from the photo-document’s perceived technical inadequacies and *limitations* (which is very different from the assumption, in

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid p188

⁹¹⁰ Ibid p188

⁹¹¹ Ibid p189

photographic naturalism, that the photographic document is the gateway to unmediated truth). Modernism is born therefore, at the point of modern photography's crisis and self doubt, and not as a re-establishment of the photograph's would-be transparency.⁹¹²

Roberts has examined the ways in which photography opened itself up to the practices of cinema – in particular to the use of montage by Soviet film makers such as Dziga Vertov or Serge Eisenstein. The use of both photo-montage and a composite image (as in John Heartfield's work) and the invocation of the contingencies of 'everyday' can be noted here.⁹¹³ Likewise for Roberts, Cartier-Bresson's concept of the 'decisive moment' refracts and echoes the cinematic model and its capacity for narrative, "the photographer uses the convergent powers of the photograph in order to position the single image within an imaginative and dramatic continuum."⁹¹⁴

Nonetheless, these cinematic forms had their own troubles in their establishment as a serious medium before a conservative intelligentsia. John Grierson recalled that an air of disrepute surrounded cinema from its inception:

I do remember seeing my first film round about 1905 and remember what a disgraceful business it was supposed to be. The film as you know is a novelty of the sideshows. It was born in the gutter, rose in the sidewalks – in the company of yokels, tin-pan pianos and the henna-haired songsters of the honky-tonks.⁹¹⁵

There was nothing necessarily wrong with this but, it would take cinema a long uphill journey, wrote Grierson "If we are to make an honest woman of her."

⁹¹² Roberts J (2009) *Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive and the Non-Symbolic*; *Oxford Art Journal* 12 .2.2009 p287

⁹¹³ *Ibid* p288

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹¹⁵ Grierson J (1934) *Lecture 2: The Social Relationships of Cinema* Grierson Archives,(G3:10) Stirling University

A catch-penny tradition – a cheap mouthpiece which you could sometimes buy by trading in a dollop of rags or a jelly jar – certainly without relation to art or education – a fit business for the roller skating rinks that had gone broke, and the low down dives where the darkness was the principle asset of business.⁹¹⁶

There were real fears surrounding the emergence of cinema and the impact of the moving images on the audience:

The flickering images were responsible for causing many viewers to have violent headaches, while the penny gaffs and sideshows in which they viewed the films were unhygienic places as many people transfixed by what they saw would relieve themselves in their seats. The combustible nature of early celluloid also meant that there was a possible risk of fire and, in 1909 these health and safety hazards were used as the pretext for the state to become involved in the regulation of the content of films when the Cinematograph Act was passed.⁹¹⁷

The rapid expansion of cinema fuelled the forces of ‘respectability’ and worries over the ‘stirrings’ that the new form of entertainment might cause amongst a predominantly working class audience – by 1914 annual admissions numbered 364 million. Women and children were seen as especially vulnerable; juvenile delinquency was directly attributed to early silent films which were perceived to set not simply a precedent but to act as a *model* to be imitated as how to commit crime.⁹¹⁸

The dominance of the commercial film industry was nonetheless significant in shaping Grierson’s Documentary Film Movement. Alert to the potential of a

⁹¹⁶ Ibid

⁹¹⁷ Eldridge J, Kitzinger J and Williams K (1997) *The Mass Media and Power in Modern Britain* Oxford University Press p14

⁹¹⁸ Ibid

medium that could reach a vast audience Grierson did not see mass communication as being antithetical to the construction of an educated participatory democracy. It was the content of commercial films that troubled him:

Just because we thought it disreputable, just because we were too proud in our attachment to painting and literature to have anything to do with this grounding art, we have allowed cinema to go by default. We caught wireless in time. We did not catch cinema in time. We allowed it to get into the hands of commerce....into the hands of every cheap skate promoter who cared to cash in on the opportunities it presented. And there it remains. No man ever chained to a rock was ever sacrificed so carelessly or so disastrously. This power which might be turned to ten thousand high purposes of education and art and national shaping has been turned over to commercial greed to do what it pleases with.⁹¹⁹

Grierson despaired at the priority of profit which he saw as the organisation of the weakness rather than the strength of the people:

I know for my part that I could create an educational film service (and a good one) for the price of a single orgy and a couple of baths of asses milk; but something fundamental would have to happen before I could get access to the money. We would have to say then that education is more important than perversion and that the organisation of life is more important than its destruction. It is I believe not in our nature to admit anything so curious.⁹²⁰

Clearly while the relationship between cinema and photography is important to consider, both of these technologies remained for a long time as subordinate to the 'higher' art forms of painting and sculpture. As Roberts points out: "Indeed

⁹¹⁹ Grierson J (1934) *Lecture 2: The Social Relationships of Cinema* Grierson Archives,(G3:10) Stirling University

⁹²⁰ Ibid

it is precisely photography's increasing awareness of its subordination to film and mass culture that provides documentary practice with the intellectual and cognitive driving force of its re-theorisation in the 1930s.”⁹²¹ This was, as I have discussed, the desire to photograph *things as they are* and this was, from its inception, never anything other than an interpretive skill to be crafted:

In documentary, the camera goes out into the world to take what it finds. Its function is to explore. The function of the director behind it is to select and so organise that the themes and the stories and other creative continuities hidden within this natural material, are brought alive. By revealing them, he gives form to natural material.⁹²²

More than this, Grierson argued that documentary practice was a way of countering an increasing alienation from the world:

Our imaginations are out of touch with the world we live in. My suggestion has been that we have lost contact with the actual, we have lost the power of interpreting it. That is to say, we have lost contact with the knowledge of reality in the deeper sense and those arts which come with a knowledge and operation in terms of reality.⁹²³

While Grierson had cinema at the heart of his interests, the rhetoric remained central to the documentary photography movement not to mention the numerous Worker Photography Movements which operated extensively in both Europe and America. As I have discussed with reference to Rosler however, documentary practice was firmly put in its place as a form gone well past its

⁹²¹ Robert J (2009) Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive and the Non-Symbolic; *Oxford Art Journal* 12 .2.2009 p281

⁹²² Grierson J (1934) *Lecture 2: The Social Relationships of Cinema* Grierson Archives,(G3:10) Stirling

⁹²³ Grierson J (unfinished, undated article) "*Lecture on documentary as a treatment of reality*")(G2:16) Grierson Archives, Stirling University

sell-by date, being more “comfortable in the company of moralism than wedded to a rhetoric or program of revolutionary politics.”⁹²⁴

Campany has also noted that the photographer’s power to define events was subject to rival technologies. It was most drastically altered by the emergence of portable, hand held video cameras in the late 1960s and early 70s:

This is both a material circumstance and a social one: as a technology video was stoppable, repeatable, cheap and quick; and institutionally it was put to use in many of the roles formally held by photography.⁹²⁵

The still cameras, says Campany, are loaded only after the video cameras are packed away.⁹²⁶ As noted earlier, Campany observed the preferred use of still photography in the construction of an official archive of ‘9/11’. Drawing from Sontag, David Campbell has suggested that “the ubiquity of the video in the representation of the other has given the photograph a renewed role as a site for reflection.”⁹²⁷

As Campany considers, the understanding and the desirability of the still photograph appears as a sort of by-product in the world of the moving image.⁹²⁸

Since the 1980s photographers have wrestled with the trenchant critiques of documentary that, as Walker argues, brought it almost to the point of paralysis.⁹²⁹ A focus on landscape as metaphor and metonym for the effects of human conflict by which to highlight, bypass or challenge the problems of aestheticising or reifying the body in pain has long been present in photographic practice. Clearly this was central to Rosler’s concerns in the urban environment

⁹²⁴ Rosler M (2004) *Disruptions and Decoys* October Books p177

⁹²⁵ Campany D (2007) *Safety in Numbness* in Campany, D (ed) *The Cinematic* Whitechapel London The MIT Press p188

⁹²⁶ Ibid

⁹²⁷ Campbell D (2003) Representing Contemporary War *Journal of Ethics and International Affairs* 17 number 2 p99

⁹²⁸ Campany D (2007) *Safety in Numbness* in Campany, D (ed) *The Cinematic* Whitechapel London The MIT Press p189

⁹²⁹ Lister M (1995) *The Photographic Image in the Digital Era* London Routledge p245

of the Bowery. However the use of rural landscape offers a different approach and a different symbolism. Nature transformed into landscape is offered as a transcendent form; its destruction is figured through the literary shape of the pastoral. Whereas the urban landscape in Rosler's work focuses on human disconnection through an explicitly built environment, the rural 'landscape' implies connection *to* the environment by acknowledging the socially constructed ideal of 'nature' itself.



Richard Misrach; *Bomb Crater and Destroyed Convoy, Bravo 20 Bombing Range, Nevada 1986* Type C colour print from *Desert Canto V*⁹³⁰

The work of Richard Misrach – in particular *Desert Cantos* has documented the damage to the Nevada desert in those areas controlled by the US Military. Weapons-testing has wrecked havoc on the landscape – water has become contaminated with radioactivity from nuclear testing that infuses the soil and has in turn laid waste to much animal life there. This desert remains full of unexploded ordnance. The image above depicts a bomb crater now full of rusty water. Military debris can be seen scattered around this scar in the earth's surface. The metaphor of the scar is prevalent here. For Badger, "The red of the

⁹³⁰Image retrieved from www.we-make-money-not-art.com

water makes the obvious but effective metaphor of the wounded earth bleeding, but more effective is the ironic contrast between the beauties of a ravaged landscape and the ugliness of some of mankind's baser impulses.”⁹³¹

Sophie Ristelhuber also makes the connection between the scar and the photograph. Six months after *Desert Storm* Ristelhuber travelled independently to Kuwait:

Both walking and flying across the battleground, she made images of all the debris left behind: from a pair of empty boots covered in oil to the weirdly beautiful patterns of trenches and shell craters.⁹³²



Sophie Ristelhuber: *Untitled* from *Aftermath* (1992)⁹³³

⁹³¹ Badger G (2007) *The Genius of Photography* Quadrille Publishing p145

⁹³² Lister M (1995) *The Photographic Image in the Digital Era* London Routledge p240

⁹³³ Image retrieved from <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2011/03/sophie-ristelhuber-books-on-books-3.html>

Ristelheuber is interested in the scar – not only as a geological memory trace on the tissue of the human body but equally in the physical scars on the landscape created by war. The scar and the photograph are here positioned as objects of equivalences, or at least having a degree of correspondence as mark making and as memory traces. Whilst Ristelheuber’s photographs are reminiscent of aerial reconnaissance photography, she cites Duchamp’s *Large Glass* (1915-23) and more specifically Man Ray’s photograph of *Dust Breeding* (1920) as stimulus. As Walker suggests, this offers an indication of the ambiguous placement of her work:

The ambiguity, the instability of Ristelheuber’s imagery lies not only in the work itself – these marks on the desert, which, seen from the air, might well be an archaeological dig or even a 1970s ‘earthwork’ – but also in its positioning between art and documentary, neither one nor the other but both at the same time.⁹³⁴

Yet, the original title of this series of work was ‘Fait’; in French the meaning is ‘that which has been done’. The photographs may be ambiguous in their content but yet they offer evidence of *that which has been done* and a faith in the factuality of the photograph. As Walker indicates, both Misrach and Ristelheuber have taken the critique of documentary on board. Ian Walker has referred to this as a sort of ‘post reportage’⁹³⁵. Given that the efficacy of photojournalism and documentary work has been so forcefully critiqued Walker suggests that photography is regrouping itself and becoming more confident in what it can do rather than what it cannot.⁹³⁵ In redefining itself as a form of ‘post-reportage’ photography can “record, document what comes *after*, what has been left when the war is over.”⁹³⁶

⁹³⁴ Lister M (1995) *The Photographic Image in the Digital Era* London Routledge p244

⁹³⁵ Lister M (1995) *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* London Routledge p240

⁹³⁶ *ibid*

Simon Norfolk: Aesthetics and Politics (Beauty as Tactic)

This excursus will pay particular attention to the work of Simon Norfolk as an interesting and useful example of the genre of ‘late’ photography. Norfolk has stated in an interview:

All the work I have been doing over the last five years is about warfare and the way that war makes the world we live in. War shapes and designs our society. The landscapes I look at are created by war and conflict.⁹³⁷

Norfolk distinguishes his work from combat photography which he describes as simply “the most visibly active form of war.” Instead, this is war photography about the nature of war and about the concept of war as it is embedded in the layers of the landscape. He acknowledges his debt to the early photojournalist practices of Fenton and Brady alongside influences from 18th and 19th century landscape painting through Lorrain and Poussin. Both photographers and painters were drawn by the idea of ‘the ruin’ and its metaphorical reference to a ‘fallen empire’. Of this however Norfolk asserts:

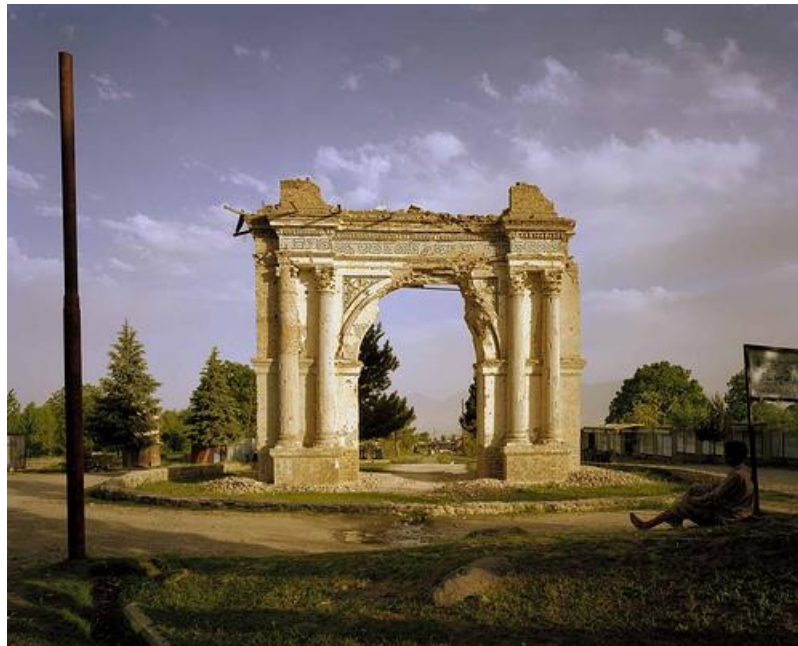
Art historical references may be intriguing, but the destruction of Afghanistan is first and foremost a human tragedy in which millions have lost their lives. The people killed in these attacks leave almost no record – only the forensic traces survive to tell of the carnage.⁹³⁸

In *Afghanistan Chronotopia*, ancient ruins such as an early twentieth Greek style century victory arch contains within itself and registers the layers of the history of war in that country. Norfolk’s photographs aim to mark the history of modern weaponry as it inscribes itself on to the landscape.

⁹³⁷ bldgblog.blogspot.com/.../warphotography-interview-with-simon.html

⁹³⁸ Simon Norfolk www.simonnorfolk.com

The arch was constructed in 1919 to celebrate newly won independence after an Afghan revolt against the British. The Greek style had appeared in Afghanistan over 2000 years before when Alexander the Great conquered the land. The arch was badly damaged during the years of the Soviet invasion in 1979 and again in 2001 with the arrival of US led international forces.



Simon Norfolk: from *Afghanistan Chronotopia* (2002)⁹³⁹

Roland Mortier has described the poetics of the ruin thus:

The ruin – curiously non-existent for the Greeks – was interesting to the Romans only as the intangible image of Destiny; a ruin was not a presence but an *absence* or a *void*, the witness of a vanished presence, the negative mark of destroyed grandeur. For them, the ruin became identified with nothingness, so to speak; it was no longer a concrete thing which could be the object of fear, admiration or sorrow, but was like the indent left by a footprint, the mortal city razed to its foundations.⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁹ All Images by Simon Norfolk retrieved from www.simonnorfolk.com

⁹⁴⁰ Cited in Zimmerman M (2003) *The Art Historian* New haven and London Yale University Press p3

In this sense the idea of the chronotope becomes an important concept for Norfolk. This is borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin as being “a place that allows for movement through space and time simultaneously, a place that displays the layeredness of time.”⁹⁴¹

Alongside the ancient structures, Norfolk also offers more modern ruins – new ‘triumphant arches’ are evoked in the structures that mark military check points; tail fins of mortar rounds collected together at a de-mining centre appear as a deadly, but beautiful coral formation; piles of Soviet cluster bombs evoke Fenton’s cannon balls: the shells of bus fleets and aeroplanes lie in the graveyards of their own modernity; a discarded track of a destroyed Taliban tank offers itself up as a bizarre, twisted dinosaur skeleton; concrete structures are riddled with bullet marks and collapse in on themselves through the architecture of destruction. Norfolk explains that the different types of damage are important, distinguishing between the “tidy picked clean skeletons of buildings” and the areas of undulating earth where de-mining teams have ‘swept’ the area:

A building destroyed by the cataclysm of an American 15,000 lb bomb creates a different historical record to a structure gradually reduced to its concrete ‘bones’ by thousands and thousands of Kalashnikov bullets.⁹⁴²

Norfolk’s photographs are ‘beautiful’ – often bathed in the golden light of idealist landscape painting. Beauty is used here as a deliberate and political strategy aimed to draw the viewer in only to reveal the hidden, buried text of the landscape. For Norfolk is interested, like the early landscape painters who

⁹⁴¹ Simon Norfolk www.simonnorfolk.com

⁹⁴² *ibid*

inspired him, in the sense of “the ultimate futility and impermanence of earthly empires.”⁹⁴³

This sense of the political uses of beauty also permeates his work in the former Yugoslavia. However, in *Bosnia Bleed* Norfolk offers a very different picture of warfare than the work in Afghanistan. Whereas Norfolk bathes the disasters of Afghanistan wars in the exotic and overt ‘golden’ glare of an imperialist and colonial framework, *Bleed* has a different bleakness. In these images, the covert complicity of the landscape in this war is examined. These pictures are as much about what the landscape hides as they are about what the landscape reveals. A number of the photographs in Norfolk’s series offer the sense of inhibited vision – images of air bubbles trapped in frozen water are opaque; snow covered ground cloaks strange, unidentifiable mounds in the landscape and what might be buried there.

Uncovering mass graves is a common occurrence in this landscape. There is, he notes, a distinction between what are termed Primary Mass Graves and Secondary Mass Graves. The primary sites are the known locations of mass executions given up in the testimonies of survivors. Yet when UN investigators arrived, these sites had been dug up using earth moving equipment and the bodies relocated elsewhere. *Crni Vrh* which translates as ‘Black Peak’ is the largest of the secondary sites to be uncovered so far. Over 700 bodies including non-combatants and children are believed to be buried there.

The photograph below shows the waste pond of the Karakaj aluminium factory complex at Petkovici. On his website, the image is captioned with the details of place. Added to this Norfolk tells us:

In the afternoon and evening of 14th July 1995, hundreds of Bosnian men and boys were taken to the embankment of the dam that holds back

⁹⁴³ bldgblog.blogspot.com/.../warphotography-interview-with-simon.html

the massive waste pond of the aluminium plant and executed. Some of the bodies are believed to have been thrown into the lake, others piled into mass graves⁹⁴⁴



Simon Norfolk from *Bosnia; Bleed* (2005)

The following image is taken at Bratunac Soccer Stadium. Many hundreds of men and boys were held across several sites around Bratunac but the majority were taken to this walled stadium. Norfolk writes that, “MSF reported having seen seven hundred prisoners at this site. A UNICEF team, in a nearby hotel, reported hearing gunshots all night from the direction of the stadium.”



Simon Norfolk from *Bosnia; Bleed* (2005)

⁹⁴⁴ Simon Norfolk www.simonnorfolk.com

In both of his projects outlined above, the textual information that Norfolk attaches to his photographs is important to consider; the text is factual and spare – no ‘clever’ ‘playful’ or ambiguous titles lamenting the inadequacy of his media are on display. This matches the ‘factuality’ of the photographic image by emphasising what *cannot* be seen. The factuality of the text however provides and reinforces an emotive atmosphere of melancholy in the images. In Norfolk’s image above, the structure of the basketball net takes on a figurative quality – a monumental wounded stick-man.

It is to be reminded of John Berger’s exercise in *Ways of Seeing*. Here Berger reproduced an image of a cornfield:

This is a landscape of a cornfield with birds flying out of it. Look at it for a moment. Then turn the page.⁹⁴⁵

The page is turned and the image is shown again, this time with the caption “This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself”. As Berger argues, “It is hard to define exactly how the words have changed the image, but undoubtedly they have.”⁹⁴⁶

It is particularly interesting to view Norfolk’s photographs on-line at his website. Again, the use of accompanying text is important to note since it offers a different experience to seeing the images displayed on a gallery wall. Norfolk writes well, setting out the context and his reasons for making the photographs in short introductory essays. Here, he makes use of the ‘hyperlink’ which by clicking takes the reader to another site. In many cases, Norfolk’s links are to BBC news pages. Not only does this offer the reader an enhanced sense of the ‘facts’ of the matter but this furthers the idea of the photographs as post-reportage through the links to journalism. The hyperlinks enable the viewer to begin an independent educative journey. Through the use of hyperlinks which

⁹⁴⁵ Berger J (1988) *Ways of seeing* British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books p27

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid* p28

connect his ‘art’ to press coverage of this war – news as ‘fact’ - the viewer is put in a position to think about the relationship between photography as a ‘realist’ technology and photography as ‘art’.

For some critics, Norfolk’s use of text seems to get in the way of the ‘late’ photograph as a radically ‘open image’. Debbie Lisle has commented on Norfolk’s extended captioning as providing “information, orientation, and political context for his images” as much as it reveals his authorial intentions.⁹⁴⁷ In the ‘late’ photography of war, Lisle argues that captioning is problematic:

Captioning assumes that the process of gaining knowledge is instigated by an authorial textual and linguistic anchor, and therefore effaces the many different ways that viewers come to know about and experience a photograph. For example, the knowledge proffered by Norfolk’s title/caption encourages a singular and unidirectional interpretive journey to the preferred reading of his Bratunac image. This privileged framework neutralises and effaces any unruly and playful readings such as those which recognise shared leisure practices (eg Hey! They play basketball!) in favour of properly reverent and solemn responses that are considered more appropriate on the face of death.⁹⁴⁸

So for Lisle, the site of Bratunac as a space for playful and creative response is a little ‘spoiled’ by the knowledge of what happened there - but not quite. Even armed with the knowledge of the systematic slaughter that took place there, Lisle suggests that this can never fully evacuate the conflicting or surprising interpretations made in the first moments of viewing; “the pious reverence expected of them in front of death sits uncomfortably alongside their spontaneous initial recognition of shared leisure practices.”⁹⁴⁹ For Lisle, this

⁹⁴⁷ Lisle D (2011) The surprising detritus of leisure: encountering the Late Photography of War *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2011 volume 29 p885

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid p886

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid p886

process of knowledge construction is a carefully negotiated comprehension between enacting the norms of solemnity and respect and “the exciting connections they feel upon recognising that foreign and abject victims of war actually engage in the same games and leisure practices that we do.”⁹⁵⁰ This process, Lisle argues prevents the ‘ghosts’ who haunt the images from remaining as victims and the subject of our pity. When we are reminded of all the other activities that took place in the stadium alongside the brutality we can now, she argues, imagine them, cheering teams and shooting hoops: “this is where spectral bodies come alive and remind us that war zones are also places where everyday life flourishes – including the practices of leisure.”⁹⁵¹

I find Lisle’s critique troubling. Firstly, human life does not ‘flourish’ in war fare. Human life continues and as much photojournalism shows us, war fare becomes part of the daily routine for those living in conflict zones. Learning to live with war is not the same as life *flourishing*. Secondly, Lisle proposes a version of humanism based on shared practices of *consumption* with no thought as to role of consumption and the struggle for local and global resources as a causal factor in war. Given the ever increasing disparities of consumption practices, this seems like humanism, or a civil discourse, that is built on quick sand. Shared phosphate of calcium is clearly not enough here. As Berger’s elegant essay on love reminds us, the people who died in mass graves, whatever their consumption practices, were people like us – living, breathing, loving, feeling, dying.

It should also be noted that Norfolk insists that the information in and the location of his photographs is accurate and this adds vital credibility to the work. He undertakes an enormous amount of fieldwork and research, wading through reports and interviewing investigators:

⁹⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁹⁵¹ *ibid*

The only way you can come at it in such a symbolic way is if you are a hundred percent sure that here are the locations – otherwise it's a weak, feeble approach.⁹⁵²

The idea of melancholic reflection and the form of lament is not limited to the production of fine art. As Company observes, in the first Gulf War, “What few images we saw were satellite images from news journalists along with US military footage. Very few photographers covered the war. They weren't allowed in.”⁹⁵³ It was only after the war that some photographers travelled to Kuwait in order to survey the remains:

Their images had a post-traumatic disposition, and a sense of mourning and paralysis. And they were accompanied by melancholic writing. Photojournalism became elegiac, poetic and muted. No longer was it campaigning writing accompanying campaigning images. It was picking up pieces like the shell-shocked Iraqi we were never allowed to see.⁹⁵⁴

Thus, Company points out that this type of imagery proliferates in new photojournalism, documentary, campaign work and even news, advertising and fashion:

One might easily summarise that photography has of late inherited a major role as an undertaker, summariser or accountant. It turns up late, wanders through the places where things have happened, totting up the effects of the world's activity. This is a kind of photograph that either forgoes or cannot represent events and so cedes them to other media. As

⁹⁵² Cited in Lowe, P (2014) *The Forensic Turn* in Kennedy L and Patrick C (2014) *The Violence of the Image* I B Taurus p225

⁹⁵³ Company D (2007) *The Cinematic* Whitechapel London The MIT Press p190

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid

a result it is quite different from the spontaneous snapshot and has a different relation to memory and history.⁹⁵⁵

As John Roberts has remarked, photography has been characterised and distinguished by its connection to what Cartier-Bresson called “the decisive moment”:

In bringing a reflective stillness to the contingencies of a passing scene or to the movement of bodies, the photograph exercises, what we might call, hidden or spontaneous powers of convergence.⁹⁵⁶

Reflecting on the decisive moment, Roberts suggests that this can be temporally extended:

That is, how the ‘event’ of the photographic process – photography’s cut into the continuum of experience; its temporal ‘pulls’, so to speak – constitute the ‘event’ of the photograph, and how those ‘pulls’ constitute the syntax of the photograph’s historicity. In other words, the photograph’s essential contingency and contemporaneity recover for us the ‘pastness’ of the past, and as such – as the discursive life of the image unfolds in time – the moment’s historical textuality. Once edited, cropped or transformed by text or by juxtaposition with other images, the ‘singular event’ is open to systematic meaning.⁹⁵⁷

These ‘Aftermath’ or ‘late’ images might then be described as being, what John Berger refers to as ‘long quotations.’ As Berger points out however, in terms of a photograph’s capacity to quote time, “The ‘length’ of the quotation has nothing to do with exposure time. It is not a temporal length.” Instead this is about the photograph’s representation of narrative range; the ability of the

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid p186

⁹⁵⁶ Roberts J (2009) Photography after the Photograph: Event, Archive and the Non-Symbolic; *Oxford Art Journal* 12 .2.2009 p281

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid

image to enable the reader to construct both a past and a future; the photograph as a cross-section of events which were developing at a specific moment in time:

We have seen that the instantaneous tends to make meaning ambiguous. But the cross-section, if it is wide enough, and can be studied at leisure, allows us to see the interconnectedness and related coexistence of events. Correspondences, which ultimately derive from the unity of appearances, then compensate for the lack of sequence.⁹⁵⁸

In this sense, it can be argued that ‘late’ or ‘aftermath’ photography in that is the product of both structure and agency has actually arrived right on time.

The Politics of Silence

In an interview, Said reflected that, “I’ve always been interested in what gets left out. I’m interested in the tension between what is represented and what isn’t represented, between the articulate and the silent.”⁹⁵⁹ As Michael Wood has pointed out, “silence, in such a view, then becomes an aspect of style,” and as such, is “not as simple as saying nothing”.⁹⁶⁰ Instead, Said welcomed an ‘allusive silence’ that shares with the “reticence of music” and as such may offer indirect expression. This ‘allusive silence’, according to Wood:

offers us its deepest pleasures and also a hint of hope amid political and other hopelessness, a sense of “that precarious exilic realm”, where we “first truly grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped and then go forth and try anyway.”⁹⁶¹

⁹⁵⁸ Berger J (2007) *Understanding A Photograph* Penguin Books p89

⁹⁵⁹ Said E (2006) *On Late Style* Pantheon Books p xix

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid

⁹⁶¹ Ibid

Silence is a political tool in that just as speech can be used to silence – and especially so in repressive social relationships – so silence can point “to a speech beyond silence.”⁹⁶² Furthermore “without the polarity of silence, the whole system of language would fail.”⁹⁶³

Susan Sontag makes reference to the “aesthetics of silence” noting, as had Said, that silence is more complex than saying nothing at all:

The exemplary modern artist’s choice of silence isn’t often carried to this point of final simplification, so that he is literally silent. Most typically he continues speaking but in a manner his audience can’t hear. Most valuable art in our time has been experienced by audiences as a move into silence (or unintelligibility or invisibility or inaudibility); a dismantling of the artist’s competence, his responsible sense of vocation – and therefore as an aggression against them.⁹⁶⁴

As Sontag explains further, participation in this ideal form of silence can be contradictory since firstly, the artist continues to make works of art but also because the isolation – or exile- of the work of art from its audience is only ever temporary and does not last:

With the passage of time and the invention of newer, more difficult works, the artist’s transgression becomes ingratiating, eventually legitimate. Goethe accused Kleist of having written his plays for an “invisible theatre.” But in time, the invisible theatre becomes “visible”. The ugly and discordant and senseless become “Beautiful.” The history of art is a sequence of successful transgressions.⁹⁶⁵

Sontag notes that:

⁹⁶² Sontag S (1982) *A Susan Sontag Reader* (with an introduction by Hardwick E) Penguin Books p192

⁹⁶³ Ibid

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid p184

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid

Silence is a metaphor for a cleansed, non-interfering vision, in which one might envisage the making of art-works that are unresponsive before being seen, inviolable in their essential integrity by human scrutiny. The spectator would approach art as he does a landscape. A landscape doesn't demand from the spectator his "understanding", his imputations of significance, his anxieties and sympathies; it demands rather, his absence, that he not add anything to it. Contemplation, strictly speaking, entails self forgetfulness on the part of the spectator: an object worthy of contemplation is one which, in effect, annihilates the perceiving subject.⁹⁶⁶

This is a strangely naive observation from Sontag given the aesthetic and ideological uses to which 'landscape' has been historically put. Moreover, as WJ T Mitchell has suggested, landscape is "already artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before it becomes the subject of pictorial representation".⁹⁶⁷ The idea of landscape is always a cultural image.

It has been used as "a 'collecting' structure for the representation of inner experience and as an ideological tool shaping the way in which we envision and structure the natural world."⁹⁶⁸ This has included the articulation of ownership and class relations; the formation of national identities including the exercise of colonial power. Exploring the visual representation of landscape raises questions about "the ideological and cultural issues that emerge when sites are variously presented as ideal, despoiled, polluted, wasted or untouched."⁹⁶⁹ This is an important point in light of contemporary practices in fine art photography that attempt to image war, after the event, without making direct representation of the body in pain. As I have explored, the use of landscape here is to explore

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid p191

⁹⁶⁷ Mitchell WJT (Ed)(2002) *Landscape and Power* London and Chicago, Chicago University Press p19

⁹⁶⁸ Adams S and Gruetzner Robins (Eds)(2000) *Gendering Landscape Art* Manchester University Press p1

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid

the complex relationship between human life, war and place. According to Emerson, the landscape has no owner – except the poet who alone can integrate its parts. Yet in response to this, Mitchell suggests that in the case of landscapes ravaged by wars and conflict, then everyone ‘owns’ – or at least ought to own it. This is in the sense that it must be acknowledged, ‘owned up to’ in order to share responsibility for its construction and complicity in its destruction.⁹⁷⁰

It is not a matter for complacency, he suggests, nor an occasion for “untroubled contemplation.” Instead, the landscape of war should be the site of a political and historical gaze as much as “an aesthetic alertness to the violence and evil written on the land, projected there by the gazing eye” – too often the eye of Imperialism and nationalism.⁹⁷¹

Late and Aftermath photography offer a vision of the landscape that perpetuates a vision of nostalgia – for the documentary, event defining purposes of photography; for the grand history painting; for the photographer as collector or explorer who goes out botanising in the debris of conflict. As Tim Strangleman has pointed out, there has in recent years, been a welcome sociological understanding of nostalgia and the complexity of remembering the past.⁹⁷²

The concept of nostalgia is often used pejoratively, implying sentimental attachment or worse, Strangleman notes, the falsification of history itself. Strangleman moves beyond the pejorative use noting that “almost all nostalgic reflection questions memory in a critical way.”⁹⁷³ Strangleman distinguishes between reflective and restorative nostalgia; “one a critical but passive position, the other implying a greater sense of engagement with the meaning of the past.”⁹⁷⁴ In particular Strangleman is eager to demonstrate the radical and

⁹⁷⁰ Mitchell WJT (Ed)(2002) *Landscape and Power* London and Chicago, Chicago University Press p29

⁹⁷¹ *ibid*

⁹⁷² Strangleman T (2013) “Smokestack Nostalgia,” “Ruin Porn” or Working-Class Obituary: The Role and meaning of De-Industrial Representation; *International Labour and Working Class History* No 86, Fall 2013 p28

⁹⁷³ *ibid*

⁹⁷⁴ *ibid*

oppositional aspects of nostalgia, “where knowledge of the past makes a dialectical intervention in debates about the present.”⁹⁷⁵

It is clearly the case that ‘Late’ photography offers one intervention in the debate on the cultural uses of photography in significant ways, but nonetheless its political efficacy as an emergent culture can still be challenged. It can be seen as one of many “Alternative attempts to achieve that stability of meaning in landscape which Ruskin sought and which has become a characteristic and honourable response to the perceived chaos of the modern world.”⁹⁷⁶ As Company has argued:

There is a sense in which the late photograph, in all its silence, can easily flatter the ideological paralysis of those who gaze at it without the social or political will to make sense of its circumstances. In its apparent finitude and muteness it can leave us in permanent limbo, suspending even the *need* for analysis and bolstering a kind of liberal melancholy that shuns political explanation like a vampire shuns garlic.⁹⁷⁷

For Campbell, what is at issue is the idea that the experience of an incomprehensible world itself becomes matter for sublimation, and if this is so, “then it is a reified as much as a rarefied response.”⁹⁷⁸

Lisle has taken Company to task for this comment, which she suggests aims to reduce viewing to his preferred reading position as one which “encourages confident ideological stances and leads to political action.”⁹⁷⁹

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid

⁹⁷⁶ Daniels S and Cosgrove D (Eds) (1988) *The Iconography of Landscape* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press p8

⁹⁷⁷ Company D (Ed) (2007) *The Cinematic* Whitechapel and The MIT Press p193

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid

⁹⁷⁹ Lisle D (2011) The surprising detritus of leisure: encountering the Late Photography of War; *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 2011, volume 29 pp888

She argues that in effect, this is a way of totalising meaning, of closing the normative circuit and as such “reinforces a hierarchy of privileged, benevolent viewers over abject victims incarcerated in damaged war zones.”⁹⁸⁰ This is a misreading. Company is well aware that all photographs are subject to multiple readings. What may well be at stake in his comment is that access to the political aesthetic of late photography is not readily or widely available – nor even access to Lisle’s own preferred and cultivated intellectual position of politically creative ambivalence – since access to the culture fashioning industry is unevenly distributed and is built in to existing structures of inequality. This is a useful reminder that whilst Apel suggested that the role of the photojournalist and the art photographer are becoming increasingly blurred this has not necessarily undone a hierarchy of visual culture.

Nonetheless Norfolk’s work can be argued to operate as a form of imagistic sociology through its detailed attention to empirical research. The relationship between image and text offer both involvement and detachment where the ‘data’ and the personal meanings attached to the subject matter are brought to light. In many ways, Norfolk’s work can be linked back to Bourdieu’s Algerian photographs; both are interested in visualising the topography of loss. However, whereas Bourdieu used the photograph as a visual ‘document’ for later research, Norfolk’s photograph is the document of a culmination of research.

The concluding chapter now turns to the relationship between photography and sociology and what might be shared between them.

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid

11. Photography and Sociology:

Breaking the silence of events



“To break the silence of events, to speak of experience however bitter or lacerating, to put into words, is to discover the hope that these words may be heard, and that when heard, the events will be judged. This hope is of course at the origin of prayer, and prayer – as well as labour- was probably at the origin of speech itself. Of all uses of language, it is poetry that preserves most purely the memory of this origin.”⁹⁸¹

⁹⁸¹ Berger J (1984) *and our faces, my heart, brief as photographs* London, Bloomsbury p98

There is clearly more to say about photography, photographers and specific photographs than I have accounted for here. There are, as Batchen points out many pitfalls to be found in any attempt to write a history of photography; there are many more so in attempting to think ethnographically and sociologically about the webs of interaction through which photography becomes part of social currency. But I hope I have at least indicated *some* of the complexity involved in this. At every stage of this process, photography writes its own history as much as it is informed by it, and as such it can be usefully examined as a critical part of the slow reach for control that Raymond Williams identified as being central to the democratisation of culture.

Photography as a field of practice opens up an important and distinctive site for cultural study. Photography is produced by, participates in and contributes to social relationships of dominance and subordination; between photographers themselves and more widely. What we can bear to see –as well as never see – operates within and is shaped by social, political and cultural processes which both constrain and enable the reproduction *and* the reformation of culture.

In treating photography as a sociological object it becomes possible to see what people do with photographs; the meanings that are attached to them and the ways in which these meanings become transformed in the course of their circulation. By exploring the interweaving histories in which particular forms of photography emerge or fade from view, some of the structural reasons for this are accounted for at a macro level. And yet, exploring the micro relationships in which the struggles for legitimacy take place opens up those structures to illuminate where significant webs of interaction take place.

As C Wright Mills argued, the cultural apparatus includes all the organisations where artistic, intellectual and scientific work goes on, including the ways in which this work is made available to others; “to small circles, wider publics and

great masses.” In this process the cultural apparatus does many things and serves many functions:

It defines the changing nature of man, and grasps the drifts of world affairs; it revivifies old aspirations and shapes new ones. It creates models of character and styles of feeling, nuances of mood and vocabularies of motive. It serves decision makers, revealing and obscuring the consequences of their decisions. It turns power into authority and debunks authority as mere coercion. It modifies the work men do and provides the tools with which they do it; it fills up their leisure; with nonsense and with pleasure. It changes the nature of war; it amuses and persuades and manipulates; it orders and forbids; it frightens and reassures; it makes men weep and it makes men laugh, go numb all over then become altogether alive. It provides the life-span and provides the violent means to end it suddenly. It predicts what is going to happen and it explains what has occurred; it helps to shape and to pace any epoch, and without it there would be no consciousness of any epoch.⁹⁸²

A growing dialogue between sociology and photography does not demand that sociologists become photographers or vice versa but instead offers space to think about what happens when cultural producers step outside their fields of interests and participate in a conversation. This is necessarily a serendipitous exercise that exposes numerous resources of hope in what are increasingly dark times.

Whether Azoulay’s desires for a civil community of photography can be fully brought in being will be dependent on dismantling many obstacles; how we look at ourselves and how we look at others. Undoing some of the distinctions

⁹⁸² Mills CW (2008) *The Politics of Truth* Oxford University Press p175

between the forms of photography under investigation in this thesis indicates formations of cultural workers between institutions with shared values and ideals, and is I hope a small contribution towards Azoulay's project.

For Williams, the developments and the distinctions between varying skills are fundamentally related to changes within the division of labour and more specifically to changes in capitalist commodity production "with its specialisation and reduction of use values to exchange values."⁹⁸³ This is not to argue for a homogenous, undifferentiated photographic practice, nor is it to discount the importance of the settings in which organised interpretive communities carry out their work. Instead the aim is to go behind some of the descriptive categories that photographic historians and critics have become so attached to – documentary, art or photojournalism – so that as Williams has put it, "We can go back behind the names, and make our own history, in our own terms."⁹⁸⁴

It is finally to claim that the concept of craftsmanship, so often found within each sphere, could become the foundation stone for examining the aesthetics, ethics and politics of photography and its evaluation.

Putting the Craftsman to Work

The figure of the *flâneur* has successfully gained much currency in contemporary social and cultural theory as a descriptive metaphor for both photographers and sociologists. However the figure of the craftsman has received less attention. This is not to say that the craftsman and the idea of craftsmanship have been ignored – in theory and in practice, the figure of craftsman was the guiding force for William Morris, John Ruskin and the Arts

⁹⁸³ Ibid

⁹⁸⁴ Williams R (1973) *Drama From Ibsen to Brecht*; Harmondsworth Penguin p382

and Crafts Movement, as it was for the Bauhaus School. The craftsman was also a guiding figure for the sociologist C Wright Mills.

The craftsman has primarily been considered in terms of historical, social and economic changes, a precursory and often sentimentalised character that has been transformed and subordinated by the emergence of the modern artist. For Richard Sennett ‘craftsmanship’ is much more than a technical practice.

‘Craftsmanship’ raises *ethical* questions which can inform the navigation of collective life. Sennett reflects on some of the earliest writing on the craftsman which date back to Ancient Civilisations and the Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus, “the master god of craftsmen who presided over them as bringer of peace and a maker of civilisation.”⁹⁸⁵ Craftsmen were perceived to put their tools to use for the *collective* good, “ending humanity’s wandering existence as hunter-gatherers or rootless warriors:”⁹⁸⁶

The word the hymn used for craftsman is *demioergos*. This is a compound made between public (*demios*) and productive (*ergon*). The archaic craftsman occupied a social slice roughly equivalent to a middle class. The *demioergoi* included, in addition to skilled manual workers like potters, also doctors and lower magistrates, and professional singers and heralds who served in ancient times as news broadcasters. This slice of ordinary citizens lived in between the relatively few leisured aristocrats and the mass of slaves who did most of the work – many of whom had great technical skills but whose talents earned them no political recognition or rights. It was in the middle of this archaic society that the hymn honoured as civilisers those who combined head and hand.⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸⁵ Sennett, R (2008) *The Craftsman*; Allen Lane, Penguin Books p21

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid p23

By 'Classical' times the craftsman's honour had diminished. In Aristotle's writing the craftsman is no more than a 'hand worker' who unlike an architect for example, did not know "the reasons of the things which are done."⁹⁸⁸ Plato however was concerned by this separation and focussed on the standard of excellence which he understood as being implicit in all productive acts and as central for any improvement or progress. Sennett reflects on this:

But in his own time Plato observed that although "craftsmen are all poets.....they are not called poets, they have other names," Plato worried that these different names and indeed different skills kept people in his day from understanding what they shared. In the five centuries between the hymn to Hephaestus and his own life time something seemed to have slipped. The unity between skill and community had weakened. Practical skills still sustained the ongoing life of the city but were not generally honoured for it.⁹⁸⁹

The unity between skill and collective life is worth retaining. As Christopher Frayling suggests, there are "hard- edged arguments" embedded in the idea of craftsmanship that are useful to both contemporary education and society. However those arguments are in danger of being confused with popular connotations of the craftsman that are not always easy to dismiss:

We have to live with them: the crafts as folksy, alternative, rural occupations associated with a homecoming vision of the future, and also with a nostalgia masquerading as history. For those connotations represent the most powerful perspective on craft in the late twentieth century that there is, backed as it is by advertising, commercial publishing, the record industry, and even some colleges of art and

⁹⁸⁸ ibid

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid p24

design where, regrettably, the look of the Arts and Crafts Movement was made orthodox while its social philosophy was abandoned.⁹⁹⁰

The craftsman is today often positioned as belonging only to the past and as having no place in today's technological culture. The idea of the craftsman as an anachronism, for Osborne, incorporates perceptions of "the perpetuation of a primitive technology as a time wasting hobby into an age which has advanced beyond it". On the other side of this argument, he notes, are those people "who with almost mystic fervour ascribe a spiritual value to craftsmanship as an antidote to the soulless standardization imposed upon modern man by the technology of mass production"⁹⁹¹

Sennett argues that craftsmanship is very much alive in the contemporary technological world, and is apparent in some forms of mass production. He uses the example of Linux technicians who participate in 'open source' software as a public production. A popular application of this is found in *Wikipedia* – an online encyclopaedia established in the 1990s to which any user can contribute. Its aim, says Sennett, was to return to the early days and "adventures of computer programming" before the software industry became "monopolised by a few dominant firms, buying up or squeezing out smaller competitors. In the process, the monopolies seemed to churn out ever more mediocre work."⁹⁹² Nonetheless, in their bid to be an open "electronic bazaar" which argued that an increased quantity of participants will solve the problems of writing of 'good code' more easily than in a closed system, the Linux programming community identify and grapple with a new problem – how to reconcile quality and open access?⁹⁹³ Sennett notes in reference to Linux that:

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid pp68-69

⁹⁹¹ Osborne H (1976) *The Aesthetic Concept of Craftsmanship*; *British Journal of Aesthetics*; p138 (<http://bj.aesthetics.oxfordjournals.org/content/17/2/138>)

⁹⁹² Sennett R (2008) *The Craftsman*; Allen Lane and Penguin Books p25

⁹⁹³ Ibid

In the *Wikipedia* application, for instance, many of the entries are biased, scurrilous, or just plain wrong. A breakaway group wants now to apply editing standards, an impulse that runs smack up against the movement's desire to be an open community.⁹⁹⁴

But for Sennett, Linux represents contemporary craftsmanship since its practice is continually evolving, finding new ways and possibilities for developing new skills in a “nearly *instant* relationship between problem solving and problem finding.”⁹⁹⁵ Whilst Sennett suggests the Linux community would serve Mills' effort to define the craftsman as a cultural worker— as one who is engaged *in* and *for* the work itself – Linux also serve as an example of Williams' challenge to ideas of mass and minority culture through exploring communication processes. Communication, in a democratic society, should belong to the whole society and is dependent on maximum participation by the individuals within it.

C W Mills considered how the concept of craftsmanship, in particular in the form that he termed *intellectual craftsmanship*, was central to maintaining a creative and innovative sociological practice without lessening its critical powers or its practical use. *On Intellectual Craftsmanship* was published as the appendix to *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) but began life as a manuscript written for students who planned to advance their work in sociology. Its first title was “On Intellectual Craftsmanship: In Lieu of a Handbook for Students beginning Independent Work” (1952) which Mills distributed among his students at Columbia University. Some broad outlines of his general ideas on intellectual craftsmanship can be set out here.

To the individual social scientist who feels himself a part of the classic tradition, social science is the practise of a craft.⁹⁹⁶

⁹⁹⁴ Sennett, R (2008) *The Craftsman*; Allen Lane and Penguin Books p26

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁹⁶ Mills C W (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford University Press, New York p195

In order to practise this craft successfully, Mills advocates that all would-be sociologists should have a firm grounding in theory and method. This is, however, subject to a number of accompanying qualifications that include the contents of his own writing – namely, that his essay on intellectual craftsmanship is not an essay on methodology in any formal sense, aiming “to take up a statesman-like prose concerning the proper course for social science.”⁹⁹⁷ Nonetheless, Mills describes the combination of methods as “simply ways of asking and answering questions” and theory as “simply paying close attention to the words one uses, especially their degree of generality and their interrelations”:

What method and theory properly amount of is clarity of conception and ingenuity of procedure, and most important, in sociology just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination.⁹⁹⁸

Thus for Mills the idea of mastering theory and method meant becoming a ‘self-conscious thinker’. This was directly opposed to being mastered *by* method and theory which inhibited the cultural workman from going about his work:

Method and theory are like the language of the country you live in: it is nothing to brag about that you can speak it, but it is a disgrace, as well as an inconvenience if you cannot.⁹⁹⁹

In the appendix to *The Sociological Imagination* Mills advised:

Be a good craftsman. Avoid any rigid set of procedures. Above all seek to develop and to use the sociological imagination. Avoid the fetishism of method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious intellectual craftsman and try to be such a craftsman yourself. Let every

⁹⁹⁷ Mills C W (2008) *The Politics of Truth: The Selected Writings of CW Mills*; edited and introduced by Summers J; Oxford University Press p44

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid 45

man be his own methodologist; let every man be his own theorist: let theory and method again become part of the practise of the craft.¹⁰⁰⁰

Mills is not advocating the abandonment of disciplinary rigour – far from it. This is the central importance of the figure of the craftsman. Eldridge describes this as being because:

Craftsmen co-ordinate head and hand, knowledge and experience; they follow traditions but have the capacity to innovate. The individual style of the craftsman's work bears the imprint of his personality. His signature is upon what he produces, as it were, representing an involvement and pride in what is accomplished. Such work may properly be described as a vocation.¹⁰⁰¹

The point is important not only for sociologists but equally for photographers and the photographic imagination.

Applying the concept of craftsmanship to photographic practice is not straightforward. As noted at the start of this thesis, the emergence of photography was understood as having a *benefit for cultural life*. John Berger observed however that the positivist utopia in which photography emerged has not been achieved. Instead this has become “the global system of late capitalism wherein all that exists becomes quantifiable – not simply because it *can be* reduced to a statistical fact, but also because it *has been* reduced to a commodity.”¹⁰⁰²

Thinking about photography as operating in a field of social practice and as holding a tension between art and science, as the practice of a craft, allows for some movement beyond the fault lines which as Sennett says, have divided

¹⁰⁰⁰ Mills C W (1950) (1967) *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford University Press, New York P224

¹⁰⁰¹ Eldridge J (1982) *C Wright Mills*; Ellis Horwood Ltd pp 37-38

¹⁰⁰² Berger J and Mohr J (1982) *Another Way of Telling*; Writers and Readers Co-operative Publishing Society Ltd p99

“theory and practice, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user.”¹⁰⁰³ Thinking about the photographer through the idea of craftsmanship allows for a clearer picture of what people using cameras do in particular places and particular times, to see what is distinctive about them and what is shared between them. Craftsmanship, as Osborne’s opening quote above makes clear, is indeed a good word to start and end an argument with.

In this sense, the figure of the craftsman as cultural worker and the idea of craftsmanship are necessary reminders of what should be involved in our interpretations, and the production of our ideal social documents.

Both sociology and photography make pictures of social life: in doing so they argue that something is worth looking at, worth recording at a specific moment and as such they share in the process of rendering observation self-conscious.¹⁰⁰⁴

The last word will go to John Grierson:

In documentary we deal with the actual and in one sense the real. But the really real, if I may use the phrase, is something deeper than that. The only reality which counts in the end is the interpretation which is profound. It does not matter whether that interpretation comes by way of the studio or by way of documentary, or for that matter by way of the music hall. The important thing is the interpretation and the profundity of the interpretation.¹⁰⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰³ Sennett R (2008) *The Craftsman*; Allen Lane and Penguin Books p11

¹⁰⁰⁴ Berger J (2013) *Understanding a Photograph* Penguin Books p19

¹⁰⁰⁵ Grierson J, op cit Grierson archives, Stirling University

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