Miranda
Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone / Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-speaking world

2 | 2010
Voicing Conflict : Women and 20th Century Warfare

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Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/1085
DOI: 10.4000/miranda.1085
ISSN: 2108-6559

Publisher
Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Electronic reference
Margaret R. Higonnet, “X-Ray Vision: Women Photograph War”, *Miranda* [Online], 2 | 2010, Online since 03 July 2010, connection on 16 February 2021. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/1085 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.1085

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X-Ray Vision: Women Photograph War

Margaret R. Higonnet

1 World War I marked a significant threshold in the relationship between photography and war. Technological revolutions produced a new kind of war, a devastatingly "total" war. Technological innovation also changed the way the war was seen, whether from a medical or a military perspective. In 1914 Marie Curie set up a military radiology service; she raised funds to create mobile x-ray vans and to equip hospitals. She taught surgeons to take two images in order to locate shrapnel and broken bones: "la méthode de la double image", a strategy of double perspective to which I will return. While the medical gaze probed the interior of bodies, the military gaze pulled away from the immediacy of the combatant's gaze. Already in September 1914, the Battle of the Marne occasioned the first use of aerial reconnaisance in the war (Virilio 17). For military commanders, the angle of vision shifted from the horizontal perspective of the footsoldier, to the "vertical, panoramic vision of overflying aircraft", which benefited from strategic as well as visual distance (Virilio 73). As a corollary, war no longer could be seen as "theater" and "spectacle" (Eric Leed 19, Virilio 15). When combatants disappeared underground into the trenches, observers turned to the sophisticated, mediated, "eyeless vision" of "optical" devices including the periscope and the camera (Virilio 69). At the same time, however, the rapid development of smaller, light-weight cameras also made it possible for foot soldiers—and for nurses and other women in auxiliary units—to smuggle cameras to the front. Illustrated newspapers purchased their amateur photos, while official propaganda and documentation led to the commissioning of professional photographers.

2 Along with the technological revolution went a gender revolution. When women replaced men in many jobs on the home front, they also assumed traditionally masculine auxiliary roles at the battlefront, and of course the traditional role of nurse just behind the lines. One consequence was that in 1918, the National War Museum, which we know today as the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth, belatedly decided to send a woman, Olive Edis, a professional photographer, to capture women's

unprecedented forms of work in France as ambulance drivers, auto machinists, or telephone operators, before such anomalous labor innovations might vanish. Thus a revolution in official photography went hand in hand with a revolution in women's work.

3 In a self-portrait Edis took, she presents herself self-consciously as both feminine and professional, as an embodiment of the chipper, elegant efficiency of the female auxiliary troops whom she has been employed to record. She displays her specially designed uniform (the badge of the National War Museum on her cap) with five strings of pearls as she leans toward us. Her self-portrait joins the camera to the uniform.

4 As the photo by Edis suggests, the photographic image shaped a form of testimony about who these women were, what they did, and where they worked. These three testimonial functions of photography—about the photographer's identity, about her tasks, and about her physical location—applied to women across the boards, from aristocrats to peasant soldiers. In the first part of this essay, I explore how those testimonial functions apply to a range of women who found themselves at the front, from a professional photographer to a soldier, to volunteer nurses. In the second part of this essay, I explore the memoirs of two women working with the Red Cross, Florence Farmborough and Margaret Hall, which suggest that a particular war genre arose at the moment when women created scrapbooks that combined photographs with their memoirs: an intermedial form of narrative that we might call a "photo-text".

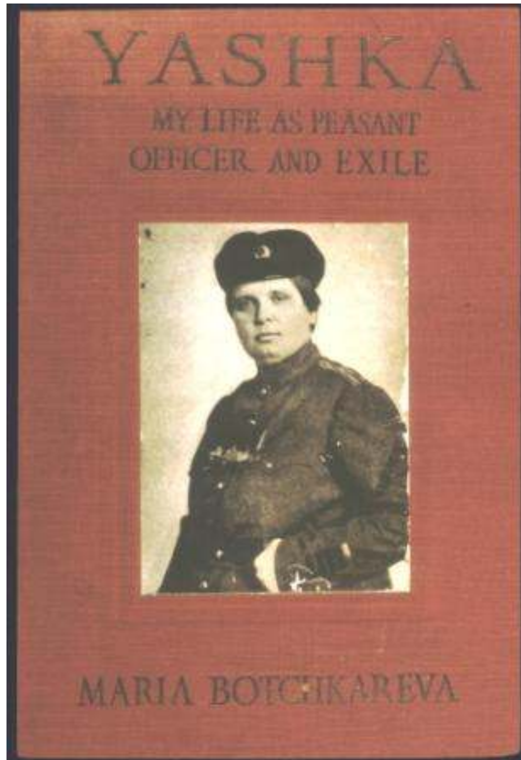
5 Who are these women who become war photographers? The question arises at a moment when gender identities are changing. Photographs therefore become responsible for fixing that moment—and yet for acknowledging that identity is not fixed, but is performed and exhibited like a uniform you can put on or take off. 1914 marked a turning point for women in Western society, and the proliferation of women's photography testifies to their sense of this moment in history. Because the war triggered mass conscription of men across the face of Europe to feed the suicidal assaults and devastation wrought by new forms of weaponry, women too had to be mobilized on the home front. They entered munitions factories, repaired trains, became tram conductors, hauled coal, and spied like Mata Hari. They replaced men as teachers, representatives to the local duma, mayors and police.

6 Women entered the war zone as well. For the first time military organizations deployed women as auxiliaries to the army, navy, and eventually air force in England and America. Especially in blurred spaces, where battle lines were fluid, women could find a place right at the front. Thus in 1914 at Pervyse on the Yser, two British women, Elsie Knocker (a trained nurse) and 18-year-old Mairi Chisholm, set up their own emergency post to pick up the wounded and drive them to hospitals at the rear. They engaged in battlefield rescues, carrying fallen men on their backs to their first-aid station, winning medals and admiration as the "Heroines of Pervyse". Equipped with cameras, they photographed each other as well as the terrain in which they worked, documenting their own authority as witnesses of the war by showing a shell exploding or the ruin in which they lived. A photograph of Chisholm shows her binoculars, which like Curie's x-rays, identify her capacity for penetrating vision, and others show their cameras.

7 Many women's war memoirs carry on their cover portraits that proclaim their radical new roles. Among the women on the Eastern front who joined combat forces, the most famous and most photographed woman soldier was Lieutenant Maria Botchkareva, known as Yashka, a semi-literate peasant who founded the Women's Battalion of Death

in 1917 and was patronized by the English suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. She placed her photograph in uniform on the cover of the memoir she dictated when she came to the United States on a mission to speak to President Wilson.

Figure 1. Maria Botchkareva. *Yashka: My Life as Peasant, Officer And Exile as Set Down by Isaac Don Levine*. New York, Frederick A. Stokes co. [c1919] Cover.



8 Equally revered in Serbia was Flora Sandes, an upper class Englishwoman who served first as a nurse, then during the Serbian retreat joined the soldiers and became a sergeant. With her small camera, Sandes took tiny snapshots of her comrades, tents, and the rugged terrain, which she published in an autobiography sold to raise funds in England for relief work in Serbia. Thus the war took the Victorian "angel in the house" and literally thrust her out into the public sphere to join soldiers in a combat for "civilization" or for the defense of injured nation-states. Her book included blurry photographs showing her in uniform.

9 Portrait-photographs testify to the use of photography by women, in order to break through the barricades separating them from what they quickly grasped was a world-historical event. On the cover of the volume (like the photo of Yashka), or at strategic moments within the text, photographs in uniform, of identity papers, or of a woman with a bandaged limb (such as a photograph of Marina Yurlova, a Cossack soldier, with her arm in a sling) stand at the intersection of the personal autobiography and the historical document. As a kind of visual signature, the image identifies the author of a memoir and encodes the kind of war work she has done. The photograph declares "I was there—though a woman". All the better, if like Yurlova, she has been wounded: the wound gives the "pinch of the real".

10 For many, work at the front seemed to bring an astonishing sex-change. A young British woman who was in Russia when the war broke out, Florence Farmborough,

exulted in her diary when she received her orders from the Red Cross and her foster-mother's blessing, "I too was a soldier going to war!" (Farmborough 30). In addition to her new nurse and "soldier" roles, she was also a photographer who carried two cameras to the front. The bourgeois separation of spheres had broken down.

11 What did these women photograph? and Where? A survey of the photographic strategies of women who found themselves at the front underscores their determination to record the war they saw. It was not enough to be the object viewed through the lens. Women working at the front needed to become subjects who "captured" their understanding of war with the camera as weapon. One goal, of course, was to demonstrate that like soldiers, they had been under fire, a fact which would confer authority on them as witnesses.

12 While it was important that the photograph locate the woman who stood behind the camera lens in a war zone, we can see in the photographs taken by Mairi Chisholm and Elsie Knocker at Pervyse in Belgium that they could use their images of that zone to record indirectly the rescue work they performed there. They sent their photographs together with their diaries back to England to be published, in order to raise funds for their medical equipment and automobiles. To present that side of their work, they engaged in a version of the "double image" that Marie Curie advocated. Chisholm's collection of photographs juxtaposes what the war has destroyed with what the two women have created. Thus one pair of images shows 1) the "3e Poste as we found it" (a wrecked house, viewing two rooms through a missing the fourth wall) and 2) the "3e Poste as we made it" (a neat bedroom, with raincoats and bags for cameras and gas-masks hanging on the wall). The first photograph serves as a record of the war zone. The second photograph in Chisholm's hands becomes an instrument for remaking the world of war. It domesticates the battlezone and appropriates it for the task of healing. As Alan Trachtenberg has written, "the viewfinder is a political instrument, a tool for making a past suitable for the future" (Trachtenberg xiv).

13 This new use of the camera, I will argue here, made possible a new genre. As a rule we interpret photography as an individual image, whose compact form lends itself to the work of memory. "Memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image," writes Susan Sontag (*Regarding* 22). But the wartime scrapbook introduces a mixed genre that juxtaposes a whole series of photographs with a diary or letters home, sometimes further enhanced by medals, ration cards, and military passes. The result is a double or compound narrative that fuses verbal and visual "snapshots"—sketches of wartime Europe produced in moments snatched from war work. The snapshot, then, often scorned as an unreflective vehicle, acquires weight from the circumstances in which it is generated and the purposes to which it is put. The two media meet at the intersection of individual and historical witness. In the composite "calligram", or relationship between verbal and visual media, Michel Foucault explains, "Word and image are like two hunters pursuing the quarry by two paths", and their conjunction "guarantees capture, as neither discourse alone nor a pure drawing would do. They are like two jaws of a trap set for the real" (22). Whereas the "No Man's Land between image and text", as W. J. T. Mitchell calls it (71), fascinates Foucault and points toward his own writing practices, the double inscriptions of Florence Farmborough's diary and Margaret Hall's memoir, point toward these women's more pragmatic documentary aims. These were at once personal and historical.

14 Farmborough and Hall both worked as volunteers near the front during the war; they photographed both the home front and the battlefront, one on the East the other on the West. Their photography was amateur and occasional (seizing moments to take a picture when they arose) but conscious of the historical moment.[1] This new hybrid genre, I suggest, responded in specific ways to the new world that women entered during World War I. Like Edis, these photographers were highly self-conscious, commenting on their photographic work in their diaries and drawing on the photographs as aide-mémoires. They understood photography itself as a kind of performance, just as they understood their new wartime roles as performances. Florence Farmborough (1887-1980), was a British governess in a doctor's family, who, when the war broke out, trained with the Russian Red Cross. Certified as a nurse, she served with a *Letuchka* or the "flying column" of a surgical unit on the very mobile Eastern front, between March 1915 and December 1917; she left Russia for England a year later. She took with her a box camera using glass plates and a smaller hand camera she bought in the Crimea. As a result, one colleague could take her image, while she was photographing another colleague. The radiologist in her unit helped her develop the glass plates, and she eventually printed over 120 in her war memoir.

Figure 2. MARGARET HALL in Red Cross uniform, August 1918. Permission of Suzanne Diefenbach.

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16 At the moment when Farmborough was preparing to leave the "new" Russia, a forty-two year old Bostonian, Margaret Hall (1876-1963), was boarding a boat to become a Red Cross canteen worker at Châlons-sur-Marne. Hall, who took a degree in 1899 from Bryn Mawr College in History and Political Economy, had helped organize suffrage parades in New York in 1915; she smuggled two cameras into France in order to document her historical experiences from 1918 to 1919. Like Farmborough, she

inserted into her memoir 265 photographs, some of which she enlarged to use at lectures she gave right after the war. Both Florence Farmborough and Margaret Hall conformed to gender roles in assuming nurturing roles as a nurse or canteen worker at the front. Indeed Farmborough consciously imitated Florence Nightingale, for whom she had been named. At the same time, they were both exhilarated to travel to the front, to take risks, to serve a useful purpose helping the military, and to be eye-witnesses of history in the making.

17 The photographic memoirs they produced typify the genre of the scrapbook or photo-text in several ways. Such scrapbooks often include reproductions of passports, travel permits, medical discharges, or official certificates awarding medals of honor, all of which serve to document the presence, actions, and authority of the author. The word becomes image in an intricate doubling of evidence when photos of these documents are pasted into the scrapbook or text. Farmborough, like other women at the front, documents her presence there. She includes the Red Cross papers that license her work at the front and that substantiate her claim to have been there. She shows her readers the Red Cross certificate that charges her with the duty of going to the assistance of the military. With a meta-narrative twist, photographs reproduce the identity photos in these official documents.

18 Margaret Hall likewise includes a French document from the Préfecture in Paris recognizing her request for a “carte d’identité”. (The actual “carte” would arrive a month later.) In addition to such identity papers, Hall locates herself physically at her work. Thus she captions a panoramic view of the canteen specifying exactly “Where I sat.” When Hall slips into an envelope a photograph of herself in front of a field hospital, she playfully writes home, “Am enclosing myself at the field hospital after an evacuation one day. Have several sweaters underneath, so don’t think I’ve grown as portly as I appear” (typescript 178). The envelope thus carries both voice and image of the author back home. But Hall avoided the self-portrait, tucking in just a few poorly focused small images of a group, carrying the caption “M.H.” beneath herself.

19 By contrast, the young and beautiful Farmborough includes numerous photographs of herself posed at work as a nurse, either using time-lapse or relying on an expert friend. Observe: these images are all posed—the passport, the men in the canteen, the women beside a tent. Paradoxically, identity-photographs are usually taken by another hand; the identity is conferred by another. In such authenticating performances we cannot seek an innocent, spontaneous, unselected, or unmediated “reality” or truth. Rather, these gestures deliberately shape an image of a life and stage a version of history.

20 The pictures that the woman herself took enabled her to document from her own angle the world she had just entered. Her own photographs operated as a record both of what lay before the camera’s lens and indirectly, metonymically, of who stood behind the camera. In the phrase of Roland Barthes, the “two-dimensional effigy” of a photograph is both testimony and expression, both evidence and symbol (*Image* 19). While this would also be true for a male photographer, the woman’s situation behind the camera was transgressive in several ways.

21 *First, a woman’s pictures of the front zone indirectly represent her physical presence as the viewing subject, and thus verify the woman’s invasion of territory traditionally reserved for men. The camera is an instrument that enables the woman to claim the authority to speak as a witness in the “forbidden zone” of men’s combat. For the

presence of women as active participants, whether as soldiers, nurses, or auxiliaries, marked a radical departure from the history of previous wars.

22 *Second, a woman's situation as a photographer in the war zone was transgressive. Anyone with a camera in an occupied zone might be suspected as a spy. In September 1918, Margaret Hall confides to her diary that when she passed French medical, police, and customs inspections, they "forgot to ask if I had a camera" (MH 11). She defiantly pasted into her journal the official American Expeditionary Force regulations banning cameras. On the Western Front, photography was closely regulated, and representations of death were sporadically censored. The truth can be used by the enemy. The truth of war is demoralizing. Naturally, this ban was a regulation honored in the breach. Soldiers and women at the front knew they were participating in a historical event. The war posed vast moral questions that called for documentation.

23 Everyone sought to record individual images of death that might somehow point toward the massive losses in wartime. Mairi Chisholm, for example, juxtaposed an elegiac, dignified image of a dead Belgian soldier lying next to the canal, which she contrasted to a photo of a decomposed German skeleton, also next to the canal. Such images of the dead were taboo—and grotesque images were acceptable only of enemy dead.

Figure 3. Margaret Hall, "At one place there seemed to be a skeleton in every shellhole." Permission of Suzanne Diefenbach.

24 *Third, the camera in the woman's hand turns a feminist convention about the gaze topsy-turvy. Instead of a man who observes a woman's body, it is now a woman who observes the violated male body. Margaret Hall notes brusquely, "At one place there seemed to be a skeleton in every shell hole" (181v). She took several images of the dead in close-up. Is the female war-photographer or war-writer more voyeuristic than a man? I suggest that Farmborough and Hall photograph not as voyeurs but as witnesses to war and its ravages, and that part of their mission was to "capture" (as they put it) what war left behind—before it had decayed and had been forgotten.

25 Farmborough was disturbed after she had photographed a dead man lying among the litter of munitions and other "crumpled forms" on a battlefield: "I took one or two photographs, but a feeling of shame assailed me—as though I were intruding on the tragic privacy of Death [...]. It was a terrible battlefield; a sight which one could never erase from one's memory" (FF 223). Yet as a nurse, Farmborough had invaded and probed the bodies of the dying men whom she knew intimately. Perhaps it was the impersonality of that camera gesture that made her ashamed. Nonetheless the "shame"

of public ignorance about “crumpled heaps” that once had been human beings (FF 222) demanded that she take her photographs. Sontag writes about a similar ethical dilemma for the modern war photographer in *Regarding the Pain of Others.*

26 These two women’s remolding of the diary form sprang in part from the hurried and disrupted conditions of wartime production. They were forced to develop a concise form of sketch, to capture intense experiences in moments snatched from their duties. Just as trenches cut through villages like one at Cherkov, photographed by Farmborough, visibly fracturing the connections of daily life, the war itself would interrupt Farmborough by a sudden call to pack and move, which broke up longer reflections. Margaret Hall calls it “reconstructing”. She writes about “One perpetual rush from one thing to another until you are worn out with the excitement and fatigue of it all, and the reconstructing of life along war lines.” (Hall 61) In the texts, the rush of war work is mimed through lists, fragments without a subject, and abrupt transitions. In the photographs, time is translated into space. The rush of work is figured visually by the crush of men at the counter of the canteen. The breakdown of the familiar civilian world is captured in the accumulation of images of destruction: bodies, trees, houses, and whole villages split apart.

27 The intermittent and interrupted opportunities to write are most visible in Farmborough’s journal. Difficulties of communication meant that her letters home were often written as diaries covering a couple of weeks, before they could be sent. The press of work meant that the writing process itself was often compressed into brief moments when patients were sleeping or when there was a lull in the fighting. Farmborough reviewed her notes in January 1918: “I have taken up my diary again. The word 'diary' conjures up the picture of a neat booklet, in which daily events are recorded in small clear handwriting. I am afraid that I do not conform to this customary rule. My diary consists of a conglomeration of scraps of odd paper, any paper which comes to hand. I am going to have trouble sorting out these fragments, all hastily scribbled notes *in pencil.*” (Farmborough 389-90) To remember meant to reconstitute a “body” of memoir from such fragments.

28 These new conditions required a new kind of writing. Farmborough insists, “I cannot pretend to describe all that I experienced at the small Red Cross station alongside the vanguard of our troops” (Farmborough 210). There she witnessed in July 1916 what she calls the terrifying savagery of warfare inscribed upon the body. “In the evening the dead would be collected and placed side by side in the pit-like graves dug for them on the battlefield. German, Austrian, Russian, they lay there, at peace, in a 'brothers’ grave'. Swarms of flies added to the horror of the battlefields and covered the dead brothers, waiting in their open ditches for burial, as with a thick, black pall. I remember the feeling of horror when I first saw that black pall of flies *moving*” (210). Farmborough’s journal is exceptional in its honesty. She sets her idealistic belief in peace and ultimate fraternity in death baldly in tension with her horror at the physical displacement of the human life by insect life. When the nurse must inure herself to what she observes, turning herself to “stone”, as Farmborough explains, the photograph with its spots of black stuck onto the bodies of the dead becomes an alternative mode of speech. Yet ironically, the frozen image cannot show us the uncanny reanimation of the dead by the “flies moving” that has provoked Farmborough’s horror—the written image does that for her.

29 The rhythm of work, the unpredictable moves from one dressing station to another, structure the diary entries into short sketches. Farmborough's inclusive vision passes seamlessly from a discussion of politics and a public speech by Kerensky to a close description of a tiny peasant home in which she is passing the night. Many of her shorter verbal sketches are elegies for dead comrades, or group portraits of the suffering and endurance of the peasantry everywhere she goes. She quickly sketches a two-year-old Roumanian child who has lost an arm, and with her photo speaks for the child. Her memoir combines home front with the battlefront, autobiography with history. Certainly the instability of war on the Eastern front contributed to this special hybrid formation. When those familiar binaries break down in wartime, they dissolve traditional gender distinctions, for the civilian world is swept up into the zone of war.

30 Farmborough takes a special interest in women, from "lady" doctors and dentists to Maria Botchkareva's Women's Battalion of Death. She cared for three of Botchkareva's young soldiers when they were wounded in August 1917, and suffering from shock (Farmborough 302). On her way back to England in 1918, she photographed Botchkareva herself as she was escaping from the Bolshevik revolution (facing page 368). By passing back and forth between her different subjects, civilian and military, Farmborough crosses what W. J. T. Mitchell calls "the gap between a historical epic obsessed with war and a vision of the everyday, nonhistorical order of human life that provides a framework for a critique of that historical struggle" (Mitchell 181).

31 Margaret Hall's memoir starts in the streets of Châlons-sur-Marne, crowded with marching men and refugees, so that her camera also succeeds in breaking down the distinction between civilian and military worlds, a point that is especially important for her, since she was working in a heavily bombed town in the militarized zone. From the window of her room perched above the train station, she "shoots" prisoners of war marching below "a few at a time" (81f), as well as the changing of the local "garde". At Châlons she captures civilian wreckage caused by indiscriminate bombing that shattered the domestic world and takes pictures of women wheeling prams filled with children and necessities on their way to the bomb shelter at the end of the day.

32 After the armistice on November 11 1918, Hall shifted her focus to the empty battlefields where she wandered "alone with the dead" (146), 75 kilometers to the East. Hoping to read history on the ground, she photographed the wreckage of the landscape littered with armaments as an allegory of war. Her artistic images are iconic. She sought out what she calls the "sameness" of a battlefield archetype and its canonical images: blasted trees, empty shells, a building without a wall. By contrast to her relief work that aimed at saving *poilus* and refugees from wartime hunger and stress, her photographic work performed after November 11 1918, aims to "capture" an injured French landscape before it has been restored to peacetime conditions. She wants to "seize" "a battlefield quite unsalvaged" she writes. "There were dead horses about, and still men unburied [...] boots with feet in them" (185). She records those boots, as well, when she catches sight of a pair sticking out from the wintry grass. That way of framing what she sees suggests she is a detective; it approaches the condition of the soldiers who recorded living in the midst of bodies; it defines war through the grotesque deaths it causes.

33 Some of her images might be taken for those of an official war photographer, seeking evidence of damages in preparation for the Treaty of Versailles. Other images offer the epic sweep of a traditional historical image. Yet the "look" of war in her photographs is

less heroic than retrospective and elegiac. She uses a ruined arch at Longwy to frame the emptiness and ruins that lie beyond. Troubling, these photographs show us beauty in the ruin. Perhaps Roland Barthes's concept of the *punctum* as a sense of presence as well as "a kind of subtle *beyond*—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see" can be connected to the absences that here become a silent presence that fills the image (*Camera* 59). The tiny car that is centered conflicts with the ruin, modernity intruding into the scene, as it emerges from an almost classical past.

Figure 4. Margaret Hall. *Long Wy.* Permission of Suzanne Diefenbach.

34 Repeatedly, Hall caught soldiers on the road: their step determined, the harsh setting a frame reminding us of the relentless effort required to keep moving both men and materiel forward. By a kind of magic, when Hall stood in the back of truck to photograph French soldiers passing on the road, they turned around to salute the camera-woman, as she turned backward to record them on film before they disappeared. Although she is absent from the image, they point to her presence. In their accelerated separation lies an unspoken narrative of death, as well as an emblem of the vanishing history Margaret Hall strives to inscribe. Yet this physical act of retrospection is also prospective, for the *poilus* march into a future made possible by the armistice.

35 The proliferation of photographs in these women's wartime diaries marks a new, hybrid genre, the photo-text, which responds to their need to break away from the confines of the past in order to shape a new future. They found in their diary and in their photography means of recording the exceptional world they had entered. Like the diary, the snapshot enabled them to remember the war in its different phases and to retain moments that slipped by. The two media collaborate as separate modes of documentation and narrative. When the daily experiences of the war proved to be

unprecedented or even beyond verbal expression, as so many soldiers would also report, then the camera offered up a different kind of account. Combined with words, the image could offer not only a supplement or elaboration but an ironically different narrative altogether.

36 To understand their hybrid testimony in a photographically illustrated diary, we must pay attention to the peculiar circumstances of women at the front in 1914-1918 and to the visual component of the scrapbook. We cannot treat these photographs as mere illustrations to decorate and enliven the textual account. Instead, we need to start by recognizing that this genre builds up a "constellation" of image and text, with two independent modes of narrative and testimony. We need to theorize this structure of narratives that combine words with photographs. These two diaries blur distinctions between battlefront and home front to write a new kind of history of the female self in the world of conflict. It is the combination that changes the way history is perceived. When the woman writer holds a camera in her hand, she changes the picture of the ground on which she stands.

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NOTES

1. An alternative approach to women’s war photography is taken by Jean Gallagher. On the one hand, she finds that military observers pursued a “specular totality”, in order to produce a unified wartime subject viewed schematically from above, and effectively erasing ideological and sexual differences. On the other hand, she argues, female photographers—Edith Wharton, Mildred Aldrich, and in World War II Martha Gellhorn and Lee Miller—offer an alternative, self-conscious model of "fragmented or indirect visual apprehension" that has been obstructed by blockages in vision (Gallagher 6).

ABSTRACTS

During World War I not only did technical revolutions produce a new, devastatingly “total” type of war, but they also changed the way war was seen, both from a medical and a military perspective. While the medical gaze probed the interior of bodies, the military gaze pulled away from the immediacy of the combatant’s gaze. The accompanying gender revolution placed women in new positions, both on the front line and behind the camera. Using the work of professional photographer Olive Edis this article first explores the three testimonial functions of photography concerning the photographer’s identity, tasks and physical location, before turning to the memoirs of two Red Cross workers, Florence Farmborough and Margaret Hall, which suggest that a particular war genre arose at the moment when women created scrapbooks that combined photographs with their memoirs: the “photo-text”.

Les innovations technologiques qui accompagnaient la Première Guerre Mondiale ont donné lieu non seulement à un nouveau type de guerre “totale”, aux effets dévastateurs, mais ont également modifié le regard porté sur cette guerre, d'un point de vue médical et militaire. Alors que le regard médical se glissait à l'intérieur du corps, le regard militaire, lui, s'éloignait, se distanciant du regard direct du combattant. Simultanément, la révolution dans les relations homme-femme donnait une nouvelle place à la femme sur le front, mais aussi derrière l'objectif de son appareil photographique. En s'appuyant sur les travaux de la photographe professionnelle, Olive Edis, cet article propose d'abord une exploration des trois fonctions testimoniales de la photographie, concernant l'identité, le travail et l'inscription dans un lieu de la photographe, pour aborder ensuite les mémoires de deux femmes ayant travaillé avec la Croix Rouge, Florence Farmborough et Margaret Hall : leurs témoignages nous révèlent l'avènement d'un nouveau genre, un collage juxtaposant récits et photos de guerre : le “photo-texte”.

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Keywords: World War I, photography, photo-text, testimony, scrapbook, gender identity, official documentation
Mots-clés: photographie, photo-texte, témoignage de guerre, scrapbook, Première Guerre mondiale, identité de genre, document officiel

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