



## Who is Surveilling Whom?

### Negotiations of surveillance and sousveillance in relation to WikiLeaks' release of the gun camera tape Collateral Murder

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Mette Mortensen

## **WHO IS SURVEILLING WHOM?**

### **Negotiations of surveillance and sousveillance in relation to WikiLeaks' release of the gun camera tape Collateral Murder**

*This article concerns the particular form of counter-surveillance termed “sousveillance”, which aims to turn surveillance at the institutions responsible for surveillance. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives “mediatization” and “aerial surveillance,” the article studies WikiLeaks’ publication in 2010 of a US military gun camera tape as an example of sousveillance. The gun camera tape had initially been used as aerial reconnaissance from an Apache helicopter during a US military operation in 2007 in Iraq. However, WikiLeaks deploys the footage as a means to surveille, or indeed sousveille, the actions of the US military on account of the tape’s documentation of how ten Iraqi civilians and two staff members from the news agency Reuters are shot from the helicopter. With the video’s representation of a specific place at a specific time as pivotal point, this case illustrates different approaches to surveillance and sousveillance by the key institutions and actors of the military, an activist organization, and the press.*

“WikiLeaks is the first intelligence agency of the people” (WikiLeaks). With these words, the Australian founder and frontline figure Julian Assange characterizes the achievement of WikiLeaks. Assange’s claim that WikiLeaks facilitates intelligence of the people contrasts with the conventional understanding of surveillance and intelligence as information about the people procured and registered by diverse government or military authorities. WikiLeaks’ inversion of surveillance epitomizes a paradigm shift prompted by the emergence of digital media. The power to surveil is no longer confined to state, military, and private corporations protecting their territory, property, and interests. Citizens, activists, whistleblowers, and others monitor those in power and make the results or documentation available online.

This article concerns the particular form of counter-surveillance termed *sousveillance*, which aims to “mirror and confront bureaucratic organizations” (Mann, qtd. in Bakir 21) by surveilling the practices and performances of surveillance. WikiLeaks’ publication in 2010 of a US military gun camera tape serves as the empirical exemplification of *sousveillance*. The gun camera tape had initially been used as aerial reconnaissance from an Apache helicopter during a US military operation in 2007 in New Baghdad, a suburb of Baghdad. However, WikiLeaks turns the surveillance institution of the military into the institution under surveillance. The organization deploys the footage as a means to surveil, or indeed *sousveille*, the actions of the US military on account of the tape’s documentation of how the pilots shoot ten Iraqi civilians and two staff members from the news agency Reuters.

With the tape’s representation of a specific place at a specific time as the pivotal point, this case illustrates different approaches to surveillance and *sousveillance* by the key institutions and actors of

the military, an activist organization, and the press. Thus, this footage has been used and/or interpreted within four different contexts. First, during a military operation, the footage enabled soldiers to monitor action on the ground in real time and respond to perceived threats. Second, the tape became evidence in the internal, US military investigation into whether the soldiers' conduct was in keeping with the law of armed conflict and the army's rules of engagement. Third, WikiLeaks published the tape with the accusation that the soldiers were guilty of a crime of war for taking up arms unnecessarily due to their misinterpretation of the gun camera representation. Fourth, the press covered WikiLeaks' launch of Collateral Murder, but paid more attention to this organization itself than to the case.

Based on interpretation of these four contexts, this article raises the following question: Which different understandings of surveillance and place have been ascribed to the gun camera tape released by WikiLeaks under the name Collateral Murder in 2010, and what are the implications of this case regarding negotiations of surveillance and sousveillance in the digital age? To address this question, the article consists of five sections. Drawing on the concept of mediatization, the first section presents the manner in which digital media have paved the way for extended access to information about conflicts. The second section outlines the particular representation of place produced by aerial surveillance. In the third section, WikiLeaks and its advocacy of "radical transparency" (Sifry) is introduced. The fourth section identifies and compares the four different contexts within which the tape has been used or mobilized. Fifth and finally, the article concludes by addressing the power struggle between surveillance and sousveillance in the contemporary converging and digitalized media landscape.

On a methodological note, it should be emphasized that the interpretation of the four contexts is structured on the basis of chronology and not according to an implicit hierarchy, e.g. of privileging the military point of view. The focus on the four interpretative contexts rather than on the text in and of

itself is a methodological choice made in order to highlight how the tape as an instance of “surveillance footage” may evoke very different interpretations of the specific space depicted through surveillance technologies — and the considerable human and legal consequences thereof.

### **Information management and dissemination in the age of mediatized conflict**

Conflict provides an interesting background for studying the inversion of surveillance made possible by digital media. From an overall perspective, the opposing logics of surveillance and sousveillance become particularly evident on account of the multitude of surveillance technologies and practices deployed, along with the sousveillance at play when footage and data used for monitoring and control are made public. To understand surveillance and sousveillance in the context of conflict, this section introduces the notion of “mediatized conflict.” This concept helps define divergent interests vested in information from areas of conflict, which are reflected in the different approaches to the gun camera tape: while the military attempts to uphold its tight information management, whistleblowers and others take part in disseminating classified and censored documents online.

Mediatization theory has been deployed in media studies over the past years to conceptualize how the media have permeated practically all institutions and organizations to an extent that the media can no longer be regarded as an institution outside culture and society, exerting an influence on the way culture and society are perceived. Rather, the media are inside society and incorporated into central institutions and organizations, which adjust to, interact with, and depend on media technologies and logics (e.g. Schulz; Hjarvard). Research into mediatization has paid relatively little attention to conflict, by contrast to the adjacent field of mediatized politics, for example (see e.g. Mazzoleni and Schulz; Strömbäck). “There is no separate theory for the mediatization of conflict,” as Knut Lundby (298)

contends (but see Cottle; Horten; Maltby), and accordingly this article also contributes to an initial sketch of this area.<sup>1</sup>

My interpretation of mediatized conflict leans on the way mediatization has mainly been used to explain long-standing, multidimensional processes of cultural, social, and political change driven by an interrelation between the media and other institutions in society. Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, and Knut Lundby write:

In general, the concept of mediatization tries to capture long-term interrelation processes between media change on the one hand and social and cultural change on the other. As institutionalized and technological means of communication, media have become integral to very different contexts of human life. The media are not just neutral instances of mediation: Media like television, radio, newspaper, the web or the mobile phone are in themselves mediators of social and cultural change. (223)

Mediatized conflict is also regarded as an interrelation process in this article, yet with the marked difference that this area does not implicate the media and another institution existing independently of the media's influence. Instead, this article presumes that conflict is thoroughly mediatized: from the great involvement of the press in conflict; to the professionalized, strategic communication on part of political and military actors; to participants in conflict documenting and sharing their experiences etc. Proposing an interrelation process between conflicts per se and conflicts under media influence therefore hardly makes sense. Accordingly, this interrelation process involves two levels of mediatization.

The first level of mediatized conflict concerns top-down information management by the state and

military, which enrolls the media in various strategies of constraints and cooperation, mainly by censorship and propaganda. They constitute different sides of the same coin (Taylor 10) as both are used to shape the public level of information. Censorship was instituted in response to the rise of war reporting in the mid-nineteenth century, and has consistently been explained by the need to maintain military secrets and protect soldiers' lives — even if the wish to suppress unpleasant or compromising news often constitutes a suspected ulterior motive (Knightley; Messinger). Consequently, the press' degree of freedom and independence comprises a major issue in the research into the media–state relationship during war (see e.g. Hallin; Robinson; Thussu and Freedman; Boyd-Barrett; Robinson et al.). The term propaganda was first coined in a political context during World War I, when military and state administrations started systematically making strategic use of the media to influence “collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols,” as Harold D. Lasswell writes in 1927 (627). As the principal instrument of control over public opinion, propaganda grew dramatically in scale during the course of the twentieth century. Today, propaganda has lost some of its former centrality as an umbrella term for diverse relations between media and state/military. By comparison to the large-scale propaganda campaigns orchestrated during the world wars, contemporary initiatives for exerting an influence on public sentiment are more differentiated. For instance, the term falls short in connection with interactive platforms for information and entertainment developed by the US military, such as video games, YouTube channels, and apps for tablets and mobile phones. Likewise, the concept is hardly attuned to diverse collaborations between the media and the state/military (e.g. embedded reporting).

The second level of mediatized conflict pertains to the way conflicts are fought and represented. Military information management faces new challenges as digital media allow more actors to



communicate facts, knowledge, and experience. Of particular interest in the current context, the bottom-up level includes counter-surveillance in two primary fashions, which in different ways blur the boundaries between involvement in and representation of conflict: citizens or activists produce and distribute videos of what they consider to be unjust exercise of power by the authorities. The mainstream news media feature this footage regularly, as has been the case in the coverage of the anti-government revolts in Burma (Myanmar) in 2007, Iran 2009 (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti; Mortensen “When Citizen”), and a number of Middle Eastern and Northern African countries from 2011 (Kristensen and Mortensen; Pantti). Moreover, the public dissemination of internal military or governmental files via unofficial channels constitutes an alternative way of monitoring those in power. Apart from Collateral Murder, prominent examples include WikiLeaks’ two other main cases in 2010, Afghan War Diary 2004–2010, consisting of over 91,000 reports, and Iraq War Logs, proclaimed by the organization to be “the largest classified military leak in history” with 391,832 reports (WikiLeaks). The leaks grant backstage insight into the rhetoric and working procedures of the institutions and organizations in questions, just as they may procure evidence for specific events. However, the big data leaks, or “mega leaks” as Assange calls them (Foreman 28), are demanding in terms of sorting out the information and foregrounding essential findings.

The two levels of mediatized conflict shed light on the political, institutional, and technological backgrounds for the competing interpretations of the gun camera tape. Whereas the US military was trying to preserve the footage as an internal document, WikiLeaks’ publication and mobilization of the tape constituted a statement against the Iraq War. The press covered the case, but played a part in it as well due to the killed staff members from Reuters and the changing conditions for the production of news implied by the leak.

## **The aerial representation of place**

Strictly speaking, the video resists the label “surveillance” in so far as it is not recorded by a regular surveillance camera. The tape may, nonetheless, be regarded as surveillance on account of its function and form. First, the footage served to monitor potential targets from the helicopter, and later interpretations also focused on the “evidence” to be extracted. Second, what might be called “surveillance aesthetics” characterize the video, i.e. surveillance is indicated by the distinctively blurred, pixelated representation of an urban space with GPS coordinates and marking of a fore sight. Highly recognizable, surveillance aesthetics are of course known from the news media’s coverage of conflict, crime, and accidents, and likewise it is frequently appropriated in fictional forms such as works of art, film, television serials, and video games (see e.g. Lyon; Pold; Lefait).

The tape belongs to the particular form of surveillance designated “aerial targeting” or “aerial surveillance” (Adey), which might, if we take the meaning of this word literally, be considered surveillance par excellence. Surveillance consists of the two words “sur” meaning “over” and “veiller” meaning “to watch,” i.e. to watch from above. Aerial surveillance has been coupled to military power since it was first used to construct maps during World War I (Adey 87). *Collateral Murder* illustrates the dual purpose often held by aerial targeting. Pilots initially deploy the gun camera tape as a “real-time” (Bishop and Philips 159) visual technology to watch and analyze the positions and movements of individuals, vehicles, and objects at ground level. Later, the footage serves as documentation of a specific event, in this case to investigate the mutual effects between the action on the ground captured on tape and the interpretation and response by the military personnel. The material in this manner

conflates warfare and representations of war, which appears to be a step further from the observation made by James der Derian a little over a decade ago in 2001 that “new wars are fought in the same manner as they are represented” (xviii). Today’s wars are also represented by the same technologies deployed to fight them.

In relation to the sketch of mediatized conflict above, gun camera tapes are utilized on both levels. On the one hand, they have been played in connection with military press conferences briefing the public about specific operations, for instance during the First Gulf War when the use of this footage was criticized for sanitizing war (see e.g. Aday). On the other hand, gun camera tapes have in recent years been published as part of the bottom-up communication of war by organizations such as WikiLeaks and by soldiers disseminating them via Liveleak, YouTube, and other sites for video sharing.

### **WikiLeaks: sousveillance as “radical transparency”**

WikiLeaks was founded in 2007, and has since established itself as an influential and disputed platform for whistleblowers to upload documents, which are “classified, censored or otherwise opaque to the public” (WikiLeaks; see also Benedetta et al.). The organization divides the opinions of those consenting to its insistence on serving “information activism” (Moss), and those believing that “information vandalism” with no regard for security, personal privacy or intellectual property would be the more accurate label (Schmitt). A key discussion thus concerns the relation between sousveillance and transparency. WikiLeaks has been praised for exercising “radical transparency” (Sifry) in accordance with the organization’s self-understanding that it:

improves transparency, and this transparency creates a better society for all people. Better scrutiny leads to reduced corruption and stronger democracies in all society’s institutions, including

government, corporations and other organisations. (WikiLeaks).

WikiLeaks in this quote equates leakage with transparency and equates transparency with enhanced democracy (see also Fuchs). However, the organization has been criticized for creating only “the illusion of a new era in transparency,” because the policy of “leak, publish, and wait for the inevitable outrage” (Roberts 117) confuses the leaks’ quantity with their significance. A related objection was raised in connection with Collateral Murder. Simply leaking the gun camera tape did not enhance transparency, critics argued, since the video lacked context (Bumiller). Following Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, the footage invites viewers to see war “through a soda straw” (Bumiller). Even if Gates’ statement is politically motivated, the reception would confirm that the video is far from self-explanatory. The narrow, targeted, and abstract representational mode of aerial surveillance was capitalized on and mobilized in vastly different contexts and for vastly different agendas.

### **Negotiating surveillance and sousveillance**

At a press conference on 5 April 2010, Assange announced the release on the website [collateralmurder.org](http://collateralmurder.org) of the gun camera video from one of two US Army Apache helicopters involved in the attack on 12 July 2007, in an unabridged 39-minute version and an edited 18-minute version. From an aerial viewpoint, the video shows how the pilots ask for and gain permission to shoot individuals on the ground, who are later identified as civilians and employees from Reuters. Along with the shooting of civilians, the content of the video was also controversial on account of the soldiers’ seeming



Light 'em all up.  
Come on, fire!

Fig. 1 Still from “Collateral Murder,” transcript of radio communication provided by WikiLeaks. <http://www.collateralmurder.com> (accessed 30 December 2013).

eagerness to fire their weapons in several scenes, for instance in exclamations such as “Light ’em all up. Come on, fire!” (2:50–2:52) (Figure 1) and “come on let us shoot!” (07:41).<sup>2</sup>

WikiLeaks had obtained the tape via a whistleblower subsequently confirmed to be former US Army soldier Bradley Manning. Twelve civilians were killed in the attack, including the photographer Namir Noor-Eldeen and the driver Saeed Chmagh from Reuters, and two children were seriously wounded. Although the footage dated back almost three years, WikiLeaks argued that it delivered new proof: “The military did not reveal how the Reuters staff were killed, and stated that they did not know how the children were injured” (WikiLeaks). Confident in the power of the leak, Assange declared that “one classified video can possibly stop a war, and maybe fifty definitely can” (Foreman 27).

The following analysis of Collateral Murder examines and compares the different contextualizations of the tape and their respective interpretations of the place depicted.

### **Military surveillance: aerial targeting**

Due to ongoing combat between US ground forces and insurgents, the space represented on the tape was demarcated as a warzone at first. Monitored from a helicopter, the place further constitutes an “air target” as a location on the ground “identified for attack from above” (Adey et al. 175). Even if aerial targeting makes an urban space legible for military intervention, the vertical viewpoint renders the city unrecognizable as itself compared to everyday experience. Coupled to control, policing, and territorial power, the aerial gaze has been criticized for obliterating the “lived” world of “experiences, perceptions

and sensations” (Bishop and Philips 159) and “elide the real and destructive consequences from its representation” (Adey et al. 175). In this way, the space represented by aerial surveillance is both “abstract and targeted” (Adey 87); the place appears abstract in as much as it looks like any other cityscape depicted by aerial surveillance, and targeted in so far as the representation shows an exact place at an exact time. Aerial surveillance hence presents a paradox. Although the place is “derealized” (Butler 1992, qtd. in Adey et al. 174) by this meticulous, bureaucratic reproduction of the urban landscape as a GPS coordinated grid, the moving images also offer the indexical assurance that they capture the locations, actions, and events occurring at this very place within this precise timeframe.

This case illustrates how the targeted and abstract aerial gaze opens room for interpretation in the gap between representation and the represented. At least in part, the killing of civilians and two Reuters employees was due to the pilots’ belief that they were insurgents after mistaking a long camera telephoto lens for a rocket propelled grenade. The pilots’ analysis of perceived threats might be reconstructed on the basis of the footage and WikiLeaks’ transcription of radio communication between the two helicopters and ground forces control:

01:33 Hotel Two-Six this is Crazy Horse One-Eight [communication between chopper 1 and chopper 2]. Have individuals with weapons. 01:41 Yup. He’s got a weapon too. 01:43 Hotel Two-Six; Crazy Horse One-Eight. Have five to six individuals with AK47s [automatic rifles]. Request permission to engage [shoot].

01:51 Roger that. Uh, we have no personnel east of our position. So, uh, you are free to engage. Over. 02:00 All right, we’ll be engaging. 02:02 Roger, go ahead.

02:03 I’m gonna ... I can’t get ’em now because they’re behind that building. 02:09 Um, hey

Bushmaster element ... 02:10 He's got an RPG [rocket propelled grenade]? 02:11 All right, we got a guy with an RPG.

This misreading by the pilots obviously questions the reliability of the gun camera as a surveillance/weapon technology. In another sequence, this very issue is brought up when one of the pilots wonders whether to trust what he thought he saw on the gun camera, a tank driving over a body:

18:16 Looking for more individuals-south. 18:18 Bushmaster Six-Bushmaster Seven.

Downloaded by [Copenhagen University Library] at 12:39 27 April 2015

18:29 I think they just drove over a body. 18:31 Hey hey! 18:32 Yeah! 18:37 Maybe it was just a visual illusion, but it looked like it.

The pilot using the phrase “visual illusion” and referring to what events “looked like,” might be read as an allusion to how aerial targeting drives a wedge between the perception of a specific space through the real-time representation and the space in itself. This inherent instability of the tape as source endures beyond its initial function as aerial targeting. In the later reception, the tape was drawn in as evidence for conflicting interpretations of the event. Where the US military considered it proof of the soldiers' statutory conduct, WikiLeaks maintained that the footage documented the illegitimate killing of civilians.

### **Internal military investigation: surveilling the evidence**

The United States Central Command conducted an informal, internal investigation into the incident shortly after the attack. In response to a Freedom of Information Act, the results were made public



online in May 2010. Freeing the pilots from responsibility, the investigation concludes with a number of recommendations. The gun camera video comprises the main evidence in this investigation and weighs heavier than witness testimonies:

The video provided me an accurate timeline of events and allowed me to corroborate [sic!] or deny other eye witness testimony received [sic!] into evidence. (United States Central Command Investigation 2)

The Deputy Brigade Commander responsible for the investigation several times comments on how viewing the tape in hindsight as evidence constitutes an altogether different experience than the pilots viewing it in real time:

Only after an extensive review of the AWT's gun-camera video and with knowledge of the two missing media personnel, is it reasonable to deduce that two of the individuals intermixed among the insurgents located in the engagement area may have been reporters. [...] The aircrew erroneously identified the cameras as weapons due to presentation (slung over shoulder with the body of the object resting at the back, rear of the torso) and association (personnel collocated with others having RPGs and AK-47s). (United States Central Command Findings 3; italics and bold in original)

Reviewed as evidence, efforts are invested in reconstructing the reality of the space "derealized" by aerial targeting. The footage's temporal and spatial components are staggered in this phase, and the simultaneity between representation and the represented has seized to exist. Accordingly, the tape now

serves as documentation for past events, with a distance in time and an intensifying presencing (Scannell 84) of the space depicted.

### **WikiLeaks: scene of crime**

As an internal document, the tape served first as real-time aerial targeting in a combat situation and later as evidence in the investigation. After publishing the video, WikiLeaks attempted to establish the place represented as a scene of crime. Turning surveillance into sousveillance, the organization firstly accused the aircrew of behaving as if they were playing a video game, and, secondly, attempted to enhance audience identification with the victims.

Firstly, although Assange's interpretation differs greatly from the United States Central Command, he also approaches the tape as double evidence of the incidents on the ground and the soldiers' response. At the press conference, he asserts that the soldiers failed to distinguish between "higher score" and "higher number of kills" in their video-game perception of the victims:

The behaviour of the pilots is like a computer game. When Saeed is crawling, clearly unable to do anything, their response is: come on buddy, we want to kill you, just pick up a weapon ... It appears to be a desire to get a higher score, or a higher number of kills. (qtd. in McGreal; see also Allan and Andén-Papadopoulos)

Assange is making a reference to the radio transmissions, which caused controversy for the pilots' seeming eagerness to fire weapons; along with the exclamation "come on let us shoot!," a comment is later made regarding the heavily wounded Chmagh "all you gotta do is pick up a weapon," i.e. to give the pilots reason to shoot again. In his critique of the soldiers, he radicalizes the claim put forward

about aerial targeting working as a derealization of the physical space in so far as the soldiers — according to Assange — look upon the individuals on the ground as figures in a video game.

Secondly, to counter this view and to augment viewer identification with the victims and their relatives (see also Mortensen “Metacoverage”), WikiLeaks’ website [collateralmurder.com](http://collateralmurder.com) foregrounds a human interest perspective, i.e. an emotionally engaging focus on the participants in events, which is common in soft news war reporting (e.g. Dimitrova and Strömbäck). In WikiLeaks’ editing of the gun camera tape, texts are inserted identifying the indistinguishable figures on the grainy pictures as Chamgh and Noor-Elden. Moreover, the video also contains a picture of Saeed Chmagh’s grieving son holding a photograph of his father,<sup>3</sup> and one of Namir Noor- Elden, with the accompanying text stating that despite his young age of 22 he was considered one of the best war photographers in Iraq. The website features other resources seemingly serving the same purpose, including pictures from the funerals of the two Reuters staff members, images of the two wounded children’s scars, and an interview with their mother, whose husband — the children’s father — was killed in the attack. In so doing, WikiLeaks turns the space represented into a scene of crime.

### **The press: metacoverage**

Even though WikiLeaks defines itself as a media organization and supplies background information on the leaks, it pursues the attention of journalists in order to win “maximum political impact,” and “to ensure that all the leaked information it receives gets the attention it deserves” (WikiLeaks; see also Lynch). When comparing WikiLeaks’ framing with the news coverage of Collateral Murder, it is remarkable that the newspapers only to a limited degree probed into the stories of the victims. In a content analysis performed for an earlier article on the coverage of Collateral Murder in three US, three

UK, and three Danish newspapers (Mortensen “Metacoverage”), the overall finding was that their stories to a large extent consisted of “metacoverage” at the expense of “coverage.” Metacoverage typically focuses on the communicative acts and strategies performed by political, military, and media actors as representatives of different organizations and institutions (Esser). In the coding of the articles, coverage was defined as a treatment of the video’s content, e.g. stories about the people directly or indirectly involved in the incident or interpretations of the footage and the case’s human, political, and juridical consequences. Articles were categorized as metacoverage when they mentioned the gun tape video, but focused on (1) WikiLeaks and its central actors, (2) the challenges WikiLeaks poses to policy-makers and the military, or (3) WikiLeaks as an example of online activism and lobbying. Altogether, out of the total 106 articles, only 12 were coded as “coverage,” while 96 were coded as “metacoverage.”

The numbers are of interest in the present context because they highlight how the point of dispute shifts when the mass media communicated the case to a broader public. Until then, constructing the action (and later also the reaction) at the specific place had been the primary concern. Attention now turns to the more principled level of the confrontation between surveillance and sousveillance represented by the positions of the military and WikiLeaks.

## **Conclusion**

The negotiations between sousveillance and surveillance have increased with the rise in recent years of user-generated content and omnipresent digital technologies for circulating images and files. On the basis of the different interpretations of the place represented on the gun camera tape published by WikiLeaks under the name Collateral Murder, this article has investigated digital sousveillance as a

new form of resistance to military practices of surveillance and information management. Moreover, the article points to the centrality of leaked footage and data in regard to sousveillance. This has manifested itself numerous times over the past decade, most recently in connection with the leaks provided by former system administrator Edward Snowden from NSA (National Security Agency) revealing the extended, mass surveillance performed by the US and other nations. The concept of mediatized conflict provided the overall theoretical framework for conceptualizing the counter-surveillance facilitated by the emergence of digital media. By distinguishing between two different levels of mediatized conflict, this framework also made way for a historical contextualization of current tendencies, since the bottom-up spread of hitherto classified or censored information was seen against the backdrop of the traditional military double grip on information management of censorship and propaganda.

Visual and audiovisual counter-surveillance invariably draws attention to the place represented. In order for the footage to evidence specific events, the actions captured have to occur within an actual, delimited, and identifiable space. The tape lends itself to different readings of the place depicted. At the outset, the place is configured through the aerial gaze; at once abstract and targeted, the pilots perceive the place as one infused with threat. The internal military investigation recognizes the misreading of the place by the pilots, but also finds this excusable on account of the difficult circumstances under which they had to maneuver. WikiLeaks, by contrast, reads the place as a scene of crime, while the newspapers eschew place and focus instead on the overall implications of the case.

An overall point to be deduced from this case concerns the value of surveillance footage as evidence in light of the conflicting interpretations of the tape. This must be seen in continuation of the long history of considering bureaucratic or scientific photography as secure and objective proof (e.g. in connection

with criminal investigations), which has been refuted by numerous examples of miscarriages of justice due to misinterpretations or mistakes arising from human error or political or subjective/personal investments in the case (Mortensen Kampen). As digital media have increased the availability of surveillance footage in the public domain, the ascribed value of enhanced transparency and openness ought in specific cases to be weighed up against the legibility and ambiguity of the material. With regard to the case's wider implications concerning sousveillance and surveillance, the tape's final context points to an important aspect, precisely because the newspapers did not pay great attention to the place depicted. This negligence shows one of the challenges for sousveillance. In order to reach a larger public, it seems to be critical that the established news circuit finds the case clear-cut enough and the messenger legitimate enough to run the story in a manner loyal to the framing by the "agent" of sousveillance.

## Notes

- . 1 To clarify, the claim made by Lundby concerns the application of mediatization theory to conflict studies. Many of the communication practices and strategies to be included under the heading "mediatized conflict," such as the state–press interrelation during war (e.g. Hallin; Robinson), propaganda (e.g. Lasswell; Culbert et al.; Taylor; Connelly and Welch; Willcox), censorship (e.g. Knightley; Messinger) etc. have of course been dealt with at great length within research fields such as political science and media studies.
- . 2 Numbers in this and the following quotes from the tape refer to time-codes in WikiLeaks' transcription of the pilots' radio communication, <http://www.collateralmurder.com/en/transcript.html>.

. 3 Obtaining the rights to reproduce this image has not been possible. Please see [http://www.collateralmurder.com/en/img/photos/sonur\\_Saeeds\\_3.jpg.html](http://www.collateralmurder.com/en/img/photos/sonur_Saeeds_3.jpg.html) (link accessed March 6 2014).





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