The Shadow Rules of Engagement: Visual Practices, Citizen-Subjectivity, and America’s Global War on Terror

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Rebecca A. Adelman

Department of Comparative Studies

The Ohio State University

2009

Dissertation Committee:

Ruby C. Tapia, Advisor

Philip Armstrong

Maurice E. Stevens
Abstract

Like all wars, the Global War on Terror (GWOT) (2001-present) has resulted in upheavals of culture and politics. What makes the GWOT unique is the degree to which these disruptions coincide. This dissertation explores their convergence in visual culture, a key medium through which Americans confront terror in everyday life. *The Shadow Rules of Engagement* is an interdisciplinary project that integrates insights from cultural studies and political theory to provide a comprehensive account of the American visual culture of terror and how it shapes the experience of citizenship.

Out of the vast archive of visual cultural production about the GWOT, I discern five kinds of what I call ‘visual practices,’ approaches to the visual and its expression of terror. The first of these, the *illuminating*, is an antiwar strategy that demands publicity for graphic images of the GWOT on the assumption that these sights will arouse opposition to the War. While those practices seek to traumatize viewers into action, *dimensional* practices presume that the controlled sight of terror can be healing, and so they transform it into two-dimensional artifacts designed to aid in the process of coping with it. Similarly, *diagnostic* practices quantify terror by rating its intensity and regulating its appearance. Terror is difficult to manage in this way, but *temporal* engagements seek to correct for its disorienting consequences by forcing it into linear narratives to deprive it of momentum and power. Finally, there are *juridical* responses to the unauthorized imaging of terror, which employ legal (and extralegal) means to respond to visual threats.

Various actors—from private citizens to federal officials—and institutions—from the Motion Picture Association of America to the United States Department of Justice—partake in these practices. Consequently, evidence of their engagements is present across
the spectrum of American visual culture, and I document a representative variety of sites, artifacts, and events, cataloging primary sources ranging from federal indictments to ‘jihad’ videos, popular novels, virtual reality simulations, and beyond. Despite their diverse manifestations, I demonstrate that all of these practices (and the artifacts around which they are centered) are concerned with redefining American citizenship through the experience of terror.
Acknowledgments

It seems to me that writing a dissertation is not necessarily a solitary affair, but rather that the act tends to winnow the writer’s social field down to only those beings gracious enough to accompany her through the process. That I should be able to finish this project with such a long list of stellar companions says very little about me, but speaks volumes about them, and their goodness.

There is, first, my dissertation committee. My advisor, Ruby Tapia, offered her early and enthusiastic support to this project, and has ever since been perpetually ready with the fundamental insights that helped me transform it from nothing into something, as well as ample quantities of unjustified but much-appreciated praise. Philip Armstrong has been a careful and challenging reader, and his astonishing gift for editorial commentary has clarified my thinking and, hopefully, my writing as well. Maurice Stevens often seemed to have a better, fuller understanding of this project than I did, and he has consistently and kindly helped me to find the big missing pieces and fit them into place.

The incredible guidance that Ruby, Philip, and Maurice have offered is an index of the intellectual capaciousness of the Department of Comparative Studies as a whole. I am deeply grateful to have been able to do my work in such a rich and collegial environment. Special thanks are due to Kwaku Korang, David Horn, Eugene Holland, and Barry Shank. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to present an abridged version of Chapter 4 in a departmental research colloquium, and that portion of this project benefitted greatly from the commentary of the audience. My colleagues in the ad hoc but very productive Comparative Studies Dissertation Writing Group providing inspiring
models and astute readership as they slogged through various parts of this document. Marge Lynd, Wen Tsai, and Lori Wilson all gave cheerful navigational assistance throughout my time as a Ph.D. student. Beyond providing a smart and supportive community in which to undertake this work, Comparative Studies also facilitated it directly by funding my travel to conferences and my participation in the 2007 Futures of American Studies Institute at Dartmouth College.

Likewise, the Graduate School at the Ohio State University has provided truly invaluable financial support at three key junctures in my graduate career—a University Fellowship at the beginning of my Master’s program, a Presidential Fellowship that fostered the timely completion of my dissertation study, and an Alumni Grant for Graduate Research and Scholarship (AGGRS) award during Winter Quarter 2009, which enabled a research trip to the Institute for Creative Technologies.

The intellectual adventures so generously funded by these bodies afforded me opportunities to share my work with a variety of very charitable interlocutors. I have tried to acknowledge the specific contributions of these wise readers and listeners where they appear in the text, but also want to offer the blanket acknowledgment that their good advice permeates the document as a whole and has enriched it in innumerable, often unexpected ways. Don Pease, in particular, has been instrumental in this process since I first made his acquaintance at the Futures Institute in 2007.

I have also benefitted immensely from the attention and expertise of many professional guides. Melissa Dabakis and Louisa Shea have, in different capacities, helped me refine my pedagogy and taught me a great deal about how best to communicate the ideas that animate my scholarship. My longtime mentor Wendy Kozol has been unflaggingly magnanimous with her insights and advice, and impeccable in her modeling of the kind of scholar I aspire to be.

This embarrassment of professional riches is matched by a similar abundance in my personal life, where good friends and family have indulged my complaining and propelled me through my work. Lacey Dalby is a spectacular friend in every way, and has been my steadfast ally and supreme confidante since forever. Rebecca Skidmore Biggio, my co-conspirator in so much, my elder (by five days) and my better, has set a
scholarly example that I am proud to follow. Rita Trimble, in addition to sharing her precious time and excellent company, has offered perplexingly unshakable faith in my work. Rachel Wortman has been equally, overwhelmingly generous as a friend and as a colleague.

Although my family was obligated by blood to tough this out, they have done so with limitless understanding and boundless good cheer. My mom, Karen Adelman, was my first and finest teacher. Without her superior model, her wise counsel, and her unwavering support, this dissertation (and so much else) would have been impossible. My dad, Gene Adelman, has never been shy about declaring the greatness of his daughter to anyone who will listen, but also instilled in me the work ethic that keeps me toiling to be worthy of his excessive pride. My grandparents, Chet and Virginia Zawistowski; my aunts, uncles, and cousins; and the Clark family have all unquestioningly accepted this work as an excuse for countless missed holidays and all manner of unacceptable behavior on my part. My dogs (probably) can’t read, but the combination of their patient dozing at my feet while I worked and occasional insistence that I go out and enjoy the sunshine like a normal person made it possible for me to write.

Finally, and ultimately, Mel Clark has been there at the beginning and the end of every page, my companion throughout this work and my partner in this life.
Vita

June 1998 ............................ Niles West High School (Skokie, IL)

May 2001 ............................ B.A. with High Honors in Women’s Studies, Oberlin College (Oberlin, OH)

2003-2004 ............................ University Fellow, The Ohio State University

2004-2005 ............................ Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of Women’s Studies, The Ohio State University

June 2005 ............................ M.A. in Women’s Studies, The Ohio State University (Columbus, OH)

2005-2008 ............................ Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of Comparative Studies, The Ohio State University

2008-2009 ............................ Presidential Fellow, The Ohio State University

Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Comparative Studies

Specializations: Visuality and Visual Culture; Culture, Nation, and Terror; Social, Cultural, and Critical Theory
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii
Acknowledgments ...................................................................................................................... iv
Vita .............................................................................................................................................. vii
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................... xi
Preface ........................................................................................................................................... xii

Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 1
The Political and the Perceptual: On Vocabulary ...................................................................... 2
Visual Practices, Citizen-Subjectivity, and the Global War on Terror:
   Conceptual and Methodological Frameworks ........................................................................ 15
Ethics and Perception: On Writing The Shadow Rules of Engagement ........................ 25
A Guide to the Shadow Rules: Organization of the Text ................................................ 27

Chapter 1: Illuminating .................................................................................................................. 32
Keeping Company with Death: A Brief History of Illuminating Visuality in Wartime ........ 34
Who We Are and Who We Aspire to Be: Visuality, Protest, and Citizenship ...................... 39
Petrified Surfaces: Illuminating Practices of the Visual .......................................................... 42
Light at the End of the Newshole: The Project for Excellence in Journalism ...................... 46
We Do Body Counts: Casualties, Citizenship, and the Illuminated Dead .......................... 51
“Now We Are”: The Casket, The Camera, and the Citizen .................................................... 58
Filling the Epistemological Void: Academic Reactions to the Abu Ghraib Photographs .......... 65
Filling the Sight by Force: The Ethical and Tactical Flaws of Illumination .......................... 75

Chapter 2: Dimensional ................................................................................................................. 79
War Out of Proportion: Size in the GWOT ............................................................................... 81
The Inability to Go Beyond: Flat Death and Flat Affect ............................................................ 87
Anti-Structures of Feeling: Dimensional Practices of the Visual ........................................... 93
List of Tables

Table 1. The GWOT in Film ....................................................................................144
Table 2. The Saw Series ...........................................................................................167
The Shadow Rules of Engagement: Visual Practices, Citizen-Subjectivity, and America’s Global War on Terror is an inquiry into the visual culture of contemporary American terror. Visual culture and terror have become objects of intense academic fascination, if not outright intellectual pleasure, and the location of this project at those sites of discursive proliferation places me, as its author, in a contingent, questionable position. My project would have been impossible without this preceding recognition of the importance of its objects of study. But in capitalizing on this potential, I risk exploiting it, and so much else.

The events of September 11, 2001 sparked an exponential increase in the strategic and symbolic use-values of terror. The opportunisms resulting from this appreciation have yielded ideological and material profits, and I am trying to avoid perpetuating the same sort of entrepreneurship in academic work. There are differences—both qualitative and quantitative—between benefits reaped by private corporations or ambitious politicians and those garnered by intellectuals in these times of war. Still, there are common conditions of possibility that need to be acknowledged. I cannot fully resolve the complex ethical questions that result from these similarities, but I do want to foreground them, to leave them unsettled and unsettling.

In “Consuming Trauma; Or, The Pleasures of Merely Circulating,” Patricia Yaeger comments on the intellectual fashion of trauma discourse, which she characterizes as an epistemology that is as affective as it is scholarly. She critiques the “pleasures of academic melancholy” on ethical grounds, observing that the academic’s ostensible

---

1 Yaeger, “Consuming Trauma,” 29.
concern with injury often results paradoxically in the occlusion of the material circumstances surrounding it. Theory, in such scholarship, functions not to advocate social justice, but instead to “jolt us out of pathos.”² Although I am not sure that pathos is as uncomplicated a reaction as Yaeger’s argument implies, I am indebted to her articulation of something of which I had only a nagging sense.

There has been a great deal of careful, circumspect scholarship about the Global War on Terror (GWOT), but Yaeger’s caution is as salient for the study of terror as it is for trauma. The concept and experience of terror are similarly vulnerable to the abstraction and commodification of academic fashion. There is suffering on all sides of this conflict, and this work should not overshadow the human beings whose lives are at stake in the war about which so many have so much to say. Whatever comfort I was able to enjoy while composing my account of it is a direct result of my distance from most of its material truths, my freedom from worry about loved ones fighting its battles, my confidence that each day will proceed uninterrupted by a catastrophic loss.

Even as my safety enables me to write this text, I have tried to prevent that privilege of comfort from transforming my work into an exercise in curiosity. This inquiry is theoretically motivated, and also seeks to account for terror’s material and discursive coordinates. Accordingly, in my work, I understand terror as a sensation that is simultaneously authentic and constructed, intense and mediated, piercing and diffuse. Although I encounter terror at a remove, my work on it is nevertheless different in intent and, I hope, execution, from the thought and emotion experiments that Yaeger rightly critiques.

The risk of theorizing the GWOT into meaninglessness is especially acute because I am strangely, unwillingly, and thoroughly beholden to it. In subtle but significant ways, this project is legitimated by its prolongation. The protraction of the war keeps my text current; I am aware of this indebtedness, and deeply troubled by it. In part, this is happenstance, but there is no escaping the fact that the continuation of the GWOT virtually guarantees that I will have more to write about. The continual evolution of this conflict has meant, on a practical level, that I have had to develop a methodology

² Ibid., 44.
suitable for the essentially stochastic nature of war, and of this war in particular. My ethical concern, however, lies in the possibility that the fullness of these pages is a reflection of (or even more troublingly, a graft from) the steady accumulation of terror’s casualties. The War does not produce my words, but it does generate their endless supply of referents.

Still, I do not wish to disclaim or disavow my work. It remains something in which I am deeply invested, as I, too, am a citizen-subject of terror. The extent to which I understand this conflict, my capacity to see it, reflects the depth of terror’s penetration into whatever it is that constitutes me, whatever it is that shapes my perception. Instead of avoiding my complicity, or simply apologizing for it, I want instead to take responsibility for it, to locate myself within the reach of my critique, to suggest that I am also caught in the same circuits of terror that I seek to disrupt. I want this text to serve as a site for the negotiation of citizenship, visuality, and terror, in a sustained and serious engagement. My theory is immediately, constitutively accountable to empirical reality. My hope is that this urgency should prevail over the temptation to simply enjoy thinking about and looking at these things, and that this text provides something other than a scholarly refuge from the daily realities of a war without end.
Introduction

Terror brings everything, sharply and suddenly, into focus. It clarifies. And in navigating our reordered worlds, we are remade as well. Terror creates an immediate need, as the previously abstract notion of ‘surviving’ becomes concrete, an urgent set of tasks to be completed. Once those are done, we can turn to the bigger, more complicated projects of repair, of recreating ourselves in accordance with the demands that terror has placed on us. Upon being terrorized, we might become any number of things—patients, patriots, soldiers, widows, pacifists. Through terror, one way or another, we find ourselves: politically, affectively, socially, and philosophically. Our new priorities, brought into relief by terror, translate into new identities and ways of being. This is true for us as individuals, and also, at a different scale, for the nation-states we inhabit as citizens.

In their encounters with terror, nation-states confront dual imperatives: to redefine themselves internally and realign themselves abroad. States must readjust themselves politically to remain viable, while nations are required to make cultural changes to remain cohesive. In the U.S., these maneuvers often entail redefinitions of citizenship, and The Shadow Rules of Engagement analyzes the visual exchanges—between a terrorized nation-state, its citizens, and its enemies—that result. My focus is on the contemporary American context dominated by the exigencies of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) (2001-present), and the processes of image-production, -regulation, and -consumption that comprise its visual culture, which I theorize as another of the multiplying theaters in this conflict.
The Political and the Perceptual: On Vocabulary

This work is necessarily interdisciplinary, and my work engages theoretical and practical insights from cultural studies; media studies; American studies; trauma studies; and political theory of the nation, state, and citizen. This text is a contribution to these fields and, moreover, an example of how these epistemologies can enrich one another. Although harmonizing such disparate types of knowledge and dissimilar modes of inquiry results in research that does not fall neatly within disciplinary categories, this integration of perspectives uncovers new dimensions of the GWOT through a methodological innovation apropos of a war that is unconfined by traditional rules, boundaries, and limits.

Rather than simply borrowing from a variety of fields of inquiry, I have tried to construct a project that is truly interdisciplinary, in which all of these different ways of knowing are equally essential to my argument. Instead of assuming that different perspectives were incommensurable, I sought out points of contact between them, consonances that had the potential to reveal previously overlooked elements of conflict, citizenship, and visual culture and their interactions in times of terror. This approach enables me to move between theoretical analysis and practical application, between cultural and political questions, between the humanities and the social sciences without, I hope, sacrificing the insights of either epistemological frame but instead constructing an argument that is capacious enough to accommodate both.

So that I might bridge these diverse discourses, I begin this project by defining key terms as I employ them, and my intentions in doing so. When these concepts appear in the text, they are as shorthand for the explications below. This should not, however, occlude the fact that many of the terms that ground my analysis are deeply contested. Throughout, I use them provisionally, and with the full awareness that their meanings are not as settled as they might appear to be.

The Nation

My project relies, first, on a theorization of the nation as a construct, an affective and dynamic constituency. Most studies that undertake this work rely, with varying degrees of fidelity, on Ernest Renan’s 1882 lecture at the Sorbonne, “Qu’est-ce qu’une
nation? (What is a Nation?)”). Renan asserted that national communities not accidents of birth or geography, but rather keenly felt experiential bonds, forged especially through suffering. He portrays the nation as an accomplishment, a communal feat of shared memories and emotions. On the one hand, Renan’s model forecloses quantitative modes of inquiry; how, for example, would one measure the “spiritual principle”¹ that he argues is the essence of the nation? On the other, however, it invites qualitative analyses of the nation as a form of social and cultural cohesion.

Various scholars have taken up this project, and Benedict Anderson’s elaborations on “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” are among the most influential. In his 1998 collection of essays, The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World, Anderson echoes Renan’s contention about the fundamental “goodness” of nations as units of social organization in a book that serves to update and extend Renan’s framework. Other theorists of the nation have diverged from the rather rosy view of it that Renan bequeathed to Anderson, and interrogated the exclusions by which national formations proceed. I read Etienne Balibar’s essay, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” as a critical extension of the argument that Anderson put forth in Imagined Communities. Nation-building projects, Balibar contends, are motivated by a need to “produce the people”² and create the ‘community’ they purport to reflect, often by invoking ideas of race. The resultant biopolitical arrangements, especially the school and the family, work to produce the people and also to ensure that the traces of that production are simultaneously obscured. Elsewhere, feminist political scientists like Cynthia Enloe have analyzed the gendered politics of nation-formation, mapping the ways that female citizens are simultaneously essential to and excluded from national communities.

Generally, these scholars understand the nation as a cultural formation more, or rather than, a political one, so that membership (or, alternately, ostracism) is determined more by personal affinity than official decree. Although culture and politics are not neatly separable, the idea of a nation as distinct from a state is a useful heuristic for

¹ Renan, “What is a Nation?”, para. 1.
² Balibar, “The Nation Form,” 93.
understanding the way that terror operates and the reactions that it provokes. The nation will be primarily concerned with matters of memory, grieving, and identity. The state will share these objectives, certainly, but will have to respond in an official capacity, making policy and plotting revenge.

The State

Demarcations between the nation and the state are rarely tidy, but it is important to avoid eliding the difference between these architectures. Briefly, ‘the state’ is the set of individuals and institutions that do the work of governance. In her conversation with Gayatri Spivak, published as *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, Judith Butler clarifies the function of the state as follows:

The state signifies the legal and institutional structures that delimit a certain territory (although not all of those institutional structures belong to the apparatus of the state). Hence, the state is supposed to service the matrix for the obligations and prerogatives of citizenship. It is that which forms the conditions under which we are juridically bound.3

Although the nation can demand allegiance, or mandate certain behaviors, only the state can enforce these requirements, whether through punishment or reward.

If it is to mete out these consequences, the state must be recognizable and recognized as legitimate, and when armed with this validation, the state exercises its authority in a variety of ways. Much of the literature that informs *The Shadow Rules of Engagement* theorizes the state as a biopolitical system that determines who ought to live and, by extension, who ought to die. The state disseminates resources in accordance with these judgments, having assumed these powers from the sovereign upon the advent of modern systems of government. The transition from absolute monarchy to democracy does not mean, however, that sovereignty has entirely disappeared; the work of Giorgio Agamben, for example, persuasively demonstrates otherwise. Sovereignty has, instead, taken on different forms, often reasserting itself in times of state crisis, when the lure of a strong, autocratic leader trumps the emotional appeal of democratic governance.

---

Even in the best of times, however, democracy does not necessarily entail parity for all of its members. Moira Gatens argues that the modern state is literally “anthropomorphic”\(^4\) and patterned on a masculinist ideal. Her analysis underscores the extent to which the state, like the nation, is a social and cultural construct, predictably consonant with regimes of inequality. In addition to the structural work of bolstering systems of sexism and racism, the state also performs mundane functions, administering the institutions that collect our taxes, provide us with certain public services (like education and social programs), tally our votes, and go to war in our names. Still, the citizen’s connection is more than simply bureaucratic. It is also acutely personal, and the state, for its part, can share in—or usurp altogether—the cultural and affective work of the nation.

**Nation-State**

When I invoke the idea of a nation-state, I am referring to an arrangement in which national and state functions co-exist. Nation-states are the wealthiest, most powerful geopolitical entities, and the most stable among them are those in which the two formations have established a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship. Still, like the ideas of the ‘nation’ and the ‘state’ themselves, the ‘nation-state’ is an unstable, provisional thing, with each element threatening to unsettle the other.

Even as the nation, state, and nation-state are my preferred analytical paradigms, I recognize that this model has its limitations, and that these terms may not be universally applicable or meaningful. There are nations without states, communities that have a strong sense of shared purpose and identity but lack a territory or an officially-recognized government (e.g. Palestine). Alternately, there are states that lack singular, cohesive\(^5\) national identities (e.g. Iraq). And there are, of course, masses of stateless people, who lack homelands and the rights and protections that citizenship entails. Dynamics of

\(^4\) Gatens, “Corporeal Representation,” 83.

\(^5\) This is distinct from pluralism. In the U.S., a pluralist but deeply stratified nation-state, terrorist events (like the Oklahoma City bombings, or September 11\(^\text{th}\)) arguably strengthened citizens’ identification with one another and the nation-state, albeit temporarily. However, terrorist attacks in a place like Iraq—where Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish identities are more salient than a unitary ‘Iraqi’ one—tend to exacerbate rather than mend inter-group divisions.
globalization have increased their numbers, while troubling the fiction that the nation-state is a static, bounded entity.\(^6\) Still, it is useful to think of the U.S. as a nation-state, particularly as a way of distinguishing it from its enemies in the GWOT, most of whom are non- or sub-state actors.

**Citizenship**

Most studies of ‘the nation’ emphasize the primacy of its meaning for individuals, particularly its citizens. At stake in this literature is individual encounter with the larger national community and its state formation in exchanges that are social, mnemonic, and affective. My project is located within the scholarly discourse that theorizes citizenship as a category of experience, and applies that model to the visual as a locus for the production of a citizenry.

At the most basic level, citizenship is a form of allegiance. With this fidelity comes certain entitlements and obligations, but those are derivatives of that fundamental loyalty. Prior to the advent of the modern nation-state, national belonging meant fealty to the sovereign, a ruler that had direct control over the lives of his subjects. Now, in modern nation-states, where leaders change on a regular and relatively frequent basis, the commitment of citizenship is meant to outlast individual presidents or prime ministers in the form of attachment to the nation-state itself, to its territory and to its institutions. Of course, there are instances when citizens identify strongly with particular leaders, or when the leaders themselves command personal loyalty. Reminiscent as they are of the dynamics of sovereign rule, such bonds deviate from the ideal of modern citizenship, and so devotees express them instead in terms of love for country (or a wish for ‘what’s best’ for the nation-state), rather than affection for a particular leader.

All nations, as Benedict Anderson has observed, imagine themselves to be just and egalitarian,\(^7\) and states also portray themselves as fair and lawful. Both bodies use citizenship as the criterion that determines eligibility for rights and protections, but not all citizens experience their citizenship in the same way, and “legal citizenship does not

---

6 In “The Repositioning of Citizenship,” Saskia Sassen argues that contemporary citizenship is based more on connections to (global) cities than traditional nation-states.

always bring full and equal membership rights.” Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis’ trenchant exposition of the circumscribed roles afforded to women in national communities, for example, is a reminder that citizenship is regimented and differential. The authors locate some agency on the part of female citizens, arguing that these roles are not “merely” imposed upon them but rather deliberately enacted, but their analysis still demonstrates that nations-states require different behaviors of different bodies. Thus, although citizenship is a status, it is also an experience, or accumulation of experiences. Belonging to the national community is about more than professed allegiance. It is also a matter of disciplined practice and participation in rituals of interpellation, regulated in large part through what Barry Richards describes as ‘emotional governance’: “a deliberate and sophisticated attention to the emotional dynamics of the public, as part of the work of government.”

Cohesive nations are feats of memory, narratives shared and enacted widely. Memory and identity often act in “mutual construction”, communally-held memories can help to underscore feelings of national belonging, but idiosyncratic memories can undermine national unity, and so they must be managed, contained, and relegated. For Pierre Nora, this administration happens through the supplanting of memory with history, cordonning memory into specific, regulated lieu de mémoire, designed for the transmission of the official version of the past. His distinction between lieu and milieux de mémoire reminds us that citizenship is a negotiation between individual and communal recollections and, moreover, that there is a link between appropriate remembering and full membership in the national community. Even as memory is displaced to officially designated sites, it is also affixed to specific objects, devices that Allison Landsberg calls ‘prosthetic memory.’ These “new forms of public cultural memory” are a response to “ontological insecurity” about the status of an otherwise

10 Richards, Emotional Governance, 21-22.
11 Jelin, State Repression and the Labors of Memory, 17.
12 Landsberg, Prosthetic Memory, 2.
13 Ibid., 19.
immaterial recollection. For a nation in process or under siege, these tools—like flags, battlefield relics, or iconic images—function as assurances and mnemonic loci of control.

State and national efficacy require governance of emotion and affect in addition to memory. Lauren Berlant analyzes contemporary American citizenship at the level of “quotidian life,”¹⁴ those myriad feelings and practices comprising a lived, affective form of citizenship that is “always in progress.”¹⁵ Her study suggests the possibility that emotional and sociopolitical systems interlock around different categories of citizens to shape their personal experiences of the nation-state. Put a slightly different way, nation-states form citizens through an Althusserian process of interpellation, hailing and constructing subjects through addresses both personalized and collective, identifying people as citizens (or, conversely, as aliens). These designations have implications that are political, social, legal, and psychic at once.

**Militarization**

One especially powerful mechanism by which the nation-state commands its citizens to attention is the process of militarization. This is a process that is related to, but still distinct from, that of mobilizing an army or a fighting force. Cynthia Enloe describes militarization as a “far more subtle process” than “simply joining a military.”¹⁶ It is also a more pervasive one. She writes:

Militarization is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas. The more militarization transforms an individual or a society, the more that individual or society comes to imagine military needs or militaristic presumptions to be not only valuable but also normal. Militarization, that is, involves cultural as well as institutional, ideological, and economic transformations.¹⁷

---

¹⁵ Ibid., 20.
¹⁷ Ibid., 3.
Militarization aligns every aspect of society with military objectives, transforming war from a discrete geopolitical event to a comprehensive social system.\(^{18}\) Militarization is all-encompassing and totalizing.

Grim as it may sound, this process does not happen passively to individuals or institutions. Certainly, there are instances where private businesses, for example, are commandeered for war production, but that is a slightly different phenomenon than what Enloe is describing and what interests me here. Militarization can only be sustainable if the nation-state garners consent for it; citizens and their organizations agree, at least on some level, to participate,\(^{19}\) just as others choose to dissent. Militarization appeals because most nation-states privilege martial forms of citizenship above all others. Even when military service does not translate into material rewards\(^{20}\) or privileges, it often brings with it recognition and social status conferred because the soldier or sailor seems to have a more intensified bond to the nation-state than his or her civilian fellow citizens. For those who do not enlist, militarization provides at least partial access to that feeling, as connecting to the nation-state feels especially imperative when it has been terrorized.

**Terror(ism)**

A comprehensive definition of ‘terror’ would be encyclopedic, particularly in light of what Žižek describes as the post-9/11 “metaphorical universalization of the signifier ‘terror,’”\(^{21}\) in which ‘terror’ comes to mean everything and nothing. So I describe it provisionally, with the recognition that ‘terror’ serves as a condensed placeholder for much larger, almost ineffable phenomena. As a political concept, terror is an inheritance from the French Revolution, and as such, terror is ironically coeval with values such as popular sovereignty, liberty, and democracy.\(^{22}\) As an experience, terror is akin to other, more common sensations. An extreme form of fear or fright, terror is more acute and intense than worry, more focused than panic,\(^{23}\) and less visceral than horror. It

---


\(^{19}\) Enloe, for her part, argues that militarization takes “decisions” (Maneuvers, 289).

\(^{20}\) This is increasingly the case in the U.S., as the norms of compensating military personnel with good wages and excellent benefits are now all but obsolete.

\(^{21}\) Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real!, 111.

\(^{22}\) Chaliand and Blin, “The Invention of Modern Terror,” 95.

\(^{23}\) Gibbs, “Panic!”.
is not necessarily contagious, but it is often communal. As Allen Feldman describes it, terror has “perceptual and somatic coordinates,” an assault that is physical and psychic at once. Terror is corporeal because it arises from perceived or actual threats to the body or the self, but it is more than a physiological response to something frightening. It entails a new and overwhelming kind of self-awareness, and this acuity coexists with the realization that others exist who can, and will, deliberately do us harm. ‘Terrorism’ is far more specific, although the term itself is freighted and fundamentally context-dependent. Terrorism is often defined negatively, by its not being an act of just war. The state-on-state violence of warfare often takes on a planned, predictable, bureaucratic character; terrorist acts are premeditated, certainly, but lack the elaborate institutionalization of standard warfare. Whether foreign or domestic, terrorism is boundless, unconstrained by treaties and ceasefires. It is terrifying precisely because it obeys a logic of nondiscrimination; it is the collapse of distinctions. Terrorism deliberately avoids differentiating between civilians and combatants and honors neither borders nor sovereignties. It is marked by indeterminacy, necessarily unexpected and unpredictable, though people can become conditioned to anticipate it. Despite these consistent characteristics, in practice ‘terrorism’ is entirely relative; one citizen’s terrorist is another’s hero, martyr, soldier, or salvation. There is no logical way to prove, definitively, whether or not a particular act qualifies as ‘terrorism,’ even though there is widespread agreement about what constitutes an act of terrorism (e.g. the deliberate targeting of civilians).

Terrorism, as an electrified claim about community and identity, has a fundamentally national character. State and national responses to terrorist acts alter the emotional and behavioral dimensions of citizenship. They demand more emphatic loyalties and they require the citizen to weigh out the degree and extent of her commitment to the national community and the state apparatus. The state, too, can make terror productive or utilize terror to do its work. This may be explicit, as when states

26 Žižek, introduction to Virtue and Terror (Revolution!), vii.
terrorize their own people or when the state internalizes terror in the name of emergency or crisis. Or it may be subtle; even the most enlightened governments have learned how to integrate terror by managing it, finding raisons d’être in the need to ensure ‘security.’

In the post-9/11 U.S., Brian Massumi detects this in the development of the terror alert scale, so that the citizenry became a “networked jumpiness,” having rapidly adjusted the state’s rubric of terror and prepared themselves to behave accordingly. Because “the hierarchies of American citizenship can be tracked according to the distribution and coding of sensations,” terror weighs and impinges differently on various citizens and subject-positions.

**Trauma**

Whereas experiences of terror are acute and bounded, trauma, its phenomenological kin, is more durable and abiding, having cultural, social, psychic, and bodily indications. Linguistically, there is often a slip in the usage of trauma, so that it is employed interchangeably as the initial, unsettling event (as in, ‘He suffered a trauma’) and as the cluster of symptoms that resulted from it (as in, ‘She is suffering from trauma.’) My own use of ‘trauma’ in this text refers more to the latter, the aftereffects of terrifying events. This formulation is particularly apt for exploring the affective dynamics of the GWOT, which I understand as consequences of or reactions to September 11, 2001.

Generally, I conceptualize trauma as a “psychocultural” phenomenon, a set of experiences that have individual and societal components. In this model, the physical and psychological idiosyncrasies of the traumatized person interact with her social, cultural, and political situation to determine the exact nature of her trauma. Moreover, my conceptualization of trauma is meant to be flexible enough to apply both specifically and in the aggregate, to individual citizens and the nation-states to which they belong, a less clinical and more cultural framework for interpreting trauma.

---

28 Dillon, “Governing Terror.”
30 Berlant, *The Queen of America*, 228.
The history of trauma as a type of illness begins with hysteria. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, mental illness was largely the purview of women, who were institutionalized for symptoms ranging from catatonia to mania, and classified as hysterics. The advent of rail transportation (and with it, the first modern, large-scale disasters) unmoored trauma somewhat from the body of the white, middle-class woman, as train crash survivors who showed no visible injuries from their ordeal nevertheless reported being troubled by pains and anxiety. Freud, for his part, surmised that ‘neuroses’ like hysteria stemmed from unresolved or unacknowledged traumas, an etiological paradigm that remains persuasive today. Beginning in World War I, trauma acquired a different gender, as men returned from the front suffering from ‘shell shock,’ a disorder with manifestations as diverse as those of hysteria. Some veterans would sit mute and unmoving for days, while others found themselves unable to rest at all, assailed day and night by recollections of what they had seen in the first large-scale war to be fought with modern military technology. Trauma retained its masculinity through the middle of the 20th century, and when PTSD was codified in 1980 in the DSM-III, its archetypal victim was the Vietnam veteran. Since then, the notion of trauma has become slightly more expansive (and has returned to include women, particularly survivors of sexual assault), but retains its association with warfare.

In clinical terms, the ‘trauma’ is the event, while PTSD describes its residue, the symptoms it causes. According to the DSM-IV, to be diagnosed with PTSD, the patient must first have been exposed to a stressor, having “experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others” and had a “response involv[ing] intense fear, helplessness, or horror.” If the patient meets these first necessary criteria, the clinician can diagnose PTSD if the patient reports symptoms from three “clusters”—intrusive recollection, avoidant/numbing, and hyper-arousal—to such a degree that functioning is impaired and for a duration of more than one month.

This temporal criterion distinguishes PTSD from the acute, immediate consequences of a traumatic event, while also signaling the residual, recurrent nature of

32 NCPTSD, n.p.
trauma. However, the ‘post-’ in PTSD can be somewhat misleading, especially in contexts where traumatic stress is ongoing\(^{33}\) rather than isolated or aberrant. Moreover, for people who are living with PTSD, the traumatic event is never quite past, but persistent. It is made continuously real, endless, through its sensory legacies, the images that intrude from inside and out.

In this way, terror, and the trauma that it might generate, is the hinge between the two vectors of my analysis: the political and the perceptual.

_Visual Culture_

Visual culture, broadly, is the full array of artifacts that comprise our visual landscape and the social and political rituals that govern how we, as seers, look at and consume them. Visual exchanges are co-constitutive connections between subjects and objects: someone seeing something, something being seen by someone. In the process, the viewer becomes more than she was before, now a subject and a spectator; being seen, the object of the look, whether human or not, is constituted culturally and epistemologically. Critical studies of visual culture are concerned with the politics (and, to a lesser extent, the ethics) of these exchanges, rather than simply the aesthetics of them, and analyze images and their audiences in social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Rituals of the visual forge communities as well as individual subjects. This is especially true for groups that regularly confront difficult scenes and images. Deborah E. McDowell’s scholarship on African-American practices of viewing dead bodies—what she describes as the work of ‘thanatography’—traces the intimate relation between social location, violence, and representation, and she demonstrates these haunted sights can strengthen familial and social linkages. Artistic renderings of trauma are often “transactive rather than communicative,”\(^{34}\) creating exchanges that are transformative rather than merely informational. In this way, the visual is not so much consumed as it is internalized.

The modern advent of technologies that radically expanded our visual capacities imbued ‘natural’ sight with a comparative quality, so that we weigh what we can see

\(^{33}\) Lemelson, Kirmayer, and Barad, “Trauma in Context,” 464.
\(^{34}\) J. Bennett, _Empathic Vision_, 7.
against our knowledge that there is more beyond our visual reach. Visual technologies determine how we apprehend and understand the world, and often modify our comprehension in unpredictable ways.\textsuperscript{35} When visual technologies are utilized as arms of power, the subjects thus constituted react to the “perceptual assault”\textsuperscript{36} through the elaboration of new senses and epistemologies.

In addition to being technologically specific, the visual is always historically situated; the GWOT, for example, is occurring within an explicitly postmodern visual frame, a time when most of the world is saturated with images. Every war has its own representational uniqueness,\textsuperscript{37} a mode and a medium that come to define it, and contemporary spectators encounter the assorted images broadcasted as synecdoches for the GWOT through a variety of new media formats, high-definition and ubiquitous. For those of us who will never fight this global war ourselves, the images it generates are as “virtual as the war itself,”\textsuperscript{38} the only things that give the GWOT form and content for those who are fundamentally removed from it.

\textit{Visuality}

‘Visuality’ is the intersection of sight and the social, the concept that accounts for the ways that our physical ability to see and our cognitive ability to process those sights are mediated by the cultural and political contexts in which we do our looking and become spectators. Spectatorship is more than passively seeing, which—as long as our eyes are functional and open—is an ongoing and largely automatic. It is more, too, than looking. It the act of watching through a gaze that is culturally conditioned to (not) see certain things, in a way that is intimately connected to meaning-making, to the process of interpreting both ourselves and the world around us. In \textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison}, Foucault suggests that different modes of the visual correspond to specific cultural and historical moments, and traces the way that institutions orchestrated public spectacles in order to regulate the behaviors of their subjects. Although my inquiry is far removed from the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century penal institutions with which Foucault was concerned, his

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\itemlator{35} Jay, “Photo-Unrealism.”
\itemlator{38} Baudrillard, “War Porn,” 87.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
model, which posits an intimate relation between subjectivity and spectatorship, enables my own project in a fundamental way.

War transforms visuality more than any other event, by supplying gruesome sights and spurring the nation-state to intensive production of narratives for how to understand them. Elaine Scarry argues that war changes the relationship between the body and the state, in large part by amplifying the demands that the state can place on the bodies of its citizens. War, as she depicts it, depends upon the willingness of citizens to sacrifice parts of their bodies that would not otherwise be negotiable. It also, I suggest, involves consenting to see things that we might not otherwise be willing to look at, and to interpret those scenes in previously unimaginable ways. This is especially true of the people actually doing the fighting, but also, to a lesser extent, for those of us who are witnessing it at home.

Visual Practices, Citizen-Subjectivity, and the Global War on Terror: Conceptual and Methodological Frameworks

To capture the relationships between these terms, I employ three conceptual frameworks throughout The Shadow Rules of Engagement: visual practices, citizen-subjectivity, and America’s Global War on Terror, and have developed specific methodologies for studying each. Ultimately, this dissertation is concerned with the interactions between these poles: how visual practices shape citizen-subjectivity, how the visual serves as a site of struggle in the GWOT, how the fight against terror has modified American citizenship, and, finally, how all three of these things work in concert to shape contemporary American life.

Visual Practices

Since Vietnam, the idea that visual culture matters in times of war has become a truism, conventional wisdom confirmed by the extraordinarily telegenic Gulf War. The GWOT is following in this pattern, and scholars, having learned the lessons of those two conflicts, have been furiously producing accounts of the importance of the visual for the GWOT. Texts like Nicholas Mirzoeff’s Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global

Visual Culture, which sets forth an expansive framework for understanding the role of the visual in contemporary geopolitics, and Andrew Hill’s *Re-Imagining the War on Terror: Seeing, Waiting, Travelling*, which is a psychoanalytical effort to theorize the visuality of the war through the lens of Lacan’s “scopic desire,”⁴⁰ along with a spate of other monographs and articles, assert the continued relevance of critical visual inquiry for understanding warfare.

My contribution is indebted to these predecessors but does not replicate their findings. Rather, *The Shadow Rules of Engagement* diverges from them in method, methodology, and argumentation, and my focus on visual practices is a substantive point of departure. Building on the literature that maintains that the visual is important in contemporary American warfare, I ask who, specifically, is using the visual, how, and for what purposes? To answer these questions, I focus on visual practices, the way that images are created, defined, and used by various parties both inside the government and out. This rich contextualization provides a complete and precise picture of the social, cultural, and political meanings of the visual in the GWOT and my objective is to provide an original and comprehensive account of the visual culture of the GWOT. My focus is less on reading or decoding representations than on considering their conditions of possibility and how they circulate, which yields an analysis that is more institutional than aesthetic. This work cannot take place without visual textual analysis, but those readings are supplementary rather than central to my argument.

This choice is deliberate, and also compelled by difficult visual circumstance. In its magnitude and yawning resistance to representation, terror confounds precisely those cultural reflexes that seek to portray it, but neither will it remain invisible. Some terrors, like those of lynching, can be imaged into a “leisure activity,”⁴¹ while those of slavery have relentless visual legacies.⁴² This suggests, then, the need to consider whose terror earns the lofty, respectful designation of ‘sublime’ and the hushed silence that follows, and whose becomes an instant visual commodity. Jill Bennett has argued that

---

⁴⁰ Hill, *Re-Imagining the War on Terror*, 3.
⁴² M. Wood, “Representing Pain and Describing Torture.”
“an imagery of trauma might not readily conform to the logic of representation,” while Baudrillard describes ultimate terror as “unrepresentable.” This does not mean, however, that terror has lacks a pattern, a mark, or a shape. Rather, that shape might be a shell, an outline, a reflection, a corona, or a negative of itself, less apparent in a visual text itself than in its social, cultural, and political functions in the terrorized American nation-state.

American citizens of the GWOT state are forced to make meaning of what they encounter visually and the state must also confront an unprecedented set of visual demands. To chart these relations, I have selected visual objects that are densely interactive, crowded with institutions and discourses, and so especially solicitous of response, and focus my analysis around the circumstances of visual production and consumption. More specifically, I am concerned with practices of the visual that define citizenship in a time of terror: what it is and who qualifies for it.

The GWOT has repeatedly occasioned deviations from the usual wartime dynamics between popular media and government, in which the relationship is either agonistic (where one seems to be foiling the aims of the other) or collaborative (where one works to further the agenda of the other, as when the media acts on the government’s behalf by producing and disseminating propaganda, or when the government seems to invite media attention, as in the practice of embedded reporting). My focus on visual practices reveals a set of dynamics that are far more complex and unpredictable, as these institutions join everyday citizens in efforts to carve out a visual landscape that promises relief from what everyone has seen.

Any effort to study visual culture and traumatic experience automatically places its author in a longstanding debate about whether or not trauma can be represented. Implicit in this question is a therapeutic assumption that representing trauma will have a purgative, healing effect. I suggest that the real concern in that query is not whether or not trauma can be represented but whether those representations can prompt some kind of recuperation, a psychic convalescence. For my part, I do not assume that ‘successful’

representation automatically entails healing. Rather, because trauma is marked by its durability and diversity of manifestations, I suggest that it may not. Moreover, in the specific case of the GWOT, and the confluence it creates between visuality, trauma, and terror, it is likely that visual representations of terror reinvigorate rather than dilute it.

Foundational theoretical work on the experience of trauma was based paradigmatically in the example of the Shoah and emphasized trauma’s fundamental unrepresentability. Different scholars made epistemological (the Holocaust cannot be represented because it is incomprehensible) or ontological (the Holocaust cannot be represented because it is a philosophical abyss for which there can be no appropriate symbol or iconography) claims in support of their arguments, but for awhile, it seemed self-evident that it was not only barbaric but impossible to write anything (poetry or otherwise) after Auschwitz. Although this is no longer the critical orthodoxy, repeated returns to the question of representing the Holocaust suggest to me that the typical framing of the positions in terms of absolutes (trauma is either wholly representable or it is not) and texts (they can either bespeak trauma or they cannot) is unsatisfactory.

So I have tried to frame my inquiry differently. The questions ordering this project necessitate a shift in attention from representations to practices, because of the nature of their objects. In The Shadow Rules of Engagement, I enact an alternative approach to these dilemmas, enabling a consideration of practices which might image terror imperfectly or incompletely and are not exclusively bound to specific texts. Rather than organizing this document by types of media or genres of visual artifacts, I have arranged my argument thematically. Formal similarities are far less significant than shared methods of coping with terror visually, which are what unify the practices that I document. Dividing this dissertation by practice allows me to demonstrate the scope and reach of every practice and their myriad institutional connections.

My method of studying visual practices reflects my understanding of visuality as a dynamic, mutually constitutive relationship between spectators and objects in specific cultural, political, and social contexts. The categories that I divide artifacts and practices into are found rather than contrived. During my half-decade of studying the visual culture of the GWOT, I have puzzled over its organization, and suspected that it was
more orderly than it might appear. Over time, I noticed patterns emerging (like the graphic protest discourse that I call ‘illuminating’ or the quantitative labor of the ‘diagnostic’), and sought to analyze them as they appeared in various places. What I began to see, eventually, was a collection of practices, all fundamentally concerned with the visual management of terror, but utilizing very different methods for doing so. These tactics are what distinguish them from one another. This automatically results in a division of cultural and political labor (only the state, for example, can do the juridical work I discuss in Chapter 5), which in turn determines who will be able to undertake each kind of practice, where, and with what resources.

Each chapter covers representative selections of cultural objects that exemplify the visual practices with which I am concerned. Throughout, I have focused on under-researched artifacts, providing, in many cases, the first sustained scholarly treatments of my objects of inquiry, a choice that, I hope, helps to document the pervasiveness of the visual practices I analyze here. Further, in an effort to account for the subtleties both of trauma and of terror, I have deliberately avoided their most spectacular textual representations and focused instead on modes of practice that are somewhat more equivocal in their promises of catharsis, reading around American terror’s most blinding afterimages in an effort to document what they occlude.

Citizen-Subjectivity

As a category of analysis, citizenship is primarily the purview of political science. Political science derives its ‘citizen’ from the rationale of economics, and takes the figure for granted; the citizen, in these terms, is an individual, who acts either rationally or irrationally, and participates politically in the nation, state, or nation-state, whether as a...

---

45 To make sure I was seeing things that were actually there, I worked this way rather than, for example, beginning with a list of practices that I hypothesized were operating and then seeking out artifacts that confirmed an initial hunch.
46 Another study whose interdisciplinary spirit is admirable (and similar in ambition to mine) is No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy, by Robert Hariman and John Louis. They argue that “[p]ublic identity is an event-driven process of performance and response, a process epitomized by its most prominent visual artifact, the iconic photograph” (136). Although my understanding of citizen-subjectivity seems to cohere with their description of public identity, we seek evidence in different artifacts, as I have tried precisely not to read the most iconic depictions of American terror.
voter, a constituent, or an office-holder. However, the status of ‘citizen’ is not as modular as this model implies, but rather deeply subjective. The citizen might participate in the everyday work of government, but every citizen does not do this—cannot do this—uniformly, for the citizen is also a subject in multiple, interlocking ways. First, s/he is a subject in the sense that s/he is under the control of a government. Second, upon entering into that relation, s/he becomes a subject in a Foucauldian sense, as “an effect and object of power.” Fourth. Thirdly, s/he is a subject insofar as s/he is constituted by systems of identification (gender, race, class, ability, sexuality). Finally, s/he is a subject in an essential way, a unique and sentient being.

In “The Subject and Power,” Michel Foucault describes power as an experiential phenomenon, not just a shapeless object. Power is both felt and enacted, and can only be “exercised” by and “over free subjects.” Subjects are necessarily actors, and power “acts upon their actions.” So it is with the nation-state and its citizens, who are both the agents and targets of its operations. Aihwa Ong has made explicit the connection between the nation-state and subject-formation, arguing that citizenship is a process of “subject-ification,” especially but not exclusively for immigrants. By regulating the lives of immigrants, the state operates through an insidious governmentality, while these new or partial citizens construct “ambivalent and contested relations” to the national authority, which play out in their everyday lives. Ong’s research suggests that citizenship is multilateral, an active site of negotiation between the nation-state and its subjects. Writing shortly after September 11th, 2001, Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai traced out state efforts to produce what they called ‘docile patriots,’ a populace made compliant by terror; my argument is slightly different, as I contend that GWOT American citizenship is about actively engaging terror and its consequences, making choices rather than merely following orders.

---

48 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 209.
49 Ibid., 220.
50 Ibid.
51 Ong, “Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making,” 263.
52 Ibid., 264.
53 Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag.”
The nation-state acts on its members as citizens and subjects simultaneously, the logistical work of government proceeding in tandem with the affective work of subject-formation. In the encounter with terror, we become “shattered subjects,” and so the nation-state’s job is one of reassembly, of making things functional—if not whole—again. The nation-state addresses practical matters, and its work might entail restrictions on mobility, revocation of privileges, or the circumscription of civil liberties, which the state administers in different ways for different of citizens. The government will likely make different demands of the citizen-subject than it did before terror, privileging either “weak citizenship” or widespread mobilization. There are less concrete (and less enforceable) imperatives as well, including norms dictating how citizens ought to think and feel about their nation-state and about their own status as subjects of it.

Theorizing citizenship a set of behaviors allows me to chart to account for these dynamics by rather than relying on irrelevant or misleading legal and political categories. If we consider citizenship to be a matter of practice rather than status, then we can account for the ambiguities and contradictions that inhere in national identification and the ways in which modes and patterns of belonging shift with time and circumstance. Judith Butler suggests that the subject is less a specific person than a “placeholder” in a structure, and my understanding of subjectivity is derived from hers; it is a relational model with a systemic orientation.

This is not to say that the individual disappears, or becomes irrelevant. Quite the opposite. Trauma has its primary meaning at the individual level, as a specific “constellation of life experiences,” and terror, too, signifies in this way. If a trauma is individualized, the afflicted person might be alienated by it; conversely, shared traumas can—but do not always—unite groups of people. In either case, however, trauma abruptly adjusts the subject’s perspective on her community, forcing an awareness of separateness or belonging. Terror does this work as well, interpellating the terrorized.

---

55 Retort, Afflicted Powers, 21.
56 Butler, The Psychic Life of Power, 10.
57 Erikson, “Notes on Trauma and Community,” 10.
58 Erikson, “Notes on Trauma and Community.”
subject into broader networks of anxiety and action. Rather, however, than posing this question ethnographically and investigating terror’s work on specific people, following Butler, I focus on terror’s consequences for American citizen-subjectivity more generally.

In this project, ‘Americanness’ is more of a condition than a stable identity, and is defined by engagement in certain acts of citizenship, many of which revolve around terror and are manifest visually: committing to memory the images of 9/11 and terror, consenting to or participating in various forms of surveillance, partaking of a racial logic that equates certain phenotypes with threat, and consuming officially vetted, mediated representations of the GWOT. Following Lauren Berlant’s argument in The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship, I attend to the ways that American identity is forged in “quotidian life” through various citizenship practices of representation and the production of visual culture. And so, I read my visual sites as places where this construction happens, attending to the relationships between visual practices and the accomplishment of citizenship.

While it constructs subjects internally, the nation and the state conspire to adjudicate subjectivities elsewhere as well. According to Judith Butler, this happens in part through the “differential allocation of grievability” and powerful nation-states have the capacity to determine what different lives and deaths are worth. In the GWOT, this has allocation has taken a variety of forms, including enforced disregard for non-American casualties, manipulation of the legal statuses of enemy combatants, and executive efforts to “exten[d] lawless power indefinitely.” By quantifying the amount of sadness appropriate for a casualty and forcing enemies outside the reach of the law and thus the status of the human, the nation and the state manage subjectivity within and beyond their boundaries, through discourse, policy, and culture alike.

America’s Global War on Terror

On September 18, 2001, Congress issued an Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) which licensed the President to take military action against those

59 Berlant, The Queen of America, 10.
60 Butler, Precarious Life, xiv.
61 Ibid., 63.
responsible for the attacks of September 11th. Public law 107-40, that short document on which so much depends, says nothing about a Global War on Terror. Initially, ‘Global War on Terror’ was a rhetorical frame, a way for President Bush to encapsulate his vision for combating violent extremism. But various forms of this phrase have found official purchase in the Department of Defense and the military, where the ‘War on Terror,’ the ‘Global War on Terror,’ and the ‘Global War on Terrorism’ became commonly accepted umbrella terms for the overarching mission of campaigns like Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).62

Although the GWOT is not limited to these battles, those are its most prominent and visible fights. As such, the GWOT is another in a long series of conflagrations between the U.S. and the Middle East, what Melani McAlister describes as a history of ‘epic encounters,’ junctures where the U.S. mythologizes a Middle Eastern country as a sacred land or an existential threat (or both), and shapes foreign policy and popular culture accordingly.63 This is a “global” campaign, surely, but most of the resources are directed toward a single region. The ‘global’ in Global War on Terror is more ideological than military, part of a larger and more nebulous desire to rid the world of all terrorists, everywhere.

The term ‘war’ itself is something of a misnomer: it is less a war than a loosely connected set of asymmetrical, prolonged, low-intensity conflicts. The singular noun form is also somewhat misleading. Although much popular and media discourse treats the War in Iraq and the GWOT as interchangeable, they are not. The GWOT is currently being fought on two main fronts: Iraq and Afghanistan. Increasingly, under President Obama, it is being fought, often covertly, in Pakistan, as the borders of Afghanistan no longer contain the fighting or the threat there. Iran is another focal point, if only for diplomatic saber-rattling. Likewise, North Korea. And although the GWOT is explicitly an American initiative, attacks in places like Bali (e.g. October 2002), England (e.g. July 2005), India (e.g. November 2008), and Israel resonate within it. On the American

62 Accordingly, military personnel who fought against terrorism after September 11th, 2001 can earn special Global War on Terrorism decorations; civilians who contribute to the cause might be awarded a different GWOT Civilian Service Medal.
63 McAlister, Epic Encounters.
homefront, things have been relatively quiet since 9/11, but as John Mueller observes, “terror continues to boom even as terrorism struggles,” and the fear of repeat terror attacks is an exaggeration of the actual, rather minimal risk of them.

Declaring a Global War on Terrorism is marginally more pragmatic than a Global War on Terror, but neither term is precise enough to be practical, and neither implied goal is meaningful enough to be measurable. And so what happens instead is the institutionalization of targeting, a relentless search for and desire to eradicate enemies. Since 2001, these targets have taken the shape of: countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, North Korea); individuals (Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Adam Yahiye Gadahn); groups (Al Qaeda, insurgents); political systems (Islamic theocracy, dictatorship, ‘failed states’); and structures (palaces, caves, a “spider hole”). Whether or not this campaign is truly intended to eradicate ‘terror’ as an affect (or to cultivate it, as others have cynically suggested) is not something I can say with any kind of certainty; this question, like many others, is—as they say—above my pay grade. In practice, though, the GWOT is far more specific and localized than its grandiose title might suggest, especially to the people who are tasked with actually fighting the Global War, and I study it accordingly.

As the U.S. makes the transition from one commander-in-chief to another (who has demonstrated a reluctance to refer to himself in those terms), a note on terminology is in order. “GWOT” is a term very much branded with the Bush legacy, and roughly two months into the new presidency, the Obama administration signaled the official end of the rhetorical era of the GWOT. Instead, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) stipulated that all references to the ongoing war should be classified as part of the ‘Overseas Contingency Operation’ (OCO), instead of the GWOT or the even more unsavory ‘Long War,’ which had been the preferred nomenclature of some in the

---

64 Mueller, Overblown, 173.
66 There was not unanimous approval of this term within the Bush administration. Near the end of his presidency, advisors began suggesting that the President adopt a different moniker the conflict; Bush insisted on retaining GWOT.
67 Kamen, “The End of the Global War on Terror.”
Pentagon. Of course, there are important differences between the Bush and Obama approaches to the task of fighting terror (the most important of these is Obama’s condemnation of torture and coercive interrogation), and I do not want to understate them. Still, I am not convinced that a change in terminology amounts to much more than that. There are substantive procedural continuities between the two administrations, a point to which I return throughout this dissertation, and there is also a conceptual one: both campaigns are designed to avenge September 11th, 2001 and prevent future attacks. Moreover, the new emphasis on a mobile, responsive military campaign is akin to what Samuel Weber describes as the Bush administration’s emphasis on ‘targets of opportunity,’ those unplanned and fortuitous turns of events that seem to mandate the instantaneous use of military force.

Ethics and Perception: On Writing The Shadow Rules of Engagement

‘Terror’ is amorphous and shape-shifting, and terrorists themselves have proven difficult both to distinguish and to defeat. Consequently, combat rules of engagement—those guidelines that commanders set forth for their troops about the use of force and the circumstances under which it is permissible—have been hard to design and easy to ignore. By specifying when a fighter can use lethal force, and against whom, rules of engagement fuse ethics and perception in a deceptively simple formula: if a soldier perceives danger, then s/he is justified in responding defensively. The paradigm is straightforward, but real-life variables make it messy. Is the soldier’s perception accurate? How imperiled must s/he be before engaging? What kind or amount of force is justifiable? These questions, whether they are asked before or after the proverbial shooting, are difficult to adjudicate in any conflict, and nearly impossible in the GWOT. Consequently, combat ROE must regularly be expanded and rewritten.

The War also proceeds according to an elaborate and flexible visual codification, which I understand as another compendium of rules of engagement governing how the

---

68 By institutionalizing contingency in this way, Obama has—unwittingly—confirmed Michael Dillon’s contention that states flourish by managing contingency, instantiating ‘security’ measures in the name of fighting terror (see “Governing Through Contingency”).

visual can and should be deployed against terror. They are ‘shadow’ rules in the sense that they are patterned on the set of ideologies, policies, and doctrines that govern the War. They are mutable but constant companions to their official kin, the outlines that appear on every surface as the bright light of terror flares behind the opaque mass of the nation-state. They are ephemeral, and unlike combat ROE, they will never be officially codified, but that does not make them any less real, or durable. They are organized and spectral. *The Shadow Rules of Engagement* takes as its focus five constellations of visual practice specific to the terrorized American nation: the *illuminating*, the *dimensional*, the *diagnostic*, the *temporal*, and the *juridical*.

I wrote in the Preface of the ethical difficulties that inhere in the work of researching a war, particularly an ongoing war, and there are methodological challenges as well. In writing about a situation that continues to develop, there is always the risk that my argument will become outdated or entirely obsolete, and I have made it my goal to keep this work as accurate and relevant as possible. One admittedly tempting way to ensure the ongoing applicability of an argument is to make it abstract by offering expansive, universal claims about the natures of things like visual pleasures or war. Another way is to allow the evolving conflict to hold my scholarship to account, and this is the route that I chose. In practical terms, it results in a document that has a lot of footnotes. But as a writer, this process of evaluating my theory empirically feels like the most responsible choice, the closest that I can come to producing ethical scholarship about very real suffering. My status as an American citizen-subject and, moreover, one who has been almost entirely insulated from that suffering, compels me to it.

For related reasons, I have chosen to focus this dissertation on the American experience of terror. Although I understand it as research on the *Global War on Terror*, this project, like the GWOT itself, is also refracted through an American frame. The visual practices I document here, the rules of engagement by which the American visual culture of terror abides, may not apply in other national contexts, because those communities will have different understandings of citizenship, different rituals of visuality, and different histories of terror that will condition their visual cultures. At some level, it is possible to generalize about the politics of such things. Most nation-
states make similar demands on their citizens and respond to terrorism in predictable ways, and these pressures inflect a society’s visual culture. The precise contours of these relationships, however, necessarily vary by place and time, a recognition that remains salient for me, even as I try to provide a broad theoretical framework for interpreting the connections between the nation-state, the citizen, and the visual in times of terror and war. My focus is on the contemporary American context, and I have tried to be precise about this in my writing and careful about qualifying the reach or applicability of my claims. This maneuver does not result from a latent belief in American exceptionalism, but rather a conviction that any nation-state ought to be studied first in its own terms.

Temporally, *The Shadow Rules of Engagement* bridges two disparate periods in American history, yoked together by an ongoing fight against terror. Prior to undertaking this dissertation, I had studied the visual culture of the GWOT for three years, almost since its beginning, and I began formal work on this project in the summer of 2007, during second term of George W. Bush’s presidency. I finished the dissertation in the spring of 2009, less than four months after the inauguration of Barack Obama. When Obama took office, I anticipated major revisions of this document, expecting that quite a lot would change. Upon rereading what I had already written, however, I realized that would not be the case. Where necessary, I have updated facts in accordance with new policies (especially in Chapter 5) and have tried, as I did during the last presidency, to keep this document current as possible with the unfolding of the GWOT. The vast majority of my argument, however, remained the same. Although the new administration has revised procedures, policies, and strategies, the broader framework of the GWOT remains intact, and its visual culture reflects this perseverance. The Global War on Terror, albeit by another name, continues apace.

**A Guide to the Shadow Rules: Organization of the Text**

The logic ordering the remainder of this text is conceptual, as each chapter is devoted to an analysis of a single practice. Although each practice gives way to the one that follows it, these practices do not necessarily function in a particular order. Rather, many of them share common impulses about the regulation of terror and citizens’
experiences of it, and when one fails to achieve its objective, another can be employed in its stead. All of the constellations of visual practice that I describe here are roughly coeval, with shared origins in the GWOT, and compatible. Although certain practices become more prominent at particular moments in the GWOT, they are not necessarily specific to them, and the chapters (and the artifacts around which they are constructed) move freely through the time and space of the GWOT, from 2001 to the present, and across multiple geographical locations and institutional contexts.

Chapter 1 is a consideration of perhaps the most common GWOT visual practice, the *illuminating*, the use by non-state actors of graphic images of the GWOT in a purportedly radical anti-war effort. I begin by historicizing these practices, tracing the role of the visual in American warfare from the Civil War to the GWOT, and then map out the relationship between citizenship and protest. With this framework in place, I analyze the illuminating work of a variety of different artifacts: meta-analyses of the media; GWOT casualty counts; Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for photos of dead soldiers’ homecomings; and academic reactions to the Abu Ghraib photos. Although all of these artifacts are shaped by common good intentions, I offer a critique of illuminating practices on tactical and, more importantly, ethical grounds, arguing that they reify the very scopic regimes they claim to undermine.

While illuminating practices rely on the power of the image to traumatize, *dimensional* practices—the focus of Chapter 2—presume that the controlled viewing of terror can be healing, and so flatten and transform it into two-dimensional artifacts designed to be therapeutic. Dimension, I argue, is crucial to our perceptions of warfare, and I contextualize dimensional practices first through the paradigm of Just War Theory (JWT); JWT’s preoccupation with ‘proportionality’ is related to the question of size, which is precisely where dimensional practices operate. But dimensional practices do not just shrink terror, they also flatten it out, and I elaborate a theoretical framework that locates them in terms of Flat Death (Barthes’ characterization of the experience of photography) and flat affect (a clinical term for an insufficient reaction to a powerful stimulus). These artifacts, which I situate on a continuum between these two types of flatness, have ancestors in a variety of other wartime visual practices, and I provide a
brief account of those before turning to my own objects of study. Chapter 2 culminates with analyses of the visual practices surrounding the plans and animations for the rebuilt World Trade Center site; ‘Virtual 9/11,’ a therapeutic virtual reality simulation designed to replicate the sensory experiences of the attacks on the World Trade Center; FlatWorld, a virtual reality architecture developed by the Institute for Creative Technologies and adapted to train GWOT troops; and, finally, the FlatDaddy project, which offers life-sized photographs of deployed American servicepeople to their families at home, all of which regulate citizenship by resizing terror.

Similarly, diagnostic practices quantify terror by rating its intensity, and they are the focus of Chapter 3. I first situate these practices clinically, comparing modern and postmodern approaches to the visual as a diagnostic technology. I then turn to the chapter’s first site of inquiry, the Motion Picture Association of America’s system for rating films that depict terror and torture, and provide a short background on the institution. From there, I move to the MPAA’s practices, analyzing their ‘ratings reasons’ for the full genre of rated GWOT films, juxtaposing their assessments with box office data to theorize about the commodity production of terror in American popular culture. As a point of comparison, I consider the rating reasons for the Saw movies, the quintessential ‘torture porn’ film franchise, juxtaposing the cinematic depiction of horror against the cinematic depiction of terror. The MPAA’s effort to limit the amount of terror that Americans have access to stands in contrast to the chapter’s final site of inquiry, the ICT’s “Virtual Iraq” simulation, an immersive virtual environment designed to recreate the unique traumas of returning OIF veterans so as to ameliorate their PTSD. These disparate sites, I argue, have in common a shared faith in the ability to quantify and calibrate terror, and to control the trauma that results from it.

Terror is difficult to manage in this way, however, and in Chapter 4, I consider more aggressive efforts to regulate its disorienting consequences through temporal interventions that force its stories into linear narratives to deprive it of momentum and power. Temporality, I argue, is essential to the nation-state and to its citizens, as well as being a constitutive element of the visual; wartime disturbs all of these familiar rhythms. Having traced the role of temporality in each of these contexts, I consider the visual
practices surrounding a variety of artifacts that seek to rewrite/re-right the time of American terror. These include the popular television series *24*; short reverse-motion sequences that rewind scenes of terror, an advertisement for the Showtime miniseries *Sleeper Cell* and the flipbook that concludes Jonathan Safran Foer’s novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close; The 9/11 Report* and its colorful doppelganger, *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*; and finally, the state and media discursive production about Osama bin Laden’s September 7, 2007 video, “The Solution,” in which the star, vexingly, looked younger than he did in 2004. I conclude the chapter by theorizing about the state’s motivation to restore temporal order and, moreover, the significance of its power over time.

My concern for state reactions to emergency presages the fifth and final chapter of this project, on *juridical* practices of the visual. This is the only chapter that has a singular focus, the October 2006 indictment of Adam Yahiye Gadahn for treason, a narrowness that imitates the intensity of the state’s wish to possess this one man, a California native who emigrated to Pakistan, joined Al Qaeda, and gained international recognition as their video spokesman. To fully illustrate the significance of this astonishing indictment, I provide a history of treason in the U.S.; to explain it, I provide a series of reasons that the United States Department of Justice might have chosen to charge him, someone who has never taken up arms against the U.S., with this capital offense. By comparing Gadahn’s case to other, similar ones (ranging from Sacco and Vanzetti to John Walker Lindh), I develop an account of the state’s concern for the visual while it is at war against terror. Gadahn has so far eluded American authorities, and continues to make videos, but I end the chapter by considering what might happen if he were actually apprehended, and use this hypothetical scenario to theorize about the place of the visual in the state of exception.

Following the circuitous (il)logic of trauma, this project ends where, in essence, it began, at the American airport. The Conclusion returns to the site where so much went wrong: the security checkpoint. As the locus of the most intense securitization after September 11th, this liminal space is now also the interchange where all five modes of terrorized visual practice converge: illuminating, dimensional, diagnostic, temporal, and
juridical. Terror is the structuring absence of this threshold, and the visual is its essential preoccupation. Yet it has also become a site where citizenship is staged, where inconvenience (or, at worst, violent intrusion) becomes a national ritual, a way of establishing membership in the terrorized American nation-state.
Chapter 1: Illuminating

On the bottom of my driver’s license, in between the barcode that promises to reveal that I am who I say I am, should anybody want to know, and the red heart that vouches for my willingness to share my organs, should I not need them anymore, there is a ‘B,’ which means that I am not allowed to drive without corrective lenses. Here, in this most banal of places, and for very good reason, the state and the visual intersect. The state has decided, based on my inability to decode a particular row of letters, that without alteration or prosthesis, I am unfit to partake of one of the privileges it has set out for me. I certainly do not want to quibble with this restriction, nor do I wish to belabor its importance, but at the most basic level, it is significant because it is an instance in which the state mandates sight, and that requirement is inscribed on the document that declares, more readily than anything else, my identity. The state often insists that it should be able to see me, and in certain circumstances, like this one, it requires that I should be able to see, a way of commanding and controlling my vision. That this example is so pedestrian should not overshadow the larger point, namely, that I, as a citizen, am situated at a nexus of the state and the visual in a relationship that is not merely unilateral or repressive.

Wars, of necessity, inspire states to be more secretive, and the American GWOT state is no exception to this pattern. Furthermore, states that are more “opaque” in their policies and procedures tend to require their citizens to become more “transparent”\(^1\) by submitting to surveillance and surrendering certain liberties. Hence, it is easy to overlook the obverse, that there are times when the state revels in brightness and courts visibility, and this is the oversight that is at the heart of *illuminating practices of the visual*. In their efforts to reveal the obscured ‘truth’ of the GWOT, these practices simplify complex

\(^1\) Gup, *Nation of Secrets*, 22.
relationships between the state, the citizen, and the visual, presuming that a sufficient amount of the third has the power to transform the relationship between the first and the second. According to this model, when provided with enough visual evidence of the state’s callous wrongdoing, the informed citizen will begin to hold his government to account, and demand an end to the War that has occasioned so many searing images. Despite the good intentions that motivate it, however, I argue that this work is generally misguided, because it misunderstands the affective, ethical, and political dynamics of the state-citizen-visual relationship.

To explore those associations more fully, I begin by historicizing illuminating visual practice as it has evolved through a range of American conflicts. By the time of the Vietnam War, illuminating visuality and anti-war activism were thoroughly enmeshed, and in the second section of the chapter, I use this commingling to frame issues of citizenship, protest, and visuality within the GWOT. Drawing from that background, I offer a working definition of contemporary American illuminating visual practice. This is the most diversified practice that I catalog in this dissertation; in terms of individuals and institutions involved, forms of visual media employed, and methods used, illumination has more adherents and avatars than any other mode of GWOT visual work. Accordingly, in this chapter, I analyze a widely-scattered assortment of sites that engage it: meta-analyses of the media; various war casualty counts; Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for photos of dead soldiers’ homecomings; and academic reactions to the Abu Ghraib photos. Despite variances in content and technique, however, all practices of illumination have shared suppositions about the natures of the state, the citizen, and the visual. They also have common goals about transforming each in turn, and I conclude with a consideration of the ethical flaws and tactical limitations of illuminating practices of the visual as anti-war strategies.

Such analysis enables me to trace practices of illumination and the spectatorship it invites, rather than analyzing particular visual cultural artifacts as representations. I focus on how different actors employ the visual in those instances, in light of Jay Ruby’s contention that in order to fully understand the visual, scholars cannot just look at
artifacts such as photographs, but must ask how people use them.² My objective in this exercise is not to turn the logic of the illuminating against its practitioners, to expose their failings in the hope of unearthing a perfect methodology for visual protest. Rather, my goal is to show that such a thing might be, by virtue of its nature and this particular visual context, unimaginable.

**Keeping Company with Death: A Brief History of Illuminating Visuality in Wartime**

Imaging conflict is the most critical visual task that nation-states confront in their missions to determine “who controls the story of war and the way it is told to others.”³ When the violence of war could only be represented iconically, as through drawing or painting, it was easy to glorify. Representations of Christ’s suffering provided the template for representing pain in Western art,⁴ and that set a precedent for aestheticizing battle. With the advent of photographic technology, the capacity to render war realistically was a convenient way to consolidate support for military campaigns.

Photography has always “kept company with death,”⁵ and in its earliest incarnations, this intimacy cultivated patriotic sentiment. Yet verisimilitude also became a liability, because realistic images of corpses convey the undeniable deadness of the bodies,⁶ and so unsanitized images of violent death had the potential to undermine the very missions they were intended to support. This alternate path led to the common presumption that the ‘real’ is the opposite of hegemony,⁷ that revelations of the truth constitute a serious threat to the dominant mechanisms that work to obscure them. Illuminating visuality takes this paradigm as its fundamental conceit, and responds by publicizing the suffering caused by the nation-state’s decision to enter into conflict.

By providing a record of it, photographic technology could capture and deny death at once,⁸ documenting mortality while providing the dead person eternal life

---

⁴ Bresheeth, “Projecting Trauma,” 58.
⁶ Ruby, *Secure the Shadow*, 75.
through the photograph. Although it was not the first war that the U.S. fought after the 1839 invention of this new medium, the Civil War occasioned a proliferation of this mode of representation, particularly in portraiture (as of soldiers) and landscape photography (as in battlefield scenes). These styles overlapped with another emerging “genre of memorial photography”: thanatography, or photography of the dead. Whether of individual corpses or of mass military casualties, thanatographic scenes could now be rendered with a new kind of accuracy.

However, this was not an uncomplicated, indexical relationship between event, image, and spectator, and ‘news’ photographs from this era were occasionally staged. Although the technology and the scenes it transmitted still seemed remarkable, it is likely that viewers were not shocked by what they saw, having already been conditioned by the genre to expect realistic scenes. On the whole, battlefield photographs did not provoke the grief that we might expect them to elicit, perhaps because death was not yet seen as something shameful and thus an inappropriate subject for photography. Because death itself was not shocking, photography illuminated war and the resultant deaths, but did not automatically galvanize opposition to it. Complex mores regarding the photography of death and national tragedy emerged during this period; for example, the corpse of President Lincoln was displayed spectacularly around the country, but photography of these scenes was prohibited. While the Civil War era provided photography with a new national purpose, this effort at regulation revealed an early disconnect between the interests of the state and those of the camera.

This fissure, however, would not be truly exploited in the U.S. until 100 years later. Neither the Spanish-American War nor World War I left behind familiar image archives. In WWI, this was due to restrictions that were technical (photographic technology was not yet widely adaptable to combat situations) and political (the era was

---

10 Bresheeth, “Projecting Trauma,” 61.
11 Nudelman, John Brown’s Body, 104.
12 Ibid., 105.
13 Norfleet, Looking at Death, 12.
14 Samuels, Facing America, 101.
marked by stringent policing of freedom of expression). Epistemological limits, too, circumscribed what could appear. WWI-era “[w]ar trauma,” Elizabeth Cowie notes, “was unrepresentable not only for the soldier, but also for conventional psychiatry.”

This was difficult for the patient, but perhaps convenient for the state, and with the exception of obscure texts like the 1917-1918 catalog *War Neuroses* and the 1924 tract *War Against War!*, visual realism remained a useful tool of statecraft. Opposition to this visual culture, if it came at all, was rooted in surrealism, which coalesced during that era. In 1929, Walter Benjamin called for a ‘profane illumination,’ the use of everyday means (drugs or otherwise) to fully comprehend the strangeness of everyday life, but illuminating visuality as Americans now know it had not yet appeared on a wide scale. This practice has another predecessor in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), which was the first war that received photographic coverage similar to what we see today. During this conflict, photographers like Robert Capa were able to capture battle as it happened, instead of just casualties after the fact. These dramatic, graphic images threatened to expose the lived experience of combat in addition to its casualties.

Coverage of World War II showcased atrocities committed by the enemy, juxtaposing them against the heroism of the Allies. Even the images that threatened to rupture this seamless alliance ultimately reinforced it. In 1943, *Life* magazine risked public censure by using as its cover photo an image of three dead American soldiers in the Pacific theater. Although the editors were apprehensive about publishing the image, it ultimately helped solidify public support for the mission, in part by militarizing the photographer and the spectator, who needed fortitude to take or to look at the images. In the appreciation of photographs like these, spectators proved their courage by looking and their patriotism by being moved but undeterred.

---

18 This text is easily accessible at *The Memory Hole* (http://www.thememoryhole.org/war/waw.htm). See also Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 14.
19 Benjamin, “Surrealism.”
21 Curbelo, “The Bodies of War.”
Such grit began to operate differently during Vietnam, the first widely controversial American war of the 20th-century. For states, manipulating information is a key element in the war-making process,\textsuperscript{22} and illuminating actions try to co-opt this strategy, providing visual information that contradicts the state’s promises. The ubiquity of press in Vietnam created an awful “tele-intimacy” during that war.\textsuperscript{23} Many advocates of illumination maintain that this delivery of grisly scenes to living rooms across America eroded popular support for the War and, in turn, the resolve of American leadership to continue fighting it, though the historical record is ambiguous on the question of whether or not graphic images won a meaningful number of converts to that side. Nonetheless, the belief that they did set a precedent for the oppositional use of images that has been reinvigorated by opponents of the GWOT.

During the first Gulf War, however, there was neither the time nor, perhaps, the desire, to take up this cause in any sustained way. On the whole, coverage of the conflict was “technofetishistic,”\textsuperscript{24} filtered through and laudatory of the military technologies that hybridized weaponry and visuality. For the U.S. and its allies, the war was brief and relatively bloodless, and prompted a shift from “military secrecy … to the overexposure of live broadcast,”\textsuperscript{25} a willingness to put warfare on display. The nature of the Gulf War and its weaponry meant that the media had an ample supply of footage that made war seem clean, precise, and victimless, and a concerted media management strategy on the part of the first Bush administration and its Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney, simply sequestered those images that could not be sanitized. Mandated press black-outs, regulations governing the mobility of journalists in the Middle East, and more subtle, targeted restrictions on story and image content (like the prohibition on photographing the coffins of American soldiers) combined with compelling images of American military prowess to make the Gulf War exceedingly telegenic.

If the Gulf War was defined by an absence of potentially unsettling images, the GWOT, at least in its initial stages, was marked by a profusion of them, largely as a result.

\textsuperscript{22} Virilio, \textit{City of Panic}, 33.
\textsuperscript{23} Sontag, \textit{Regarding the Pain of Others}, 21.
\textsuperscript{24} Robins, \textit{Into the Image}, 38.
\textsuperscript{25} Virilio, \textit{War and Cinema}, 66.
of the new policy of embedded reporting. Whereas Gulf War media policies sought to keep reporters away from the battlefield, the goal of embedded reporting was to put them there. Embedded reporting often creates agreement between government and media narratives about the war automatically, so the state does not need to rely on prohibitions or censorship to facilitate this consonance. The practice was reminiscent of WWII-era journalistic adventures built around physical and ideological intimacy between troops and reporters. In the GWOT, as in that war, the reliance of news sources on these reports from the field cultivated an unacknowledged and shared perspective on the sights of war among media personnel and their audiences.

Consequently, regardless of the ubiquity of the media in the early days of the War in Iraq, Americans’ vision was quite limited. Certain aspects of the conflict received far less attention than others. Because the situation was so dangerous, reporters had limited mobility in covering the war, and to stray from the protective escort of the military was a potentially life-threatening choice. Hence, there was often close correspondence between media and military assessments of the situation. However, following 2007 revisions to the embed policies, reporters have observed that although they are allowed to embed with units, the military prevents them from covering combat operations, and have dis-embedded photographers who release graphic images of casualties.

At the outset of the Iraq War, U.S. officials quietly covered the U.N.’s tapestry of Picasso’s Guernica in what seemed to be the ultimate dismissal of the (visual) realities of war. For concerned observers, this was the first provocation of many. Notwithstanding the potential for controversy, war coverage has repeatedly demonstrated that it is possible for devastation to be beautiful in photographs. Even when scenes from the GWOT were disturbing, they often retained their aesthetic appeal, and most news “photographs from Iraq are pleasing to the eye, given added saturation and reduced modulation to create

26 Mellencamp, “Fearful Thoughts,” 120.
28 One of the revisions required reporters to obtain written permission from wounded soldiers before publishing photographs of them. Obviously, if a soldier is seriously injured, this permission would be very difficult to obtain. See Kamber and Arango, “4,000 U.S. Deaths.”
29 Retort, Afflicted Powers, 16.
flatter colors, as in cartoons,” their strange loveliness competing with and sometimes overriding their constitutive ugliness. The goal of illuminating the ‘real’ nature and cost of war is to countermand this, a mission enabled by an unprecedented degree of access to technologies of image-production and channels for image-distribution.

**Who We Are and Who We Aspire to Be: Visuality, Protest, and Citizenship**

Relationships between protest and the visual can take multiple forms, with images serving alternately as the cause of protest (as when they incite people to dissent) or the effect of it (as when the government releases them in acquiescence to popular demand). In times of war, these various configurations of protest and visuality often coalesce around death, dying, and spectacular injury, but always belatedly so, because the image itself can only circulate after the grievous thing has occurred. It is the job of protest rhetoric to gloss over the futility of such displays by claiming that illumination is a worthwhile end in itself, or a means to some greater accomplishment.

As the official beginning of the GWOT, the retaliatory bombing of Afghanistan in October 2001 went largely unopposed. When the theater of operations expanded to Iraq, however, many on the Left ran out of patience and responded with an “unprecedented” worldwide effort to “stop a war before it began.” Pre-invasion anti-war protests were usually couched in the rhetoric of justice or non-violence, opposition to war in the abstract. Once the war actually began, protest realigned to orbit around victimized bodies of civilians and soldiers. Silvia Alvarez Curbelo characterizes corpses as “war’s most opaque symbol,” commanding and obscuring our vision at once. As the mute and undeniable truth of conflict, dead bodies both invite and refuse meaning-making, symbols that only become more evocative as they increase in inscrutability.

Practices of illumination are fundamentally concerned with the mortality of the body politic in both corporeal and symbolic terms. Illuminating practices that seek to expose the bodily cost of war invoke actual, biological death as a sign of political decay, using images to illustrate the severity and extent of the ruination of the state, a message

---

that is all the more poignant when the dead are the nation-state’s ‘best’: its young male soldiers. In light of all of this, protest starts to seem medicinal, and illumination looks like a way for citizens to defend their besieged body politic.

Broadly, citizenship is a “cluster of rights and obligations binding subjects of a state … to agents of that same state.” Generally, the choice to protest seems reasonable when the rights of citizenship seem to outweigh the obligations. Wars, when they come, shift this balance, always increasing the latter and often reducing the former. The ideal wartime citizen understands that it is her job to sacrifice on behalf of her nation-state, whether or not she approves of what it is doing. Government secrecy about the nature of its military operations enables Americans to feel distant from them and uncertain about the significance of those missions. In general, protest is easiest to legitimize in a war with low popularity and low immediate stakes. For this reason, illuminating practices are also selective; after all, the war with Afghanistan was itself a highly secretive operation, but was not a favored object of illumination. Without acknowledging the way that circumstances facilitate opposition, protest discourse emphasizes the difficulty of dissent, and deems protest patriotic by reinterpreting the obligation of the citizen to be that of saving the state from itself.

Such revision is enabled in the U.S. by a strong association between freedom of speech and American identity and a related emphasis on individuality. Fantasies of American citizenship are often built around a personal and “unmediated” relationship between the individual citizen and his nation-state. Hence, many American anti-war activists felt compelled to speak out against the GWOT, to give voice to their shame at and remorse over the possibility that an unjust war would be undertaken ‘in my name.’ For example, in their Foreword to *Administration of Torture: A Documentary Record*

---

34 Ibid., 852.
35 Gup, *Nation of Secrets*, 83.
37 Zelizer, “Death in Wartime,” 33-34.
38 Schauer, “The Exceptional First Amendment.”
From Washington to Abu Ghraib and Beyond, Romero and Shapiro make the following claims:

“The United States has both the oldest written constitution in the world and a long history of ignoring it in times of national crisis.”
“Amercians did not authorize any of these actions that were taken in our name.”
“This is not the way our democracy works.”
“It is not who we are or who we aspire to be.”

All of these things may be true, but they are also emblematic of the rhetorical ease with which such generous depictions of the American state, nation, and self can be leveraged in their own critique.

Moreover, they reveal an irony at the heart of so much protest against the state, namely that it would be unintelligible without citizenship. Although other critiques from other quarters might be irksome, in the U.S. protests only matter to the extent that they emanate from those whom the state recognizes as citizens. Rey Chow observes that for minority ‘ethnics,’ protest becomes a mode of articulating and a synonym for identity, and that model is instructive here, for it is precisely at the moment of protesting rejection of the state that American identity becomes salient. Just as subjects, in Foucault’s terms, can only be constituted by power, the protesting citizen, the hero of the anti-GWOT movement, can only exist to protest as part of a state system.

What makes this awkward position livable for protesters is the tendency of anti-GWOT protest discourse to sever the American nation from the American state, using the mythic greatness of the former to impugn the misdeeds of the latter. The schadenfreude that Martin Jay detected behind the Left’s critiques of the GWOT was enabled by precisely such a split, so that critics could revel in setbacks for the administration, even as they lamented the consequences for their fellow citizens. Wartime nationalism is a wish for an idealized nation; anti-GWOT protest emphasizes state interference in that vision and the ways that its ill-conceived policies besmirch the American name. All of those

42 Foucault, “The Subject and Power.”
43 Jay, Refractions of Violence, 185.
mangled bodies, imaged on placards, photocopied onto fliers, and circulating “like ghosts deprived of rest,” seem to demonstrate the state’s perversion of that otherwise wholesome fantasy.

For a position as blunt as that of the anti-war movement, nearly any body will do, as long as it can be portrayed as a sympathetic figure. The affect that an image provokes, more than the story it tells, is what makes it compelling, and illuminating practices of the visual exploit this cognitive link between sight and emotion. This platform, already fractured by its confused relationship to nation and state, is also balanced precariously upon fragile, damaged bodies. If the GWOT as a whole is marked by a “differential allocation of grievability,” in which some deaths seem more lamentable than others, the victims of war find a sad, belated form of redemption in their representation through illuminating practices: the more piteous the casualty, the more visible she will become.

Petrified Surfaces: Illuminating Practices of the Visual

For war images to do their illuminating work, they must be concentrated enough to provoke an intense reaction. In the visual landscape of the GWOT, they must match the capacity of terror to hijack “the image-machinery” in an instantaneous and devastating strike. Although this power often resides in photography, it is not exclusive to it. Nonetheless, the illuminating shot imitates the action of the photograph to capture an instant and transform it into something staggering. In Christian Metz’s terms, photography “is the effect … of a laser or lightning, a sudden and violen[t] illumination on a limited and petrified service,” and illuminating practices of visuality seek to mimic this operation.

Prolongation of the display dilutes the experience of illumination, and risks entrancing or desensitizing the viewer. Because “sight can be turned off (we have lids on

---

45 Massumi, Parables for the Virtual, 24.
46 Butler, Precarious Life, xiv.
47 Retort, Afflicted Powers, 28. With its economical combination of instantaneity and devastation, this is the sense in which 9/11 was, in Karlheinz Stockhausen’s controversial phrase, ‘the greatest work of art in the entire cosmos’ (as quoted in Hilferty).
our eyes, we do not have lids on our ears),”49 the image must assault us more quickly than we can defend ourselves. Unless the subject is independently radiant, photography, literally the practice of writing with light,50 can only do its work with a flash; illuminating practices of visuality aspire to the same efficiency and brightness. Here, however, Ulrich Baer’s evocative definition of the flash is telling in characterization of the paradox of sudden, overwhelming illumination:

An excess of light that promises total [but] illusory visibility, and that goes out at the same moment it goes on, the flash cannot be integrated into sensory experience but only registered, belatedly, incompletely, possibly as shock; too much light produces a loss of sight. The flash promises instant revelation of the truth. It occurs as an accident, unexpected and impossible to anticipate or parry, even by someone trained to resist it. The resurfacing of cognition that follows, however, may achieve only partial recovery: the flash disorients you, and the subsequent cognitive effort may not fully integrate the moment of disorientation into memory.51

Insofar as they replicate this sensation, illuminating practices of visuality encounter an aporia: this brilliance is both essential and crippling.

Urgency provides the momentum that illuminating practices of visuality need to overcome this conundrum. Their objective is to use visual proof of state grotesquerie as an antidote to that very thing, in the hope that these sights will spark the opposition necessary to undo it. When David Campbell reflected on the proliferation of analyses of 9/11 by arguing that “little if any of this discourse has been illuminating,”52 he meant that none of them provided an assessment of the situation that was accurate and incisive enough to be translated into an effective response; the work of illumination is, of necessity, a deeply teleological undertaking. Without their expressed revolutionary purpose, illuminating displays would seem unforgivably prurient. In order to distinguish illuminated looking from idle spectatorship (and, of course, so that practitioners might

49 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 118.
50 Batchen, Burning with Desire, 101.
51 Baer, Spectral Evidence, 34.
52 Campbell, “Time is Broken,” para. 4.
distinguish themselves from mere voyeurs), it must claim a goal beyond simple visual consumption.

In calling this work ‘illuminating,’ I have deliberately chosen a term that is lofty, with its air of divinity and the sublime. Illuminating work is more than launching an exposé or practicing simple gotcha journalism. It is purposefully moralistic, and intended to be a destabilizing, radical translation of visual truth into anti-war action. Practitioners of illumination intend to overwhelm their spectators, but the goal is not simply to enrapture but to inspire them.

Like all of the practices that I catalog in *The Shadow Rules of Engagement*, illuminating engagements with the visual flirt with terror. Unlike their counterparts, most of which involve coping with it, illuminating practices of the visual seek to goad American citizens (and perhaps their Coalition allies) out of their “catatonic rigidity, their intellectual and emotional coldness”53 and into action. In order for illumination to work, though, it must shock without awing, because it would be useless if spectators were merely dumbfounded by the scenes they confronted. In this way, illumination works best if it utilizes images that are not entirely unfamiliar (which would threaten to immobilize) but still ostensibly astounding, the articulated purpose of the display working to keep it from seeming unnecessary or gratuitous. Thus, illuminators circulate images we have all seen before, mining them again and again.

Terror is, in part, an epistemological affront, an attack that creates new and horrifying kinds of knowledge. Illuminating practices of the visual revel in this creation, and presume—without a trace of Foucauldian irony—that knowledge, wielded properly, is power. The precise contours of the knowledge-power relationship are variable by context, and I need to underscore that my description, analysis, and critique of illuminating practices of visuality are specific to the context of this nation-state and this war. There is an element of historical specificity as well, as many of the illuminating practices I document here were (and remain) motivated by a desire to ‘expose’ or countermand the wartime secrecy of the Bush administration. The Obama administration has successfully represented itself as more transparent than its predecessor, and the

53 Subirats, “Totalitarian Lust,” 182.
specifics of illuminating work during this presidency may be different than those of the practice under the previous one, even if the basic equation will likely remain the same.

Still, I want to clarify that the framework of my argument may or may not be translatable onto other circumstances. For example, although illuminating practices of the visual share similar documentary impulses with projects like *Without Sanctuary*, they engage citizenship, subjectivity, and protest in substantively different ways. Likewise, the nexus of citizenship, images and resistance has different contours outside of the United States, whose oppositional cultures are shaped within a polis defined by a uniquely fraught nexus between speech and citizenship.\(^{54}\) Hence, I do not wish to collapse all efforts to display suppressed images (e.g. that of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*) into the same category, because I believe that it is possible, in those circumstances, to document the invisible without crudely illuminating it.

In her discussion of ‘critical carceral visualities,’ Ruby C. Tapia considers the dearth of images of incarcerated women, a lack that mirrors the general invisibility of prisons (and their prisoners) in the U.S. However, in confronting this absence, Tapia observes that “[w]hat to lament … is not entirely clear.”\(^{55}\) This uncertainty suggests that the best mode of redress for this erasure is not the simple proliferation of images, but reparation of the violence done by keeping these women out of sight, coupled with a careful accounting of what can/not be represented within the current paradigms for creating and understanding images. GWOT illuminations, however, rarely reflect such nuance, wielding the visual as a provocation and a reminder of all the things that Americans are, supposedly, entitled to see.

Like all visual practices, the American work of illumination has particular subjects and objects. Although any non-government actor could, technically, partake in illuminating visuality, not every institution pursues it with the same voracity. These images are intended for any audiences that might have a stake in ending the war. Whereas state-sanctioned images of conflict are meant to entice viewers into the state-sanctioned view of things, illuminating images are deployed to interpellate spectators into

\(^{54}\) Schauer, “The Exceptional First Amendment.”
\(^{55}\) Tapia, “Profane Illuminations,” 686.
an oppositional community by the sheer force of their affective power. In the shock that comes from the sensory encounter with horrible things, viewers are “simultaneously hypersensitized and anesthetized.” Regimes of illumination disregard the possibility that these affective extremes can coexist in the same visual moment, and in their reliance on the first condition, advocates and practitioners dismiss the second as ethically deficient. If the sight of terror undoes us, illuminating practices of visuality are meant to reassemble us into militancy, eager to avenge the wrongs that we have seen.

The diverse set of actors who undertake this work of illumination have that in common. They share the assumption, prevalent on the Left, that “knowledge of truth leads to moral actions” and share common visual “patterns of fascination.” These generally orbit around what Taussig has described as the state’s “death-work,” the assorted rules and rituals that the state has devised for making death manageable. The goal of illumination is to show the suffering that results from state actions and state indifference, so that the ethical viewer will want to struggle against it. In this logic, that which is illuminated should shock the spectator out of what Eisenman calls “moral blindness,” the ability to ignore such wrongs as the torture at Abu Ghraib. Presumably, this awakening leads to ‘moral sightedness,’ and illuminating practices of visuality strive guilelessly toward such a figment. Even if the display of such images achieves its emotional goals, there remains the possibility that no matter how well-intentioned they are, “certain uses of the image will deflect rather than illuminate the politics of an event.” This notion is one that opponents of the GWOT, emphatically unflinching in their confrontation with difficult visual facts, seem unwilling to countenance.

Light at the End of the Newshole: The Project for Excellence in Journalism

Many illuminating practices fault the media for failing to hold the government to account, and criticize the quality, quantity, or content of GWOT coverage. The most

---

57 Colla, “Power, Knowledge, and Investment,” 66. I should note that Colla makes this claim earnestly, as an endorsement of those on the Left who have gambled on such a claim.
59 Taussig, The Magic of the State, 5.
60 Eisenman, The Abu Ghraib Effect, 9
61 George and Shoos, “Deflecting the Political,” 589.
typical critique of press failure to illuminate comes from anti-war groups, but they do not have a monopoly on such complaints; proponents of the war have repeatedly claimed that the media’s representation of the situation in Iraq is too negative.\textsuperscript{62} From the vantages of either side, both claims are correct, but such a relativistic position is unhelpful in a context where everyone is competing for claims to the ultimate truth about the war.

Enter the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), a “non-partisan, non-ideological research institute that studies the press,” one of a collection of ‘fact tanks’ funded by the Pew Charitable Trust. In essence, the PEJ reports on reporting, relying largely on quantitative methods to see what the media is doing and, by extension, what kind of information the public is getting. Committed as they are to objectivity, the PEJ tends not to publish reports suggesting that the media has failed in its duty, but rather leave the statistical truth to speak for itself. Emphasis on documentation and revelation relies on an illuminating logic, assessing the media’s willingness to report on the often violent realities of the GWOT. The PEJ is prolific, issuing short studies on various media topics almost daily and publishing more detailed research on a regular basis. These reports gauge how, and how well, the media is informing its audiences of developments in the war, turning an illuminating lens on the illuminators themselves.

Michael Dimock’s April 5, 2007 write-up, “Who Do You Trust for War News?” presents data on the limited confidence that the American public has in the information they receive. He reports that people have very little faith in the reports issued by the media and the military, and that they trust the press even less than the services. These trends, Dimock observes, “mirror” perceptions about how well the war is going. Polling undertaken in 2003 documented a stark partisan difference, with Republicans indicating a far greater likeliness to trust both of these outlets, but this gap has continued to narrow, as members of both parties become more uniformly skeptical. Significant portions of those queried in 2007 indicated that they have “no confidence” at all in either source (21% for the military, 27% for the media). Among Dimock’s target audience of journalists, this revelation should provoke some self-examination, but more generally, this is the epistemological crisis out of which the appeal of illumination grows.

\textsuperscript{62} Project for Excellence in Journalism, “The Portrait from Iraq,” 9.
Near the end of 2007, the PEJ issued a 25-page meta-analysis entitled "The Portrait from Iraq: How the Press Has Covered Events on the Ground," which provided an optimistic counterpoint to the gloominess of the findings that Dimock reported. Despite late declines in violence, 2007 was the deadliest year of the War for American forces, and the report stated that "journalists have responded to the challenge by keeping many of the accounts of these attacks brief and limiting the amount of interpretation they contain." So, while 47% of the sampled news stories centered on violence, these items occupied only 27% of the newshole (the time and space available for reporting), which indicates that they tended toward brevity. By refusing to take a side, the PEJ does not indicate whether this is a positive or negative attribute, though they later comment that the overall tenor of the reports was one of "instability and attacks" without any analysis, which suggests that the study’s authors might prefer some contextualization. In the end, the report does seem to imply that journalists are doing their best under difficult circumstances, quoting an interview with an unnamed magazine editor who asserted that the press is doing a good job "'bearing witness'" in Iraq, by "'being in places that few other Western eyes saw.'" There was one finding, however, about which there could be no uncertainty: improved public opinion about the war "coincides closely" with decreased coverage of violence, a trend that seems to validate the illuminating hunch.

For Mark Jurkowitz, author of another PEJ study about "Why News of Iraq Didn’t Surge," May 24, 2007 marked a "turning point in media coverage of the third-longest war in U.S. history." Jurkowitz argues that on that day, when Congress voted to fund the War without requiring any timetables for troop withdrawal, media coverage of the war began to decline, dropping 50% by the fifth anniversary of the war on March 19, 2008. The "political fight" over the war had fizzled out, the media was distracted by the emerging "mega-story" of the 2008 presidential campaign, and the surge-related

63 Ibid., 1.
64 Ibid., 3.
65 Op. cit., 10. This is one point where illuminating practices and investigative journalism align, but the latter, bound to avoid editorializing, privileges information for information’s sake.
reduction in violence\textsuperscript{68} meant that there was little else to say. In what he called another “eye-catching statistic,”\textsuperscript{69} election coverage surpassed that of the War by a margin of 10:1, while Jurkowitz was surprised that the War had figured so little in the campaign.\textsuperscript{70} Despite a brief uptick in early autumn, attributable to coverage of the surge, the overall trend of Jurkowitz’s graph is downward, indicating a decreasing percentage of the newshole occupied by Iraq coverage. This illustrates his subtle assertion that by weaning Americans off a steady diet of disaster, the media distracted them from “a five-year-old war with no quick resolution in sight.”\textsuperscript{71}

Unlike the news stories that they study, documents from the PEJ rarely include images, relying instead on charts and graphs to convey information. This is a different use of the visual, but one that rests equally heavily upon the assumptions that inform so many oppositional deployments of images in the GWOT. Diagrams present information in digest form, condensing it to make it readily consumable and compelling, trading on the shock that comes from a sudden and revelatory encounter. Sharply sloping lines and stark numerical differences alert readers that something is going on, that there is something they should know. PEJ reports cushion this awareness with detailed explanations and the cool assurance of scientistic methods, but their figures are nevertheless meant to be provocative.

Freedom of the press, taken as a right, is underscored in these papers as an obligation. The job of the reporter is to present a view of the conflict that is untainted by affiliation with the military or the government, and steady and proportional in its gaze. In the PEJ’s portrayal, the media is accountable for the task of informing the public, who seem only to watch what they are given, either believing it or not. It is the job of the media, these reports imply, to earn and then retain the credulity of their audiences, on the assumption that ‘excellence’ in journalism results in quality of citizenship, which is tacitly defined as awareness of current events.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., para. 7.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., para. 4.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., para. 11.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, para. 11.
The citizen, however, appears here only in the aggregate, present merely as a datum in the opinion poll, part of a mass of news consumers who are constantly calibrating whether or not they can stomach the sight of more violence. The opinion poll, often described as the ultimate manifestation of weak citizenship is, for Rancière, the favored instrument of “postdemocracy.” He argues that this incessant polling about matters large and small is a way of obscuring both the real sentiment of the people and the true operation of the state.\(^{72}\) In querying a random sample of Americans about their perceptions of the trustworthiness of various sources of information, citizenship is a reduced to a yes-no question about tolerance for (the awareness of) American deaths. No doubt the PEJ surveys are well-designed and offer valid assessments of the trends they document, but they are premised on the illuminating simplification that elides citizenship and knowledge, assuming that more of one entails more of the other.

Since the Korean War, there has been a verifiable inverse relationship between the number of American deaths and the degree of popular support for the war that killed them.\(^{73}\) Patriotism has, in turn, become less a matter of supporting the state than of supporting the troops it commands. Recently, the tightrope position of supporting the troops while critiquing the state has taken on the valence of being a progressive (if not radical) response to the war. But this compromise does nothing to dissociate citizenship from violence, which remains the true litmus test of loyalty. In light of this, media reluctance to report on the troops starts to seem like a much more egregious failure.

Illuminating practices are endlessly regenerating. They are based on a circular logic in which the only possible remedy for the deficiencies documented in these reports is more information, a saturation of truth. Those who advocate for more media ignore the possibility that “dark stories of terror and bloodshed are memorized only to be remembered/forgotten,”\(^ {74}\) that we can recall images or snippets without awareness of

---

\(^{72}\) Rancière, *Disagreement*, 103.

\(^{73}\) Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” 44. Alternately, Lawrence Kaplan argued in *The New Republic* that the data actually reflects a higher tolerance for American casualties than some would have us believe. He suggests that politicians have become too sensitive to the vicissitudes of public opinion in deciding foreign policy, and that as a consequence, policy elites are more risk-averse than the constituents that they claim to represent.

\(^{74}\) van der Veer, “The Victim’s Tale,” 188.
why, how, or to whom they matter. No matter: the only thing to do is to insulate the newshole with more information, to paper the walls with clippings and photos.

**We Do Body Counts: Casualties, Citizenship, and the Illuminated Dead**

Perhaps the information that has been most conspicuously absent from the American newshole is that related to casualties of the GWOT, and the media and government are equally, though differently, responsible for this lacuna. For the government, confrontations with death are a bureaucratic issue\(^{75}\) and a public relations challenge. The media, simultaneously accountable to its audience and to its advertisers, must make difficult calculations between the values of good news stories and the characteristics of marketable ones, in light of the plain fact that an image of “a dead body is never a good adjacency for ads.”\(^{76}\) Given these practical considerations, and the simple truth that “military deaths are more complicated than civilian deaths,”\(^{77}\) it seems unlikely that there is any real conspiracy of silence here.

Since the beginning of the GWOT, the Pentagon has generally sought to minimize publicity about American casualties, but even under the Bush administration, it certainly did not keep them a secret. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) casualty figures are easily available and updated almost daily on the DoD internet casualty status report. Information about enemy dead has been more tightly controlled by official channels, and, unlike in previous conflicts, the military has been reluctant to announce insurgent fatalities because they are wary of the propaganda value that such numbers can have for those groups.\(^{78}\) Civilian casualties have received even less government attention, and only scattershot (usually human-interest) mentions in the media. It is, therefore, no surprise that these suppressed, obscure figures are the target of aggressive illumination campaigns.

---

\(^{75}\) Capdevila and Voldman’s *War Dead* provides a detailed overview of the chillingly methodical way that governments in Western nations have handled their war dead.  
\(^{76}\) Carr, “Show Me the Bodies,” para. 7.  
\(^{77}\) Sledge, *Soldier Dead*, 273.  
\(^{78}\) Munro, “Counting Corpses.”
Much of the American polity entertains “outsized expectations regarding the efficacy of force”\textsuperscript{79} and a short-term, highly selective memory of war, and as a result, it often greets the announcement of war casualties with surprise. It was not until the Civil War, as Drew Gilpin Faust notes, that the American government had to deal with death in any significant way, a large-scale mortality that posed logistical, theological, and epistemological problems. Prior to the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, most Americans, even those who did have access to education, were basically “innumerate,”\textsuperscript{80} so responding to tragedy with counting would not necessarily have been an intuitive thing to do. Rather, the practice of counting the dead and compiling aggregate data about them evolved as a way to help comprehend the scale of the loss and manage its consequences.

In the GWOT, successful illumination requires astonishment, and casualty counts facilitate it by distilling long lists of dead into tiny, needlelike figures that quickly infuse a massive quantity of death into a curious populace. The body of the abstract casualty of war has become valuable capital in the effort to accumulate as much information as possible. In her lecture on “Frames of War,” derived from a forthcoming book by the same title, Judith Butler argues that there is no automatic link between a death that is counted and a life that \textit{counts}, and asks whether ‘numerical recognition’ (one’s presence in a count of casualties) is adequate, ethically and politically. Body count websites answer those questions in the affirmative, emphatically.

In photographing torture, there is “a politics and logic of forcing a body under duress to surrender meaning,”\textsuperscript{81} to speak of and through its damaged corporeality. Unlike illuminated photographs of torture, to which I turn later in this chapter, casualty counts rarely include graphic images, but they perform the same extractive work, cajoling the dead—reduced inscrutably to names or numbers—to tell a story about the horrors of warfare. As in the PEJ reports, the logic of illumination is subtle, but essential. Casualty counts abide by a simple equation of numbers with truth, which acquires a moral value, and should, therefore, impel action.

\textsuperscript{79} Bacevich, \textit{The New American Militarism}, 2.
\textsuperscript{80} Faust, \textit{This Republic of Suffering}, 250.
\textsuperscript{81} Grojeda, “Picturing Torture,” 208.
Driven by the urgency of such a cause, venues for this calculation often become sanctimonious about their figures and the care with which they were collected. However, iCasualties.org, the website for the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, is subtle in comparison to its peers. Here, the interested surfer finds a meticulous accounting of all Coalition casualties, as well as sundry ‘Other Deaths’ like those of contractors, journalists, and Iraqis (though the website repeatedly disclaims those figures, reminding visitors that it is “not a definitive count of Iraqi deaths”). Much of the website is occupied by numbers, charts, and graphs, various methods for calculating and plotting casualty information. With the exception of the newswire on the right side of the main page, there is very little narrative here: if the numbers speak at all, they do so for themselves. The most prominent charts tally Coalition deaths, but the site includes figures on American wounded and a small table for the ‘Missing or Captured’; appropriately enough, on my last visit to the site, the links associated with those names led to bad URLs. Overall, the easily navigable site provides efficient, orderly accounting—the opposite of bureaucracy—and is the most comprehensive public clearinghouse for this information. Because it is a user-friendly portal for information that is often otherwise atomized or obscure, iCasualties has become a widely respected source for curious laypeople and journalists alike, a process of legitimation aided by the site’s lack of polemic or jingoism. The plain objectivity of the facts apparently trumps what would otherwise be a major liability in the realm of internet sourcing: the fact that the site offers no information about who authors or updates it.\footnote{The only inkling of an agenda comes from the advertisement that invites visitors to support iCasualties by purchasing certain books on Amazon.com, including Jeremy Seabill’s \textit{Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army}; Stephen Kinzer’s \textit{Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change From Hawaii to Iraq}; and Vincent Bugliosi’s \textit{The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder}. However, iCasualties does not explicitly translate its figures into a moral critique.}

Although it does so without much fanfare, iCasualties.org focuses primarily on the deaths of American troops. Whether in subtle features (like the white background, blue charts, and maroon writing) or in clear disproportions of data, the inclined observer would be likely to presume that the site is an American project. Whereas deaths from other Coalition nations, far fewer in number, appear only as totals, each American fatality

\footnote{Wikipedia tells me that it is the project of Michael White, a software engineer from Georgia.}
is listed by name, and these are hyperlinked to the DoD reports confirming each one. Beyond indicating a national affiliation, the bias toward U.S. troops does not reveal much about the political position of the site, which could signify either way, because everyone wants to make clear their support for them.

Though the site is clearly oriented toward America, it also recognizes other casualties, and its version of citizenship is tepidly cosmopolitan, insofar as citizenship is defined as knowledge of death. Knowledge on iCasualties.org comes not in the form of images but again through numbers, graphs, and tables. The logic of illumination here is subtle and understated, and the sheer volume of information arrayed on the home page makes it difficult for any single number to stand out or to overwhelm. Because the site highlights the scale of suffering, rather than the intensity of it, the international element of its illuminating appeal has a very narrow chance for success, requiring readers to muster a great deal of emotion about a comparative handful of deaths, portrayed without sentiment, of people from other nations.

By comparison, the work of the Iraq Body Count (IBC), “The worldwide update on civilians killed in the Iraq War and occupation,” is quite unsubtle. Although the site offers graphs and narrative analytical pieces in addition to its infamous count, the tally of dead is clearly the centerpiece of the site, the source of its notoriety and its most heavily advertised product. The counter, positioned clearly in the middle of the home page, is an estimated range of Iraqi civilian deaths, compiled based on media, hospital, and morgue reports. Behind the numbers there are detailed lists of incidents and individuals (populated with information on the person’s date of death, name/identifier, age, sex, location, and occupation, if known), but the layout of the site, and its insistent repetition of the numbers, telescopes viewers’ attention to the calculation is its most prized visual artifact.

By the very act of compiling and disseminating this data, IBC has fashioned an oppositional discourse. The top of the page offers an epigraph from General Tommy Franks: “We don’t do body counts.” To that, the IBC rejoins: we do. The site is steeped in protest, implicit in the count and explicit in the narrative. To look, in this case, is to object. To be outraged, so much the better, and the IBC invites participation from
visitors, who are encouraged to contribute to their mission by providing sourced information that would verify a fatality; making a donating to help fund laborious information-gathering; or educating others by publicizing the work and findings of the IBC. In trade, the IBC makes an offer, inviting anyone interested to “exploit the full value of the data we provide.”

More earnestly than any other artifact I address in this chapter, the creators of IBC have made the case for illumination. Unlike iCasualties.org, where any motive beyond the informational one is only implied, the IBC site has outlined and elaborated its ‘Rationale.’ The first three axioms of the IBC are as follows:

“The human cost of war must be recorded.”
“Knowledge of war deaths must be available to all.”
“US and UK citizens bear particular responsibility for events in Iraq.”

And so, it follows that they should be the most heavily burdened by the tasks of collecting and knowing their costs (the site is maintained by volunteers from both nations). According to the IBC, the “common humanity” of Coalition citizens and Iraqi dead necessitates the gathering of “as much detail as possible about each death.” But without discounting this ostensibly noble archival effort, it seems to me that the sheer textiness of the IBC signals a doubt about its power; as Joshua Hirsch notes, when “images no longer traumatize, the text … must … work harder.”84 The IBC’s repeated assertions of the humanitarian importance of their work function as a bulwark against the indifference of spectators, who—conditioned to associate death with graphic images—might be skeptical of or unmoved by a number. There is a way in which the IBC functions as an apology, or a confession; the arduous task of disclosing becomes a form of punishment, and ultimately, exoneration for the crimes thus publicly avowed.

Visually, the IBC is stark, a background shaded in gunmetal grey and layered with grey and white textboxes; the only significant interruption comes from the red numbers, growing steadily beneath an image of a stealth bomber dropping ordnance upon them. However, supportive guests are encouraged to download a miniature IBC counter

---

for their personal webpages, and for this, they can choose from two colors, the monochromatic grey scheme or the cynical red, white, and blue. Otherwise, the spectacle here comes from numbers rather than pictures; the professed belief of the IBC is that systematically collected “information empowers people to act,” an intellectual rather than an emotional inspiration. In order for such appeal to work, the data must be as accurate and precise as possible. It is on these grounds that the IBC volunteers critique another, more dramatic work of illumination aimed at solving the same problem.

Largely uncontested until the autumn of 2006, IBC had been the preeminent source for independent data on OIF Iraqi casualties. That November, the British medical journal *The Lancet* published a controversial and headline-grabbing estimate of excess mortality resulting from the GWOT in Iraq, “Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey,” funded in part by MIT. These results, based on statistical models extrapolated from household interviews, projected a range of casualties whose mean was, at the time, nearly ten times greater than the figures published by IBC: 654,695 excess deaths, from a range of 392,979-942,636. The study’s authors argued that their method, which combined surveys with a relatively new form of statistical analysis, would necessarily yield much more information than “passive surveillance,” like that of the IBC and humanitarian organizations. Emphasizing the sophistication of their research design, the authors asserted that their estimate of excess mortality was the more accurate one, and noted that the information they elicited had a 92% confirmation rate.

While American officials quietly downplayed the results and the media seized on them, the IBC returned fire in a short-lived turf war over who knew more about Iraqi deaths. It responded with methodological salvos, arguing that their actual count was inherently more accurate than an estimate and critiquing the researchers’ decision to commingle civilian and combatant casualties. Such separation is essential for projects like that of the IBC, because it helps to preserve the purity and, hence, the

---

85 The range of casualty estimates in this case is actually a more precise way of keeping track, because it reflects the complex nature of this kind of information-gathering, which a single figure would obscure.

sentimental force of the figure of the civilian casualty, who is central to illuminating work. Despite this difference of technical opinion, both sides clearly agree that any civilian casualty of warfare is untenable. What is significant here is the way that the irreversible deadness of these people nevertheless made it possible for them to become data, points of scholarly disagreement and objects of sympathetic concern.

The study by Burnham, Latta, Doocy, and Roberts appeared in an internationally respected journal, which has a far more staid reputation (and perhaps readership) than the IBC, and the authors couched their protests in strictly humanitarian terms. They argued that civilian deaths on this scale constituted a humanitarian emergency, and called for more investigation to verify or disconfirm the findings, as well as interim intervention into the unfolding disaster. They invited readers to engage less as citizens than as medical professionals, bound by duty to save lives.

The possibility that nearly 1,000,000 extra people had died in what was then a three-year war was staggering enough, but that shock was surely compounded by the nature of the forum, with the usually benign trappings of the scientific journal article transformed into political fodder. Detailed figures and tables, bar graphs to show comparisons, lines plotted to demonstrate trends, and a map filled in various shades of red and pink to show the variable excess mortality rates by province: these illuminate through their epistemological weight and their credibility.

None of the casualty counts I have analyzed reinforce their messages with graphic images. In a way, this is a laudable strategy, as it avoids reproducing the spectacular scenes of carnage to which I turn below, where the victims gain notoriety without substantive recognition, because of the indifferent scopic regimes in which their images are consumed. Elaine Scarry has argued that “[t]he difficulty of imagining others is both the cause of, and the problem displayed by, the act of injuring,”87 and in a war where images matter so much, it is worth considering the consequences of such blankness. Unintentionally, it functions as a form of erasure that underscores the ghostliness of the

87 Scarry, “The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons,” 281.
casualties themselves, who haunt the counts in barely human form, as “what is not seen, but also powerfully real.”

Illuminating practices are riddled with aporiae, intractable dilemmas, and unbreakable cycles. In policy terms, the major problem is that the only way to prevent (civilian and military) deaths resulting from the American occupation is to end it immediately, but such a withdrawal would inevitably result in more Iraqi deaths. A similarly insoluble problem structures its visual ream, for no matter how they are imaged, there is a way in which Iraqi casualties of this war cannot appear. That may be because of the “unrepresentable … is not the horrific event but the subjects’ relation to that event,” the messy and myriad connections that the practitioner of illumination has to the bodies upon which she depends for something to do, and for absolution.

“Now We Are”: The Casket, the Camera, and the Citizen
Unlike their Iraqi counterparts, who struggle to matter at all, American casualties of the war seem to signify everything to the American public thoroughly enamored of its military, and this section focuses on those comparatively hypervisual casualties. In America as in any other nation-state, the “[n]ational dead are never killers,” just heroes. Because Americans tend to romanticize combat, once soldiers, sailors, and Marines are deployed, civilians often have a hard time imagining what they are doing, why and how they are fighting—death is the only thing that is even scarcely intelligible. In the 2004 debate over a collection of coffin photos, a range of actors sought to harness that terrible clarity. My focus here is on the effort to transform it into an illuminating technology aimed at showing both the cost of war and the government’s efforts to occlude it. Here again, there is the confluence of generally admirable intentions with vexed relations of visuality, in which the dead body becomes currency in a much larger trade, a wrangling

89 Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” 49. Mueller argues further that war-weary Americans, exasperated by the rising death toll, are inclined to favor quick solutions, like drawdown, to protect their troops. He suggests that Americans have at least a sense of how deadly the consequences of such an action would be for Iraqis, but that they are largely untroubled by it.
over the fundamental obligation of the state to honor its war dead and to uphold its own
laws.

Despite the primacy of these privileges in the Bill of Rights, American popular
opinion tends to favor restrictions on free speech and media,\(^\text{92}\) on the convictions that
some speech is not worth protecting and that the government has a right to privacy in the
national interest. However, the documented secrecy of the Bush administration became a
common, often justifiable target for its opponents. According to Retort, “The challenge
to secrecy … is a set of moderate and Constitutional arguments—limits, legalities,
minimal accountability—and a calling into question of more and more of what the state
actually consists of.”\(^\text{93}\) The logic that less secrecy will necessarily compel the state to act
more justly is a common conceit of illuminating practices of visuality. In an unpopular
war, it morphs into the assumption that candor about the resultant deaths will result in a
more reasonable, less lethal strategy. When news leaked that someone was using camera
at Dover Air Force base in Delaware, one of the main sites for the homecoming of dead
American soldiers, the resulting images were infused with the hope that they would be
the ones to undo the whole thing.

April 2004 was a bad month for the Bush administration: the battle of Fallujah,
the Abu Ghraib photos, Tom Brokaw’s roll call of the American dead, and the
publication of the coffin photos,\(^\text{94}\) all of which threatened to undermine public faith in the
mission that had already gone on 11 months longer than it was supposed to last. While
the other public relations disasters were largely out of its control, the administration had
tried to prevent precisely the kind of spectacle that grew around the coffin photos. On the
“eve” of the Iraq war, officials at Dover received a reminder about a directive that had
been in force since November of 2000, but had gone “unheeded” during the first phase of
the GWOT in Afghanistan. This policy reiterated that which had already been in place at
Dover for 12 years, and codified the “simple solution”\(^\text{95}\) that the Bush administration had
to the public relations liability of scenes of returning caskets. It “ended the public

---


\(^{93}\) Retort, *Afflicted Powers*, 190.

\(^{94}\) Grojeda, “Picturing Torture,” 206-207.

\(^{95}\) Milbank, “Curtains Ordered for Media Coverage,” para. 2-4.
dissemination of such images by banning news coverage and photography of dead soldiers’ homecomings on all military bases.”96 Although photographs of war victims often function at least to “create the illusion of consensus,”97 the Pentagon was not taking any chances. Despite public support for such displays, the Bush administration prohibited them on the grounds that they were “insensitive” to the families of the deceased.98 Whether or not this was an accurate assessment of the families’ wishes is unclear, but at least one man believed that the larger, Constitutional issue superseded the messy business of feelings. And so Russ Kick filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for all casualty photos.

Kick, creator of The Memory Hole, is always up for such a challenge. A freelance writer and editor, Kick is a consummate iconoclast and a subscriber to a starkly dualistic understanding of censorship and speech. He is a firm believer in the right to and necessity of free speech, particularly that which “undermines the consensus, harpoons big lies, sweeps dirt back out from under the rug, and shows the way things could be.”99 Accordingly, he has edited the Abuse Your Illusions series, and written such books as Everything You Know About God is Wrong. He is a skeptic of the government’s narrative about 9/11, and generally seems to endorse the position that the more vociferously the government denounces something, the more true it must be.

His websites, The Memory Holes, versions 1.0 and 2.0, with their promises of “Rescuing Knowledge, Freeing Information” are a monument to suppressed information, that which otherwise would have been lost or destroyed, as in the incinerators at the bottom of the original ‘memory holes’ in 1984. The sites are built largely around documents obtained through FOIA requests, including FBI files on famous people, FOIA case logs (that track the number and adjudication of all the claims that each agency receives) and the full complement of Abu Ghraib photographs. The original site was last updated October 23, 2006, but even during Kick’s long hiatus, it remained an active clearinghouse for all such information, including the pictures he received from Dover.

96 Ibid., para. 1-2.
97 Sontag, Regarding, 6.
99 Kick, Abuse Your Illusions, 9.
upon a successful appeal of his rejected FOIA petition. The new Memory Hole, launched in early 2009, feels more like a blog, with time-sensitive updates posted in a running feed. Reflecting the current allocation of attention and concern, many of the prominent headlines focus on the economy (and, more specifically, bailouts of various types), while the War has become less prominent. Although the format is slightly different, the general tenor of the site, with its emphasis on guerrilla surveillance over the actions of the state and its representatives, remains the same.

The FOIA was passed in 1966 (and followed by the 1976 Government in the Sunshine Act) as a measure to help increase public access to ‘government secrets’ that would be of import to the public and the media. The Act is designed to make requesting and receiving such information affordable and efficient. Although requesters must abide by certain procedures, and the Act includes a handful of exemptions for things like trade secrets, oil wells, and national security, the FOIA was meant to expand public access to the inner workings of government, though different administrations have interpreted its intent differently. Whereas President Clinton had a tendency to declassify documents on a massive scale, the impulse of the Bush administration had been to err on the side of secrecy, and so far the Obama administration has a mixed record on questions of transparency. As Attorney General, John Ashcroft reinterpreted the FOIA to give government more latitude in refusing such requests, saying that it could do so as long as it could give a reason,\textsuperscript{100} while the public claim devolved from a ‘right’ to a ‘need’ to know.\textsuperscript{101}

FOIA requests in the GWOT have unearthed a number of documents besides the coffin photos, including an extensive record of documents relevant to Abu Ghraib,\textsuperscript{102} and the FOIA has become an established tool of the illuminating practice of visuality in a confrontation with a reticent state. Kick, for his troubles, received a CD of 361 photographs from the Air Force. 73 of these were astronaut fatalities from the Columbia

\textsuperscript{100} Gup, \textit{Nation of Secrets}, 18.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{102} See Jaffer and Singh, \textit{Administration of Torture}. 
explosion, while the remaining 288 were military casualties of the GWOT, and he estimated that 98.4% of these images depicted fatalities from Iraq. Because the Air Force removed all identifying information from the coffins, viewers have no way of naming the subjects of the photographs. But for Kick, this is immaterial. “Be this as it may,” he wrote about the anonymity of the dead, “the significance of the photo release remains unchanged. We were not allowed to see the war dead arriving at Dover. Now we are.” Indeed, Kick seems generally unconcerned with precision; many of the photographs on his site are reproduced with out captions or explanation—the illumination itself is sufficient.

This laxity underscores the strangeness of the GWOT approach to American military dead. Post-Vietnam, ceremonious homecomings for the deceased “became increasingly common and elaborate” and were occasionally attended by presidents.103 Alternately, the primary concern of the The Memory Hole is to document the work of uncovering the flag-draped caskets, and to showcase the results of that labor, a task that overshadowed all of those funereal precedents (and the reasons for their creation). Whenever nation-states try to commemorate them, the “real dead are simultaneously forgotten, replicated, sequestered, serialized, and unknowned,”104 reduced to tokens and unintentional symbols of the nation’s sensitivity. Confronted with a patriotic obligation and empowered by a “very real public appetite for unalloyed images of the Iraq War,”105 Kick forged a new kind of mourning ritual, where participation in national grief requires only the effort required to click through a slide show.

This dilution seems to vindicate, at least partially, the Pentagon’s main stated regulation for not wanting a media presence at the homecomings, namely that abiding by every families’ wishes and thus giving every fatality a customized homecoming would present an insurmountable logistical difficulty that might also compromise the “privacy and dignity” of the dead and their families.106 Although I am not endorsing their effort to regulate the press, the crassness of the internet display makes those concerns seem

103 Milbank, “Curtains Ordered for Media Coverage,” para. 6.
104 Anderson, The Spectre of Comparisons, 56.
105 Carr, “Show Me the Bodies,” para. 4.
reasonable. After all, if the dead in question were non-military private citizens, the government would be unable to disseminate photographs of them, because their privacy would be protected under the provision of the FOIA meant to ensure that the government could not be coerced into revealing personal information about other citizens. Now, however, the coffin photos are free to circulate; Kick reminds his guests that because the coffin photos are government property, they are in the public domain and so unbound by copyright restrictions. Illuminate at will.

And illuminate everyone has. In a noteworthy reversal, these selfsame coffin photos have been used by “anti-occupation” groups in Iraq and elsewhere in the region as propaganda and to appeal to Americans angry about the war. Their hunch that these images would be compelling and inflammatory was right, and back at home the demand for such images exceeded the bandwidth of The Memory Hole, and Kick directed frustrated viewers as follows: “Due to the huge traffic (4 to 5 million hits per day) in the days after the photos were posted, the following sites have mirrored the Dover photos: Antiwar.com/Exit Consulting/Warblogging.com.” The Memory Hole, it seems, was on to something.

But what? Given that the coffin photos were largely superfluous any effort to “drive home the basic reality of mounting casualties,” which Americans already comprehended, it is likely that the desire that Kick tapped into on such a massive scale was something beyond basic civic literacy. Moreover, the photo archive as a whole is rather monotonous. Newspapers like The Washington Post published the handful of photos that were the most evocative, those that were the best composed and most eloquent. Otherwise, the photos, perhaps reflecting the routinization of military life, are all variations on a theme: shots of Air Force personnel, at various times of the day or night, tending to various quantities of coffins, in and around cargo planes. Beyond the fact of the casualties themselves, there was nothing controversial here. The photographs promised neither unique insight nor aesthetic experience. Rather, the spectacle was the

107 Terry, “Killer Entertainments,” para. 17.
109 When commenting on Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ decision to lift the ban on coffin photographs, John Ellsworth, a gold-star father and president of Military Families United, asked, “What is the need to
photographs themselves—their existence, censorship, and eventual publication—rather than what they conveyed: “the significance of the photo release remains unchanged.”

Two years later, in 2006, American military dead became something else, the subject of a Pulitzer Prize-winning special report entitled “Final Salute,” first published by Denver’s *Rocky Mountain News* and continuing to circulate via the internet. In this story, photographer Todd Heisler and reporter Jim Sheeler follow USMC Major Steve Beck as he makes his casualty notification rounds. Unlike the official anonymity of the Dover coffin photos, everyone in “Final Salute” has a name and a story. Some of the photos have become quietly iconic (like that of a plane full of wide-eyed passengers who see a flag-draped coffin coming out of the cargo hold beneath them) and all of them are meant to be “unforgettable.” Whether it is the Wyoming family going through the box of their son’s personal effects or the pregnant woman bathed in the blue light of her laptop as she settles into a bed prepared for her by the Marines on the floor below her husband’s casket, the photographs and the stories that they tell are compelling. Again, the question is one of how they are used, how essentially the same dead can be promoted from the inglorious mass of the fringe website to the resplendent pages of the Pulitzer Prize-winning photo essay. Despite the sensitivity with which these pictures were taken and then displayed, which strikes such a sharp affective contrast to their haphazard and confrontational display in The Memory Hole, when the dead Marine and his grieving family become the subject of a piece so acclaimed, consuming those images becomes an aesthetic event as well as a citizenship ritual, two kinds of refined pleasures that are dependent (however reverentially) on death and suffering.

Now, the status of the coffin photos has changed again. In late February 2009, Defense Secretary Robert Gates officially reversed the ban on photographing coffins of military dead. Under the new policy, photography will be permitted as long as the family of the soldier consents, a practice patterned on similar regulations at Arlington National Cemetery. Announcing his long-standing discomfort with the ban, Gates used the show these caskets, other than to try to inflame controversy?” (*op. cit.*, Bumiller, “Defense Chief Lifts Ban,” para. 14). He seems to be querying the utility of this kind of illumination, suggesting that there is nothing to be gained or learned from the display, particularly because scenes like the ones in question are already familiar.
occasion of President Obama’s decision to review it to effect a change in policy, and cited an Army memorandum in favor of lifting it as explanation for this revocation. While John Ellsworth, the president of Military Families United, criticized it as a concession to anti-war groups that will make it easier to ‘‘politicize our fallen,’’ major news institutions and some activist groups lauded the policy as a triumph of truth over censorship. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, described himself as ‘‘very, very supportive’’ of the new policy because it is so ‘‘family-centric.’’ Obama has voiced his ‘support’ for Gates’ decision through the White House Press Secretary, Robert Gibbs. The policy and its implementation fall to Gates, though it coheres generally with the Obama administration’s effort to present itself as transparent, accountable, and trending toward openness rather than secrecy. Whether we think this is a better, nobler, or more enlightened policy than what we had before, whether we think that this is a way of honoring or exploiting dead soldiers, the debate reveals one constant: although their photographs may now be produced, circulated, and consumed differently, the absolute value of the dead themselves as visual commodities remains unchanged.

**Filling the Epistemological Void: Academic Reactions to the Abu Ghraib Photographs**

The other major visual story of April 2004, and perhaps the biggest of the GWOT itself, that of the Abu Ghraib photos, progressed under a different dynamic of spectacle and repression, but continued the pattern of suturing citizenship to the sights of violence and death. Whereas the dead body in the coffin photos and “Final Salute” is a device intended to bind the citizen-spectator to his nation, the tortured (and occasionally tortured-to-death) body in the Abu Ghraib photos is wielded by illuminators in an effort

---

112 Russ Kick criticized what he perceived as Obama’s equivocation on the issue, characterizing the President’s response as “um, er, well.”
113 It might also signal that the state will begin doing some of its own illuminating work, which may or may not render the work of non-state illuminators superfluous, though this is far from certain. This trend would have continued if, at the end of May 2009, the Obama administration released another (allegedly more graphic) collection of interrogation photos, as it had promised to do.
interfere in that relation, to provoke a disavowal of the nation-state by the offended citizen-subject. Through this process, it is nonetheless absorbed into a national discourse, endlessly rewritten as a character in the unraveling story of national identity.

Illuminating practices of the visual are useless without an audience, and in this way, they are more resource-intensive than the other practices I document in this dissertation. They require some kind of violation, a commitment to imaging it, and an willing spectators. Audiences are compelled by the pleasures and benefits of spectatorship. In a commercial setting, this relation is straightforward enough, but what are the politics of pleasing an academic audience? Moreover, what does it mean that arguably the greatest intellectual frisson of the GWOT has been routed through the converted prison at Abu Ghraib? Almost soon as the images aired on 60 Minutes II on April 28, 2004, they became iconic, particularly for the anti-war Left, and within that movement, they spawned a distinct subgenre of academic writing, the analysis of the politics of the torture image. Torture became a topic about which everyone had something to say but also an “epistemological void,” a bottomless pit into which they dumped an endless supply of words. What is especially interesting to me, in the context of this current inquiry, is the fertility of this handful of photos, in recognition of the possibility that “the blossoming of narratives around the photographs becomes another way of disregarding that suffering.” In what follows, I consider this profusion in terms of illumination and the alignments it creates between citizenship, violence, and the visual.

Almost as soon the images appeared, it became somehow automatic that they should be recirculated, and it was no surprise that much of this traffic took place in the academy, as the photos seemed so quickly to “disappear down the memory hole” of the government and the general public. The axiomatic logic of this distribution and reproduction is encapsulated by Eisenman’s contention that “[a]ny effort to uncover and thereby weaken the Abu Ghraib effect will require careful attention to some disturbing

---

114 Yaeger, “Consuming Trauma,” 47.
116 Bresheeth notes that there are ‘thousands’ of Abu Ghraib photos currently in the public domain (“Picturing Trauma,” 67 n. 30). I am not sure about the accuracy of that figure; I have only seen 144.
photographs; there is simply no alternative.”

This assumption of a civic duty to undo Abu Ghraib is also predicated on a belief that sight will lead uncomplicately to that outcome, but Eisenman (and he is not alone in this) does not specify how, precisely, this transmogrification will occur. The weighty visual burden of torture, it seems, must simply be shouldered: penance for not having pre-empted it.

My intention is not to impugn the morals or motivations of the authors of this voluminous (and still growing) body of work, but rather to consider the way that these images are taken up, and to provide an alternate reading of the discourse, but not of the images themselves. Without name-calling or accusations, I would like to examine this proliferation alongside Edward Said’s definition of Orientalism, which, as he describes it, is possessed of a “flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the upper hand.”

In a context where Orientalism remains entrenched, even the purest of intentions, the desire to write on the side of justice and to condemn torture, like feelings of pity or shame, can only privilege the Westerner, who demonstrates his sentience and ethical superiority by confessing to and demonstrating penitence for a wrong.

Revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib made headlines for two reasons: it was Americans that were doing it and they had the audacity to take pictures. But torture, even American torture, is nothing new. What was really shocking was the recording, staging, and distribution of images depicting it, and the confluence of these novelties made it a compelling story. The most immediate reactions to the revelation of torture at Abu Ghraib came from the media, the military, and the government. From the Taguba Report obtained by The New York Times to Seymour Hersh’s famous story in The New Yorker (punctuated by the incongruous, ubiquitous single-panel New Yorker cartoon), journalists revealed that torture was more widespread than it looked in the photos and that culpability for these crimes reached very high into the administration. The earliest goals

---

121 Kurasawa’s analysis of ‘humanitarian visuality’ in “Perilous Light” is a useful model for mapping the vexed relationships between power, distance, sight, and sympathy.
122 Bresheeth, “Projecting Trauma,” 65.
were to figure out what exactly had happened, and how. President Bush, though opting not to issue a formal apology, promised an inquiry, and swore that the “world will see the investigation and justice will be served.”

With the biggest questions answered, or at least subject to inquiry, the discourse opened up to the academy and the art community. The most visible cultural productions related to Abu Ghraib are the movies, like *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007); *The Prisoner or How I Planned to Kill Tony Blair* (2007); and *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), which generated a batch of review articles that commented on the film and also, of course, on torture itself. If, upon their initial confrontation with the images, many viewers failed to “acknowledge their pleasure,” such denial is slowly becoming impossible, as the stories become popular commercial ventures and cultural artifacts.

And also lines on CVs: the academy has been prolific, writing and writing in an effort to uncover the truth of the images, why they were taken, who is guilty, what they ‘really’ show. Many articles extrapolate from the images to develop theories of American culture, the state, and the military as a whole. Despite these differing objectives, all of this scholarship shares a common conviction: that as soon as someone reveals it, the power derived from this ultimate truth will be enough to disabuse the U.S. of its support for torture. In the process, the images have become touchstones of discourse about the GWOT. Like Marianne Hirsch’s description of the common trope of writers encountering Holocaust photos, the experience of viewing the Abu Ghraib photos has become an academic primal scene. Scholars have responded either by a focus on grim detail or abstract analysis. Like anti-slavery rhetoric in the 19th century, some academic treatments of Abu Ghraib fixate on the physicality of the scenes, the various accoutrements of torture—underwear, an MRE box, permanent markers, wires, a leash—and seize on small details like the so-called ‘torture playlist’ published in *Mother*

---

124 Leigh Raiford’s discussion of the efforts to resignify lynching images is instructive here (“The Consumption of Lynching Images,” 273).
125 Gilmore, “How We Confess,” 188.
126 See, for example, Kelly, “Innocence, Perversion, and Abu Ghraib.”
127 See, for example, Hillman, “Guarding Women”; and Rajiva, “The Military Made Me Do It.”
Jones.130 Others engage the images indirectly, reading them as synecdoches or symptoms of a much larger pathology. If the existence of an image requires us to “confron[t] the reality of the nontextualizable,”131 the very possibility that some scenes would literally be too much for words has proven an irresistible temptation for those who wish to write about them.

As illuminating practices of the visual, academic approaches to the display of the images have been variable in their approaches, reflecting what Hartman described in the context of American chattel slavery as the malleability of the captive body as an object of white sentimentality.132 Almost everyone, it seems, has something to say, no matter their training, their discipline, or their specialty. They are licensed to speak by the sheer fact of their spectatorship, and in the U.S., from their association with the state responsible for what they saw. Many reproduce the images in one way or another, trading on the putative realness of the images, “grainier and having poor[er] lighting”133 than most stylized pictures of the War. The bad image quality compounds their hypervisibility and the resulting “obscenity of accuracy,”134 making the work luminous, and brittle. My concern is not whether the images are reproduced, or how many of them a work uses, but how the author leverages them to enhance an argument.

Less than a month after the photos were first publicized, Susan Sontag published “Regarding the Torture of Others” in The New York Times magazine. In it, she argued for the inextricability of the horror of the deeds and the fact of their being photographed. Accordingly, she compared the Abu Ghraib photos to lynching souvenirs (as a digital version of those keepsakes) and pornography,135 two contexts in which violence and the visual are blurred together. The electronic version of the essay features four photographs, aligned on the right side of the page. Three of them are from the collection of iconic torture images, the hooded prisoner on the MRE box, the simulated fellatio between two

---

130 Sharrock, “Am I A Torturer?”
131 Stafford, Good Looking, 85.
132 Hartman, Scenes of Subjection, 19.
133 Machlin, “Visual Discourses of War,” 140.
134 Avery Gordon, Ghostly Matters, 16.
135 Both of these comparisons are by now commonplace, and have been subject to a great deal of debate. Although few scholars quibble with their aptness, there is disagreement about the details of the parallels between the disparate scenes (See for example, Frost, “Photography/Pornography/Torture”).
male prisoners, and Lynndie England with a man on a leash. At the top is a dun-colored image of an empty corridor at Abu Ghraib, captioned “Between Tortures.”

Sontag’s essay includes an internal critique of the use of the images, and she forcefully criticizes the common assumption that expressing ‘disgust’ at the images was an adequate response, calling it an “insult”136 to those who are depicted in them. She further warns Americans against “indulging in an orgy of self-condemnation,”137 a much-needed reminder of who the real victims are here. Yet for Sontag, the ultimate casualties of the photographs are American; the photographs, she writes, “are of us,”138 and the blessing hidden in their brutality is that they were “necessary to get our leaders to acknowledge that they had a problem on their hands.”139 Butler, in her review of Sontag’s oeuvre, argues that this is a point where Sontag underestimates the power of torture photographs. In them, Butler contends, “we see ourselves seeing,” and as they “rebuff” us, they spotlight the dynamics of spectatorship.140 Without doubting the veracity of any of these statements, I am curious about their implications, about the ease with which these photographs and the tortured bodies they depict can be transformed into something they never consented to be.

For Retort in Afflicted Powers, this photographic evidence of American soldiers had the potential to be a course of shock therapy for the state that “was entrapped in its own apparatus of clichés.”141 Arguing that 9/11 was an ‘image-defeat’ for the spectacular state from which it could not recover, Retort analyzes the GWOT in terms of the intertwined missions of the U.S. to accumulate capital and triumph through spectacle. In their analysis, the Abu Ghraib photos compounded the humiliation of the collapse of the World Trade Center: “The Towers keep falling, and now they are joined by the imagery of Abu Ghraib.”142 Accordingly, the frontispiece of the book, which is printed on heavy, high-gloss paper, is the ‘Gilligan’ image of the wired detainee perched atop the box.

137 Ibid., para. 22.
138 Ibid., para. 8.
139 Ibid., para. 20.
140 Butler, “Photography, War, Outrage,” 826.
141 Retort, Afflicted Powers, 23.
142 Ibid., 35.
Their argument implies that reproducing this image is an affront to the mainstream media and the administration, and so a radical act under the conditions where the spectacle dominates so much else. They write,

The release of the Abu Ghraib photographs—for all that the exact chain of circumstances is still shrouded in mystery and no doubt will remain so—is one among many pieces of evidence lately of a breakdown in the usual media-administration contract.\textsuperscript{143}

This breach, in their analysis, signals a crumbling of the spectacular alliance that has so far enabled the U.S. to dominate its citizens and the world through force and delusion.

Others have argued that it was the very obscenity of the images that “enabled the Pentagon and White House”\textsuperscript{144} to disavow them. Retort, however, pitched their argument at another level of analysis, suggesting that the release of the photographs was indicative of administrative weakness. Perhaps they are correct. The signifier of the ‘tortured detainee’ is capacious enough to accommodate all sorts of truths. My objection to the text is less to the questionable merits of its argument on this point, and more to its apparently uncritical reproduction of this image, and they way that this invites readers to interpret it as a kind of victory.

Nicholas Mirzoeff, in his \textit{Radical History Review} article, “Invisible Empire: Visual Culture, Embodied Spectacle” is far less sanguine in his evaluation of the consequences of the Abu Ghraib images. He notes that the resulting scandal was little more than a flash in the pan, barely registering in the 2004 election.\textsuperscript{145} This, he argues is proof that “[w]hat was seen was assented to.”\textsuperscript{146} Mirzoeff offers two interventions in his article, which is an exploration of visuality under conditions of globalization and ‘permanent war.’ First, he argues that the behaviors depicted in the images of the torturers are part of a larger effort by the administration to portray Arabs as

\begin{footnotesize}

\footnotetext[143]{Ibid., 191.}
\footnotetext[144]{Hernandez, “The Tortured Body,” para. 19.}
\footnotetext[145]{Mirzoeff, “Invisible Empire,” 21.}
\footnotetext[146]{Ibid., 35.}
\end{footnotesize}
‘sodomitical.’

Second, he makes a more general claim about the importance of a free visuality to full citizenship, which Mirzoeff posits as the antidote to government surveillance. Here, too, is an explicit endorsement of the logic of illumination. He notes that while the media and the public all relinquished their right to see the images, the ACLU filed suit for release of all 144. Moreover, Mirzoeff plots his own visual coup by reproducing the images liberally through the text: they are slightly blurred, but everywhere, interrupting the flow of sentences and paragraphs, occupying large portions of the page, utterly intrusive. Compared to Sontag and Retort, Mirzoeff engages more directly with the images ekphrastically with an art historian’s eye for detail, describing and analyzing the scenes they depict. He does this on the way to a concluding argument for the ‘right to look,’ and ends the article with a bulleted list of what this liberty might entail.

Mirzoeff argues that this should include the “right to know when one is under surveillance,” but it is curious that there is no provision in this admittedly partial collection of the freedom to be untormented by the visual, to be left visually alone: not to have your picture taken while you are tortured, and not to have those pictures wantonly reproduced, even in your best interest. In the academic discourse I consider, there is a marked absence of sustained self-reflexive critique about the process of speaking (showing?) for others. Perhaps this seems excusable because those others do not seem to have anything to say. Marcus Wood observes that abolitionist narratives, while often lavish in their sympathy for the enslaved, were careful to avoid portraying them as martyrs, because only agents could martyr themselves, and only white abolitionists could qualify for such a lofty designation.

---

147 Much of the discourse on the Abu Ghraib photographs is redundant, whether in the repeated comparisons to lynching spectacles or in the emphasis on the sexualized nature of the torture. On a note similar to Mirzoeff’s, Alphonso Lingis argues in “The Effects of the Pictures” that the sexualized torture organized at Abu Ghraib and depicted in the photos was “staged as specifically Muslim degradation” (85).
149 Ibid., 23.
150 Ibid., 40-41.
151 Ibid., 41.
There may be a similar dynamic operative here, a presumption that it is the job of the well-meaning Western scholar to suffer the pain of confronting these realities in order to intervene on behalf of the helpless others. Reflecting on Abu Ghraib, Dora Apel notes that “torture images do not inherently produce their own undoing—it depends on us.”

This assignment, this sense of purpose, offers an eerie confirmation of Debord’s description of a “worldwide division of spectacular tasks;” in this case, it is the job of one group to suffer, the role of another to inflict that injury and to photograph it, and the calling of another still to make meaning both of the pain and its representation.

Accordingly, W.J.T. Mitchell implores his readers to persist in their effort to extract meaning from the photographs:

> What I am suggesting ... is that there is something more to be learned from these pictures than the story of what happened at Abu Ghraib, and who is to blame for it. These images were, after all, paid for with the tax dollars of American citizens. We own them, and must own up to what they tell us about who we are, and what we are becoming in the age of the biodigital picture.

Although his reminder about tax dollars is ostensibly meant to remind Americans of our shared culpability for these acts of torture, it also implies that the images are ours to do with as “we” wish, a privilege bought with our (now besmirched) citizenship.

Irrespective of the ease with which we have all fallen into our various roles, it is worth noting that they place us, as spectators, in an interesting position with regard to international law. The Third Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war specifies that in addition to being physically protected by their captors, they must be shielded from “public curiosity.” The spirit of this clause has been extended to prohibit exploitive or degrading media access to prisoners of war. For this reason, and also because it functioned to make the humiliation more acute, photographing the torture was also torture in itself. In a crucial way, then, the illuminating protesters are also abetted

---

156 Kozol and DeCola, “Remapping the War on Terrorism,” 179; and Grojeda, “Picturing Torture,” 229.
by the logic that justified the torture itself, that it was acceptable because the victims were not technically prisoners of war, but merely ‘enemy combatants.’

But now that the photographs are taken, knowing that the torture cannot be undone, what are the ethics of circulating them? This is a crucial question of ends and means, for it ignores the need for silence about their experience that many of the tortured express\footnote{Lazreg, \textit{Torture and the Twilight of Empire}, 259.} while also troubling the apparent harmlessness or goodness of academic curiosity. Then again, Elaine Scarry posits an inverse relation between a capacity to injure and to imagine an individual,\footnote{Scarry, “The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons,” 285.} and if the photographs facilitate our imaginative identification with the Iraqi detainees, it seems that we would be less likely to consent to their maltreatment. But what if we are unable to imagine what counts as injury? And might there be circumstances in which imagination itself might injure the other?

Torture has always kept company with information.\footnote{This alliance shows no signs of weakening. In March 2009, Philip Shenon, a reporter who “covered the [9/11] commission from start to finish,” explores the possibilities that much of the information contained in \textit{The 9/11 Report} (to which I return in Chapter 4) was obtained through the use of ‘enhanced interrogation techniques.’ Worse, he also raises the possibility that the suspects who were subjected to these techniques were handled in that manner \textit{because of the 9/11 Commission} (“The 9/11 Commission and Torture,” 43).} Intelligence-gathering is the most common justification for torture, a practice with a precedent in Roman law, in which information given under the duress of torture could be used to fortify otherwise questionable evidence.\footnote{Skolnick, “On Controlling Torture,” 216.} Although there is disagreement in the intelligence community about the efficacy of torture for eliciting valuable intelligence, there seems to be no such skepticism about the informational value of the images of torture on the part of those who make a career of analyzing them. What new evidence do torture photos promise to reveal under scrutiny, that we, as witnesses, could not have otherwise obtained? It is safe to assume that most of the academics who take up the images oppose torture, and so what else is there to prove by looking at them? In posing these questions, I am not advocating censorship, but rather am offering an invitation to consider the possibility that maybe some things should be off-limits to academic discourse. I am not necessarily suggesting that they should be, but rather wanting to think through what it would mean if they were.

\footnote{157 Lazreg, \textit{Torture and the Twilight of Empire}, 259.\n158 Scarry, “The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons,” 285.\n159 This alliance shows no signs of weakening. In March 2009, Philip Shenon, a reporter who “covered the [9/11] commission from start to finish,” explores the possibilities that much of the information contained in \textit{The 9/11 Report} (to which I return in Chapter 4) was obtained through the use of ‘enhanced interrogation techniques.’ Worse, he also raises the possibility that the suspects who were subjected to these techniques were handled in that manner \textit{because of the 9/11 Commission} (“The 9/11 Commission and Torture,” 43).\n160 Skolnick, “On Controlling Torture,” 216.}
One way of approaching this possibility is via Spivak’s assertion that the subaltern cannot, by definition of either term, speak. Many have refused to speak on behalf of the soldiers whose actions are recorded for this gloomy posterity, assuming that they can speak for themselves and leaving them to do so. John Limon, in his essay on shame and Abu Ghraib, cited his position as an “academic latecomer” to the debate as one reason why he wishes “to say as little as possible about the military and civilian torturers at Abu Ghraib and their victims,” but even in this noble gesture, he has taken a position and thus entered into the discourse, implying that the torturers are unworthy of the courtesy of speech and that he is not authorized to speak for their victims. Here again, however, the constellation of rights and obligations are refracted through the position of the academic, rather than the people who are pictured. The subalterns here are repeatedly rendered both hypervisible and mute—it is striking to me that shared and respectful silence does not even seem like a possible response. I believe that the felt obligation to fill the void with words and pictures is a consequence of the illuminating impulse, which is preoccupied primarily with its subjects, at the expense of its objects, who have already yielded so much.

**Filling the Sight by Force: The Ethical and Tactical Flaws of Illumination**

My purpose in writing this has not been to call for visual decorum, or to advise that we ought to just ignore troublesome images. Rather, I would like to suggest that the visual practice of illumination as an anti-war strategy, as I have defined it here, should be subject to critique, on the grounds that it is ethically dubious and tactically flawed. In part, illuminating work is based on a belief that citizenship can be demonstrated by a stoic willingness to confront difficult truths and bear the pain that follows. This assumption is essentially problematic because it overlooks the possibility that the “squirm” and the “recoil” that seem to prove the spectator’s empathy also enable his or her “perseverance” before difficult sights. Proponents of illuminating visual work ignore the possibility that the repugnance that allows one to claim her citizenship and her

---

161 Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
162 Limon, “‘The Shame of Abu Ghraib,’” 554.
humanity is the same thing that allows her to keep looking, to keep engaging these
difficult stimuli and enjoying the agonized, guilty pleasure that comes from mastering
them.

Practitioners of illumination rely upon the penetrative power of the visual. “The
Photograph,” writes Barthes, “is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because
on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because nothing in it can be refused or
transformed.” Equipped with the speed, suddenness, and immutability of the image,
they set to work trying to goad—perhaps to terrorize—their audiences to arms against the
state, the war, and the very violence they wield in pictorial form.

Spectators, bombarded though they might be, are not entirely blameless here. The
patriotic visual thrill-seeking occludes the “fact” that “most members of most nations
participate in way or another in the killing of others and/or in economic or political
domination,” and we take our discomfort at the visual legacies of that complicity in
trade for that guilt. If we squirm before these images, it is because we feel a “tension
between self and image,” the distance between what they depict and who we believe
ourselves to be. But again: as we mire ourselves in this remorsefulness, we are the
subject—they are just bodies, corpses, tragedies. If it is true, as Hernandez argues, that
“[t]orture disfigures us all,” that is beside the point. My suffering, my shame, and
whatever angst I might summon are, both qualitatively and quantitatively, immaterial.
Under our rapidly blinking eyes, their suffering becomes spectacularized and so,
meaningless. In the process, they—whoever they might be, anyone, so long as they are
miserable—become the abject, neither subject nor object, just the discarded conditions of
our own self-creation. And in our horror at the contact with them, we enact the
fundamental ritual of subjectivity, becoming ourselves more and more fully.

Practitioners assume that illumination will work, that reactions to these sights will
be predictable, or uncomplicated. Even the awareness that something is tragic is not

---

164 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 91.
166 J. Bennett, “The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory,” 3.
168 Hartman, Scenes of Subjection, 22.
169 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 1.
enough to make it really feel that way, and even that feeling may not amount to anything. The dynamics of imaging complicate the dynamics of sentiment and the experience of affect. Moreover, the very premise of illumination presumes that sympathy is radical, that an emotional response to the news or sight of a death is at odds with and a threat to the grim bureaucracy of the state. Not necessarily.

Just as the illuminating paradigm presumes simple causal dynamics of spectatorship, it also generalizes the state’s relation to the visual to that of repression or fear. It assumes that the state cannot manage images or that there is a point at which state control over the image ends. But there is substantial evidence against these claims. Butler reminds readers that, for all its purported fear of incriminating images, after Abu Ghraib the DoD published certain photos from Guantanamo Bay to “make known that a certain vanquishing had taken place.” Indeed, military images from the prison are readily available online, through the Army’s own websites.

Undeniably, all of the artifacts I have cataloged here are liabilities: ideologically, politically, diplomatically. But François Debrix sees a larger picture as well, and he writes, chillingly, that “The apparent excess or failure of the images of war’s terror ... is a strong and crucial instrument of mobilization of certain ideologies, ideas, and ideals. It is no excess or failure at all.” In reality, these artifacts also provided a mechanism by which to gauge public tolerance for this kind of news and, in the case of Abu Ghraib, its display. The same image that seems to be disastrous for the state can serve it indirectly as a uniquely powerful tool. On the one hand, the uproar over allegations of maltreatment at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay functioned as a significant (if temporary) challenge to the way that the administration has prosecuted its GWOT. On the other hand, it “distracted … from the real secret” of so-called ‘black sites,’ which went unknown and unremarked at the time.

170 I presented a longer version of this argument at the The Human Condition Series conference on Terror in Barrie, ON in May 2008.
Generally, the GWOT has not been characterized by absolute visual secrecy. Rather a fantasy of patriotic de-repression, like that which Foucault detected in the history of sexuality, and a faith that revelation of the truth would save the nation-state from itself retroactively created the illusion of such absolute concealment. Even if states might prefer that things run smoothly, they are equipped and designed to handle the contingent,\(^{174}\) the out-of-control. And so whatever satisfaction we might derive from the thought that the state is humbled or flummoxed by an image should be tempered by Agamben’s contention that the post-9/11 “politics of security secretly works toward the production of emergencies,”\(^{175}\) which ultimately amount to little more than costs of doing business.

Beyond their common ability to profit from catastrophe, the state and its illuminating antagonists also share a common infatuation with surveillance. Both organizations fantasize about the “perfect disciplinary apparatus [that] would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly.”\(^{176}\) For the state, this would be a way of ensuring the docility of its citizens. For the illuminating regime, it would be a technology to police the behavior of the state. Whether or not such a thing is necessary or desirable is ultimately beside the point.

Having dispensed with all of this, as I arrive at the conclusion of this chapter, academic custom dictates that I should provide an alternative, to chart a course that would allow us to make use of these visual facts without exploiting them. My sense, however, is that there is no such thing. In the end, I think it more important to interrogate that impulse, that wish to justify our infatuation with these representations of terror. Personally, I am unable or unwilling (or both) to conceive of an architecture that would smooth out the relations between terror, visuality, and citizenship. The rest of this project, though, is dedicated to an analysis of the sites that endeavor to do just such a thing.

\(^{174}\) Dillon, “Governing Through Contingency.”


\(^{176}\) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 173.
Despite worries that the demand for personnel created by the prolongation of the GWOT has resulted in the erosion of the U.S. military’s enlistment standards, it is still not as if anyone can join. True, the military has increased both the intensity of its recruitment efforts, even as it has relaxed its regulations about educational attainment and criminal background, but it needs more than docile bodies, which are, after all, easy enough to come by. In addition to being pliant, willing to follow and internalize orders, military bodies must be able to do so. Hence, enlistees must be found mentally, emotionally, and physically competent. The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) or Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT) gauge the first, updated DoD mental health standards determine the second, and exacting medical screenings govern the third.

Before their service becomes official, potential enlistees go to their area Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) to undergo a full suite of evaluations, including medical examinations (also known as the ‘underwear Olympics’), and the results of all of these inquiries determine whether they are eligible then to take the Oath of Enlistment. Physical inspections are conducted in accordance with elaborate protocols; for example, U.S. Army Regulation 40-501 is a 135-page document detailing military fitness standards, an exhaustive list of all the conditions, ailments, and “defects” that might require the further scrutiny of a Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) or render an applicant unfit for service altogether.

On pages 19 and 20, however, there are two charts—self-explanatory, precise, and generally anomalous among the pages of elaborate definitions and qualifications—that end with a simple footnote indicating that failure according to these rubrics means
that the volunteer will be summarily “rejected for service.” These tables outline, without equivocation, the “Military acceptable weight (in pounds) as related to age and height” for males or females at the time of “initial army procurement.” If a would-be soldier of a particular height and age exceeds the weight limit, the Army then turns to a Body Mass Index (BMI) test; if s/he is overweight but has a body fat under the maximum allowable, his or her size alone will not prevent enlistment. If both his/her weight and BMI exceed the Army’s maximum, the potential soldier is disqualified. Additionally, the standards indicate that one can also be too short—60 inches for males, or 58 for females—or too tall—80 inches for both males and females—to serve, conditions that are presumably far less common than the avoirdupois with which AR 40-501 is otherwise concerned.

What is important here is not the rationale or fairness of these standards, but the way that they use size to regulate access to this expression of citizenship. These charts articulate a mundane politics of dimension in the GWOT, and the visual culture of this war is as preoccupied with size as the forces that fight it. Military discipline and effectiveness require a limited variance in terms of size and proportion among all servicemembers, and the visual culture of terror, a thing which is outsized and unruly by its very nature, necessitates the same degree of rigor. Unlike the work of illumination that I discussed in the previous chapter, which relies heavily on the power of an image to unsettle its spectators, dimensional practices of the visual suggest that the measured sight of terror can be healing. To achieve this palliation, practitioners compress terrifying sights into smaller, more manageable artifacts. They do so on the assumption that control over the size of a thing is control over its scale relative to the subject and, thus, over its power. Terror can massive, enormous, insurmountable, and so dimensional practices of the visual engage terror by sizing it up and then literally flattening it out, eliminating its depth, and therefore its capacity to overwhelm.

Because this is an explicitly militarized process, I begin this chapter with a consideration of the issue of size in warfare, in metaphorical and applied terms. I then

---

1 Metaphorical shortness in the military refers to the length of service remaining, as in the common complaint, “I’m too short for this shit,” meaning ‘I’ve been here for too long and am getting out too soon to have to do this menial thing.’
outline the theoretical poles of my argument: flat death (Barthes’ pithy description of the experience of photography) and flat affect (the failure to register a clinically appropriate emotional response to a stimulus). Dimensional practices of the visual create artifacts placed along a continuum of flat death and flat affect, and with this background in place, I provide a more detailed definition of this mode of engaging with terror. I then turn to four artifacts illustrative of this practice: the plans and animations for the rebuilt World Trade Center site and the memorial that will be installed there, *Reflecting Absence*; ‘Virtual 9/11,’ a therapeutic virtual reality simulation designed to replicate the sensory experiences of the attacks on the World Trade Center; FlatWorld, a virtual reality architecture developed by the Institute for Creative Technologies and adapted to train GWOT troops; and, finally, the FlatDaddy project, which offers life-sized photographs of deployed American servicepeople to their families at home. I conclude with a theorization of the kind of citizenship that rests prone upon this leveled terrain.

**War Out of Proportion: Size in the GWOT**

Size is a crucial element in both the theory and practice of warfare, a factor in the determination of whether a war is justifiable and in the calculation of whether or not it might be winnable. It is an ethical and tactical concern. Despite its significance, however, size remains incompletely theorized as a vector of warfare. Without such an analysis, dimensional practices of the visual are unintelligible and so, in the following section, I address the politics of size in warfare, temporarily setting aside questions of the visual so that I might return to them more fully later. Such a detour is especially necessary because terror knocks everything out of proportion, and terrorism seems to confound all the rules of size by which war usually proceeds.

Distinct from both the moral absolutes of pacifism and the pragmatic fatalism of realist political thought, Just War Theory (JWT) aims not so much at the abolition of war as at the establishment of a fair and durable peace. In the West and in international law more generally, the collection of customs, doctrines, and ethical precepts grouped together as JWT is derived from the fourth-century writings of St. Augustine, who held
that the real evil was not war itself but injustice within it.\textsuperscript{2} Traditional JWT is comprised of two sets of criteria, \textit{jus ad bellum} and \textit{jus in bello}. The former governs the decision to go to war, and the latter regulates the conduct of those who fight once the war has begun. Unlike the negative parameters set by section 2(4) of the UN charter, which prohibits war except in cases of self-defense or actions explicitly authorized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC),\textsuperscript{3} JWT places a set of positive obligations on the leader contemplating war. \textit{Jus ad bellum} has seven components:

1) Just cause: as in a rejoinder to some evil deed  
2) Right intention: purity of motive (justice rather than vengeance)  
3) Competent authority: the recognized power to mobilize a military  
4) Reasonable chance of success: so as not to endanger anyone worthlessly  
5) Proportionality of ends: goals must reasonable and thoughtfully determined  
6) Last resort: exhaustion of every other avenue for resolving the conflict  
7) Goal of peace

Operationalizing these principles is predictably difficult, and everybody, of course, thinks their war is just. But even as the accurate interpretation of these tenets is a matter of ongoing academic and political debate, the framework remains a salient paradigm in the legal and ethical evaluation of conflicts. The same is true for \textit{jus in bello}:

1) Proportionality of means: technologies of warfare should be reasonable and as humane as possible  
2) Discrimination: protection of non-combatants should be a paramount concern

Here, too, the ambiguity of these standards is a practical limitation, but the basic ideas have evolved into a general consensus about how to reasonably and rightly prosecute a war.

Both sets of rules are organized according to a logic of proportionality, so that ‘justness’ becomes a function of size in relation, and the calculation of whether a war has

\textsuperscript{2} Langan, “The Elements of St. Augustine’s Just War Theory,” 171.  
\textsuperscript{3} Chesterman, \textit{Just War or Just Peace?}, 1.
been ethically fought is one of scale, of the victor in comparison to the vanquished. *Jus ad bellum* criteria are essentially an ethical cost-benefit analysis: is the terrible weight of war sufficiently counterbalanced by the good that could potentially be achieved by participating in one? This is, with varying degrees of precision, the computation that any leader undertakes before pursuing military action. Such circumspection is easier before than during a war, but the work of ethical assessment continues in the processes of establishing (and then abiding by) the rules of engagement.

Once the war is underway, proportion becomes a matter of more immediate and material concern. In a combat situation, JWT often ends up being the “body of thought that represents the soldiers’ struggle with the tension between winning and fighting well.”\(^4\) Someone who feels threatened might not recognize the difference between how much force is justifiable and how much feels necessary. Weighing this out becomes even more difficult as weapons technologies evolve, and the resultant changes are, again, both moral and strategic. Watershed military events like the firebombing of Dresden and the use of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki radically reconfigured the terms by which the justness of a war could be evaluated. Later, the discourse of ‘smart’ weaponry during the Gulf War transformed the (theoretical) accuracy of ordnance into endorsements of its morality.\(^5\) Both examples demonstrate that proportionality is relative rather than absolute. In the context of such ethical flexibility, the question of discrimination between civilians and combatants becomes even more vexing, because killing them can be deemed necessary and thus ethically justifiable, or unintentional and thus ethically neutral.

In theory, JWT comprises the standards to which states are held accountable. In practice, of course, they are applied unevenly, if they are applied at all. What, then, of non- or sub-state actors? In a way, such groups are unthinkable within JWT, because the doctrine specifies that the authority to wage war resides only in recognized nation-states. For many, like political scientist Eric Patterson, traditional JWT is quaint, if not archaic, in the face of threats that Augustine and his later commentators could not anticipate:


“rogue states, non-state actors, and WMD.” Nonetheless, the actions of ‘terrorists’ are often condemned on the grounds of their deviation from JWT, and a common, convenient way to define terrorism is to describe it as a pattern of violent activity that “systematically breaches the internationally accepted rules of war.” To outsiders, terrorist acts seem to flout all of these criteria and to do so extravagantly. Familiar denunciations of the strategy of the 9/11 hijackings—that they were nihilistic acts in the service of a hopeless and amorphous cause—critique the hijackers’ perception of proportionality, and take it as evidence of a pathologically skewed ethical calculus. In this model, their deliberate non-discrimination against civilian casualties compounds the gruesome excess, the disproportion of their means of waging war.

‘Terrorist’ acts proceed according to a different mathematics. In this rubric, the parity achieved when massive armies kill scores of enemies in other massive armies is as insignificant. Likewise, the quantity of casualties caused by inept suicide-bombers who kill no one but themselves. For those who plan and execute them, the ‘success’ of a terrorist act derives entirely from the degree of disproportion it entails, the most carnage achieved with the fewest resources. Terrorist strikes are often far less lethal than their organizers hope, but these actions are most symbolically potent when an absolutely small number of actors inflicts a relatively or, better yet, an absolutely large number of casualties. Unless Americans themselves are the victims of a lopsided defeat, popular opinion tends to favor the underdog, and so media and political narratives of terrorist events must work against this predilection. The sheer disproportionality of terrorist attacks helps to mitigate whatever sympathy their causes might arouse.

It is hard to know how afraid we ought to be of terrorism. John Mueller has argued that our fear of terrorism is generally ‘overblown,’ while Krueger and Laitin demonstrated, equally persuasively, that the architects of the GWOT have tended to ‘misunderestimate’ the danger that terrorism poses and the difficulty of combating it. That these authors could confront identical facts but use them to form contradictory

---

6 Patterson, “Just War Theory in the 21st Century,” 120.

84
interpretations demonstrates that terror is a very difficult threat to quantify. Generally, because would-be terrorists are often constrained by a lack of resources and imperiled by the threat of visibility that comes with the execution of a particularly successful operation, the “operational inventory” of these groups is “rather limited.” The deliberate and “exaggerated violence” of so many terrorist attacks overwhelms our instruments of threat perception, and the reality of a small danger transforms quickly into the widespread fear of a big threat.

As the vehicle that packages and delivers most of the world’s representations of terrorism, media reports are often the only things upon which audiences can rely to calibrate these mechanisms, but these reports often sacrifice context, details, and distinctions to produce stories about a generalized and unified peril to the West. This perspective was bolstered early in the war by characteristic GWOT media practices like embedding reporters, whose stories, according to Butler, helped to form a common “cognitive apprehension of the war,” a paradigm that inflected American interpretations of all the subsequent news emerging from the region. Similarly, John Mueller speculates about the existence of a tacit media “catastrophe quota,” a rule requiring a certain ration of mayhem in every broadcast. With the end of the Cold War and the resultant disappearance of big geopolitical problems, meeting the quota required exaggeration of the little ones. The size of a terrorist threat is not fixed but variable and, more to the point, malleable.

In addition to being a metaphorical property of warfare and its representation, size is also a tactical issue for the military. JWT aims at the “preservation of a moral order” attained through proportionality; in the real world, military strategists must leverage size to achieve objectives, devising tactics that may or may not concur with JWT in the process. Often, bigness is crucial to military dominance, and disparity of strength or size

---

10 Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God, 124.
11 The racial/ethnic and affective codes that structure their reports further confound our abilities to gauge the size of a terrorist threat. No matter the focus, news reports about ‘Arabs’ tend to be governed by a “vagueness phenomenon” (Stoltz, “Arabs in the Morning Paper,” 105).
12 Butler, “Photography, War, Outrage,” 823.
13 Mueller, Overblown, 135.
14 Langan, “The Elements of St. Augustine’s Just War Theory,” 175.
between two forces often guarantees a kind of stability, albeit an unpleasant one for the little guy. Other times, equilibrium emerges from the massive, as in the quietude bought by Cold War-era Mutually Assured Destruction. Large forces can be good deterreants, but they make stealth impossible, and so the most powerful armies also spur technological advances in miniaturization.\(^{15}\) Thus, in the relationship of the military to size, the guarantor of success is not largeness or smallness, but cleverness in the management and manipulation of scale. Thus, Bacevich’s claim that the U.S. military stance toward the Middle East from 1945-1979 emphasized “economy of force”\(^{16}\) is a strategic lesson, but also a dimensional one: superiority was attained through careful measurement. He goes on to argue that the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan forced Carter to break this habit,\(^{17}\) two events that predestined the GWOT and its characteristic disproportion.

Size functions in different ways on the two main fronts in the current war. Early advances in Afghanistan were largely attributable to the relative largeness of the coalition forces,\(^{18}\) while subsequent setbacks have been explained in terms of an inadequate presence of U.S. and other troops. In Iraq size has been something of a wildcard. On the one hand, the enormity of the initial, invading force contributed to the swiftness and (American) bloodlessness of the war proper (March 19-May 1, 2003), and a reluctant consensus confirms that the troop ‘surge’ has been a significant factor in the measure of stability that has been achieved since the autumn of 2007. On the other hand, the most significant external obstacle to American victory there has been resistance from groups that are smaller in number and more limited in infrastructure than U.S. troops, which are hence more flexible, mobile, and adaptive. More generally, the global “scope” and “scale” of this war, what Andrew Hill calls its “spatial dimension,”\(^{19}\) are part of what distinguish it from other conflicts.

---

\(^{15}\) de Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, 151.


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 181.

\(^{18}\) Andrew Hill opines that the use of “inappropriate tactics” by the U.S., particularly the out-of-proportion use of heavy bombardment on an enemy characterized by its tactical ‘lightness’ is a symptom of American ‘acting out’ in response to the trauma of 9/11 (*Re-Imagining the War on Terror*, 20-21).

\(^{19}\) Hill, *Re-Imagining the War on Terror*, 2.
Essentially, the GWOT is a war out of proportion; the traditional rules of wartime proportionality, in both ethics and tactics, now confound rather than complement one another. As versions of the ‘Bush doctrine,’ a model that inverts many of the traditional criteria of justness in the name of security, replace JWT as the preferred geopolitical paradigm of states all over the world, the U.S. has lost its ability to anticipate the strategic exigencies of size. This is because the GWOT is built on inverted ground: terror corrupts our perception of size, and our language reflects this confusion. When we are truly afraid, we speak reflexively of ‘sheer terror,’ using the language of less to signify more, the spare phrasing evocative of the smooth, slick, unscalable, surface of terror, upon which we are unable find anything like a purchase.

The Inability to Go Beyond: Flat Death and Flat Affect

Flatness is endemic to warfare. The two main indices of a mission’s success—ruined landscapes and enemy casualties—are characterized by their flatness. Scarry evocatively describes the aftermath of battle as ‘the laying edge to edge of injured bodies.’ Similarly, wartime perpendiculars, whether the surviving soldier is standing over the body of a dead enemy or comrade, signal either victory or defeat. For those who remain on the homefront, war arrives flatly: vertically on the television screen, horizontally in the newspaper, and shallowly in “figural representations” of its characters and events. The thing that is upright is the thing that has survived. To this rule of flatness, the GWOT is no exception, from the rubble in the parts of Afghanistan that were ‘bombed back to the Stone Age’ to the flags smoothed over the rows of closed caskets. The GWOT has resulted in more American deaths and more images of them than most observers anticipated, and new flat things come home every day. Beyond the governance of proportion, management of flatness is also required of the state, particularly when the shiny plane of the image is colored with a prostrate body.

---

20 Tyler, “History’s Actors,” 34.
21 Cataldi, Emotion, Depth, and Flesh, 11ff.
23 Willis, Portents, 9.
Dimensional practices of the visual must prepare citizens for precisely such two-dimensional encounters. They do so by integrating flat death and flat affect, offering every citizen-spectator a unique combination and a customized perspective. By capitalizing on the godlike individuality that comes from the experience of visual perspective, 24 dimensional practices of the visual provide each user with a personalized mixture that serves as the screen through which he can confront (stand up to) terror as a visual phenomenon.

Roland Barthes, throughout *Camera Lucida*, reiterates the intimacy of the relation between death and photography. On the one hand, Barthes observes, photography conveys the fact of deadness bluntly and unequivocally. On the other, it hints at the promise of resurrection and eternal life attained through the persistence of the photographic record. Either way, for Barthes, modern death and modern photography are co-constitutive and roughly coeval. Modern life, he suggests, is characterized by the displacement of death from the everyday field of experience, but the suppressed fact of mortality continually insinuates itself through the photographs surrounding us. 25 Ubiquitous, these new encounters with death are also somewhat hollow. “With the photograph,” he writes, “we enter into flat Death,” 26 a death generally devoid of its usual emotional content. For Elissa Marder, flat death “is th[e] inability to ‘go beyond’ the passing of the past—the being caught in the relay of an infinite mechanical reproduction which we do not transcend.” 27 By mimicking the banality of death, photography conveys its actual “horror,” which Barthes locates in its very “platitude,” 28 an emotional flatness compounded by the physical flatness of the photograph.

Barthes is primarily concerned with personal experiences of death and photography, and this makes his work particularly useful for a consideration of dimensional practices. But it is also possible to extrapolate from his model, and apply it to photographic practices common to an entire nation-state. Just as the private viewer

26 Ibid.
27 Marder, *Dead Time*, 87.
28 Ibid., 92-93.
must transcend the emphatic flatness of the snapshot to make meaning of it and locate its *punctum*, to too must the citizen-subject interpret the war casualty image and marshal the appropriate feeling to signify her belonging in the nation-state to whom the dead body belongs. This bridging transects nation, visuality, and flatness and enables the image to do its transformative work.

Wars come to the civilian populace through texts, and the American visual culture of the GWOT is characterized by a ubiquity of images in a variety of formats. Constant access to global media yields information (or at least the feeling of being informed), but leaves the spectator vulnerable to a barrage of flat deaths. The work of citizenship requires parsing the difference between the flat deaths are nothing more than that, and those that ought to be treasured and resurrected through a patriotic gaze. Knowing how to do this means rationing affect, meting it out in accordance with national loyalties, giving an appropriate portion of the right emotion in response to a particular visual stimulus.

Even apart from this nationalist urge or a state imperative to mourn (or at least to perform mourning superficially), affect is a site of regulation. Psycho-medical systems are designed to evaluate it, determining what is too much, what is not enough, and what is just right. Notions like ‘flat affect’ presume that emotions will have an embodied depth, that they will be rooted or tethered in some organic way to the body from which they emanate. ‘Flat affect’ is the term for an improper relation between the degree of feeling expressed or demonstrated and the stimulus toward which it is directed: a bad proportion, an imperfect scale, a failure of body and mind. Barthes, for example, was uneasy about the shortage of affect that he identified in himself as he confronted the immutable flatness of the photograph. He wrote mournfully of having “nothing to say about the death of the one whom I love most, nothing to say about her photograph, which I contemplate without ever being able to get to the heart of it, to transform it.” But in

---

29 Elshtain, “Reflections on War and Political Discourse,” 276.
31 Short of ‘flat’ affect, there is also ‘blunted’ affect, where emotional reactivity is decreased but less skewed to the circumstances.
32 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 93.
the very act of acknowledging that something is wrong, he demonstrates an awareness that he is failing.

For people who have conditions like schizophrenia or depression, the two mental illnesses most often associated with flat effect, such sensitivity to emotional conventions may be impossible. Alternately, for those dealing with trauma and its residual effects, flat affect might be a favorable alternative to the unremitting sensation that characterizes post-traumatic stress, a respite of sorts. But in American psychiatry, flat affect is almost always deemed pathological. In this work of diagnosis, there is a slippage between symptom and disease: is flat affect the real problem, or a manifestation thereof? And what is the difference? Because it may well be “impossible” for anyone to “gauge the depths of trauma,”33 for those who undertake clinical or scientific study of “how people come to be overwhelmed,”34 it is tempting to focus on the superficialities of trauma, its surface manifestations, the way it exteriorizes itself. For this purpose, ‘flat affect’ is a useful diagnostic concept, as it legitimates what might otherwise be just a hunch about the wrongness of someone else’s feelings.

‘Flat affect’ is fundamentally communicative. It is distinct from the thoroughgoing solitude of depression, the inward chaos of schizophrenia, or the punishing circumspection of PTSD. For flat affect to be diagnosed, the subject must have an interlocutor that is able to make comparisons between actual and ideal emotional displays. It is a social category, defined by criteria that are culturally variable, and generally unforgiving of the personal circumstances that might make flat affect seem logical, or sane, a dilemma that is especially acute in wartime. Jonathan Shay, in his groundbreaking study, Achilles in Vietnam, sets forth the axiom that “War Destroys the Trustworthy Social Order of the Mind,”35 confusing norms and reflexes and requiring an absence of affect in soldiers at precisely the times when civilians might be the most emotional.

33 Sebald, On the Natural History of Destruction, 89.
34 van der Kolk and McFarlane, “The Black Hole of Trauma,” 4.
35 Shay, Achilles in Vietnam, 32.
This kind of emotional manipulation is an extension of the everyday politics of affect in the nation-state. Most critics, like Brian Massumi in “Fear: The Spectrum Said,” focus on the way that the U.S. has, in its GWOT, focused on provoking affective responses as a way of manipulating its citizenry into acquiescence. An over-emphasis on the cultivation of fear, however, occludes the fact that the reverse is also a necessary operation. It is impossible for the nation-state to successfully conduct a war if everyone is hysterical with fear or grief, and so good citizens must learn to modulate their emotions in accordance with the needs of the nation-state. Often, the primary need is for calm. The nation-state might facilitate this directly, by modeling the reserve it expects, or more subtly. It might also act more subtly, as by producing “templates” for the remembrance of nationally traumatic events like war, outlines that serve as flat, modular patterns to channel and delimit affective response, dampening citizens’ emotions when they threaten to become unhelpful or unwieldy. There is evidence, though, that these efforts might be superfluous, because citizen-subjects learn how to self-regulate in times of crisis. For example, Patrick Bracken documents a marked decrease in clinic admissions for mental health complaints in Northern Ireland in periods of especially intense fighting during ‘The Troubles.’ Bracken explains this by noting that war does not automatically increase the incidence of trauma, and hypothesizes that the intensified social cohesion that many enclaves feel during conflict can mediate its otherwise deleterious psychic effects. Flat affect is occasionally desirable, or productive.

Then again, flat affect often keeps company with a general anhedonia, which might explain why popular American enthusiasm for the GWOT has declined so precipitously, even in the face of (relatively) good news. Hence, the GWOT places the state in a difficult situation, affectively speaking. While a circumscribed range of emotional responses made recovery from various public relations debacles like Abu Ghraib and the ‘coffin photos’ easier, flat affect is often generalized rather than selective, and there are times when a massive outpouring of enthusiastic feeling would be really useful for the state. Yet as long as an administration is on the defensive about the war

37 Bracken, Trauma, 68-69.
and unable to persuade its people about the usefulness of all the flat deaths that they see, too little affect is probably easier to manage than too much. The greatest peril of this kind of generalized flat affect is simply boredom, as opposed to emotional energy that might be channeled into opposition.

When the *New York Times* reported in July 2008 on the shortage of photos of dead American soldiers,38 it inadvertently posited a relationship between flat death and flat affect. The implicit argument of the piece was that more flat death (that is, more pictures) would result in more flat affect through desensitization. This is a dilemma, however, because the article also suggests that censorship keeping casualty photographs from the American public presents a disingenuous view of the War. The article tells the story of Zoriah Miller, a freelance journalist who ran afoul the Marines for taking and then electronically disseminating photographs of American casualties of a suicide bombing, and uses his case as proof of a much larger military hostility toward journalists and the photographs they create. The article closes with Miller’s interpretation of the situation:

The fact that the images I took of the suicide bombing—which are just photographs of something that happens every day all across the country—the fact that these photos have been so incredibly shocking to people, says that whatever they are doing to limit this type of photo getting out, it is working.39

If it is correct, Miller’s analysis suggests an economics of affect in which the scarcity of an image determines its value. This clarifies the nation-state’s options for dealing with the visual. It could relent, by releasing a torrent of images of the dead, flooding the proverbial market. This strategy has the advantage of (potentially) slaking the public appetite for photos of the war dead and thus decreasing their value, but also risks provoking widespread grief and anger. It is safer, then, for the nation-state, to support the proliferation of other images, in the hopes that such a substitution will decrease the demand for the original.

38 Kamber and Arango, “4,000 U.S. Deaths.”
39 Ibid., para. 36.
Anti-Structures of Feeling: Dimensional Practices of the Visual

Dimensional practices of the visual are born out of this vexed arithmetic. Because they are charged with the task of taking terror, something immeasurably, ungraspsably big and making it small, bounded, and manageable (or, put another way, taking something sublime and making it tangible) they are riddled with contradictions. They are engineered to help people live with terror, but function by providing objects that simultaneously simulate and defuse it, rendering terror both vivid and palatable. Consequently, dimensional practices are founded on a paradox: they are the most directly concerned with realism, and also the most reliant on simulation.

Dimensional practices are also the most spectacular of all those that I describe in this dissertation. They are spectacular in the sense that they are uniquely innovative and terribly dazzling. They must be, if they are to compete at all with terror and its magnitude. But in their reliance on simulation, they also embody Debord’s definition of the society of the spectacle, in which “[a]ll that was once directly lived has become mere representation.” Dimensional practices of the visual rely extensively on the products of spectacular society to do their work and are, as a whole, the most technologically involved of all the processes I document here. Unlike their illuminating counterparts, which leverage the ‘real’ in their confrontation with terror, dimensional practices privilege realistic simulations—often generated through complex human-machine interfaces—of the flattened “desert of rubble” that terror creates out of a spectacular society.

Even though they reflect a widespread emotional fixation, dimensional practices are not indices of a ‘structure of feeling.’ Raymond Williams defines the structure of feeling as a “mode of social formation, explicit and recognizable in specific kinds of art, which is distinguishable from other social and semantic formulations by its articulation of presence.” In his figuration, affect is an edifice, or a scaffold; instead of this, dimensional practices produce anti-structures of feeling. They create by leveling, a productive razing that lays the groundwork upon which a balance of flat death and flat

40 Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, 12.
41 Agamben, “Marginal Notes,” 77.
affect might be achieved. They produce more by making less, building increasingly lighter structures to handle increasingly heavier things.

W.J.T. Mitchell, in *What Do Pictures Want?*, argues that the two defining sights of the contemporary moment are that of Dolly, the cloned sheep, and 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, both of which he describes as “living images or animated icons.” Mitchell’s comparison between cloning and terror provides a unique insight into the nature of dimensional visual practices. In the strength of their connection to the ‘real’ life of the GWOT, dimensional artifacts are not quite the simulations utterly detached from the real that Baudrillard describes, but they are indeed built upon a habit of “substituting signs for the real itself.” This is a logical strategy for dealing with the trauma induced by terror. Among psychological ailments, trauma disorders are unique because their “core issue” is “reality,” an unmanageable excess of it, rather than the fantasy or delusion that characterizes most mental illnesses. Dimensional practices of the visual work to make terror un-real and so to decrease the intensity of the trauma that results.

Creating a visual artifact always involves a negotiation of the size of the object represented, and visual realism is partly a matter of scale: the trueness of proportion between the thing and its representation. Modern producers of visual culture often relied on the manipulation of size as a preferred visual practice for dealing with personal and social upheavals. Beginning in the 18th century and until well after the ascension of photography in the mid-19th century, portrait miniatures were a favored visual mode for commemorating the death of a loved one. Loftus and Kaufman note that even private “memories serve various social functions,” and as an intensely personal form with a high degree of cultural legibility, “[m]ourning miniatures express[ed] a private grief in a public language.” According to Susan Stewart, modernity brought with it a new malleability and politics of scale, the ability to make objects very small or very large.

---

45 Ibid., 146.
48 Frank, *Love and Loss*, 123.
She argues that each form of resizing corresponds to different historical positions. In the miniature, Stewart detects the “origin of private, individual history,” while the gigantic holds the “origin of public and natural history,” and items of each size facilitate the individual’s entry into both durations. Likewise, early photography—the hallmark of modern visuality—was similarly preoccupied with size, as epitomized by the visually and technologically painstaking work of ‘photomicrography,’ the use of photographic technology to enlarge and render parts of the physical world too small to be detected by the naked eye. In the act of making something bigger or smaller, power is articulated in the mastery over size. While miniaturization “offer[s] a sense of containment and control over an event,” enlargement is a way of taking control of otherwise overwhelming objects or sites. Agamben argues that the dimensions of an image are not immutable properties but rather qualities of the spectator’s experience of it. This description explains the appeal of dimensional practices. Trauma and terror at actual size might be ineffable, but made smaller or larger, they are knowable and yielding, either shrunken to manageable dimensions or blown up to comic proportions.

In all of the examples I document below, an actor or institution creates a dimensional experience for someone else, with the understanding that their experience will make the artifact feel appropriately big or small. Dimension and subjectivity thus acquire an intimate relation through the visual. There is often a great distance between the subjects of these practices (the people that use them) and the things they depict, and the goal of the most dimensional practice is to shrink the experiential gap between the user’s location and the person, place, or thing depicted. Whether that distance is measured in miles, years, or memories, dimensional practices of the visual are designed to draw users closer to their terrors, but to also insulate them with the reassurance that they are only ever representations thereof, and not the terrors themselves.

By the time it is conveyed to its viewers, the dimensional artifact will have rendered terror, if not totally inert, then at least tamer by flattening it, caging it so that the

49 Stewart, On Longing, 71.
50 Jeffrey, ReVisions, 13.
51 Sturken, Tourists of History, 2.
52 Agamben, Profanations, 56.
viewer can confront and defend herself against it more easily in a fairer fight. Terrorism aims at “revealing the vulnerability of a nation’s most stable and powerful entities,” and as the opposite of towering skyscrapers that seem to be asking for it, dimensional practices of the visual erect targets that barely rise above the ground, making everyone safer by keeping them in two dimensions. Moreover, by removing terror from the realm of the real and relocating it into the realistic, dimensional practices not only rob it of its power but they also transform it into a symbol, thin, shimmering, and translucent. The gross disproportion that makes terror so acute is reversed here, with big things becoming very small indeed. The goal is to prove that terror can be taken down to size. At times, however, dimensional practices of the visual seem to overstate their own cases and reduce terror too far, almost trivializing it. Alternately, spectators might become enamored of the dimensional fictions, learning to coexist with downsized versions of terror in relationships that are happy, or even pleasurable.

Reconciliation through dimensional practices comes from a negotiation of flat death and flat affect, achieving a compromise between them and accessing one through the other. Among the most dramatic wartime artifacts of dimensional visual practice is the aerial survey photograph, often displayed in before-and-after pairs to underscore the extent of the ruination. These photographs can be breathtaking, but Davide Deriu counsels against their appeal, arguing that spectators ought to look past their aestheticized version of warfare, made possible by their remove, and see them instead as “images that witness the depth of historical trauma in their midst.” Doing so requires confronting flat death and surmounting flat affect, fighting a visual war on two fronts. In this way, aerial ruinsescapes are precursors to GWOT dimensional practices, whose spectators must perform a similar feat. The major difference, however, is that the destruction is much closer to home.

The organization of this chapter reflects this oscillation. Its arrangement is loosely genealogical, as each of these artifacts begets, in a way, the next, continually recalibrating the mixture of flat death and flat affect required of each citizen. Even if it is

54 Deriu, “Picturing Ruinscapes,” 201.
imperative to rebuild Lower Manhattan, it is impossible without first exorcising the terror there, just as the mountains of dust and scrap must also be removed. Virtual 9/11 enables a purging of trauma and externalizing of terror that makes it possible to cope productively with the war. The war needs soldiers, who need training, and the preparation that FlatWorld accomplishes enables the war which makes FlatDaddy necessary, and make possible his progeny, who are only now coming into focus.

A Plan for Lower Manhattan: Modeling Reflecting Absence

Like someone making a large donation in the name of a deceased loved one, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) has transformed the ruined World Trade Center site into one of the “most expensive ongoing projects in the world.”55 In addition to the usual elements of mixed-use urban development that combines office, retail, and cultural spaces, the reconstructed site will include a space for commemoration of what was lost, ensconced in the shadows of what has been rebuilt. This section takes as its focus the various imaging technologies that the LMDC and its agents have used to communicate this vision to the public: blueprints and models that transcribe their promises. The planned site will be horizontally and vertically sprawling, but the plans convey this in a visual language that is flat and spare.

In a clear example of what Susan Willis calls the “federalization of 9/11,”56 what was originally envisioned as a communal site of healing and commemoration has instead become mired in state and local politics and the thicket of the needs of a whole host of stakeholders. While the immediate aftermath of the attacks demonstrated the extent to which catastrophes can unify, the ongoing debates about rebuilding Lower Manhattan demonstrate how quickly this amity can erode “under the stress of competing interests.”57 The Ground Zero upon which Lower Manhattan will be rebuilt was a mythic location, “more a concept than a place.”58 The redeveloped site will have to be both at once: a

56 Willis, Portents of the Real, 25.
57 E. Kaplan, Trauma Culture, 137.
58 Sturken, Tourists of History, 168.
conceptual architectural re-vision of the World Trade Center and a real urban site, constructed in accordance with millions of mundane considerations.

Although most were reluctant to admit it at first, the sudden evacuation of so many acres of exceedingly high-value real estate provided an unparalleled urban planning “opportunity.”\(^{59}\) Capitalizing on that potential, however, would require surmounting countless logistical obstacles, and the process has drawn controversy and complaint from nearly all involved quarters, as the work of memorialization has been prolonged by an extraordinary proliferation of bureaucracy,\(^ {60}\) while the cost is expected to run to $20,000,000,000 by 2011.\(^ {61}\) 9/11 made visible the “enormous materiality of the infrastructure of capitalism,”\(^ {62}\) and someone would have to clean up the mess and cover the blemishes. Created in 2002 with the charge of redeveloping Lower Manhattan after 9/11, the LMDC provides administrative oversight and creative direction in that project. The day-to-day business, however, is handled by the Lower Manhattan Command and Control Center (LMCC), which was created in November 2004 for that expressed purpose, when it was rapidly becoming clear that many of the original and ambitious plans would not be realized on time, if they even materialized at all.

Ranking below the LMDC in creative authority (and budgetary power) is the site’s master planner,\(^ {63}\) Daniel Libeskind, the man charged with delivering on the LMDC’s somewhat defensive promise that “There is a plan for Lower Manhattan.” During the design selection process, Libeskind became something of a folk hero, widely represented as a genuinely patriotic artist railing against the bureaucratization of loss, but

---

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 250.

\(^{60}\) Sorkin, “Back to Zero,” 213.

\(^{61}\) Polidori, “Mega-Projects,” n.p. Kevin Rozario’s historical analysis of how Americans “came to view disasters as agents of economic, political, and moral progress” in The Culture of Calamity (26) includes a consideration of the various kinds of profit to be reaped from 9/11.


\(^{63}\) There are a number of actors involved in this project, with varying degrees of symbolic and material claims on Lower Manhattan. Although the Port Authority will have control of the main building—1 WTC—Larry Silverstein (of Silverstein Properties) is the primary leaseholder and developer for the WTC site as a whole. Other individuals and parties, like former governor George Pataki, current NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg, and the 9/11 families also have strong, if informal, ties to the site and sway in the decisions about redeveloping it.
he has since been demoted to something of a laughingstock, the “fancy-glasses-wearing master planner” whose vision now seems overwrought.

Still, despite multiple revisions and amendments, Libeskind’s general plan for four buildings and a museum/memorial remains generally intact. The centerpiece of the rebuilt site, under construction and supervised by architect David M. Childs, was to be his 1776-foot-tall “Freedom Tower,” controversially renamed in March 2009 as ‘One World Trade Center.’ Libeskind’s plan specified that the structure of this building should stop at the height of the original WTC towers, 1362 feet, and culminate in an illuminated antenna. This building, according to the LMDC will be “unprecedented in terms of life safety and security,” which will be guaranteed by a variety of “redundant measures” to protect the promise that Libeskind inscribed in the plans as “Life victorious.” The remaining three buildings will be less tall and less symbolically large than the Freedom Tower, oriented more toward function than emotion.

Although the redeveloped site is meant to be immersive, lively, and somewhat “chaotic” rather than pedantic or overbearing—lots of traffic, sunshine, and open space—many critics suspect that the Ground Zero has become a location of what Victor Burgin calls ‘paranoiac space’ that worries always about being invaded. Preventing terror altogether is probably impossible, but the very notion of a plan to rebuild on the

---

64 Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 250.
65 Goldman, “Man-of-the-Month,” para. 9.
66 Although some criticized the change as ‘unpatriotic,’ it might allay the lingering fears that deeming the building “Freedom Tower” would make it a tempting target for future terrorists attack. The AP (Westfeldt, “Critics Call Freedom Tower,”) report on this decision and resulting controversy suggested that there is some mystery around the reason for the name change. Part of the motivation by the site’s owners and developers, including the Port Authority, may have been commercial, as reports surfaced of the Port Authority using the moniker ‘One World Trade Center’ in its efforts to court “high-profile commercial tenants” (para. 15).
68 With the exception of the plans for the Freedom Tower / One World Trade Center, design information on renewnyc.com is scanty, particularly compared to the detail available about the World Trade Center memorial. This could reflect a concern for security, or the indeterminacy that results from continual wrangling over the details, or a combination of both.
69 Hoskins, “The Politics of Memory,” 250. Here, Hoskins is referring in particular to the scrapped plans for an International Freedom Center on the site, a rather heavy-handed museum about the evils of intolerance that ultimately proved to be more trouble than it was worth.
70 Burgin, “Paranoiac Space,” 183.
site of the World Trade Center reveals a belief that with enough security and preparation, anyone and anything can be safe.

Yet the jury that picked the winning design for the memorial, *Reflecting Absence*, had priorities other than rather mundane, logistical concerns as they weighed out which submission best achieved their goal to “inspire an end to hatred, ignorance, and intolerance” by commemorating 9/11. Although the technical details of redesigning the whole site meant that all but the most experienced architects (like Libeskind) would find such a task impossible, the smaller scope of the memorial project and the sense of shared, communal suffering made a public design contest seem practical and appropriate. Anyone who was willing to pay the non-refundable $25 registration fee and abide by the 38 pages of guidelines—both practical and ideological—set forth by the LMDC could submit an idea, further evidence of Sontag’s rather cynical claim that there is no such thing as “collective memory,” only “collective instruction.”\(^{71}\) The carefully cultivated openness of the competition resulted in an exceptionally wide variance in the quality of the submissions themselves and the creativity of the visions they reflected. Despite being rather grim, the competition drew a sizeable field, and the LMDC reports that they had 13683 registrants who ultimately submitted 5201 design ideas, representing 63 nations and 49 states. Out of these, the jury picked the work of Michael Arad, then an ‘unknown Israeli architect,’\(^{72}\) who submitted a design entitled *Reflecting Absence*, and eventually paired him with a more established landscape designer, Peter Walker, to refine his idea. Ultimately, the jury decided to avoid directly “iconic solutions” to the problem of commemoration, in order to reflect the evolving quality of memory\(^{73}\) and stated that they selected the Arad/Walker design because it was the most eloquent in “allowing absence to speak for itself.”

Predictably, *Reflecting Absence* commemorates an idealized version of the Towers, the tall and distinctive structures visible from afar, rather than the quotidian experience of the World Trade Center, which many New Yorkers described as

\(^{71}\) Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 85.


\(^{73}\) K. Savage, “Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument,” 116
inconvenient and oppressive,\textsuperscript{74} while at street level, the “towers virtually disappeared”\textsuperscript{75} because all that was visible was their enormous bottoms. \textit{Reflecting Absence} mourns the loss of the buildings by forcing the gaze downward, rather than upward, into the preserved ‘footprints’ of the towers, which Arad and Walker describe as “open and visible reminders of the absence.” With its waterfalls and reflecting pools, and scattershot arrangement of the names of the dead below ground, \textit{Reflecting Absence} is meant to emphasize the “haphazard brutality” of the attacks and the “vast scope of the destruction” by playing off of the “enormity of [the] space” they left behind. Arad’s original presentation of his vision was compelling but rather sterile, and Walker added more green than Arad’s spare design originally called for,\textsuperscript{76} including deciduous trees to reflect what the plans describe as the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. This addition was meant to make the space more inviting and draw it closer to the LMDC’s vision of a street-level plaza that was inviting to tourists and regular pedestrians and served as an interface between the memorial and the city, an open, urban, inviting feel lacking in the initial design.

Marita Sturken writes that the “void is the primary aesthetic” of the memorial design,\textsuperscript{77} and in this way, Arad and Walker have taken the dimensional work of the attackers one step further. The hijackers reduced the Towers to piles of scrap, rubble that Patricia Yaeger describes as the ‘archive’ of the event,\textsuperscript{78} and the designers have reduced that rubble to nothing, or to a subterranean negative of itself, incorporating dimensional terror into the ground of the city itself. If the hijackers assured that there would be “nothing else to see on Ground Zero,”\textsuperscript{79} Arad and Walker turned that nothing into something.

Their vision, as yet unrealized, comes to the public through models, drawings, and animations available online. In addition to the usual aerial views (that make everything smaller still) and monochromatic presentations, the LMDC has published a handful of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{74} Morton, “‘Document of Civilization,’” 21.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 17.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Lubell, “\textit{Reflecting Absence}.”
\item \textsuperscript{77} Sturken, \textit{Tourists of History}, 266.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Yaeger, “Rubble as Archive.”
\item \textsuperscript{79} Baudrillard, \textit{Power Inferno}, 38.
\end{itemize}
more vibrant illustrations and a brief animated tour of the site. In these scenes, it is always a bright, sunny day, and the spaces are populated by figures utilizing the space as intended (no kids on skateboards, no homeless people resting under trees, no vendors selling tacky souvenirs). The essential quiet and stillness of the drawings also serves a pedagogical function that instructs viewers on how the ideal visitor will behave: he will pause in his walk from here to there, or she will stand quietly and reflect. As a primer on the often vexing cultural questions of how, exactly, to behave at monuments, the drawings offer small signals on how to mourn, indicated in the contemplative angle of a visitor’s head or the bouquets of flowers left behind, even as they market the space to potential investors, tenants, users, and visitors.

The various technologies that the LMDC has employed to depict these street scenes continue the work of leveling begun by those young men, flattening the buildings into drawings and then flattening them again to appear on a computer screen. For those who may not be ready to plan a vacation to or set up shop upon an overhauled Ground Zero, these two-dimensional scenes provide a non-threatening and understated invitation by modeling a calm and controlled mode of return to the site of terror. There is no depiction of the awkward enthusiasm of the tourist to a site of tragedy, no sign of a goofy, grinning visitor posing for a photograph before the crypt that houses unidentified remains. Just as there is no one misbehaving in the drawings, neither is there anyone visibly wracked with grief: they are just coping, carrying miniature sadesses through this miniature world.

Simply put, terror is nowhere and everywhere here. Even the sun that lights the drawings is ambiguous: on the one hand, it brightens the space and infuses it with an element of stoic good cheer, while on the other, it is a subtle reminder of how warm,

80 Paul Virilio writes of the ‘aphasia’ of wartime, and argues that widespread militarization of the public “extended [it] into peacetime” (War and Cinema, 28). The utter silence in the drawings, though predictable, still seems a haunting reflection of that prediction.
81 Anderson, The Spectre of Comparisons, 48-49.
82 The most explicitly pedagogical video is available at http://www.lowermanhattan.info/tools/mplayer/default.asp?clip=wtc_memorial&title=Animation%202&desc=47%20seconds. This animation depicts mourners crouching to leave mementos in the underground chamber and parents educating young children about what they are seeing.
83 Lennon and Mitchell, “Dark Tourism.”
sunny autumn days can end up. At street level, only the outlines of terror are visible (the perimeters of the Towers’ footprints), but in the underground chamber, it is pervasive. The models simulate an experience of visiting the redeveloped site, providing a pre-enactment of return and exposing viewers to shrunken, flattened, diluted forms of terror.

While confrontation with the “gruesome” images of war and terror requires us either to look at them or to look away from them, to be “spectators or cowards,” there is no such ultimatum here, nothing to see that is not somehow lovely. Because these renderings are drawn and thus iconic rather than directly indexical of the site, the spectatorship they invite is more akin to that of a painting than a news photograph. Indeed, the websites for the memorial design competition and for the LMDC traffic almost entirely in drawings and simulations, rather than in photographs. There is no danger that flat death—with all its horror and ambivalence—will intrude and spoil the afternoon stroll through the park that is advertised here.

Flat affect, however, has been a more difficult thing to incorporate into the planning. While the planners have had to attend exhaustively to safety in order to banish terror (real or felt) from the site, such a thing is easier said than done. Proving David Campbell’s contention that “[s]ecurity as the absence of movement would result in death via stasis,” recently, area business interests have voiced concerned that the stringent traffic control measures proposed by the NYPD will choke redevelopment of the site. The question becomes one of how to calculate affect with an eye toward profitability: enough feeling that people will want to come to experience the site’s affective power but still feel comfortable to spend money, not so much that they will want to stay away.

In the animation of the memorial site, nearly everyone is standing still as they pondered Arad and Walker’s design, which suggests that for these cartoon guests at least, the affective ratio was right. In this 30-second film, produced by Squared Design Lab and available on renewnyc.com, the primary motion is that of the ‘camera,’ the falling of

---

84 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 42.
85 Campbell, Writing Security, 12.
86 Bagli, “Police Want Tight Security.”
87 The whole thing actually lasts 38 seconds, but only 30 of those actually contain animation. Oddly, the clip begins with the black and white countdown omnipresent in so many old movies.
the water, and the shimmering of the pools. The silence of the film is eerie, because it clearly depicts an urban scene, and shows things (like falling water\textsuperscript{88}) that make distinctive noise. The loop begins with a godlike aerial view of the scene, and then drops to plaza level for a sustained shot even with the sightlines of the silent visitors, who stand unmoving on a sidewalk stippled with the shadows of the leaves of those deciduous trees. Their total inertia is especially striking because other things move around them, as if they are all paralyzed.

These bodies of these sentries, rooted to the spot as if temporarily “imprint[ed]” by trauma,\textsuperscript{89} are the only thing that provides a legend, a way of calculating the scale of the scene. The body is usually the tool we utilize to perceive scale,\textsuperscript{90} so that the size of a thing becomes relative to the size of our bodies; in the plans for Reflecting Absence, the bodies of the mourner-visitors are dwarfed by the memorial space around them. This intersection of the body and dimension is what enables us to form spatial memories, records of “location, orientation, distance, and direction.”\textsuperscript{91} Whereas photos of the 9/11 first responders tended to be framed and cropped in ways that made them seem “larger-than-life,”\textsuperscript{92} towering over the ruins behind them, while these animated visitors are reflecting on absence, they are positively tiny: just dots in the aerial view, and doll-like in their measurements at street level, made insignificant by their disproportion to the holes gaping below them.

Only one person breaks the catatonia of the scene. As the point of view drops slowly from the sky to street level, a lone figure walks purposefully through the shadows of the trees at the back of one of the footprints. He is entirely black, moving in the dark while everyone else stands immobilized in the sun. He does not do anything or to interact with the memorial or anyone else in any way, and so his purpose in the animation is initially unclear, and he is easy to overlook in casual viewings of the clip. But that is perhaps precisely the point.

\textsuperscript{88} As visitors descend to the underground part of the memorial, the falling water around them is designed to dampen street noise from above.
\textsuperscript{89} J. Bennett, Empathic Vision, 23.
\textsuperscript{90} Stewart, On Longing, xii.
\textsuperscript{91} Cohen, Memory in the Real World, 55.
\textsuperscript{92} Lurie, “Falling Persons,” 59.
Ground Zero quickly became a heavily surveilled site,\textsuperscript{93} and the rehabbed World Trade Center site will almost certainly continue in that pattern. Detecting that lone man, seeing him and becoming curious about his intention while everyone else is so harmlessly engaged is practice for the later trip to the actual site, where everyone will have to do her civic duty by being perpetually on the lookout for anything amiss, even as they pretend that everything is fine. There is, after all, a plan for Lower Manhattan, and this is it. Practice surveillance like this provides a point of entry into the tiny universes of these models. As we are registering the sight of that man, the ‘camera’ is tracking downward until it finally deposits us with the other mourners, so that we can become citizens in their little world. In a public space like this, grieving becomes a “prescriptive political practice,”\textsuperscript{94} and good citizens stand still, both so they can mourn and so that anyone who deviates becomes visible as a misfit and a potential threat. Despite the tranquility of its clean surfaces, flat and open spaces, and manicured natural features, terror, so carefully ironed out of the designs, resides at \textit{Reflecting Absence} in this shadowy figure. Of course, the animation ends peacefully, the scene cutting to a neutral shade of grey, and what I saw, well, it was probably nothing.

\textbf{Scaling the Avoidance Wall: ‘Virtual 9/11’}

For some citizens, the main visual task of the GWOT is learning how to see, to force their eyes to adjust to the post-9/11 landscape. For others, however, a more urgent problem is finding a way to un-see, to delete the sights and sensations that interfere with the work of living after terror. In the months following September 11, 2001, data suggests a general unanimity in threat perception by New Yorkers, in terms of the degree and immediacy of the danger they sensed.\textsuperscript{95} For some, this nagging fear was a logical reaction to an extraordinary situation, but for others, it grew into part of a much larger complex of persistent anxieties that have accumulated into PTSD. One of the available

\textsuperscript{93} Sorkin, “Back to Zero,” 216.
\textsuperscript{94} Doss, “Death, Art, and Memory,” 69.
\textsuperscript{95} E. Ann Kaplan surmises that the intensity of the experience of terror would be inversely proportionate to one’s distance from the scene (\textit{Trauma Culture}, 99), a general trend borne out—with some variations by age, gender, and political affiliation—empirically by Fischhoff, Gonzalez, Small, and Lerner in “Judged Terror Risk.”
treatments for this disorder, tested extensively among first responders to the site with very promising results, is a virtual reality simulation called ‘Virtual 9/11.’ This program relies on computer-generated animations and artificially-produced sensations mimicking those of Ground Zero to coax sufferers out of their trauma and help explain the “enigma of survival”\textsuperscript{96} that constitutes it. Ground Zero is a hyper-visible nexus of trauma and a thus logical object of reproduction in the efforts to undo it, a vivid cue to present the alert, anxious symptoms of trauma.

‘Virtual 9/11’ is a way of accelerating and refining the process of exposure therapy (also called ‘imaginal exposure therapy’), which has become the “gold standard” in treatment of PTSD.\textsuperscript{97} During exposure therapy sessions, clinicians guide patients through detailed recollections of the traumatic events, on the logic that repeated exposure to frightening stimuli in a controlled environment will disconnect the stimulus from the exaggerated response it provokes. However, as proponents of VR-assisted exposure therapy observe, “[m]any patients are unwilling or unable to self-generate and re-experience painful emotional images,”\textsuperscript{98} producing instead a “flat emotionless tale”\textsuperscript{99} of what happened. Regular exposure therapy can only work if the patient self-generates images traumatic enough to provoke the intended catharsis, but because this process can be traumatic in itself, and so many patients are unable to achieve their therapeutic goals. Because PTSD is characterized by a compulsion to avoid stimuli reminiscent of the traumatic event and even the memory of trauma can produce real, physical sensations of it\textsuperscript{100} the potential of exposure therapy often goes unrealized.

During imaginal exposure therapy, patients are charged with conjuring their own memories of the traumatic event. Although they might be able to remember other sensory elements of the situation like smells or sounds, scenes (i.e. mental images) are the only stimuli that patients can generate autonomously;\textsuperscript{101} thus IET is, in itself, a visual

---

\textsuperscript{96} Caruth, \textit{Unclaimed Experience}, 58.
\textsuperscript{97} Mundell, \textquotesingle\textquotesingle Virtual 9/11,\textquotesingle\textquotesingle para. 6.
\textsuperscript{98} Difede and Hoffman, \textit{Virtual Reality Exposure}, 529.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 531.
\textsuperscript{100} J. Bennett, \textit{The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory}, 27.
\textsuperscript{101} The lexicon for describing trauma reflects its visual nature. As Saltzman and Rosenberg observe, “From primal scene to flashback to screen memory to the dream, much of the language deployed to speak
experience. But because 9/11 was “so terrifying that it severed seeing from believing,”¹⁰² for traumatized survivors, the usual circuit between physical sight and cognitive interpretation was damaged. When the exposure therapy patient instead becomes a virtual reality spectator/participant “immersed in electronically simulated inputs,”¹⁰³ she is no longer obligated to imagine the trauma, and she can focus instead on narrating and thus diminishing the intensity of feelings that result. Virtual reality relies on the ability of the patient to see to achieve its therapeutic objectives and supplements his sight, ensuring that he sees correctly.

As an innovation in exposure therapy, VR therapy can help the patient “break through an avoidance ‘wall’ and find the path to healing,”¹⁰⁴ and healing means, in part, the regulation of affect, a process that is haunted on all sides by flatness. Flatness, in different forms, is both a peril and a goal of exposure therapy. Flat narrations of the traumatizing event do not provide the patient with enough momentum to break the ‘avoidance wall.’ But the other side should not be an overcorrection: the patient’s affect in response to the traumatic stimuli should be reasonable and modulated. Either way, diagnoses of PTSD are based largely on the severity of its “superficial” manifestations,¹⁰⁵ the intensity with which they appear on the surface of the patient. Although no one is absolutely sure why or how, VR therapy punctures that barrier, and in most cases, patients report improvement.

VR exposure therapy is descended from a more established clinical use of virtual reality: pain management. The field of ‘VR analgesia’ was pioneered by Hunter G. Hoffman, who suspected and then proved that VR could ameliorate psychological and physical pain, a finding that led to the developments of such simulations as SpiderWorld (used to treat severe arachnophobia) and SnowWorld (used to distract burn patients from excruciating treatment regimens). The latter case was especially remarkable because it

¹⁰² Melencamp, “Fearful Thoughts,” 130.
¹⁰³ Crawford, “Unheimlich Maneuver,” 976.
¹⁰⁴ Mundell, “‘Virtual 9/11,’” para. 10.
demonstrated that VR can work as an analgesic even in cases of ‘extreme pain.’ Because VR could help alleviate mental and physical suffering, psychiatrists suspected that it might hold promise for treating PTSD, a disorder whose symptoms manifest psychologically and physically at once, and researchers first explored this possibility with a rudimentary simulation called ‘Virtual Vietnam,’ and developed it more fully with Virtual 9/11. Unlike SnowWorld, which works by diverting the patient’s attention away from his pain, Virtual 9/11 is only effective if they can direct the patient’s focus to it.

As they view an animation of the World Trade Center scene, Virtual 9/11 patients recount their memories of September 11th and the clinician then utilizes the program to generate sights and sounds that match the patient’s commentary, they will soon be able to introduce smells as well. Once the patient’s articulated or demonstrated anxiety decreases, the clinician can introduce more and increasingly traumatic stimuli. Judith Cukor, the New York City-based psychiatrist leading the effort (working with Hoffman and others) to use VR to help people cope with 9/11 PTSD has also experimented supplementing the therapy by administering low doses of D-cycloserine. DCS is a tuberculosis drug that has improved animal learning, in an effort to speed the patients’ retention of the lessons learned through the therapy. In effect, the DCS capitalizes on the untrustworthiness of memories by simply creating new ones.

A one-minute video sample of Virtual 9/11 available online through the University of Washington, where Hoffman is a research scientist at the Human Interface Technology Lab, offers a sense of the scene that unfolds before the traumatized patient. The color scheme is limited and the images are limited in their verisimilitude, but there is no mistaking the intent of the simulation, which is designed to “evoke a level of response that created discomfort but was tolerable.” Users view the WTC from a strange angle, as the simulation begins innocuously with street noise and an empty blue sky. Once the

---

106 Hoffman, Sharar, Coda, Everett, Ciol, Richards, and Patterson, “Manipulating Presence Influences,” 166.
107 Mundell, “[Virtual 9/11],” para. 12.
108 Ibid., para. 13.
109 Ibid., para. 22.
jet crashes into the building and we hear sirens and screaming, the time frame becomes extremely compressed until the building falls with a crash and the sky fills with smoke. Although the perspective is generally stationary, the film zooms in on a body falling from the towers and tracks its dizzying descent. This falling person provides the only real sense of verticality in the simulation, a body already freighted with so much meaning required to do just this one more thing in service to its fellow citizens.

Apparently not for nothing, however, because the study participants, after completing their course of treatment, showed a “statistically and clinically significant improvement” relative to the control group, defined as a decrease in reported PTSD symptoms to within normal or more manageable levels. Researchers believe that the therapy works by “modifying the patient’s memory” and describe the outcome of one patient’s therapy as follows: “After treatment, [she] could remember what happened to her on September 11th, but without the same degree of associated terror.”

This severing of sight and memory from affect is achieved, in part, by a flattening of the scene and safely containing it on a screen. Multiple sensory inputs help make the simulation immersive, while users generally remain in one place, as the events unfold before them, seen through a helmet and goggles, viewing a visual story that unfolds with all of the certitude of flat death, but none of its direct indexicality. The bodies they encounter are anonymous stock figures, composites who run or scream or fall from the sky, as characters designed only to remind the patient of those who were present at the creation of their trauma.

Unlike in the Reflecting Absence models, citizenship here is deeply individualized, the nation-state present only as the lightning rod for the patient’s trauma. As they watch the buildings collapse or ‘run’ through them looking for exit, they chart their own course through a common trauma. But by focusing on the buildings, the simulation still retains the national frame of the events. Buildings like the World Trade Center are/were a “visible embodiment of the invisible,” vectors of the amorphous idea

111 Ibid.
113 Leach, “9/11,” 181.
of a national homeland, and finding a way to survive their collapse is preparation for the work of citizenship that happens outside the doctor’s office.

Specifically, Virtual 9/11 makes it possible for the patients to more rationally make the calculations that all GWOT Americans make (often unconsciously) on a daily basis: determining whether a particular thing is a threat or not, and deciphering whether a particular terror is real or not. Virtual 9/11, when it works, frees patients from the most burdensome and disruptive of these calculations, or keeps her from feeling like she needs to double-check them incessantly. But just as Americans were told to recover from one terror while still preparing for another, the freedom achieved through Virtual 9/11 might not translate beyond that specific trauma. This leaves the patient as vulnerable as anyone else to new terrors, but perhaps able to derive a consolation of sorts in the knowledge that, at least in this one regard, she is finally the same as everyone else.

“Welcome to FlatWorld”: Training for Combat at the ICT
Coping with civilian traumas is one thing. Dealing with military service is another. Just as wartime makes greater demands of soldiers than their civilian countrymen, so too are the virtual reality instruments designed to equip them for their duties far more complex than those developed for dealing with the garden-variety traumas of 9/11. One such instrument, emblematic of the growing field of ‘military new media,’114 is the FlatWorld or Mixed Reality (MxR) project by USC’s Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), a virtual reality platform that is adaptable to many purposes but used regularly for military training. The ICT115 develops a staggering variety of military applications; FlatWorld is the scaffold that enables many of them.

Located in a white, six-story office-building behind one of Marina del Rey’s many strip malls (this one featuring a Pilates studio and a veterinary clinic that also specializes in canine acupuncture), and identified outside only by a small sign with a stylized logo, the ICT is one of the prime university-affiliated research centers (UARCs) in virtual reality research and development. The ground floor of the building houses a

---

114 Leopard, “Mobilizing Affect.”
115 I return to the ICT in the following chapter, where I analyze their Virtual Iraq as a diagnostic practice of the visual.
reception area that is nondescript (save for its large movie theater-esque popcorn machine), but amenable to guests and visitors. Their Virtual Reality Theater is a dual-use space, designed for research purposes, but also for the screening of a nauseatingly realistic introductory video that showcases the quality and intensity of their simulations. Similarly, their screening room is a small lecture hall dominated by a massive screen for public demos of their designs and projects. The floors above are a warren of cubicles and office space, where much of the actual work of the ICT takes place. When I visited, my companions included journalists, filmmakers, and Army personnel (one in fatigues), the diversity of interests among the visitors mirroring those represented at the ICT itself.

Promotional materials for the ICT describe it as a “cross-disciplinary environment” where techies, entertainment professionals and, often, military personnel, work together to develop the most immersive and effective simulations possible. The ICT assertively brands itself as a unique player in this evolving field and makes this promise in its promotional materials: “Engaging and effective. Powerful and portable. Our innovations help save lives, resources, and time.” While they revel in their achievement of “synergy” between simulation researchers and entertainment professionals, their work is likely to alarm observers concerned about cross-pollination between warfare and entertainment, and their products seem to validate grim prognostications about the development of a militarized culture industry.

Beyond being remarkable for the creativity of their work, the ICT is also astonishing in its sheer productivity. Most UARCs just do theoretical research and write papers about it; the ICT actually produces usable products, lots of them, and currently has dozens of active projects. Founded in 1999 with a 5-year, $45,000,000 grant from the US Army, the ICT began its work “with the promise that any technological advances [it made could] also be applied to creating more compelling video games and theme park rides.” Such an origin story is fairly typical in the VR field, for despite widespread fascination with the technology, industry alone cannot fund the research required to

---

117 Gourley, “Institute for Creative Technologies.”
118 Lenoir, “All But War is Simulation,” 328.
achieve truly astonishing results. Hence, most VR innovations happen at institutions formed through partnerships between government, industry, and the academy in “university-based research” settings. Today, the ICT is still funded almost entirely by the military and is specifically affiliated with the Army’s Research, Development, and Engineering Command (RDECOM), motto: “Technologically Driven. Warfighter Focused.” While I was at the ICT, however, staff repeatedly clarified their positions by indicating that they are employed by USC (i.e. not by the military), and many have roles elsewhere at the university, as teaching or research professors, or, in some cases, connections to the entertainment industry.

Researchers at the ICT develop instruments that help users hone combat skills including leadership, decision-making, cultural literacy, and technical proficiency. Many of these follow the general format of a ‘serious game,’ a video simulation that combines the motivating urgency of the game format with educational, usually military, objectives. Further, in their unitary perspective and the individualized experiences that emerge from it, most of the ICT’s projects are similar to so-called first-person-shooter (FPS) games (examples of which include Doom and the Call of Duty series), although many of the ICT simulations leave their users weaponless.

FPS is more a question of perspective than violence; that is, the first-person is more integral to the game than the shooting. Through images and narrative, FPS games align the whole world around the perspective of the shooter, who interacts with the world by exploring, gathering information, and acting on it. Because these environments are often physically demanding, part of the pleasure derived from video games is the

119 Ibid., 299.
120 Ibid., 300.
121 The ICT does not do any classified work, and so when it prepares simulations for sensitive topics like tactical questioning, it must ultimately pass them on to the Army for completion.
122 My goal here is not to make an ethical case for or against these video games, though my general feeling is that arguments about their negative cultural consequences tend to be overstated and reliant on simplistic understandings of the relationship between media consumption and social behavior. Video games have, of course, been blamed for many transgressions. Some of these accusations related to the military include Susan Willis’ implication that the torturers at Abu Ghraib got bored with their video games and so turned to real victims (Portents of the Real, 126), and Karen J. Hall’s contention that violent video games like America’s Army acculturate players to the experience of watching, and then partaking in killing (“False Witness,” 99).
opportunity to experiment with life in a perfected body that is, as Michele White points out, often very different from the real body of the player. She argues that the ideal computer user or gamer has a perfectly flat body, tightly muscled and free of fat, so no contact between the flesh and itself distracts or detracts from the immersive experience of playing. This idealized type is, of course, at odds with the physique that generally results from long hours spent at a computer. In FlatWorld, which requires none of the bulky head-mounted apparatuses that usually make VR possible, users—whose military bodies are already closer approximations to the smooth, muscular ideal—stand, move, and interact. Rather than being hunched over a tiny screen, this activity keeps the body flatly out of contact with itself and deeply enmeshed in the (flat) world around it.

In all of their endeavors, the ICT aims for video-game verisimilitude, the high degree of realism that avid players of advanced video and computer games come to expect: environments that are lifelike and engrossing. Sophisticated projects like these rarely gain attention outside of specialized technical and military circles, but in 2004, the ICT made broader headlines with the launch of *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Released almost simultaneously to the military as a training aid and to the public as an XBox game with few substantive variations between the two, *Full Spectrum Warrior* earned the ICT a great deal of positive recognition from the media and satisfied customers among gamers and soldiers alike.

The pleasures available through FlatWorld are somewhat more refined. Launched in early 2001 to prepare soldiers for the tactical, ethical, and cultural dilemmas that might arise during peace-keeping missions in the Balkans, the FlatWorld architecture has since been adapted to other settings, including villages in the Middle East. According to its creators, the cultivation of sensitivity is a key indicator of ‘success’ in FlatWorld simulations; they work if they can avoid flat affect. A central tenet of the ICT philosophy is that effective learning requires intense emotional engagement, and so its simulations

---

124 Leopard, “Mobilizing Affect.”
125 Writing for the *New York Times*, Clive Thompson provides a first-person account of the “surprisingly distressing”—and thus successful—experience of playing *Full Spectrum Warrior* for the first time. (“The Making of an X Box Warrior,” para. 1).
are designed to cultivate two kinds of sensitivities: respect for cultural differences as well as the capacity to discern them.

The FlatWorld project is a ‘mixed-reality’ virtual simulation that couples physical objects and simulated experiences built around digital ‘flats.’ These “large rear-projection screens that employ digital graphics to depict a room’s interior, a view to the outside, or a building’s exterior”\textsuperscript{126} give the environment its shape and structure and also give the project its name. Combined with physical props, the objects coalesce into an “immersive simulation in which a person’s entire body is engaged in a space where they can move freely and touch physical objects seamlessly integrated into an interactive [virtual environment].”\textsuperscript{127} David Krum, one of computer scientists working on the project, described the project in similar terms when I heard him lecture about it, calling it an integration of virtual reality with the real world.\textsuperscript{128}

The ICT touts a number of distinctive elements of this project: it is scalable,\textsuperscript{129} portable,\textsuperscript{130} versatile, and affordable, being run wherever possible by commercially-available off-the-shelf (COATS) computer hardware. All of this means that FlatWorld can achieve sophistication and cost-effectiveness without sacrificing either one. Additionally, the design allows users a full, free range of motion within the bounds of their FlatWorld, and also does not require the head-mounted display (HMD) goggles that most virtual reality simulations do. Additionally, the distinctive, infinitely reusable, and visually versatile flats can be configured to simulate a variety of locales, including a variety of ‘typical’ Middle Eastern scenes. Fighting terror, in mixed reality, is learning how to negotiate various arrays of flatness, utilizing these surfaces to successfully execute a mission.

ICT researchers noticed that most educational VR trainings focus only on the development of skills, and they maintain that military personnel would benefit from more

\textsuperscript{126} ICT, “FlatWorld.”  
\textsuperscript{127} Pair, Neumann, Piepol, and Swartout, “Flatworld,” 12.  
\textsuperscript{128} Krum, “Mixed Reality Lab (MxR) Immersive Experiences.”  
\textsuperscript{129} Pair, Neumann, Piepol, and Swartout, “Flatworld,” 13.  
\textsuperscript{130} Currently, there are FlatWorld set-ups for training in Fort Sill, OK; Quantico, VA; and Camp Pendleton, CA.
attention to emotion in training.\textsuperscript{131} The ICT aspires to provide users with an “artificial world” made lifelike by realistic cultural details. Much of their work has a somewhat anthropological sensibility about it. This definition of culture is evidenced in the following shorthand:

If a hundred people from the same culture are put into the same situation, they won’t respond in a hundred different ways. Instead a handful of responses will cover the range of responses.\textsuperscript{132}

Because the ICT claims “We specialize in tact, not just tactics,” the goal is to plan for a circumscribed range of culturally-determined reactions likely to result from a particular action by the soldier.

Jennifer Terry has suggested that the military tends toward “decontextualizing moves”\textsuperscript{133} in its representations of warfare, stripping violence of its ethical and cultural contexts but not its glory, FlatWorld deviates from that pattern. At the same time, however, it proves once again Edward Said’s contention that the Orient often becomes little more than a representation.\textsuperscript{134} The vision of the enemy that emerges through FlatWorld is less two-dimensional than it might appear, but more formulaic than we would hope.

Like all ICT projects, FlatWorld achieves the sensation of realism by attending to small things like ambient noise (even that of a frequency that would not be readily detectable) and blinking,\textsuperscript{135} features that might not be noticeable unless they were missing. Like all ICT projects, and the blockbuster films that they emulate, FlatWorld installations contain “a good story, good characters, and good special effects,” which the ICT cites as a key part of its approach to ‘cognitive training.’ Like film (but unlike most video games) Flat World and other ICT projects utilize ‘coercive narrative’\textsuperscript{136} to guide

\textsuperscript{131} Rizzo, Morie, Williams, Pair, and Buckwalter, “Human Emotional State,” 1; and Morie, Iyer, Valanejad, Sadek, Miraglia, and Milam, “Emotionally Evocative Environments,” 1.
\textsuperscript{133} Terry, “Killer Entertainments,” para. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{134} Said, Orientalism.
\textsuperscript{135} Morie, Iyer, Valanejad, Sadek, Miraglia, and Milam, “Emotionally Evocative Environments,” 2.
\textsuperscript{136} Morie, “Coercive Narratives.”
users toward certain places and behaviors, to ensure that they learn something from the simulation instead of just wandering around.

One of the things that makes FlatWorld so unique and also so effective is its achievement of seamless integration between the virtual and tangible worlds. In addition to the more abstract form of cultural sensitivity promoted in the negotiation simulations, FlatWorld also offers its users a more corporeal form of training. Drawing from the logic that human evolution was fueled in part by our ancestors’ interactions with a tangible world, FlatWorld simulations seek, in the words of a promotional video, to “harness the power of the human” by reinforcing learning physically. Citing interviews in which soldiers describe their ‘muscle memory’ for performing certain crucial tasks and a relying on a theory of cognition which holds that learning results from the integration of mental and physical stimuli, ICT researchers built physical cues into FlatWorld to reinforce the coercive narratives driving the simulations. For example, their Infantry Immersive Trainer (IIT) at Camp Pendleton and Quantico, ask soldiers to make ‘shoot/no-shoot decisions’ in realistic scenarios, and incorporates specially designed ‘simunition’ systems (which Krum described as “paintball on steroids”) to underscore the lessons that the simulation is meant to teach.

Further, as a user moves bodily through the world, an operator can use buttons to “trigger scripted events”\(^\text{137}\) that give FlatWorld its educational power. Most of the actual teaching, however, is done by virtual humans\(^\text{138}\) who can converse with, instruct, and react to the real human user. The ICT relies on virtual humans because they are cheaper than real teachers (and also, I suspect, because they’re really cool), and their objective is to “replicate real world conditions without the costs associated with live exercises.” FlatWorld is, after all, preparation for combat. Even though it employs, like many ICT undertakings, design elements and ideas from immersive theme-park rides,\(^\text{139}\) FlatWorld is neat but meaningless without the referent of real war, and its objective is to “give the

\(^{137}\) Treskunov, Pair, and Swartout, “The Flatworld Simulation,” 3.

\(^{138}\) Additionally, many of the demos for the mixed-reality simulations are populated by virtual human users as well.

warfighter the ability to experience an environment before physically being there.”

Alice Crawford detects in VR a radical potential, because it enables users to “periodically estrange [them]selves from our accustomed bodily parameters the confines of the normative ego so that we may return” to themselves and to their relations in a more humane and empathic way. FlatWorld prepares users for that return by training them to excel in their duties to the nation-state, a simulation of what their chosen mode of citizenship requires.

Doubtless, this would be impossible without the variety of sensory aids that can be appended to the FlatWorld architecture to better evoke the corporeal encounters of war: powerful audio systems, platforms that generate vibration under the soldier’s feet, smell machines, and so on. These elements combine to make the ICT product uniquely valuable for its purposes, but they would all be meaningless without the simulation’s visual elements. Some of its creators assert that the graphics must be extremely convincing, otherwise the “mixed-reality illusion fails.”

In general, virtual reality offers a more intense encounter with the visual than that provided by other media, so much so that the discrepancy between visual and corporeal stimuli can result in severe nausea on the part of the user. Presumably, with a more ambulatory simulation like FlatWorld, this would be less of a problem, but the fact remains that virtual reality fails or succeeds by its images, though this outcome is dependent less on the indexical quality of the visual representations and more on its affective resonance.

For the ICT, the goal is always a simulation that achieves “feels-real” rather than “photo-real” authenticity. VR animation cannot generate the purely indexical relations between object and image that photography can, and so the correspondence in FlatWorld is intuitive, or affective, rather than precisely visual. In the absence of true flat death, FlatWorld soldiers can fight a war that leaves no record, no visible traces. FlatWorld enables them to risk themselves without any but a simulated threat of harm. Free from

---

141 Crawford, “Unheimlich Maneuver,” 988.
142 Pair, Neumann, Piepol, and Swartout, “Flatworld,” 15.
143 Crawford, “Unheimlich Maneuver,” 977.
the threat of this kind of flatness, users can lose themselves in an intellectual and affective expedition. In this way, FlatWorld gives them access to the courage that comes from invincibility, even as they experience a version of the stress that comes from having to make complex decisions quickly in an unfamiliar and deeply unpredictable environment.

This is why, with FlatWorld, “‘You can create veterans who’ve never seen combat.’” Users become veterans because they have a scaled version of the physical, interpersonal, and ethical dimensions of warfare, shrunk and flattened through the removal of risk and physicality. But still, they have not seen combat (in that they have never fought in a real war, nor have they seen one). In FlatWorld, fighting a war and fighting terror become suspensions of disbelief that make it possible to bring the whole world down to size.

A Million Little Things: The FlatDaddy/Mommy Project

Photography provided a solution to the “perennial desire to substitute an image for an anticipated loss,” and image-making is an acknowledgment and a refusal of that loss at once. Everyday photographs are not meant to replace the scenes they depict, and we do not pretend that they do. Such make-believe would be a denial of the absence that gives photographs their sweetness and their meaning, and would pervert the role of photography as a “mode of bereavement,” as a thing that makes leave-taking possible. In this way, FlatDaddy is a unique use of photography, because it is composed less of a departure than it is predicated on the promise of a return.

Because it contradicts so many of our contemporary instincts about the proper use of photography and the appropriate place of photographs, it is tempting to dismiss the cutouts as absurd, to psychologize or pathologize their users, and to condemn the project as another way to coerce compliance from military families. But to do any of those things is to overlook the complexity of these relationships to photographs and the ambivalent experiences of citizenship that they facilitate. Understanding the FlatDaddy

146 Batchen, Burning With Desire, 116.
147 Cadava, Words of Light, 11.
project requires taking seriously what Lauren Berlant might call a ‘silly object’\textsuperscript{148} of American popular culture. Sometimes, when reading or watching people’s accounts of their FlatDaddy experiences, it is hard to discern, how earnest they are; how much they understand that though he is real, he is not sentient; or whether this might be proof of what grief and fear can do. Because the relationships that FlatDaddies have with their wives and children are so perplexing, it is easy to be dismissive. The true motivations for their use are probably impossible to ascertain, and that is not my objective here. My concern is the transactions between flat death and flat affect that take place on their laminated surfaces.

Marketed by SFC Graphics in Toledo, Ohio, FlatDaddies and Mommies are “life-sized printed posters of parents who are actively serving overseas in the military.”\textsuperscript{149} GWOT FlatDaddies were born (?) in 2003, when the then-wife of a National Guardsman serving in Iraq, Cindy Sorenson, got the idea from a classroom activity based on the children’s book \textit{Flat Stanley}, in which children made small paper cut-outs of themselves and sent them to their parents serving overseas.\textsuperscript{150} Sorenson made a life-sized photographic poster of her husband, and then passed the idea along to Elaine Dumler, an author and motivational speaker who published the idea in her popular book series \textit{I’m Already Home}, which provides military families with ideas for activities that can help maintain togetherness during long overseas deployments. From there, a Maine National Guard unit seized on the idea, and began providing FlatDaddies to all of the families left behind; SFC, in an effort to help them meet the demand, began soliciting charitable donations to provide free FlatDaddies to any family that requested them. Demand, however, has since exceeded good will, and in the Spring of 2008, SFC Graphics was forced to start charging for their services: $49.50 for your Daddy or Mommy, though people who are feeling magnanimous can donate a figure to an anonymous military family in need, or send an SFC gift card to someone they know.

\textsuperscript{148} Berlant, \textit{The Queen of America Goes to Washington City}, 12.
\textsuperscript{149} SFC Graphics, “flatdaddies.com.”
\textsuperscript{150} Zezima, “When Soldiers Go to War.”
Buying a FlatDaddy/Mommy is easy. Purchasers simply log on to the SFC website and upload a photo, in accordance with certain instructions. It must be a digital image of relatively high resolution, shot from the waist up. In response to a hypothetical question about whether the photograph must depict the person in uniform, SFC replies: “It is best for the photo to be taken in uniform, but we understand that you might not have a good quality photo of your loved one in uniform.” Although choice of clothing is ultimately at the customers’ discretion, my research suggests that military uniforms are slightly more popular than civilian dress. SFC reminds its patrons that it is unable to create FlatDaddies from images that are blurry, out of focus, or taken from a distance. Once the photo is ‘approved,’ FlatDaddy or Mommy will arrive within 2-3 weeks. When s/he arrives, FlatDaddy/Mommy is quite flat indeed, just a large sheet of printed paper. Some families simply tack them up on the wall, while many others choose to cut along the outline of their bodies, mount them on foam board, and laminate them, making them a bit more substantial and durable enough to rejoin family life. Or at least part of him. Official FlatDaddies are life-sized, but more precisely “life-size-from-the-waist-up.” Petrified into whatever facial expression they had when the picture was taken and truncated for ease of production, FlatDaddies and Mommies (half-)embody Barthes’ assertion that what is developed in the photograph is “undevelopable.” It will not grow or change, but only appear again and again, reanimated in the same form under a loving gaze.

Although the GWOT versions are new, the practice is not entirely unique to this war. In response to an NPR story about FlatDaddies/Mommmies, a Gulf War veteran called in and noted that before his regiment deployed, their children were invited to trace the silhouettes of their departing parents’ bodies on large sheets of paper, and then have their parents do the same to them, so they could have portable versions of one another.

---

151 Ibid., para. 4.
152 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 49.
153 FlatDaddies/Mommies make literal John Tagg’s argument about representation that “[h]istories are not backdrops to set off the performance of images. They are scored into the paltry paper signs …” (Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 65).
during the war. Even if the soldier returns home and replaces his image, it remains haunted as ever by the threat of loss.

Dimensional practices of the visual focused on representing the body of the soldier are not unique to recent military excursions, as the specter of never-coming-home is common to all wars. It is the primarily the scale of representation that has changed over time, evolving into its current life-size. Prior to the invention of photography, mourning miniatures provided a way to commemorate military casualties and national heroes.\textsuperscript{154} While likenesses such as these provided renderings of the face or body of the deceased, photographic portraiture seemed to capture and convey interiority,\textsuperscript{155} creating a different kind of visual triangulation between spectator, object, and image. Pocket-sized daguerreotypes became popular almost as soon as they were available in the mid-19th century, but by 1860, their place had been usurped by the emerging genre of the carte de visite.\textsuperscript{156} Unlike their predecessors, CDVs had the advantage of being readily reproducible and capturing the whole body,\textsuperscript{157} and so providing a fuller likeness of their subjects. Mourning miniatures, because they were unique and far costlier, remained a more valuable if less popular format.\textsuperscript{158} By the Civil War, stereoscopic viewing technology made it possible to view battlefield scenes of corpses in three dimensions, which put viewers in increasingly “intimate relationships”\textsuperscript{159} with the scenes and casualties they consumed. Advances in visual technology increased our capacity to maintain interpersonal connections despite ongoing wars, and photography has become an essential part of militarized rituals of departure, deployment, and return.

Populist in their manufacture and appeal, all of these genres are literal forms of what Alison Landsberg describes as ‘prosthetic memory,’ objects that become mnemonics for the things that they depict. But in addition to fabricating physical memories, making FlatDaddies also entails the literal production of citizens. LexJet, the manufacturer that provides the machines that SFC Graphics uses to make the Daddies

\textsuperscript{154} Frank, \textit{Love and Loss}.
\textsuperscript{155} S. Smith, \textit{American Archive}, 57.
\textsuperscript{156} Volpe, “Cartes de Visite,” 43.
\textsuperscript{157} Volpe, “Cartes de Visite,” 50.
\textsuperscript{158} Frank, \textit{Love and Loss}, 296-297.
\textsuperscript{159} Samuels, \textit{Facing America}, 74.
and Mommies, featured a story about the program in one of their monthly newsletters.\textsuperscript{160} It is illustrated with an image of long rolls of connected Daddies coming out of the printer, the literal production of citizens. But despite their very mechanical reproduction, there is no indication that the aura—as Benjamin would have it—of these photographs is any less powerful for being fabricated, its “ultimate retrenchment” occurring again and again in the faces\textsuperscript{161} that regard wives, husbands, and children happily from their cardboard perches.

While real Daddy/Mommy fights for real abroad, FlatDaddy’s/FlatMommy’s job is to keep the family whole at home, and many product testimonials suggests that s/he does just that. Cultural representations of military men tend to portray them as totally ideal, both masculine and domestic,\textsuperscript{162} and FlatDaddy, by allowing him to be in both places at once, makes this plenitude possible, while FlatMommy, in her continued presence in the home, neatly skirts the anxieties provoked by the thought of women serving in the military. These stories are full of accounts of FlatDaddy going to soccer games, FlatMommy getting there just in time for Mother’s Day, always enabling the family to achieve at least a semblance of normalcy. Of course, in the face of these photographs of happy children and contented spouses, it seems crass to speculate about what might happen if this is eventually all the Daddy/Mommy they have left.

Cynical evaluations of the FlatDaddy/Mommy seize on precisely this possibility. Perhaps more so than in any other photographic practice, FlatDaddy utters the threat that ‘he is dead and he is going to die.’\textsuperscript{163} It is hard not to feel that the relentless activity of FlatDaddy/Mommy (soccer game, piano recital, family vacation) is a way of screening off the very real threat of death, or denying it altogether. FlatDaddies and Mommies are very portable, and they can become something of a fetish to be toted around, a charm for drawing good luck and preventing danger.\textsuperscript{164} As long as FlatMommy and FlatDaddy keep moving around, they will elude the things that could harm them. Like a museum

\textsuperscript{160} LexJet, “Flat Daddy\textsuperscript{TM} Brings Troops Home.”
\textsuperscript{161} Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 1238.
\textsuperscript{162} Kozol, \textit{LIFE’s America}, 37.
\textsuperscript{163} Barthes, \textit{Camera Lucida}, 95-96.
\textsuperscript{164} Metz, “Photography and Fetish,” 216.
artifact, acquired and so “saved out of time,” families snatch Daddy and Mommy out of history and into the safe and perpetual present of busy domestic life.

When *Esquire* magazine gave FlatDaddy a place of dishonor in the 2006 edition of its annual list of “Dubious Achievements,” it included a picture of a smiling family on vacation with their dad propped on the SUV bumper, and the snide tone of the article as a whole grates against the innocence of the image. However, the magazine’s actual description of the FlatDaddy initiative is brief and merely factual; readers, whom the magazine generally envisions as savvy and jaded, should understand its dubiousness on their own. Similarly ambivalent was the November 3, 2006 edition of the nationally-syndicated *Six Chix* comic strip, drawn by Katherine LeMieux. In the single-panel cartoon, two children sit on the swing set with FlatDaddy (made even flatter on the pages of the morning paper), presumably an allusion to a similar photograph that ran just over a month earlier in the *New York Times*. One muses that she wishes they’d send her FlatDaddy to war and let the real one come home. Though tepid critiques like this abound (with various degrees of general anti-war indignation) in places where FlatDaddy has been discussed, displeased first-person accounts are very rare.

Alison Buckholtz, writing for the *Times* in April 2007, offers a uniquely dejected narrative of her life with a ‘father on poster board.’ She writes that she initially found the whole idea “vaguely Orwellian,” but that as her husband’s deployment wore on, she succumbed to something like peer pressure and ordered one for her family. Once he arrived, everything changed, and his mute and insistent presence forced her family to focus constantly on his absence, making the process harder for her and her children. She ultimately decided to retire FlatDaddy and to deal more directly with the issues that her husband’s deployment raised, even as she left open the possibility that others might benefit from such a cardboard companion.

---

166 The only source I have so far located that even gestures toward academic analysis is a blog post by media scholar Dennis Dunleavy. The polemical tone of his piece elicited reciprocal responses, including the common suggestion that FlatDaddies be sent to war instead; musings about what happens if real Daddy is crippled and left as helpless as FlatDaddy; and a handful of lascivious comparisons to blow-up dolls.
167 Buckholtz, “A Father on Poster Board,” para. 4.
Quite unsurprisingly, nearly all of the people who post testimonies on the SFC website do so to voice their appreciation for their cardboard spouses. The only complaint they have, usually offered in good humor, is that FlatDaddy/Mommy occasionally startles neighbors, other family members, and pets. For the most part, however, their stories are variations on two main themes: FlatDaddy keeps the kids company, and will help ease the transition when he comes home. FlatDaddy, it seems, is the ideal companion, and derives endless enjoyment from comforting and entertaining the kids; suggestions that he does the same thing for spouses are far less common. Whether or not SFC Graphics screens or edits the posts is not immediately clear, but it does endeavor to respond preemptively to detractors in its FAQ section:

Q: Is a cardboard cutout really a good substitute for a deployed parent?

A: Experts believe the cutouts are a useful psychological device, especially for children, to help cope with the stress of long absences. It helps the family stay connected and is a constant reminder that even though mom or dad is thousands of miles away, they are still a part of their lives.\(^{168}\)

At times, I get the impression that FlatDaddies/Mommies are even more a part of their children’s lives their organic counterparts could ever be, as many of them seem to keep grueling, almost super-human, schedules as they accompany their children absolutely everywhere.

A short by University of New Orleans film student Danny Bourque, “Flat Daddy,” confronts precisely this dilemma. The film, which purports to be ‘based on true events’ (but does not specify which events, just like SFC does not specify who, exactly, the experts are that endorse FlatDaddy), illustrates the story of a mother and her young son. Once she introduces him to FlatDaddy, telling him that “Not all of Daddy can come home yet,” the little boy incorporates him seamlessly into his daily life. Daddy gets platefuls of dinner at the table and a free serviceman’s ticket at the movie theater (after which the cashier rolls her eyes at the craziness of the woman who brought him in) and

---

\(^{168}\) SFC Graphics, “flatdaddies.com.”
the little boy gets a best friend. Mommy, too, enjoys his company one night, until the little boy naively interrupts her because he is confused by all the noise coming from the bedroom. Ultimately, real Daddy returns, and as he walks impassively into the living room, still wearing his boots, Mommy promises, “Today he’s all here again.” But not quite. Real Daddy has something that seems like PTSD, manifested in brooding silences and flat affect, and he shows no interest in doing any of the things that FlatDaddy did: eating, playing, going to bed with Mommy. As the film ends, the little boy retrieves FlatDaddy from the laundry room and begins to engage him in one of their games.

“Flat Daddy” won a handful of minor awards, including the designation of regional semi-finalist for the Student Academy Awards, and broaches many of the unspeakable things that nag lurid imaginations: Daddy’s return physically whole but mentally fractured, the persistence of Mommy’s desire beyond Daddy’s departure. This, in particular, is remarkable, as it directly contradicts chaste images of waiting military wives. Citizenship is typically understood as a “fraternity” devoid of “everything sexual,” but this Mommy articulates her patriotism differently, showcasing a form of female desire that deviates from what the nation-state prescribes.

Whereas other wartime visual objects of affection, like the pin-up girls of WWII, were miniaturized enough that they could not be mistaken (or substitute) for the real thing, FlatDaddies, in their constitutive realism and human dimension, seem to court intense physical contact; SFC must militate against this in discourse and in the production of the photographs themselves. Indeed, FlatDaddy’s creators seem anxious to avoid the easy comparisons between FlatDaddies and Mommies and sexualized blow-up dolls with their anxious insistence that the photographs only be from the waist up, their impotence reiterated by the absolute flatness of the finished products. Their suggestion

---

170 Thanks to Jason Loviglio, who suggested this ancestry for the FlatDaddies of today.
171 The film *Lars and the Real Girl*, which tells the story of a quiet bachelor who falls in love with a mail-order blow-up doll and the whole town plays along, provides something of a cultural template for interpreting FlatDaddies and Mommies. The charm of the film lies in the fact that there is nothing untoward between Lars and his doll, Bianca.
172 In his art historical study of colonizers’ engravings of ‘savages,’ Michael Gaudio argues that the technology of engraving seemed, to audiences, far more respectable than the ‘protuberance’ of other art forms like sculpture (“Flatness and Protuberance”).
that FlatDaddies/Mommies be made from photographs of the real daddies and mommies in uniform may also be motivated by this concern for purity. The uniform might serve as a reminder that this is a soldier rather than a spouse (never mind the possibility that the uniform might cultivate rather than inhibit desire), and almost certainly emphasizes the real person’s absence, rather than signifying their presence.

The blog “A Year Together … Apart,” maintained by a FlatDaddy wife named Amanda Stapp, is a public exploration of the vexed dynamics of life with a Flat. Shortly after their marriage in February 2008, real Jason was deployed to a peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, and she started a blog to track their separations and her adventures with Flat Jason, whom she describes as a “stand-in for my real Jason.” The tone of the blog is generally upbeat and cheerful, just occasionally (and then, only gently) accusatory of the nation-state that made her spend almost the entirety of her first 400 days as a newlywed alone. Although similar content appears in still photos on the SFC website and sites like YouTube host a handful of comparable videos, “A Year Together … Apart” is by far the most detailed chronicle of life with a Flat, and is unique because there are no children to excuse Amanda’s imaginative play. Indeed, this relationship with Flat Jason constitutes something of an unauthorized use of a FlatDaddy™; even as Amanda portrays her bond with Flat Jason as strictly platonic, it is also quixotically, undeniably romantic.

She seems to take Flat Jason nearly everywhere with her, and with the exception of times when he enjoys “freak[ing] out” other bowlers at the local alley and suffers “size discrimination” at the movie theater when he is forced to wait out the film in the office, Flat Jason gets along well with everyone and is consequently very popular. She tracks their adventures for anyone who might be curious through detailed narratives and plentiful snapshots, chronicling meals and chores, as well as more involved outings to concerts and fairs. Sergeant First Class Barbara Claudel, who headed the Maine National Guard’s FlatDaddy distribution program, often comments that “Deployment isn’t a big thing, it’s a million little things,” and “A Year Together … Apart” proves it.

173 Zezima notes that FlatDaddies and Mommies are especially useful for National Guard families, many of whom did not anticipate and are not accustomed to long overseas deployments (“When Soldiers Go to War,” para. 12).
Complicating their association with death, vivid photographs require us as spectators to manage the “excess of life” that they bespeak, and Amanda seems to do this with the loving precision and comprehensiveness of her narrative.

Other than occasionally describing him as a “stand-in,” Amanda never seems to break character in her entries and admit that Flat Jason is not really alive. She endows him with agency: when he stays home, it is not because she leaves him but because he does not feel like going out. He shares her taste in food. His dependability, she writes, makes him an excellent pet-sitter. I have read “A Year Together … Apart” compulsively since I discovered it, and at first, I wondered whether Amanda was aware that her new companion was just a representation, just an image, a figment, a trace. It is hard to tell if she is just being playful; or if she is expressing the moderate craziness of long-distance lovesickness more candidly than others might; or if she is really not … okay. More than anything, it seems that she is haunted, that with Flat Jason (and all the friends who seem to play along), she occupies a liminal space between his death and his safe homecoming, keeping herself busy in the meantime with his ghost as it moves freely about their world.

Eventually, I dispensed with those questions about Amanda’s connection to reality, which seem, to me, to be too simplistic. I am more interested in the possibility that Amanda is, in her smiling devotion, fully embodying the citizenship ideal that is co-produced along with all those FlatDaddies and Mommies. Steadfast and dutiful, she uses her love of husband and vicariously engages his love of country to animate a flat death and invest it with patriotic meaning, and to content herself, albeit begrudgingly at times, with that. Here, too, terror is made small and flat, palatable because she waits it out in good company. With her electronic chatter—which she confesses is matched by a similar volubility in conversation—Amanda compensated for the intractable silence of her Flat Jason, sustaining the noise so that if were to come (though she never allows herself to imagine it would), the terrible, life-changing sound of two careful knocks on the flat barrier of the door would be totally inaudible.

But no matter anymore. As of early spring 2009, Amanda reports that Real Jason is home, safe and sound, and they have resumed their life together as newlyweds. Shortly

---

after Jason’s return, Amanda announced that she would no longer be maintaining “A Year Together ... Apart.” A new blog, commemorating this new chapter of their lives, was both appropriate and necessary because, as she noted in the first post in her new online home, “Stappshot,” they have “outgrown [their] old blog.” Since his return, Amanda’s husband has been rebuilt to his full three dimensions, a restoration celebrated in their blog with videos; previously, when there was just Amanda and Flat Jason, she represented their lives only in still images. Flat Jason, it seems, has more or less been retired, but to readers that might miss him, Amanda offers the following solution: “Here's hoping that you enjoy the antics of Real Jason as much as you enjoyed Flat Jason. And who knows? Your favorite flatness may make a special appearance or two. Stay tuned.”

**What Terror Produces**

Photographs can be hidden, mutilated, or discarded, but cannot, by their nature, be “transform[ed]” once they are created. However, this general rule of photography, like so many others that constrain his moribund peers but not him, does not seem to apply to FlatDaddy. He has begun, if not to reproduce, at least to replicate: SFC Graphics is now offering FabricFamily, “The most versatile life-size photo prints available today.” Designed for deployed servicemembers rather than the families that await them at home, the FabricFamily project prints family photos onto textiles that are “lightweight, foldable, washable, and ironable.” Cheaper than FlatDaddy at only $39.95, FabricFamily can be made small enough to be held in a soldier’s hand or as large, the advertising implies, as life. But then again, not quite: all fabric families measure just 36”x26”. The truth—that these are not really life-sized—does not seem to matter here, as SFC markets them as such despite the obvious truth that they are not. After all, dimensions are affective qualities rather than physical properties. And so, citizen-subjectivity in the GWOT goes from flat to crumpled in a sweaty hand or stuffed into the pocket of dirty fatigues, but remains very durable.

176 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 93.
Ultimately, “[t]error is what terror produces,” 177 and American terror in the artifacts I considered here has become flatness, a condition of infinite malleability. When terror cannot be manipulated, it must be managed, cut down into palatable doses, and that is the work of the diagnostic, to which I turn in the next chapter. But there is no need for such intervention in a flat world. From dust and girders to waterfalls and trees, from real-life to animation, from animation to real-life, and from father to cardboard cut-out, all of these artifacts shuttle us between the various affective planes required of citizens. Like the technically valueless 9/11 commemorative coins so enthusiastically advertised on late-night television, the subjects of terror are permanently incused with its shape, giving terror physical form while its various waste products (concrete, dust, uncontrollable memories, disbelief, and the cropped edges of photographs) are quietly carted away.

Chapter 3: Diagnostic

It is a common misconception that President Bush, in his September 20, 2001 address to a joint session of Congress, explicitly instructed the American people to demonstrate their post-9/11 patriotism by shopping. This was what he actually said:

Americans are asking, “What is expected of us?”
I ask you to live your lives and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.
I ask you to uphold the values of America and remember why so many have come here. [...] I ask you to continue to support the victims of this tragedy with your contributions. [...] I ask your continued participation and confidence in the American economy. Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity; they did not touch its source.
America is successful because of the hard work and creativity and enterprise of our people. These were the true strengths of our economy before September 11, and they are our strengths today. [...]¹

Even without the direct exhortation to do so, however, many Americans did, indeed, go shopping. Anecdotal evidence suggests that much of this commerce was emotionally (rather than presidentially) driven: reported upticks in the sales of pets and junk food are just some of the hallmarks of post-9/11 retail therapy.

To his critics, the very possibility that the President had implied that shopping² was an acceptable or even desirable response to a national tragedy was evidence of

---

¹ CNN, “Transcript of President Bush’s Address.”
² For a critique of the ideological significance of post-9/11 consumerism, see Marita Sturken’s Tourists of History. For Sturken, consumerism is akin to paranoia, in that they “are both responses to disempowerment enabled by notions of innocence” (41).
callous simplemindedness. What interests me now is the strange, simple mercy of his suggestion. The invitation to continued economic participation granted stunned Americans permission to do something normal in the face of something terrible, but more than that, it offered a concrete piece of guidance. Whether we heeded it or not, it was something comprehensible, a thing to do or not do, an order to follow or not, a relatively simple choice to make when so much seemed uncertain and beyond our control. I suspect that, like me, most other American citizen-subjects had a sense of what was or was not appropriate following September 11, a lay and improvised catechism of behaviors suitable for the aftermath of terror and death. The President provided an official benchmark through or against which we could judge our conduct (and that of others), a diagnostic criterion for how a terrorized American ought (not) to act. For the record, I did go shopping in the months after September 11, but probably no more or less than usual.

As I began drafting this chapter, I was shopping again, clicking back and forth between this window and an eBay auction for something I absolutely had to have: the Playmobil 3172 Security Check-In toy set, a miniature version of the real thing that includes a walk-through metal detector, a luggage x-ray, security guards, and a “lady traveler,” complete with rolling suitcase. This is a fundamentally creepy plaything, I know, but it embodies, in molded and colorful plastic, the themes that drive my inquiry in this chapter, which is fundamentally concerned with the transformation of terror: into pleasure, into objects, into symbols, into commodities that can be valued and circulated. It reminds me that terror often transfigures the unthinkable (like the notion of responding to terror with consumption) into the mundane, and that the rubrics by which we assess both of them co-evolve.

Many of the strategic questions that dominated the aftermath of the attacks (What do terrorists look like? Is racial profiling a permissible or efficient way to determine who is a threat? How much surveillance is necessary? Where is Osama bin Laden?) hinged on the visual. They converged with newly urgent representational quandaries (Is it unseemly to keep showing the same footage of the attacks? What kinds of images should be censored? Can we air commercials again? When will television programming return
to pre-9/11 normal?) to foster the creation of rules governing the visual life of the post-9/11 American nation. These regulations ranged from official, as when a White House team met with Hollywood studio executives to discuss how 9/11 could be represented, to deeply individual, as in the personal convictions that helped us, as individual citizen-subjects, to determine what kinds of images we could stomach. This chapter focuses on systematic, institutional codes for the evaluation of terrifying images, which I suggest evolved out of these ad hoc judgments in the days and weeks immediately following the attacks.

I begin by providing a brief history of visual diagnosis, comparing modern and postmodern epistemologies of sight in the detection of pathology. This provides a general background for the two foci of this chapter: the Motion Picture Association of America’s (MPAA) system for rating GWOT films and the “Virtual Iraq” simulation designed by the Institute for Creative Technologies. I offer a short history of American film ratings as context for my consideration of the MPAA’s ratings of the genre of GWOT movies, reading the given ‘rating reasons’ against the textual and extra-cinematic content of the films. I then compare the GWOT movie ratings to those of a popular and very profitable ‘torture porn’ franchise: the SAW series. In contrast to these recreational productions of terror, I then turn to “Virtual Iraq,” a simulation designed to gauge and treat the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) of returning soldiers. This therapeutic virtual environment integrates an elaborate inventory of sensory triggers engineered to simulate deployment to Iraq with a sophisticated clinician interface designed to provoke and ultimately extinguish the anxiety associated with combat stress. I conclude the chapter by exploring dynamics of citizenship operative in these disparate diagnostic practices of the visual, which share a common faith in their potential to regulate terror by quantifying it.

These diagnostic efforts are founded on the same basic difficulty. ‘Terror’ as both a concept and a thing is confounded and confounding, and invites the very kind of analysis that it eludes most easily and refuses most aggressively. “Whether terrorism is a greater or lesser threat in probabilistic terms than other destructive political phenomena,” Barry Richards writes in Emotional Governance, “it presents us with the experience of a
threat which by its nature is more intense and terrifying than any other.”3 Unlike the dimensional practices I discussed in Chapter 2, which work in part by short-circuiting and manipulating terror, diagnostic practices recognize and surrender to terror’s power, opting to either to regulate it, as in the case of the MPAA, or to harness it, like the ICT masterfully does.

The Clinical Origins of Diagnostic Practices of the Visual (A Very Brief History)

Modern epistemologies of the visual were founded on positivism and derived from an intellectual faith in new visual technologies. The increased sophistication and capabilities of inventions harnessing discoveries about light and optics made it seem logical to link seeing and interpretation. Advances in lenses and the development of technologies of seeing from eyeglasses to photography in the 18th and 19th centuries contributed to the ascendancy of sight as a privileged mode of apprehending and comprehending the world. In the process, Heidegger argues, “[n]ature and history became the objects of a representing that explains,”4 components of a comprehensive ‘world picture’ that equated seeing with mastery.

Like the world around it, the human body—especially but not exclusively the deviant human body—became the object of a new kind of scrutiny. New visualization technologies contributed to the formation of explicitly visual modes of diagnosis, which focused on visible, physical, exterior manifestations of interior conditions, and prompted the development of categories of mental illness like ‘hysteria.’5 This and many other types of so-called abnormality acquired a clinical life in images. The extensive photographic catalogs of neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, for example, inventoried the diverse physical symptoms of illnesses that might otherwise be invisible or unseeable, documents of the “autopsy on the living” that was 19th-century psychiatry.6 Commenting on this history, Ulrich Baer argued that the first “theory of trauma was ... born from the

---

3 Richards, Emotional Governance, 128.
5 Jay, “Photo-Unrealism,” 354.
will to see,"\textsuperscript{7} an origin story that resonates with contemporary approaches to the detection and treatment of trauma, to which I will return later.

Postmodern visual culture is characterized in part by a skeptical assessment of the positivist visuality that characterized modernity, but not a total renunciation of it. Instead, advances in imaging and medical technologies have made the clinical gaze even more penetrating. Whereas modern scholars of illness and injury focused largely on the exterior, their postmodern descendents utilize their new gadgets in a search for a more definite bodily truth, one that provides an internal etiology for an externally visible malady or, alternately, a clear cause of a disease that is felt but cannot be directly seen. Skin no longer serves as the limit of surveillance, and these new technologies have transformed the body into what Jay Moman calls a “site for the inscription and retrieval of information,”\textsuperscript{8} a reluctant confessor of corporeal truth to whatever regimes might want to know it. Throughout this evolution, the visible has shifted from a symptom itself to a representation of disease, and sight (aided by new imaging technologies) has become an intercessor between the body and the knowledge it promises to yield.

What, then, does all of this mean for the body politic? The policy governing the GWOT is a combination of the modern world-as-a-picture paradigm and the postmodern emphasis on decoding it. We cannot measure terror directly, so we often look for it in representation (e.g. in racial profiling of ‘threatening phenotypes’) or analyze it at a remove, through metaphor. The analogy to illness, virus, or cancer is a favorite of politicians and pundits alike, because it captures the idea that terror/terrorism/terrorists are a stealthy threat to the body politic. Like these diseases, they often remain invisible, and the appearance of their symptoms is a sign that it is already too late. They are recalcitrant, stubbornly refusing to yield to the best medicine of the Western world, eschewing democracy like a resistant germ immunizes itself against a cure. And so on. W.J.T. Mitchell argues that these metaphors combine with the actual threat of biological attack to make the notion of terrorism-as-disease a “potent and inevitable icon in the

\textsuperscript{7} Baer, \textit{Spectral Evidence}, 21.
\textsuperscript{8} Moman, “Submerged Landscapes,” 127.
collective imagination.”9 Hence, the best methods—we are told—for combating terror are monitoring and, when necessary, ‘surgical’ strikes, with more aggressive courses of action/treatment as potent last resorts.

“The System Can’t Work Unless You Understand the System”: Rating American Movies

The American system of movie assessment that has been in place since the 1930s is patterned on modern approaches to sight and analysis. It is a literal, rather superficial practice that employs visual evidence (the content of the film) in a social/cultural diagnosis. Originally, this diagnosis came in the form of the granting or withholding of the Production Code Administration’s (PCA) Seal of approval. Receipt of the Seal defined a film as safe, or even socially healthful, while the lack thereof marked a film as deviant or, more precisely, likely to contribute to the deviance of viewers. As the PCA evolved into the current ratings system, diagnoses became less absolute and more relative, so that a film could occupy a range of positions from wholesome (acceptable for all ages) to selectively dangerous (quarantined from everyone under the age of 17). The system is designed so that the production and rating of a text are undertaken by separate organizations, and totally disregards the possibility that censorship—as Butler suggests—actually precedes and “produces” speech.10 After all, most film historians agree that the Code’s detailed restrictions actually did not actually expunge prohibited thematic elements, but rather prompted most filmmakers to find subtler, more creative ways to depict them. However, for the PCA and its institutional descendants, such a thing would be inconceivable.

Prior to the formation of the PCA, the assessment of films was the purview of city and state boards of review (or censorship), who legislated according to local norms that often varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In 1909, Marcus Loew organized other theater owners and film distributors to form the National Board of Censorship, which would later become the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures. Despite its rather draconian name, the Board was actually organized in opposition to New York Mayor

10 Butler, Excitable Speech, 128.
George Brinton McClellan’s effort to shut down the nickelodeons in December 1908. By screening films for content and giving awards for those that it deemed the best, the Board sought to legitimize the film industry while also avoiding the repressive policies of local board and governments. Likewise, the PCA was not merely a self-appointed moral authority. It was established by the MPAA in 1934, and, like the Board, was designed with the interests of the studios in mind, to help streamline the process of distributing films and insulate them from the vicissitudes of local boards while also lending the appearance of concern for the welfare of audiences.

In the early 1920s, a series of scandals involving movie stars (most notoriously, the manslaughter conviction of “Fatty” Arbuckle) exacerbated widespread social concern, particularly on the part of religious interest groups, about the ill effects of film. This new scrutiny prompted the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (the MPPDA, which would later become the Motion Picture Association of America) to hire Will Hays to handle public relations and police the morality of the movies and the people that starred in them. Although his list of ‘Don’ts’ and ‘Be Carefuls’ was drafted in 1927, it was not until 1934, with the establishment of the PCA and its mandate that all filmmakers submit their products for review before release, that his ‘Formula’ acquired teeth. Under the notorious leadership of Joseph Breen, who expanded the original concern with depictions of sexuality to take on nearly everything that might be objectionable in film, the PCA became the arbiter of what the American people would be allowed to see.

In the early days of film, as Susan Buck-Morss notes, cinema audiences found it difficult to distinguish film from real life, so engrossing was the spectacle before them, and anxiety over the injurious power of the movies spiked with the advent of sound. Calls for regulation and censorship were often couched in rhetoric about concern for children and other impressionable viewers, particularly the working class, who now had access to this cheap and potentially inflammatory form of entertainment. More mature or elite audiences, it was assumed, would be able to make the kind of moral judgments

---

necessary to keep from being corrupted by film. In the end, however, decisions about what kinds of movies to make and how to apply the Code were less about moralizing and more about negotiating between the studios’ need for immediate profits (often reaped with more sensational themes) and the long-term respectability that would sustain their business.\textsuperscript{13} Even for the religious authorities whose influence shaped the Code and its application, like their studio counterparts, regulation of film was a way to gain legitimacy and “cultural authority,”\textsuperscript{14} rather than an end in itself.

Although the Code was in force until 1968, both its authority and popularity had already begun to wane. By 1966, a “slippage of studio authority over film” had combined with more general social upheaval\textsuperscript{15} to undermine the power of the Code, and in 1968, Jack Valenti eliminated both the Code and the Seal of approval that it bestowed.\textsuperscript{16} The PCA became the Classification and Ratings Administration (CARA). Instead of a Seal, CARA provided age-based ratings for film, a shift from the censorship of the Hays era to a system of communicating with parents,\textsuperscript{17} so that film ratings morphed from a matter of public, social concern to an issue of private, domestic choice. Beginning in November 1968, as Valenti recalled before Congress, films would be rated G, M, R, or X. Over time, ‘M’ (Mature) became ‘GP’ (General audiences, Parental guidance suggested), which then became ‘PG,’ a category that split into ‘PG’ and ‘PG-13’ in 1984.\textsuperscript{18} Filmmakers were no longer required to submit their films for rating, but the vast majority chose (and still choose) to do so, because unrated films are harder to distribute and tend to make less money.

In 1990, the classification process evolved again, yielding the current system. Valenti and his staff began issuing ‘rating reasons’ for ‘R’\textsuperscript{19} movies,\textsuperscript{20} a practice later expanded to other categories as well, in the name of giving parents even more

\textsuperscript{14} Couvares, “Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church,” 129.
\textsuperscript{15} Valenti, “Are the Current Media Ratings Systems Effective?”, 50.
\textsuperscript{16} Haines, The Moviegoing Experience, 32.
\textsuperscript{17} Kirsh, Children, Adolescents, and Media Violence, 306.
\textsuperscript{18} Valenti, “Are the Current Media Ratings Systems Effective?”, 52.
\textsuperscript{19} In its explanation of movie ratings, the MPAA says that ‘R’ movies “may include adult themes, adult activity, hard language, intense or persistent violence, sexually-oriented nudity, drug abuse or other elements, so that parents are counseled to take this rating very seriously” (mpaa.org).
\textsuperscript{20} Valenti, “Are the Current Media Ratings Systems Effective?”, 51.
information about what they might be taking their child to see, and changed ‘X’ to ‘NC-17.’ Although the application of the rating was the same—no one under 17 admitted—the semantic change was an effort to soften what Valenti describes as the ‘surly’ connotation of an X. In theory, the demise of the Code freed filmmakers to be more adventuresome in their craft, because it implemented a shift from “filtering [films] for content” to filtering “audiences ... for films.”22 In reality, although the post-Code system is represented as more lax and respectful of artistic freedom than its predecessor, the effects of CARA are often practically similar to that of the Code,23 in that they induce filmmakers to make safer products so that the broadest possible audiences will have access to them.

Even as CARA emphatically asserts that it exists to communicate with parents, to demystify films for them on behalf of their children, many critics suggest that its process for rating movies is flawed: secretive, inconsistent, overly rigid, or repressive—censorship by another name.24 Indeed, just as details about administration and application of the Code were kept secret until 1983,25 the present system can also be quite mysterious. Director Kirby Dick, in his documentary This Film is Not Yet Rated, employs a team of private investigators to determine who is actually rating the films, and how, and seems to verify the hunch shared by many controversial filmmakers that CARA’s system is subjective and disingenuous.

Filmmakers voluntarily submit near-finished products to the MPAA. They are then screened by raters, who draft observations and then provide a rating by majority vote taken after group discussion. If a filmmaker is unsatisfied with the rating that her product

21 These short lists appended to movie ratings provide miniature confirmations of Butler’s very satisfying observation that the “regulation that states what it does not want stated thwarts its own desire” (Excitable Speech, 130).
22 Franklin, Politics and Film, 152.
24 Some have critiqued CARA’s practices as violations of the First Amendment. It is difficult, however, to legally prove that the system for rating movies is any kind of infraction, as it does not prevent people from making controversial movies, only (indirectly) impedes their circulation. Courts have repeatedly held that while ‘indecency’ is protected by the First Amendment, ‘obscenity’ is not, though these terms are, of course, subject to interpretation. Although, as Schauer demonstrates in “The Exceptional First Amendment,” the U.S. tends to employ a very expansive definition of free speech, this legal freedom does not necessarily translate into popular approval of or support for controversial or offensive speech/art.
receives, she has the option to appeal, though most report that this process—which includes representatives from religious groups—is even more arcane than the initial rating assignation, and only infrequently results in the desired outcome (a reduction of the initial rating). According to the MPAA, there are no ‘special qualifications’ needed for becoming a movie rater (some of whom do this as a full-time job and make a very comfortable living in the process), but the organization emphasizes that all of its raters are parents of small children. Dick, however, reveals that even this is not always the case. As the MPAA institutionalizes it, rating films is a lay diagnostic practice of the visual; it requires no special background or equipment, just an ability to watch movies and interpret readily available evidence through extant cultural frameworks. By directing its communication to parents and representing itself as their advocate, the MPAA has tried to insulate itself from charges of censorship. Who, after all, would rather protect filth than children?

Judith Mayne asserts that cinema is an *institution* in the Althusserian sense, a device for interpellating audiences into an ideological system. And so although the MPAA is separate from the state, I would argue that it is a technology of citizenship, particularly for women. Feminist scholars of the nation have argued that women achieve membership in it largely through their status as mothers; the nation values them as reproducers of citizens and vehicles for the transmission of cultural norms. Prized as ‘cultural carriers’ but otherwise typically excluded from the work of nation-building, women belong through their children. And so, as mothers make these entertainment decisions, their private choices also become matters of national concern. The job of the MPAA is to guide them in these decisions by providing a general framework (the ratings categories themselves) and a specific rationale for applications (the ratings reasons).

Although the MPAA’s method is not as systematic as filmmakers (or people trying to construct an argument about it in their dissertations) might hope, there are some discernible trends in its application of ratings. Firstly, the MPAA approach is

28 Ibid., 315.
quantitative, as ratings depend in part on how much objectionable content appears in a particular film; for example, the conventional wisdom is that PG-13 films can have one ‘fuck’ before they become R-rated, and as a result, filmmakers trying to retain that status deploy that precious obscenity strategically. Although there is a great deal of bean-counting in the assignation of a rating, Valenti has suggested that the raters are also qualitative in their approach as they evaluate how questionable elements are “treated on-screen by the filmmaker.” Thus, they would be likely to draw a distinction between a film that depicts drug use as fun and one that portrays it as damaging.

Hence, the MPAA is also comparative in its ratings. Most observers suggest that CARA is far more “lenient” in its ratings of violence than of sexuality. They claim that CARA tends to be more stringent in its ratings of sexual content than of graphic violence, and cite this discrepancy as one more way that the American raters are different from their counterparts elsewhere in the world, who tend to see filmic violence as a greater peril than on-screen sexuality. Even though it purports to assess each film on its own merits and not in comparison to other movies, CARA is nevertheless concerned with how a given subject could also have been represented in a film. Ratings reasons also justify and amplify the letters with adjectives, often citing ‘strong’ or ‘graphic’ violence and ‘brief’ or ‘pervasive’ sexuality, though these intensifying terms do not seem to be systematically applied. In this way, their diagnostic practice gains refinement, if not consistency.

In the end, the MPAA approach is only as systematic as its operators, and only as effective as its adherents. As far as outsiders know, there is no official metric for the rating of films, just the general guidelines I outlined above. Ratings are determined by group vote rather than individual assessment, and this measure might eliminate at least some of the subjectivity in the ratings process, but overall, the process relies far more on intuition (and the skills gained from a lifetime of visual consumerism) than on data. Moreover, CARA can only rate the films; it is up to parents to listen or not. Valenti testified emphatically that

29 Valenti, “Are the Current Media Ratings Systems Effective?”, 54.
30 Prince, Classical Film Violence, 262.
If parents don’t care, or if they are languid in guiding their children’s movie-going, the ratings system becomes useless. Indeed, if you are 18 or over, or if you have no children, the rating system has no meaning for you.\textsuperscript{31}

And so while the MPAA tends to adopt a rather laissez-faire posture in emphasizing the choices of individual parents, they nevertheless use promotional materials to regulate their decision-making.

One such poster offers the simple reminder that “The System Can’t Work Unless You Understand the System,”\textsuperscript{32} which is both an admonition to parents and a capitulation of the ultimate impotence of CARA. In order to be effective, CARA requires consent from those whom they seek to govern (in this, they are much like the state). Beneath this warning/complaint is an explanation of what each rating means, color-coded; G is blue, PG is green, PG-13 is yellow, R is orange, and NC-17 is red. This is a shorthand of threat, a quick way to calibrate just how concerned parent-citizens should be about a particular visual text. It is also a clear visual echo of the Homeland Security Advisory System,\textsuperscript{33} which color codes the degree of terrorist threat to help Americans determine how worried and vigilant we ought to be.

Although the schematics diverge on which color best represents innocuousness (G movies are blue and PG are green, while the least severe terror threat, ‘Low,’ is green and ‘Guarded,’ the second-lowest, is blue), the allusion remains potent, and the method of reducing a mass of data to a chromatic symbol remains the same. So does the goal: in both cases, the ratings systems want users to ingest this information quickly and act accordingly, to assess the risk it implies and behave responsibly. Like the Department of Homeland Security, whose website provides a list of ‘Recommended Activities’ that follow from each color of threat, the MPAA, in a similarly-colored poster, advises

\textsuperscript{31} Valenti, “Are the Current Media Ratings Systems Effective?”, 54.
\textsuperscript{32} An image of this poster is available under ‘Ratings Posters’ at filmratings.com.
\textsuperscript{33} It is worth noting that this system was not initially intended for public use or guidance, but was originally devised as a way for government agencies to communicate quickly about the level of threat and prepare accordingly. Although the National Threat Advisory might now work to “calibrate the public’s anxiety” (Massumi, “Fear,” 32), that was not its original purpose.
parents on what to do with each rating, ranging from “G: Take the Kids” to “NC-17: Hire a Sitter.” Yet the ominous tenor of the MPAA’s poster about “The System” is undermined somewhat by the cheery imperative at the bottom: “Enjoy the movie and come back often.” Presumably, because the system can’t work unless you understand it, return visits to the cinema will help you become more facile at using it; in much the same way, the longer one lives at a given color, the more habituated to it she will become, and thus all the more practiced at behaving in accordance with its demands.

**Target Practice: Rating the GWOT in Film**

Every war in recent American history has defined and been defined by a medium: WWII had radio, Vietnam had television, the Gulf War had even more, while the GWOT is the first war to be fought in a digital world. Movies are unable to represent war immediately and so cinema has never been able to cover a conflict as it happened. Rather, films define wars retrospectively, even as the movie industry must always be prepared to respond to the exigencies of wartime. War changes movie-making, readjusting the relationships between the film industry and the state and redefining norms about what kinds of subjects are appropriate and appealing. Historically, mainstream films have fallen in line with patriotic movements, while the upheaval of war has temporarily opened spaces for filmic exploration of otherwise taboo dimensions of violence or sexuality.

Unlike traditional warfare, which generally leaves filmmakers and studios with a clear sense of what is or is not tolerable, terror makes these determinations more difficult, because it confounds the very terms that we employ to issue these judgments. Censoring and rating films is about distinguishing what is “permissible” or safe from what is “dangerous,” but the defining characteristic of terror is its capacity to confuse and

---

34 Trumpbour’s account, in *Selling Hollywood to the World*, of the relationship between the MPAA and the State Department during WWII that documents is a useful case study of these processes.
35 Increasingly stringent FCC standards about obscenity, as Anthony Kaufman observes (“Yanks Nix Iraq Pics), has made it almost impossible to create realistic war movies that are suitable for television.
36 Grieveson for example, notes that the long-standing rule about avoiding discussions of ‘VD’ in films was suspended during WWI because of health problems in the military, but re-emerged after the War (“Not Harmless Entertainment,” 278).
corrupt these categories. Terror re-engineers the world, so that the very thing that seemed safe and normal one day (like going to work at an office in a skyscraper) seems extraordinarily dangerous the next. The already complicated tasks of screening a film for threatening elements and determining which audiences are capable of deflecting them are made even more complex in a situation where everything could be terrifying and in the task of rating films that are meant to convey precisely that reality.

Furthermore, trying to assess such representations when there are no reliable criteria available is nearly impossible. Rating a movie about terror requires analysis of a representation of the unrepresentable, a quantification of the unquantifiable, and a negotiation of the improvised social and cultural codes about what is appropriate in the wake of a disaster. The stakes are radically different, and the stakeholders are myriad and have emotional as well as political investments in representation. In governing depictions of 9/11, for example, Susan Faludi characterizes the ‘9/11 Families’ as the new Production Code Authority, their experience empowering them to be unofficial gatekeepers over representations of that day, and in the case of United 93, they acted as official arbiters of how September 11th could be represented. In general, mainstream movies about the attacks have had to preserve their gravity without reproducing the spectacular ‘theatricality,’ that defines terrorist attacks; 9/11 must be represented in a way that is compelling without being entertaining. The MPAA, then, is the body tasked with adjudicating all of this. Given that, as Krueger and Laitin argue, the state has been making bad calculations about terrorism with flawed studies and inaccurate models, I ask whether the MPAA has fared any better.

In order to assess this, I consider the emerging genre of GWOT movies, having studied nearly every text within it, with two exceptions made for methodological purposes. First, I do not include the critically-acclaimed compilation 11’9”01, because it is unrated; that is, the contributing filmmakers opted not to submit it to the MPAA for

---

38 Because ‘terror’ is nearly impossible to define, it is also hard to measure objectively. Krueger and Laitin suggest that the best a state can do in policy-making is aim for “consistent application of ambiguous definitions” (“Misunderestimating Terrorism,” para. 15), so as to hold at least some variables constant.

39 Faludi, The Terror Dream, 2.

40 Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God, 121.

41 Krueger and Laitin, “‘Misunderestimating’ Terrorism.”
rating. Secondly, I only include two documentaries; there are dozens of GWOT documentaries, but most tend make very little money and reach only very select audiences, and I have chosen to include only two here as disparate representatives of the documentary subgenre, *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Gunner Palace*.

Overall, GWOT films vary widely in specific theme, quality, verisimilitude, and box office, but have in common their vetting by the MPAA and, hence, their status as regulated representations of terror. My orientation here is toward the institutional, rather than the aesthetic, as I try to position each film vis-à-vis the state and the MPAA. In addition, I attend specifically to whether the filmmakers received assistance from the Department of Defense, the military, or the federal government and try also to assess why these films earned the ratings that they did, by analyzing their ratings reasons against the texts themselves and in comparison to other films. Thus, my goal is not to provide a close reading of every GWOT film, but rather to account for the way that various government and industry regulatory bodies have evaluated the stories that they tell about combat, citizenship, and terror. In their depiction of a war that is ongoing, or a past terror that remains animated by traumatized rememberings of it, these films construct what Lowenstein describes as an ‘allegorical moment,’ a “shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted, and intertwined.” The job of the MPAA, then, is to brace spectators for impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Release Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Rating Reason</th>
<th>Box Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/25/2004</td>
<td><em>Fahrenheit 9/11</em></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“Some violent and disturbing images, and for language”</td>
<td>$119,078,393</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The GWOT in Film

42 See Robb, *Operation Hollywood* for a fuller analysis of the relationships between the U.S. military and the movie industry.
44 Reliable box office figures are available on Yahoo! movies and Box Office Mojo (boxofficemojo.com). Even when the dollar amounts are not exact, they still provide a rough (and relative) estimate of a film’s popularity and cultural weight.

4/28/2006  *United 93*  R  “Language and some intense sequences of terror and violence”  $31,471,430

8/9/2006  *World Trade Center*  PG-13  “Intense and emotional content, some disturbing images and language”  $70,236,496

6/22/2007  *A Mighty Heart*  R  “Language”  $9,172,810
9/14/2007  *In the Valley of Elah*  R  “Violent and disturbing content, language, and some sexuality/nudity”  $6,777,589

9/28/2007  *The Kingdom*  R  “Intense sequences of graphic brutal violence, and for language”  $47,536,778

10/19/2007  *Rendition*  R  “Torture/violence and language”  $9,664,316

11/9/2007  *Lions for Lambs*  R  “For some war violence and language”  $14,998,070

11/16/2007  *Redacted*  R  “Strong disturbing violent content including a rape, pervasive language and some sexual references/images”  $65,087

12/7/2007  *Grace is Gone*  PG-13  “Thematic material, brief strong language and teen smoking”  $50,080

12/21/2007  *Charlie Wilson’s War*  R  “Strong language, nudity/sexual content, and some drug use”  $66,646,385


Table 1 Continued

---

45 The IMDB page for this film indicates that there is an “appeal planned” for the rating, but I was unable to find any other sources to corroborate that.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Rating Description</th>
<th>Box Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4/25/2008</td>
<td>Harold &amp; Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“Strong crude and sexual content, graphic nudity, pervasive language and drug use”</td>
<td>$38,087,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/2/2008</td>
<td>Iron Man</td>
<td>PG-13</td>
<td>“Some intense sequences of sci-fi action and violence, and brief suggestive content”</td>
<td>$318,412,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/7/2008</td>
<td>Battle for Haditha</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“War violence, disturbing images, and for pervasive language”</td>
<td>$7,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/17/2008</td>
<td>W.</td>
<td>PG-13</td>
<td>“Language included sexual references, some alcohol abuse, smoking and brief disturbing war images”</td>
<td>$25,517,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documentaries**

The fact that the first GWOT movie, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, was a documentary and an extremely profitable one (second in take only to the least realistic film of the genre so far, *Iron Man*) should not be taken as the indication of a precedent. Moore’s Oscar-winning muckraking “opened the floodgates” for a veritable “litany” of war documentaries, but none has even approximated the financial success of the first.46 The triumph of the film was dependent on the coincidence of Moore’s dexterity with a popular distaste for the Bush administration, a lot of hype, and the general ‘epistemophilia’47 that characterized the beginning of the GWOT, when information was scarce and sought-after.

The vast conspiracy toward which Moore points in *Fahrenheit 9/11* resists summary, but there are a few theses that the film takes as axiomatic and interlocking. According to the film, the Bush family and, more specifically, the second Bush administration were complicit in 9/11 because of their close ties to Saudi Arabia and its royal family. After stealing the 2000 election by leveraging family connections, George W. Bush became even guiltier for ignoring crucial intelligence reports about the

---

47 Mellencamp, “Fearful Thoughts,” 129.
imminence of the attack. This inaction, while devastating for the American people, provided an opportunity for the oil and defense industries to reap massive profits by launching a war in Iraq, with the support of a government that was too afraid to do anything else. Because American elites are not required to fight for their country, the burden of military service falls disproportionately upon citizens who are poor or non-white, who are fighting in the name of a nation-state that has stripped everyone of their freedoms.

As a ratings arbiter rather than a censorship board, CARA does not evaluate films themselves, only how (in)appropriate they might be for a given audience; they assess content for affect rather than quality. One of the words that recurs regularly in their ratings is the adjective ‘disturbing.’ Part of the reason for Fahrenheit 9/11’s ‘R,’ for example, is that it has “some violent and disturbing images.” No doubt, there are many troubling things to see in this film, whether the eerie poise of the elected officials primping for post-9/11 television appearances or the civilian casualties in Iraq. But more than this, Fahrenheit 9/11 is visually interesting because of what it does not show: namely, the actual attacks48 of September 11, 2001, which are represented aurally with a soundtrack of jet engines and terrified street noise over a black screen49 and then indirectly with slow pans over New York streets filled with bloodied, dusty survivors. In visual terms, the black screen is basically the only thing that makes Moore’s film unique; the combat images fall in line with similar footage in news media, and there is nothing unusually graphic. But the scene (or lack thereof) of the attacks themselves is not referenced in the rating reason, which cites only disturbing images rather than more general disturbing content or material. This oversight is surprising for an agency that is usually so attuned to anything that might unsettle audiences, and meticulous in its warnings, almost as if it was as surprised by the representation—a terror without visual content—as the Bush administration was by the attacks themselves.

---

48 Moore is apparently not averse to showing footage of the planes hitting the World Trade Center, for he showed precisely that iconic scene in Bowling for Columbine.
49 Alejandro González Iñárritu makes a similar choice in his contribution to 11’09’01; almost the entire short film is a black screen accompanied by an audio montage, punctuated with very brief shots of 9/11, fleeting but instantly recognizable. This method, according to Andrew Hill, is a way of “working to negate and deny the spectacularity” of the attacks (Re-Imagining the War on Terror, 16-17).
Moore’s expert, glossy filmmaking stands in stark contrast to the far grittier *Gunner Palace*. Documenting the lives of 400 soldiers in the 2/3 Field Artillery unit, stationed in a “bombed out pleasure palace” previously owned by Uday Hussein, *Gunner Palace* was quite successful in comparison to the rest of its peers, even if it did not achieve the same success as *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The film oscillates between footage of nighttime raids and arrests (one of which would lead to the documentary *The Prisoner Or, How I Planned to Kill Tony Blair*) and long sequences of sunny afternoons spent roughhousing in the pool, punctuated with improvised raps by the film’s stars. While Moore is a showy and confident filmmaker, Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlin seem a bit more reluctant, showcasing a soldier whose direct address to the camera impugns both the film and its connoisseurs: “For y’all this is just a show, but we live in this movie.”

For a director of Moore’s status and a film as anticipated as *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the R rating was not as detrimental as it can be for smaller projects. Although ratings reasons, especially for war films, are often a little absurd in their juxtaposition of relatively innocuous plot points (“drug references”) with serious thematic issues (“torture”), the struggle over the rating of *Gunner Palace* dramatizes this weirdness. The MPAA raters originally returned the film with an ‘R’ rating, and Tucker and Epperlin believed that this was purely a judgment of the language in the film. They were concerned that the restrictive designation would keep *Gunner Palace* from reaching a large audience who might find it educational or valuable, and so they mounted an appeal and supported with a petition, asking the MPAA to reconsider. Surprisingly, it did. Because the MPAA does not make their deliberations public (and generally takes pains to do the opposite), I do not know the specific grounds on which it decided to overturn its previous judgment. It is common knowledge, though, that the appeals process is quite stringent (or dogmatic), and that filmmakers’ claims usually fail. The relative ease50 with which Tucker and Epperlin secured a reduced rating is perhaps attributable to their film’s status as a documentary, rather than a narrative film. In a way, rating documentaries

---

50 In *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*, Kirby Dick specifically cites *Gunner Palace* as a rare instance where a filmmakers’ appeal was successful. Dick’s own effort to appeal to get his film’s NC-17 rating lowered was unsuccessful. He released the film defiantly, unmodified and without a rating.
might be a bit easier for CARA, and less fraught, because their fictional kin force the MPAA to address complex issues of representation and affect. Because the MPAA is not a censorship agency, and does not vouch for either the quality or credibility/accuracy of the films it evaluates, in rating a movie that purports to be the truth, it cannot ask filmmakers to adjust the content, and needs only to determine how offensive it might be, and label it accordingly.

**Contextualizing Films**

Excepting *Harold and Kumar* and *Iron Man*, to which I will return later, the remainder of the GWOT films are conscientious adaptations; they vary in their degrees of adherence to ‘true’ stories, but all aim for realism and, more precisely, plausibility. But despite garnering awards, critical acclaim, and festival accolades, these movies have been far less profitable and popular than *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Film critic Anthony Kaufman has speculated on why this might be,\(^{51}\) and he posited a kind of combat fatigue on the part of the viewers, so that popular impatience or boredom with the war morphs into disinterest in films that depict it, with the result that even stylized or unique representations of the war fail to draw large audiences.

Even without reaching blockbuster status (*Iron Man* is a special case, and only allegorizes the GWOT), however, these films contribute significantly to popular understandings of and feelings about the war, especially when Americans are simply tired of the news. In rating such films, the MPAA has to confront the historical events that they visualize and must also assess the filmmakers’ deliberate efforts to contribute to the historiography thereof, even while counting how many times the soldiers cursed. In many ways, the industry’s move away from documentaries and toward fictions and adaptations is predictable. War documentaries tend to be redundant, telling versions of the same story, trending toward visual and narrative similarity, and losing their capacity to impress and engage audiences. Eight years (and counting) into the GWOT, war-weary audiences are quite familiar with the usual stories, and are seeking something different.

\(^{51}\) Kaufman, “Yanks Nix Iraq Pics.”
In this regard, the tagline for *Charlie Wilson’s War* is revelatory: “Based on a true story. You think we could make all this up?” Along with *W.*, this film is part of a subgenre of GWOT films that I understand as contextualizing pieces, efforts to provide historical and political origin stories for the GWOT. *Charlie Wilson’s War* is a witty and engrossing account of the effort by Texas Democratic congressman Charlie Wilson to coerce the U.S. government to arm the mujahideen in Afghanistan against the Soviets. Cajoled by a meddling debutante and a surly CIA operative, Wilson gets his money and his weapons; the Afghans rout the Soviets, and help the U.S. turn the tide in the Cold War. The logical sequel to this film—in the form of the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and September 11th—receives no direct mention here, and is only foreshadowed in congressional refusal to fund reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Wilson’s queasy smile as he receives a CIA award for his actions. Alternately, *W.* is the quintessential Oliver Stone political epic (unlike *World Trade Center*, of which more below).\footnote{This movie struck me as a misfire on Stone’s part. The acting was mediocre and the casting was odd. Though Stone strove for accuracy and verisimilitude, the differences between the characters and the real people that they represented made the picture discordant, a version of the ‘uncanny valley’ that I discuss below in the context of virtual reality.} Josh Brolin portrays the President as shiftless and privileged, motivated by a lifelong desperation for the approval of his father, who berates him for his uselessness but habitually, begrudgingly bails him out after every misfortune. *W.* is depicted as earnest and guileless, aggressively handled by Cheney and Rove and coddled by Rice. 9/11 is referenced only in passing, while the GWOT is portrayed as the scheme of W.’s cabinet, foisted on the President over the objections of Powell.

At least from my perspective, there is a vast difference in quality between the two films; *Charlie Wilson’s War* was simply a better movie, while the buzz about *W.* seemed more about the boldness of its premise than the quality of its execution. But they have substantive similarities in the elements that typically concern the MPAA, commonalities that make the rating difference between them surprising. There is plenty of booze in both of them: the motif of Bush’s alcoholism and subsequent pious sobriety recurs throughout *W.*, and Wilson does plenty of unrepentant drinking. Wilson also shares a hot tub with companions that are snorting cocaine, but does not seem to partake himself. There is
cursing in both, though less after W. is born again, and so on. Part of what contributes to W.’s PG-13 is its use of ‘brief disturbing war images,’ which include iconic images from the Gulf War, scenes of ‘shock and awe’ from the beginning of the Iraq War, and wounded Iraqis and American soldiers in hospital. W. is bloodier, but Charlie Wilson’s War has war footage, too: sequences of the mujahideen shooting Soviet helicopters out of the sky, punctuated with a running tally of the equipment destroyed. Yet these are comic and, oddly, triumphant—the non-diegetic music, for example, conveys the sense that every successful strike by the Afghan fighters against the Soviets is a surprise victory for the underdog. Overall, W. has a lower rating but more gore and less swearing, while the rating for Charlie Wilson’s War is more restrictive but does not even cite the ‘war’ that the film depicts (albeit comedically), perhaps because doing so would require a painful acknowledgment that identification with the protagonist and enthusiasm over his cause also entails a kind of complicity in what would come after.

The 9/11 Movies
That very thing, the attacks of September 11, has been the subject of only two mainstream films: United 93 and World Trade Center. Both are deeply claustrophobic films: in United 93, viewers are always trapped, in the cabin of the aircraft or the windowless air traffic control centers, while the only relief from tight shots of the entombed PAPD officers comes in cuts to their anguished families. Both films are chaotic, whether in the confusion of the FAA and military personnel trying to improvise a response to a preposterous hijacking situation or in the wreckage of Lower Manhattan. But apart from these narrative and aesthetic similarities, the films follow entirely divergent arcs.

Critical opinion was equally varied and generally sharply divided, with Oliver Stone coming up short. The reactions to United 93 were almost uniformly strong endorsements of director Paul Greengrass’s craft if not the cinematic experience of the film itself. Thomas Doherty, in Cineaste, marveled at Greengrass’s Hitchcockian use of timing and suspense. Martin Amis wrote that it left spectators “in a state of near-perfect
distress.”53 *Film Comment* called it “stark, wrenching, and overwhelming;”54 and the reviewer for the conservative *American Enterprise* commented that even the anti-patriotic cadre of movie critics was “humbled” by the patriotism of this film.55 Interrupting the litany of praise, Dargis and Zacharek, writing in the *Times* and *Salon.com* respectively,56 both opined that they did not understand why the movie had to be made, and Zacharek went further to say that it was not a “great movie.” That assessment is as close as any major critic veers toward disparaging the film, and both Dargis and Zacharek seemed to be referring to their own discomfort, rather than the actual movies. As for why the movie had to be made, Paul Greengrass had a quick and airtight rejoinder: “‘The victims’ families want this movie made. Every one of them.’”57

*United 93* seems to refuse critical scrutiny. These writers were able to confess their own discomfort with the film, or evaluate its aesthetics, but mostly stopped short of really analyzing the content of the film. I did not fare much better—my notes from viewings of the film are filled with marginalia in which I ask myself rhetorically why I cannot seem to decode it. All the standard analytics that I might bring to bear on a visual text do not seem to reveal anything substantive. There are predictable dynamics of gender and race, evident especially in juxtapositions of white female flight attendants and the Arab male hijackers. The film makes now-familiar critiques about the ill-preparedness of the government, aviation officials and the military. It trades on sentimental representations of the heroics of the passengers and their last moments. All of this seems critically, ideologically unassailable, however, because the film works so hard to present itself as an accurate reenactment of what happened on that flight. Greengrass chose to cast many of the characters as themselves, for example, and used average people rather than high-profile actors to portray passengers on the plane. The end credits remind audiences about the “meticulous research” that went into “all aspects of the production,” even as they confess that some events and characters were

54 Doherty, “*United 93*,” 25.
56 Dargis, “Defiance Under Fire”; and Zacharek, “*United 93*.”
“necessarily compositcd” and “fictionalized.” This disclaimer notwithstanding, there is no way to evaluate the accuracy of the representations because audiences have only the same data that Greengrass did (transcripts of phone calls made from the plane, recollections of air traffic controllers of the events of that morning, etc.). In the process, United 93 has become the truth of what happened on that day.

Moreover, the film—I see this now—works as a powerful form of interpellation. It is surprisingly engrossing, which is astonishing because the ending is known from the outset. In interviews, Greengrass repeatedly explained that he cast the movie (perhaps even, as some critics opined, to its own aesthetic detriment) with average people because he wanted the audience to identify with them in a way that they would not be able to connect with a star. Ostensibly, this increases the power of the film by serving as a reminder that this could have happened to any average American traveler. And even though I fancy myself to be inured to such provocations, there were moments in the film when I noticed it working on me. When the camera panned to hysterical passengers screaming and crying instead of doing something proactive, or when the hijackers shooed an EMT off a wounded passenger and she capitulated, I felt a surprising and ungenerous flash of annoyance, and I cannot imagine that I am alone in that irritation. The film almost serves as a primer, explaining to audiences what (not) to do should they ever find themselves in a similar situation. And if we are persuaded by Elaine Scarry’s paean to those passengers who did fight back, “Who Defended the Country?”, in which she argues that the passengers’ populist, improvised form of resistance is the best opposition to terrorism, then United 93 is a very important film indeed.

So why would CARA opt to restrict its lessons to citizens over the age of 17? One explanation would be that they are meting out terror, rating in deference to the cognitive and emotional faculties of younger viewers. But another magical thing happens when an American youth turns 18—beyond access to R-rated movies, cigarettes, pornography, and the voting booth, he also becomes eligible for military service. The credits of United 93 indicate that the filmmakers “gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Department of Defense” and go on to name particular individuals from the DoD affiliated with the project. That the Pentagon would have willingly contributed to a film
that showcases their own ineptitude in responding to terror attacks is surprising, especially considering that they are generally very selective in choosing their cinematic collaborations, preferring (for obvious reasons) favorable representations of the military. As David Robb points out, the DoD is savvy in choosing and managing its affiliations with the film industry, and its chosen partnerships are always self-interested. The Army, for example, is explicit that any assistance they lend to a film should be offered with an eye toward recruitment;\textsuperscript{58} that is, they will only help with movies that make good advertisements. It stands to reason that the DoD would have similar criteria, and might hope that the patriotic fervor cultivated by the film would translate into action, into enlistment. If the first, most emotionally wracking experience of viewing \textit{United 93} corresponds with that crucial time when a citizen has to decide if she wants to become a soldier, too, so much the better.

Compared to the grimly inspiring and critically lauded \textit{United 93}, Stone’s sentimental retelling of the story of two Port Authority Police officers trapped beneath the collapsed World Trade Center was received far less favorably. Most critics commented on the film’s failure to live up to the expectations that they had for an Oliver Stone film. Overall, the critical consensus was that the lack of edginess, political commentary, or convincing conspiracy theories, resulted in a film that felt melodramatic and “hobbled,”\textsuperscript{59} though it did garner more than twice as much revenue from the public as \textit{United 93}, a profit that might be attributable to the profile of the director or the cast, or the film’s promise of a tamer story of September 11\textsuperscript{th} than \textit{United 93}. In Stone’s depiction, the attacks are “as apolitical as a mine collapse,”\textsuperscript{60} and CARA’s assessment seems to agree with this, as the rating reason says nothing about terror(ism). There is no mention of Al Qaeda in \textit{World Trade Center};\textsuperscript{61} alternately, from the beginning, \textit{United 93} makes explicit connections between the religious beliefs of the hijackers and their actions. Comparisons of \textit{World Trade Center} to a made-for-TV movie abounded,\textsuperscript{62} and

\textsuperscript{59} Mendelsohn, “September 11 at the Movies.”
\textsuperscript{60} Kauffman, “Stone Restrained,” 21.
\textsuperscript{61} “The View from Ground Zero,” 72.
\textsuperscript{62} As in Thirion, “Devenir Stone,” 28.
Rolling Stone’s Peter Travers commented that somehow the task of representing 9/11 had transformed Oliver Stone into “Ron Howard.” Although many appreciated Stone’s tact in handling the attacks themselves, which are indexed only in the shadow of a jet moving across a building before the sound of impact, and the fact that he showed only one victim pinwheeling to the ground, the general sense was that World Trade Center was far less compelling than its most obvious point of comparison, United 93. Although I agree with these assessments, in fairness, I think it is unlikely Stone could have made this film any other way, given the “prescriptive” politics of grief that surround Ground Zero.

Although Dargis and Zacharek both failed to see the usefulness of United 93, from my perspective, that criticism about the lack of utility seems to apply far more to World Trade Center. Stone’s film is a story about waiting, by the Port Authority Police Department officers immobilized under a collapsed tower and by the families desperate for word about their status. It is a film about having nothing to do but hope for the best. There is very little action, and citizenship here is reduced to depending on someone else to do something; in the case of the PAPD officers, that someone is a retired Marine who conscripts himself back into service to search for survivors at Ground Zero. This is a narrative about individual initiative, certainly, but that agency is dampened by the overwhelming feeling of helplessness on the part of everyone else. The story suggests that survival is a matter of luck, rather than action, a moral that is hard to translate into any kind of patriotic purpose.

Both films have an essentially predictable ending; in United 93, we know that the passengers are going to die even as they cling poignantly to the hope that they will not, while the tagline for World Trade Center is a spoiler, describing the film as “a true story of courage and survival,” so we know that the officers will live the whole time that they and their families doubt it. (Strangely, though, I found myself feeling irrationally, nauseatingly optimistic until almost the end of United 93, as if there was a chance that the passengers’ resistance would be successful and they would survive.)

---

64 Doss, “Death, Art, and Memory,” 69.
Presumably, the difference in their endings is a major factor in the difference between the tepid PG-13 and the decisive R ratings. From the outset, *United 93* was marked as a disturbing film. Even the previews enraged some audiences, and the ratings reasons for the films suggest that the difference between the two films is a matter of degree: “intense sequences of terror and violence” in *United 93* as opposed to World Trade Center’s “intense and emotional content.” Yet how is it that the image of a trapped officer shooting himself in the head with his service weapon because he knows he is going to die a terrible death is less disturbing than a hijacker stabbing a flight attendant is unclear. The MPAA identifies ‘terror’ in *United 93*, but this is more an affective valence and extra-cinematic feature than a component of the film itself, which cuts to black before the doomed plane crashes to the ground. Surely, the passengers are mortally frightened, but are they more afraid than the men pinned below 30 feet of debris? The real terror of *United 93* is in its provocation of the audience, prompted again and again to ask themselves how they would have reacted in the same situation, when there was a choice to make and the fate of the nation-state might have been at stake, as opposed to a situation where the protagonists are noble but helpless and waiting only for a hero to come and save them.

**Non-combat Films**

Whereas the 9/11 movies prefigure the GWOT, non-combat movies like *A Mighty Heart*, *Grace is Gone*, and *Rendition* use the war only as a backdrop for other narratives, all of which are sentimental, but only one of which, *Rendition*, is overtly political. *A Mighty Heart*, an Angelina Jolie vehicle, tells the story of Mariane Pearl, the pregnant wife of doomed journalist Daniel Pearl, during the saga of his disappearance on the eve of their planned departure from Pakistan. Here again, the end of the story is written before the film even begins, and whatever suspense the film achieves comes from the

---

65 Corliss, “Let’s Roll …”, 70.
66 Parenthetically, it also strikes me as odd that the first rating reason for *United 93*’s ‘R’ is language.
67 Kauffmann, “Drama and Disorder.”
68 Writing in *Time*, James Poniewozik identifies this commonality between the two films: “They let us see [September 11th] as a day when Americans tapped their strength, transformed, and sacrificed —whether you and I, munching our Raisinets in the audience, did or not.”

156
tautness of Jolie’s performance and the viewer’s affective investment in the story, rather than the plot itself. Likewise, the ending of *Grace is Gone* is simply a denouement. The draw of the film is in the struggle of the main character, a distant but devoted father of two young daughters, who learns that his wife has been killed in Iraq, and takes his daughters on an impromptu road trip to an amusement park instead of telling them the what is really going on.⁶⁹ Conversely, *Rendition* is the only one of the non-combat films that is truly suspenseful. After a suicide bombing in North Africa, an Egyptian-American chemical engineer is apprehended at the airport on the way home from a conference; transported to a secret detention center in Egypt because he allegedly received cell phone calls from the terrorist suspect, he is tortured by Egyptian officials in interrogations overseen by a reluctant young CIA agent and ordered by his diabolical boss in Washington. The battered suspect ultimately makes a false confession under duress, and when the contrite, disillusioned agent figures this out, he arranges his escape back to America.

The MPAA apparently rated *A Mighty Heart* and *Grace is Gone*, both war movies without war footage, on fairly simple criteria. The terse rating reason “language” for *A Mighty Heart*’s ‘R’ is unusually brief even for an organization that tends to be pithy in its judgments. Viewers never see the definitive beheading itself, only watching the faces of others as they watch the tape and hearing as they try to convey this development gently but unequivocally to Mariane. Still, it is odd that there was no ‘thematic material’ (a catch-all term that the MPAA uses to refer to anything that parents might not want their children to see, from difficult coming-of-age stories to abortion) in *A Mighty Heart* that warranted mention, as there was in *Grace is Gone*. The mention of ‘teen smoking’ in that film seems superfluous, given that the film is about a family whose mother has died violently; it also means that the DVD opens with an anti-smoking commercial from anti-tobacco campaign Truth (but no PSAs about how war is also occasionally fatal).

*Rendition* is a little trickier. Although the tagline for the movie—“What if someone you love just disappeared?”—trivializes the international crime of extraordinary

---

⁶⁹ The film, made with the assistance of a Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense’s office of Public Affairs, did well at Sundance, though it grossed next to nothing (in Hollywood terms) on release.
rendition into a simple personal tragedy, there is no avoiding the graphic content of the film itself. And, indeed, this is an R-rated movie, on account of its “torture/violence.” It is noteworthy, though, that there is torture in *A Mighty Heart*, too, when suspects in Daniel Pearl’s disappearance are stripped and strung up by the wrists during interrogation, but there is no mention of that in the rating reason. Moreover, even as the film emphasizes its own ideological rightness (the credits inform us, for example, that the production was carbon-neutral) and the long-suffering goodness of Mariane, who parleys a reporter’s question about her husband’s death into a response about the many other people killed in terror attacks while they were looking for him, the police interrogation tactics are depicted rather sympathetically, necessitated by the urgency of the investigation. Furthermore, a postscript, superimposed on the screen as Mariane and her small son walk away from the camera into the watercolor daylight of a Paris street, provides the following resolution to the case: “It is alleged that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was the man who killed Daniel. He is currently in US custody in Guantanamo.” Having just spent nearly two hours suffering along with the survivors of KSM’s (alleged) victim, how are audiences (who are sensitive enough to be concerned about climate change) supposed to feel about this? Unsurprisingly, in these films ‘torture’ only counts as ‘torture’ when it happens to an innocent person, like a chemical engineer mistaken for an accomplice. The only official victim in these movies is an American man, but even he is only half so, which might explain the elision of ‘torture/violence’ in the rating reason, in which the latter term depoliticizes the former. Perhaps only the American half was tortured, while the ‘Arab’ half was subject to the far more common (and far less objectionable) ‘violence.’

**Critiques of American Troops**

In rating the subgenre of GWOT films that explicitly critique of the conduct of American troops (*Redacted*, *Battle for Haditha*, and *In the Valley of Elah*), the MPAA is far less equivocal; all of the films are rated R, and the rating reasons are explicit and detailed, as if to cordon off these potentially inflammatory films with rhetorical barricades. *Redacted*, which tells the story of a gang rape and arson committed by a
small group of American soldiers, recreates the circumstances leading up to the crimes from a variety of perspectives, ranging from the handheld autobiographical camera work of a soldier who aspires to be a film student to a somewhat parodic production of a French art film on the checkpoint that the soldiers man. The film asserts “Truth is the first casualty of war,” and describes itself as a project that “visually documents” the events that transpired.70 Battle for Haditha has a similar mission, but is less conceptually and aesthetically sophisticated. The film is a narrative of the Haditha massacre in November 2005, in which a traumatized unit of Marines exacts brutal retaliation from a civilian population whom it deems responsible for a deadly IED attack shot with as much as possible with “real people and real locations” and in “real time.” The film is ambivalent in its assignation of blame, apportioning guilt both to the officer on the ground who led the retaliatory attacks and the chain of command that ignored his repeated requests for help with the nightmares that plagued him. In the Valley of Elah tells the story of a retired MP who pairs with an embattled female detective to solve the disappearance of his son upon return from Iraq. In the process of discovering that his son was brutally murdered—hacked to pieces and then partially incinerated—by traumatized fellow soldiers, he also learns that his son had been involved in the torture of prisoners. The previously patriotic man is disillusioned by this; early in the film, he stops to reprimand a janitor at a nearby school that he has hung the flag upside down (as in a sign of distress), while at the end, he returns to the school and instructs the hapless (and, naturally, immigrant) custodian to leave it upside down permanently. The film ends with a non sequitur dedication “For the children,” a caption above a picture of the mangled corpse of a child. Although this is apparently apropos of nothing, along with the upside-down flag, it might serve to shift some of the blame for the murder off of the guilty soldiers themselves and onto the state that wounded them. But this reassignment, if intended at all, is subtle.

70 In its illuminating effort to rescue ‘truth’ from war, the ‘special features’ section of the DVD includes a segment called ‘Collateral Damage,’ an album of “actual photos from the Iraq War.” Oddly enough, this film also features more product placement than any other, and the credits thank dozens of companies—from Apple to Zippo—for their consideration.
Even for a group that tends to be outspoken in its anti-war positions, the choices by these filmmakers to make movies like these is remarkable, a direct affront to the mandate to support the troops and a deviation from the tentative liberal party line of doing so while condemning the war. The MPAA’s aggressive ratings feel like retaliation in kind, enumerations the films’ infractions. This is especially apparent in its dispensation of *Redacted*. Not coincidentally, the film which is least sympathetic in its portrayal of the perpetrators and the most reluctant to exonerate them with subplots of PTSD (indeed, their jobs are portrayed as boring rather than dangerous) received the lengthiest, most accusatory rating reason.

*Critiques of American Policy*

Critique of official policy is common stuff of open debate and active discussion, and as the terrain of films such as *Stop-Loss, The Kingdom*, and *Lions for Lambs*, is safer, more familiar ground than condemnations of soldiers’ conduct. *Stop-Loss* tells the story of a sergeant who returns home, expecting to be discharged from the Army only to learn that he has been stop-lossed. He is desperate to avoid another tour, and tries first to travel to Washington to appeal to a local politician. When he is unable to complete that trip, he makes preparations to flee to Canada, but after a return trip home for the funeral of a friend, he decides to follow his orders and report for duty. Although I found *Stop Loss* somewhat disappointing compared to Peirce’s *Boys Don’t Cry*, the film does provide a detailed portrait of the thoroughgoing trauma of war and its capacity to haunt everyone it touches. Alternately, *The Kingdom* is an action movie that foregrounds the connection between U.S. oil consumption and violence in the Middle East. That pedagogical narrative gets lost in all the forensic drama and explosions as an FBI team travels to Saudi Arabia to investigate a sophisticated attack on an American oil company housing development there, but reasserts itself in the end in an acknowledgment that there is bloodlust on all sides of this conflict, when the film reveals that “We’re going to kill them all” is a mantra common to terrorists and the Americans deployed to fight them. Finally, *Lions for Lambs* is an ideologically confused project that toggles between storylines and political positions, cutting between a political science professor/Vietnam
veteran trying to motivate an apathetic but talented student to do something, two special forces soldiers wounded on a mountaintop as the first casualties in a newly aggressive effort to defeat the Taliban who also happen to be previous students of that professor, and a young GOP senator offering an exclusive on this new offensive to a veteran liberal journalist. While the suffering of the soldiers, the rhetoric of the professor, and the indifferent hawkishness of the senator are useful symbols for an anti-war film, Lions for Lambs also offers an indictment of anti-war liberalism, critiquing the media for its support of the initial war effort and then for its vapid, impractical pacifism.

All of these films received ‘R’ ratings, but although they apparently shared a common propensity for obscene language, the MPAA adjudicated their violent content quite differently. Lions for Lambs had “some war violence,” while Stop-Loss had “graphic violence” (both during and outside of combat), but these seem relatively tame in comparison to The Kingdom’s “intense sequences of graphic brutal violence.” There is more to be gleaned from this than the observation that MPAA ratings can be erratic, and that action movies tend be more profitable than dramas (in this case, The Kingdom out-earned Lions for Lambs by a factor of three and Stop-Loss by a factor of four).

There is also something about the narrative of each film, which cannot be encapsulated into a rating reason, even one as explicit and involved as that for The Kingdom, the film that made the most direct accusations of American government culpability for terrorism. Stop-Loss takes a tepidly anti-war position, scaling policy down to the level of an individual network of friends and families and war down to individual suffering or heroism, while Lions for Lambs struggles to take any position at all, alternately glorifying war and caricaturizing militarism. The Kingdom is geopolitical in scope and categorical in its assignation of blame. Moreover, it is the only one that does not end with a with a gesture toward heroism—either in the soldier who accepts his new orders or the pair of special forces fighters who go down shooting—but rather with a nod toward a threat that persists beyond the frame of the movie. Even as it documents all of this, there is one concept that the MPAA avoids in its laundry list of reasons for the film’s ‘R’ rating: there is no mention of either terror or terrorism, even though the film is driven by a series of terrorist plots. Rating the film in those terms would amount to a concession
that its premise—namely that American actions cause terrorism against American citizens—was right.

**The Grotesque**

And then there is *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay*, a subgenre unto itself. A sequel to the ineffable *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, this movie is funny\(^1\), absurd, and gross\(^2\) in equal measure. To get the full *Harold and Kumar* experience, I watched the unrated version of the film, which is seven minutes longer (and nastier) than the theatrical release. Harold and Kumar, a dope-smoking odd couple, plan a trip to Amsterdam to find Harold’s love interest. They are detained by airport security, but Kumar extricates himself and his friend by accusing the screeners of racial profiling. Overly enthusiastic for their arrival in Amsterdam, Kumar goes into the airplane lavatory to assemble a bong that he developed specifically for airplane use. The other passengers mistake it for a bomb, and they launch a quickly coordinated attack against the apparent hijackers, a scene that is a perverse echo of the climax of *United 93*. The would-be heroes subdue them, believing that they have thwarted their plan to blow up the plane. Harold and Kumar end up in Guantanamo Bay, barely escaping the sodomitical guards that terrorize the prisoners, and the rest of the movie proceeds with them on the run from the authorities, until they ultimately befriend George W. Bush over a joint. Disillusioned by their time in Gitmo and the corruption of all the feds they meet, Harold and Kumar lament to the President about the state of America. He reassures them that “you don’t have to believe in your government to be a good American; you just have to believe in your country,” proving that even a *Harold and Kumar* movie can be educational.

A film like this provides an embarrassment of riches to the MPAA, and the rating reason is an exasperated litany of its crudeness. Interestingly, however, the premise of

\(^{1}\) Although this is the only comedy, the other films are not entirely humorless. *Charlie Wilson’s War*, for example, is extremely well-written, and offers droll humor as a complement to the political plot. Additionally, films that feature soldiers often provide comic relief in witty dialogue between their characters. Most of the people I know who have served in the military are funny, and this may or may not be evidence of a trend in that culture, but I am especially interested in why they are consistently represented as funny in film.

\(^{2}\) Achille Mbembe’s discussion of vulgarity in the postcolony as a symptom or mechanism for coping with a repressive state may be instructive here.
Guantanamo Bay apparently did not figure into the ratings calculation, even though the film implies that (mostly) innocent Americans would be detained there and explicitly contends that torture takes place at the facility. Amnesty International critiqued *Harold and Kumar* for what it identified as its comic, trivializing depiction of the detention facility, but the MPAA found this less objectionable than the drug use and all the rest. In my assessment, although the film did not offer a serious treatment of the abuses at Guantanamo, it did portray their grotesquerie and excess. Here again, however, in the rating, torture is elided into other thematic elements (like sexual content) rather than cited directly, suggesting a reluctance on the part of the MPAA to engage it directly or seriously consider its filmic significance in movies about the GWOT.

*The Fantastic*

The sci-fi action movie *Iron Man* provides a differently unrealistic treatment of the GWOT; whereas *Harold and Kumar* was intentionally absurd and frivolous, *Iron Man* seems to take itself more seriously, even as it promises—and delivers—a fantastic account of anti-terrorist activity. Its discussion of the War is only allegorical (as nearly all superhero movies are), and references to it are subtle and symbolic, and I include the film here as a point of comparison. *Iron Man* (the second-highest grossing movie of 2008, surpassed only by *Dark Knight*) tells the story of the genius leader of a defense company that is captured by a terrorist group called ‘10 Rings’ after they ambush his convoy with weapons that his company designed. They command him to produce a replica of a new and lethal explosive that his company has just begun to market, but he uses the supplies instead to build a bionic suit that enables him to escape. Upon his return to the states, he vows to get out of the war business and tries to retrofit his suit in the cause of justice. Of course, after foiling villains both foreign (as when he arrives in a village and interrupts a Taliban-style public execution, shooting the persecutors with laserlike accuracy and leaving the villagers to dispense with the leader) and domestic, he ultimately triumphs. Given the essentially, extraordinarily fictional quality of the film, it is perhaps surprising that the credits for this filmcite a military advisor and thank the Department of Defense. But it is also predictable, given that the DoD is often eager to
affiliate itself with movies that support, even subtly, its vision of the world and the connections it posits between advanced weapons technologies and global peace and justice.

Similarly, the MPAA’s rating is unsurprising. More striking is the fact that the GWOT film that comes closest to matching *Iron Man*’s profits is *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The differences between these two very successful (read: profitable) films suggest that it would be hard to define a single formula for a GWOT movie smash. But they might also elucidate something about the public’s appetite for war films, as they represent a massive shift in desire from documentary to fantasy. Four years and thousands of casualties after its release, *Fahrenheit 9/11*’s earnings were surpassed by a movie about a superhero who defeats a fictional group of terrorists. For its part, the MPAA found *Iron Man*’s “intense sequences of action and violence” less objectionable than *Fahrenheit 9/11*’s “violent and disturbing images.” It is hard to identify grounds on which to make a substantive comparison between the two films, except that both of them tell stories of the defense industry run amok, but in *Iron Man*, that excess only kills the bad guys.

_A Lack of Metrics ..._

Given the idiosyncrasy of the system by which the MPAA rates all movies, including those about the GWOT, I do not want to overstate my interpretations of CARA’s decisions, and I recognize that it may not be possible to prove much about The System by drawing from the ratings of individual films. Through comparative analyses of films against one another, however, certain patterns begin to emerge. For this reason, such an analysis is a good way to take the emotional temperature of the terrorized nation-state, a way of gauging what seems to be acceptable and tolerable.

In October 2003, Donald Rumsfeld infamously admitted that

Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the Global War on Terror. Are we capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrasas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training, and deploying against us?73

---

Like the state, the MPAA has had to improvise defenses against terror, to devise its own (imperfect) metrics for measuring it in a campaign with much lower stakes. Like the Department of Homeland Security (low/guarded/elevated/high/severe), the MPAA’s relies on vague categories (G/PG/PG-13/R/NC-17), translating a mass of information into just a few adjectives. There is no ‘winning’ or ‘losing’ in their effort, as there is in the GWOT, but there are benchmarks, and the MPAA seems to be more successful in their mission than the GWOT state has been. As Jack Valenti testified before Congress in 2005, “The rating system isn’t perfect but, in an imperfect world, it seems each year to match the expectations of those whom it is designed to serve—parents of America.”

The MPAA has proven itself able to determine how scary something is, and many American parents seem to agree with their assessments. After all, it is easier to gauge how frightened we actually feel than it is to determine how frightened we ought to be. And so, five and a half years after Rumsfeld’s grim prognostication, without any evidence of improvement on that front, perhaps films about terror(ists) serve as a form target practice in an effort to apprehend a much larger threat.

You Haven’t Seen Anything Yet: Terror, Torture, and Saw III

Films about terror are a recent descendent of a much older genre: the horror film. Horror films provide audiences with “recreational terror,” a pleasurable simulation of horror in a controlled environment. Thus, as a supplement to my analysis of terror films, I turn now to a comparative consideration of a contemporary horror series: the popular Saw franchise. 2006, the fifth year of the GWOT, occasioned the release of only two major films about it: United 93 and World Trade Center. Both of these films, however, were out-earned by another experience of cinematic terror that year: Saw III. Drawing more than 2.5 times as much box office as United 93 and $10,000,000 more than World Trade Center, I understand Saw III as the third, climactic scene of a 2006 triptych of American terror. Although this line of analysis might seem unusual or counterintuitive at

---

74 Valenti, “Are the Current Media Ratings Systems Effective?”, 56.
75 Pinedo, Recreational Terror.
first, the MPAA’s reason for *Saw III*’s emphatic ‘R’ rating suggests a subtle but substantive connection between the three films.

Part of a growing subgenre of horror films often called ‘torture porn,’ the *Saw* series chronicles the exploits of the ‘Jigsaw Killer,’ who captures and tortures his victims in order to teach them larger life lessons through the “therapy of animal terror,” requiring them to purchase their freedom and survival with agonizing but non-lethal forms of suffering. More gruesome than frightening, the *Saw* movies are an adaptation of the so-called ‘splatter film.’ This subgenre of horror movies, exemplified by *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Halloween*, provided a “spectacle of endless death” that was cheap to produce and popular with audiences. As special effects technologies have evolved, these films have become gorier and more extravagant in their carnage. For many aficionados of the films, part of the pleasure comes from knowledge about the stagecraft behind them, and *Saw* DVDs often include segments on how the filmmakers staged the tortures, while graphics and engineering magazines provide more technical explanations for the same things.

Essentially, the challenge of making horror movies is to make them grisly enough to capture audience attention (and money), without making them so terrifying that viewers stop watching or leave the theater altogether. To keep a horror film from being either not horrifying enough or too horrifying, filmmakers must calculate who their target audience is and what they would enjoy seeing and experiencing, while also estimating how much fear and gore the MPAA would tolerate and within the desired rating. One concession to all of these demands is that horror films have become “increasingly open-ended.” This has the practical advantage of enabling lots of profitable sequels, but it also provides audiences who might want such a thing a more prolonged experience of terror, one that might last beyond the end of the film, without running afoul of the MPAA.

---

76 This classification also often includes films like *Hostel* (2005), *The Devil’s Rejects* (2005), and *Captivity* (2007). David Edelstein (“Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex”) has also argued that *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) should be added to the list.
77 Osmond, “Reviews, *Saw.*”
78 Magistrale, *Abject Terrors*, 166.
by adding more frightening scenes to the movie. At the same time, for movie-goers that have had enough, the end of a horror film will at least provide some relief, if not the satisfying, definitive closure provided by other genres.

Still, this strategy has its financial risks, because inevitably “a certain weariness sets in” with the release of second or subsequent movie sequel.\(^{81}\) \textit{Saw II} was a clear exception to this rule, out-earning the first of the series by nearly $33,000,000, or 58\%. \textit{Saw III}, with its upped ante of gruesomeness (and perhaps also its coincidence with other filmic depictions of terror earlier in 2006) continued to defy this pattern, and went on to become the second most profitable of the series to date. Although all of the \textit{Saw} movies have the same premise and general storyline, many reviews suggested that \textit{Saw III} had raised the gruesomeness bar once again; one critic wrote “\[s\]awing off your ankle to spite your thigh is now officially kid stuff.”\(^{82}\) Indeed, \textit{Saw III} promised a whole new adventure with the tagline “Suffering? You haven’t seen anything yet.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Release Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Rating Reason</th>
<th>Box Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/29/2004</td>
<td>\textit{Saw}</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“Strong grisly violence and language” [“Edited for re-rating” – was originally NC-17](^{83})</td>
<td>$55,153,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/28/2005</td>
<td>\textit{Saw II}</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“Grisly violence and gore, terror, language and drug content”</td>
<td>$87,025,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/27/2006</td>
<td>\textit{Saw III}</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“Strong grisly violence and gore, sequences of terror and torture, nudity and language”</td>
<td>$80,150,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/26/2007</td>
<td>\textit{Saw IV}</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“Sequences of grisly bloody violence and torture throughout, and for language”</td>
<td>$63,270,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/24/2008</td>
<td>\textit{Saw V}</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>“Sequences of grisly bloody violence and torture, language and brief nudity”</td>
<td>$56,746,769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Table 2. The \textit{Saw} Series}

\(^{81}\) Newman, “\textit{Saw III},” para. 3.
\(^{82}\) Gleiberman, “Torture Logic,” para. 1.
\(^{83}\) Although the American theatrical release of this film was an edited version, in Britain, the film ran uncut.
Saw III tells the story of a gravely ill Jigsaw and his apprentice Amanda (a self-mutilator and former junkie who is desperately devoted to her mentor, whose trap once saved her from herself) entrap an unhappily-married female brain surgeon and a grieving father whose son was killed by a drunk driver, later revealed to be husband and wife. As the man confronts the various people responsible for his son’s death and the lenient sentence that the driver received, the woman must keep Jigsaw alive, for if he dies, an explosive collar around her neck will detonate. This approximation of a suicide-bomb scenario is the closest that Saw III comes to referencing real-world terrors directly, but given the cinematic context of the year of its release, even this convoluted allusion is enough to achieve a real-world resonance. Although wars occasionally result in a decrease in the production of horror films, as in the 1940s, when real life seemed to be horrible enough, the GWOT has not occasioned any measurable change in this regard. For my purposes, it is significant Saw III was released in the same year as United 93 and World Trade Center, and is the only one—despite aesthetic and narrative similarities among all films in the series—whose rating reason links terror and torture.

However, torture in the Saw series takes a form quite unlike that which has characterized the GWOT. Torture in the Saw movies is excessive and theatrical; it is more like that of the Inquisition, or the horror staged in the Grand Guignol (to which many reviewers compare the films). In Saw, victims bleed and lose body parts through elaborate schemes designed to elicit precisely those results. We see their limbs amputated, watch as their joints are dislocated, and we hear them scream and plead for their lives. In this way, Saw redefines torture as only these exaggerated behaviors; watching Saw, unlike watching news reports about the GWOT, there is no doubt that

---

84 Worland, The Horror Film, 128.
85 Unlike in the photos from Abu Ghraib, torture in the Saw movies unfolds in moving images. Still photos lack that terrible motion, and also its soundtrack. In this way, Elizabeth Alexander’s reading of the courtroom replay of the Rodney King videos is instructive, as she argues that the extreme slow-motion that made all the scenes seem discreet and disjointed and the silencing of the audio obscured the violence of the LAPD officers (“‘Can you be BLACK and Look at This?’”). Perhaps the stillness of the Abu Ghraib photos and their inability to reproduce the sounds that doubtlessly accompanied their production was part of what made it possible for so many to doubt that they actually depicted torture.
what we are seeing qualifies as torture; through this vivid, unequivocal depiction of suffering and harm, the films become the definitive example of what torture looks like. Anything short of what the Jigsaw Killer and his proxies do (like, for example, only pretending to electrocute a hooded prisoner and photographing the scene) becomes dubitable—unsavory, sure, but not necessarily ‘torture.’ This revision is deeply problematic because the Saw movies, in many ways, serve as the definitive example in popular American culture of what torture looks like.

Meanwhile, in its rating reason for Saw III, the MPAA’s linkage of terror and torture (in that order) implies that one automatically follows from the other. This is an idea that had the potential to be uniquely resonant on the heels of the only two films to depict American terror directly. Although the content of all the Saw films is essentially the same, Saw III was the only one of them to receive a rating that directly linked terror and torture, and Saw III was the film released in the same year as United 93 and World Trade Center. Those two films were charged with representing American terror, while Saw III became the arbiter of what counts as torture, and the MPAA’s brief gloss on the film quietly suggests that it torture is a logical reaction to the terror that came before.

**Deployment in the Uncanny Valley: On ‘Virtual Iraq’**

In its movie ratings, the MPAA performs an (imperfect) calculation of risk. This labor, on an individual scale, became part of the practice of citizenship after 9/11; studies like that of Fischhoff, Gonzalez, Small, and Lerner on popular threat perception revealed that people were making those kinds of assessments on a regular basis. For most of us, whose lives will never be directly or specifically threatened by terrorism, these calculations are ceremonial: practically unnecessary but emotionally valuable. For others, like military personnel, however, survival depends on the rightness of their existential math, a habit that many find impossible to break upon return to civilian life.

“Virtual Iraq,”86 a simulation piloted by Dr. Albert “Skip” Rizzo at the Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), tries to reprogram these behaviors by meting out

---

86 I am very grateful to Dr. Albert “Skip” Rizzo, who made time in his exceedingly busy schedule to speak with me, and provided wealth of information about and examples of the work that Virtual Iraq can do.
threatening stimuli one at a time. The thinking is that the soldier suffering from PTSD will learn, in the process, to adjust their calculus, to realize that these terrifying things no longer add up to danger now that the war is over, and so no longer justify fright and vigilance. In many ways, Virtual Iraq is a bookend to FlatWorld. That simulation educates soldiers for combat; this one seeks to help them forget what they have learned. The development of ‘PTSD’ as a diagnostic category made it possible to construct a “scientific inventory of the nature of human suffering.”

Virtual Iraq integrates that knowledge with technical skill and a spectacular sensibility to offer suffering humans an immersive therapeutic experience.

Even as the ICT touts its application of movie industry techniques to virtual reality, they also repeatedly emphasize a key difference between VR and film, namely that film can only ever be a ‘passive simulation,’ a story told by someone else. For the resolution of trauma, such a linear and generalized narrative may not be useful. Trauma “is not a story but a cascade of experiences,” and such a torrent of stimuli is precisely what good VR can provide. Christian Metz has compared film to a daydream, on the grounds that during both experiences, participants know that they are only fantasizing.

Such awareness has no place in an ICT simulation, which strives to be so immersive that it ceases to feel like (or even to be) simulation at all. An entertaining trick in general, this intensity is absolutely crucial for VR simulations designed to undo PTSD, because they must first outdo it.

Some of what cannot be achieved by film can be experienced in video or computer games. Playing a game requires far more intention and activity than watching a film does; insofar as they are totally absorbing, games have a higher “delusion coefficient” than their theatrical kin. During the GWOT, war-related video games have proliferated, an acceleration of a trend that began after the Gulf War. But most GWOT

---

87 van der Kolk and McFarlane, “The Black Hole of Trauma,” 5.
89 Metz, The Imaginary Signifier, 135.
90 Ibid., 109. In introducing the concept of the ‘delusion coefficient,’ Metz is referring specifically to cinema; I am adapting it to the experience of VR.
91 Conway, “Info-War, Info-Peace.”
games are patterned on the same narratives\(^{92}\) about valor, individualism, and victory over evil, whose general progression is predetermined by their programmers. Although the ICT provides a framework for its VR simulations and relies on ‘coercive narrative’ to ensure that each training simulation meets its objectives, Virtual Iraq is meant to be flexible and responsive to the needs of each user. Its creators admit that by comparison, Virtual Iraq is less graphically sophisticated than the war video games from which it descends, but it is also more involved and involving than these predecessors. But because Virtual Iraq sessions are tailored to the cognitive and emotional needs of each individual user, they are evocative in ways that typical games, which are meant to be entertaining as they provide all players with roughly the same experience, are not.

Therapeutically, virtual reality at the ICT has two different applications, one for patients and the other for clinicians. The former will be my focus in this section, but the Virtual Patients simulation for training therapists is nonetheless worth mentioning. An expansion of the ICT’s Virtual Humans project, Virtual Patients enable fledgling psychiatrists to interact with clients, specifically traumatized clients, without having to practice on actual human beings. This is a noteworthy reversal in the original pattern of therapeutic artificial intelligence, in which a chat program called ELIZA,\(^{93}\) developed by Joseph Weizenbaum in 1966, was able to convincingly simulate conversation with a ‘therapist’ to whom unsuspecting users recounted their problems.

Forty years after Weizenbaum successfully replicated talk therapy with a computerized clinician, the ICT developed virtual patients, the first of whom was Justin, a young man sent into therapy because his parents suspected him of using marijuana; his role is to train clinicians how to deal with a client that is taciturn and reluctant to therapy. Next came Justina, a provocatively-dressed young woman whose intrusive memories of a sexual assault make her an archetypal civilian survivor of trauma. Although most clinicians are initially skeptical about (and a little amused by) the prospect of applying their training and skills to fake people, they tend to fall into the simulation fairly quickly.

\(^{92}\) H. Brown, “Killer Apps.”

\(^{93}\) Thanks to Marita Sturken, who suggested this precedent when I was first working to conceptualize this part of my project.
Commenting on a videotaped session between a young male doctor and Justina, Rizzo cited the ‘rule of 3’ in simulated encounters, namely that after a virtual human gives three consecutive appropriate, realistic responses, her real human interlocutor will begin to interact with her as if she is a person. Virtual Iraq, however, is designed for real patients and meant to be operated by real clinicians.

Compared to the virtual World Trade Center that I consider in the previous chapter, Virtual Iraq is technologically more complex and ideologically more complicated. Whereas the terror of 9/11 was rooted in the targeting of innocent people, the trauma of warfare is infused with questions of agency, complicity, and guilt. For the most part, it would be unthinkable to claim that any of the people who died in the 9/11 attacks were complicit in its violence. The virtual World Trade Center was designed for the utterly blameless (civilian survivors of the attack) or the straightforwardly heroic (the first responders who reported to the scene); Virtual Iraq is intended to help more people in more difficult positions make whatever kind of internal peace is possible.

In the GWOT, as in any other war, assignations of guilt and innocence are difficult to make. Because “social context” can determine the nature and extent of trauma94 GWOT veterans will, on the whole, likely return to a more accommodating and forgiving environment than Vietnam veterans did, and the unpopularity of this war has not translated into animosity toward soldiers as it did during Vietnam. Popular discourse and popular culture alike are essentially univocal in their commitment to support the troops, and there is good evidence that prevailing sentiment and media representations can determine the intensity of a soldier’s trauma.95 In the U.S., the majority of the disapproval about the war has been either abstract or directed at its architects, rather than at the soldiers who fight it. This general commitment to the troops has been unshaken by revelations of American soldiers doing bad things (as at Abu Ghraib or in films like Redacted); the affection toward and support of the troops that is withdrawn from those bad actors is simply shunted away, onto those who were in similar situations but chose to act rightly.

94 Bracken, Trauma, 70.
95 Paulson and Krippner, Haunted by Combat, 12.
None of this, however, can fully mediate the axiomatic truth of war, that it is inherently a traumatic experience.\textsuperscript{96} Rizzo repeatedly commented that immediately after combat, nearly anyone would exhibit symptoms of trauma, but that it only becomes a clinical problem when it persists. The specific dynamics of wartime PTSD will vary by context and conflict, but as long as there has been combat, there has been combat stress, and similar symptoms have been called by a variety of different names. Clinical nomenclature for these maladies has evolved from ‘Swiss disease’ in 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Europe, to the ‘Soldier’s Heart’ or ‘Nostalgia’ of the Civil War, to the ‘Shell Shock’ or ‘Combat Neurosis’ of WWI, to WWII ‘Battle’ or ‘Operational Fatigue,’ which would become ‘Combat Stress’ during Vietnam and ‘PTSD’ thereafter.\textsuperscript{98} Different kinds of fighting yield different kinds of combat stress,\textsuperscript{99} and PTSD is, for many the price of survival. This is especially true because advances in armor and medical technology mean that there will be more survivors of contemporary wars\textsuperscript{100} and hence, quantitatively more people living with trauma.

The military has a variety of tools for assessing these casualties and their symptoms.\textsuperscript{101} Worldwide, most armies use a “functional gauge” to monitor combat stress\textsuperscript{102} that defines wellness essentially as the ability to serve. This emphasis on force strength creates an ethical dilemma\textsuperscript{103} unique to practitioners of military psychiatry, who must always weigh the military’s need for manpower against the patient’s need for

\begin{itemize}
  \item Coker argues against this logic, and claims that that the real problem is not warfare itself but the modern pathologization of it, which has transformed it into “an abnormal experience that produces an abnormal reaction” (\textit{The Warrior Ethos}, 98).
  \item Combat traumas are often conflict-specific. For a detailed accounting of the distinctive stressors of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, see Nash, “The Stressors of War, 18ff.
  \item Paulson and Krippner, \textit{Haunted by Combat}, 9.
  \item For example, German psychiatrists working with veterans of WWI identified three subtypes of shell shock, each corresponding to a different fear precipitated by a particular feature of that war: trench neurosis, gas neurosis, burned-alive neurosis (Binneveld, \textit{From Shell Shock to Combat Stress}, 87).
  \item RAND Center for Military Health Policy Research, \textit{Invisible Wounds of War}, xix.
  \item The Department of Defense has issued a different kind of evaluation, announcing in early 2009 that it would not award the Purple Heart to veterans suffering from PTSD (Alvarez and Eckholm, “Purple Heart is Ruled Out”), a diagnosis not of the soldiers themselves, but of the magnitude of their sacrifices. The VA, for its part, has had to perform a different kind of valuation so that it might adjudicate disability claims: that of determining how much, precisely, a particular injury is worth (Goldberg and Willse, “Losses and Returns,” 280).
  \item Solomon, Laor, and McFarlane, “Acute Posttraumatic Reactions,” 104.
  \item NCPTSD and Walter Reed, \textit{Iraq War Clinician Guide}, 18.
\end{itemize}
recuperative rest, and a related diagnostic one, as battlefield psychiatrists must also
determine whether it would be better for the mission to return the afflicted soldier to the
battlefield or keep him away from it. Battlefield psychiatry typically relies on the PIES
(proximity, immediacy, expectancy, and simplicity) formula\textsuperscript{104} in its interventions,
utilizing common-sense treatments and assuming that they will work at least well enough
that the stricken soldier/patient will be able to return to the fray. Once the fighting has
subsided, diagnostics and treatments can become a bit more sophisticated. The most
common instrument for assessing the PTSD of soldiers is the PTSD Checklist-Military
Version (PCL-M), a set of 17 questions corresponding to the symptoms of PTSD, that
asks the soldier to rate on a Likert-type scale (1: not at all to 5: extremely) how much
they have recently been bothered by these symptoms. A total score of 50 or higher
indicates PTSD. Once one has been defined as a candidate for PTSD, the PCL-M makes
it impossible to score 0, and so to indicate a total absence of trauma. The lowest possible
score is 17, and though this technically means ‘I am not bothered at all’ by these
symptoms, it still seems to suggest that they are there. The PCL-M refuses the possibility
that anyone would come through combat unscathed.

Rizzo, who originally worked in brain injury rehabilitation, built the initial
prototype for Virtual Iraq on the hunch that there would be a need for it (and essentially
for free). Once he had a workable demonstration, he contacted the Army to ask for
funding, and was denied; in his telling, this is because America was still in the ‘mission
accomplished era’ and so doubted that the war would last long enough to produce a
significant population of traumatized veterans. All of this changed in July 2004, with the
publication by the \textit{New England Journal of Medicine} of a study that demonstrated higher
incidences of major depression, general anxiety, and PTSD in veterans from Iraq than
those from Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{105} The researchers attributed the difference to the greater
combat exposure of Iraq War veterans, among whom the frequency of experiences like
being shot at, handling human remains, knowing someone that was killed, or killing
corresponded to an increase in these illnesses. Even more alarming was their finding that

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{105} Hoge et al., “Combat Duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.”
only 23-40% of those afflicted sought any kind of treatment. Suddenly, Rizzo and his collaborators became very popular, and since then, the Army has tried in general to be more proactive in addressing the psychological needs of its personnel.106

Any virtual encounter is a product of the interaction between the world itself, its creators, and its users.107 Designed especially for ‘trigger pullers’ rather than support personnel,108 the content of Virtual Iraq is an inventory of the sights, sounds, and smells of combat translated into multiple kinds of stimuli: visual, auditory, vibrotactile, and olfactory.109 Originally built on the cheap by “recycling virtual assets” from games like Full Spectrum Warrior, the ICT’s Virtual Iraq team continually improves and enhances the simulation with input110 from returning OIF personnel, who suggest the addition of very specific sensory details to lend authenticity, traumatic minutia—like the pervasive smell of cooked lamb—that a non-veteran would probably never consider.

As they select their patient’s ‘triggers,’ operators can specify weather, viewpoint/character, and time of day (Virtual Iraq includes a green night vision mode) as needed to customize the three available scenarios that correspond to the founding sites of so many veterans’ trauma: a convoy, a checkpoint, and an urban patrol. Each of these is available in ‘safe’ or ‘action’ views. Sounds include different types of ordnance and weapons, various vehicles idling, crying babies, imprecations shouted in Arabic, aircraft, and a lengthy call to prayer mingled with ambient street noise. These are augmented by the unpleasant smells of combat: diesel fuel, cordite, gunpowder, burning rubber, garbage, body odor, and more. The patient moves through the scene holding a ‘natural navigation control,’ a replica M4 that does not shoot but rather houses a thumb control that orients the user’s movement through the virtual world. Once the details are specified

106 One such example of this is its intensive collaboration, begun in late 2008, with the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to identify risk factors for suicide among soldiers. This 5-year project will provide NIMH researchers with unprecedented access to Army records and databases; in turn, the NIMH will offer ongoing updates about its findings, so they can be implemented immediately. Part of the impetus for the study is a need to determine etiologies for those Army suicides (roughly half of them) where there is no clear causal factor (see Alvarez, “Army and Agency Will Study,” for a fuller report on the project).
110 Much of the data-gathering that the ICT does for its simulations occurs through interviews with experts.
and the simulation is perfected, it becomes a deeply individualized ‘place of memory,’\textsuperscript{111} derived from a cache of common symbols and constructed for the purpose of a cure.

In Virtual Iraq, nearly everything is terrifying. The feeling of terror, generally, is a “reasonable response to war,”\textsuperscript{112} but here, even non-militarized objects are resignified. In part, this is facilitated by the elaboration of ‘moral geographies,’\textsuperscript{113} in which some parts of the world are discursively coded as evil/dangerous in comparison to the goodness/safeness of other locales; the Middle East has long been represented as one of those essentially fearsome places. Iraq, the place that its veterans have nicknamed the ‘sandbox’ or the ‘sandpit,’ is readily reconstructed in the simulation, which requires only the software, an affordable head-mounted display, a smell-generating machine powered off of a USB port, and a Baseshaker platform, which creates vibrations that correspond to sounds. Everything about the simulation is haunting—the empty desert, the cloudless daylight, the unmoving palm trees. Occasionally, a threat appears from the landscape, like a dark figure\textsuperscript{114} running alongside the Humvee and shooting. The precision of the simulation is enhanced by sensory details: babies crying, operating instructions in the Humvee, a poster of Moqtada al-Sadr in a house where another soldier has killed one insurgent and captured another. These set the stage for a variety of terrifying events, including the Humvee passenger getting shot, the vehicle being fired on so that the windshield shatters, IED attacks, and more.

Despite all its gadgetry, Virtual Iraq is not meant to render human clinicians obsolete, but rather is intended as a tool to extend their skills. Its creators are emphatic that it is not meant to be self-administered,\textsuperscript{115} but rather should provide an interface between clinicians and patients around trauma. In this sense, it is a more social and interactive application of virtual reality. It is also, therefore, unlike earlier applications of the technology, which derived their novelty from the fact that the user related only to the

\textsuperscript{111} Nora, “Between Memory and History.”
\textsuperscript{112} Lichtenstein, “The Appearance of the Other,” 316.
\textsuperscript{113} McAlister, Epic Encounters, 4.
\textsuperscript{114} From a distance, these attackers resemble the shadowy figure who paces across the back of the ‘Reflecting Absence’ animation that I discuss in the previous chapter.
technology and the world it generated\textsuperscript{116} instead of to other humans. Clinical trials\textsuperscript{117} for Virtual Iraq use the simulation in the latter stages of a 10-session series; sessions 1-3 focus on the establishment of rapport and therapeutic alliance between the clinician and the patient and more traditional forms of psychoeducation, with VR introduced in sessions 4-10, which are often also punctuated by assigned ‘in vivo\textsuperscript{118} exposure to everyday stimuli that trouble the post-traumatic patient. The goals of this course of treatment are extinction of the anxiety response and/or habituation to anxiety-provoking stimuli.\textsuperscript{119} Like Virtual 9/11, Virtual Iraq is meant to not to distract\textsuperscript{120} the patient from their suffering, but to engulf them in it through a process that is supervised and methodical.

Among the many features that make Virtual Iraq unique is its ‘Wizard of Oz’ clinician interface, which enables the therapist to control the content of the simulation and monitor the patient’s response to it. There is something chilling about the title of this feature, suggestive as it is of the clinician’s power to manipulate a vulnerable patient; indeed, as soldier-patients, those seeking relief from Virtual Iraq are redoubled as ‘docile bodies,’ at the scrutinizing mercy of the military\textsuperscript{121} and medicine. As its creators put it, however, the Wizard of Oz enables the clinician to easily customize triggers in real time, which is “essential for fostering the anxiety modulation needed for therapeutic habituation.”\textsuperscript{122} The interface is meant to make the simulation user-friendly, operable by anyone with a basic knowledge of computers. The simplicity of the design, however,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116} Csordas, \textit{Body / Meaning / Healing}, 264.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Virtual Iraq is currently in clinical trials at a number of sites, including in Iraq itself under the direction of Greg Reger, and Army psychologist.
\item \textsuperscript{118} ‘In vivo’ exposure to the initial traumatic stimuli (like those of combat experiences) is often, obviously, impossible. Instead, VR offers ‘in virtuo’ exposure (Bouchard, Côté, and Richard, “Virtual Reality Applications for Exposure,” 347).
\item \textsuperscript{119} A different sort of rehabilitative experiment is underway in Saudi Arabia, where the government is funding multiple initiatives to ‘deprogram’ former jihadists (see Zoepf, “Deprogramming Jihadists”). These interventions focus on reintegrating fighters into normal, functional social networks, providing them with rather more marketable skills and material resources, and re-educating them about Islamic theology.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Rizzo noted in an aside during his presentation that Edna Foa, a clinical psychologist and leading advocate of imaginal exposure has criticized the use of VR to treat PTSD, on the grounds that it is a distraction from the real work of therapy.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Foucault, in \textit{Discipline and Punish}, identifies soldiers as quintessential docile bodies (135).
\item \textsuperscript{122} Rizzo, Rothbaum, and Graap, “Virtual Reality Applications,” 198.
\end{itemize}
makes caution essential; Halpern\textsuperscript{123} recounts an anecdote about a therapists’ accidental mouse-click and the startled confusion that the unintentional stimulus provoked in the patient.

The Wizard of Oz interface endows the clinician with the power to control the simulation, and also a kind of knowledge-power to monitor its effects, as the interface includes a screen that displays data from the sensors attached to the patient’s body, which will manifest anxiety even if the patient himself will not admit to feeling or suffering from it.\textsuperscript{124,125} Unlike the hysteria of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, which offered “an extraordinary bounty of symptoms” with “no organic basis,”\textsuperscript{126} the Wizard of Oz interface makes possible the visualization of an organic corroboration for an otherwise invisible condition. Traumatic memories can produce real sensations\textsuperscript{127} or be otherwise encoded in the body;\textsuperscript{128} the monitoring system transforms those mysterious feelings into data.

Virtual Iraq works on the same logic of exposure therapy as the World Trade Center simulation I discussed in Chapter 2. In addition to the advantages of Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy (VRET) over traditional imaginal exposure therapy, simulations like Virtual Iraq are customizable to the traumas of each individual user. Insofar as trauma is an “experience that resists integration into larger contexts,”\textsuperscript{129} this individualized approach is a logical one, as it offers a treatment that is private and tailored to the patient himself, rather than dependent upon his ability to convey it to the clinician through traditional narrative therapy. They are immersive in a way that mere imagination is not, reinforcing the traumatic memories with sensory cues. Finally, because of the well-documented stigma that many military personnel experience around

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{123}] Halpern, “Virtual Iraq.”
\item[\textsuperscript{124}] I imagine that this could also have the added benefit of eliminating doubt about the veracity of client reports of symptoms. The literature on military PTSD is riddled with suspicions that veterans will exaggerate the degree of their trauma in order to claim benefits (see NCPTSD and Walter Reed, \textit{Iraq War Clinical Guide}; Jakupcak et al., “Anger, Hostility, and Aggression, 951, etc.). Presumably, such ‘objective’ indices of anxiety like these would seem more credible than subjective self-reports of symptoms.
\item[\textsuperscript{125}] Dixit, “Shell-Shocked Troops.”
\item[\textsuperscript{126}] Didi-Huberman, \textit{The Invention of Hysteria}, 74-75.
\item[\textsuperscript{127}] J. Bennett, “The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory,” 27.
\item[\textsuperscript{128}] Allan Young, “Bodily Memory and Traumatic Memory.”
\item[\textsuperscript{129}] Baer, \textit{Spectral Evidence}, 1.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
seeking treatment for mental health problems and suspicion that they might have of the therapeutic process, VR could potentially provide a way of overcoming that obstacle for a generation of “mostly young men experienced with seeking technological solutions to many day-to-day challenges.” As an alternative to the language of ‘therapy,’ Rizzo also suggests renaming the Virtual Iraq process to something less pathologizing and more appealing, like “VR post-deployment reset training.”

Yet the same sophistication that makes virtual reality a promising alternative to other, more primitive methods might also prove to be a liability, in its precipitation of the problem of the so-called ‘uncanny valley,’ a founding paradox of VR. All VR simulations aspire to immersion, which is achieved by realistic design elements assembled convincingly. However, research has shown that the more realistic a simulation is, the more fragile it becomes. In a VR world “without physical presence,” reality is constructed only out of representations, and the degree of realism in these simulations shapes users’ expectations. For example, if a user is interacting with a virtual human that mimics a living interlocutor in every way (appearance, speech, gesture, comportment) but does not blink, that small omission can distract the user from the simulation or keep her from losing herself in it, perhaps by underscoring its artificiality. In an otherwise precise simulation, even small lapses in verisimilitude seem all the more glaring, and can cause the immersion to fail by troubling the illusion that the scene is real.

The case of PTSD, however, might be an exception to the rule of the uncanny valley. In describing his simulation, Rizzo repeatedly emphasized that no one would

---

130 Reger and Gahm, “Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy,” 945; see also Rizzo, Rothbaum, and Graap, “Virtual Reality Applications.”
131 Rizzo, “Virtual Iraq.” Clearly, there is a politics of gender operative here. A recurrent motif in the discourse on using VR to treat military PTSD is to compare it to lying on a therapist’s couch, talking about your mother. VR simulations are portrayed (and likely seen by their users as) less effete, more masculine and efficacious ways of coping with combat stress.
132 D. Thomas, “Rethinking the Cyberbody,” 220.
133 This description is consonant with Baudrillard’s description of the simulation, which is “no longer that of a territory, a referential being or substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (“Simulacra and Simulations,” 145). However, I am reluctant to make these connections too aggressively, in part because the language and conceptual framework of theory and that employed at the ICT are so different, and I want to preserve that. Rizzo is emphatic that this kind of work cannot be done “from the ivory tower,” and so I think it especially important to study Virtual Iraq in practical, empirical terms.
mistake it for the real world, no matter how sophisticated the graphics and other illusions. But, he continues, that does not matter for someone with PTSD; they are likely to be so attuned to any sign or reminder of danger that even a “whiff”\textsuperscript{134} is enough to provoke the traumatic response. For the traumatized person, trauma is abiding, a habitation. Fear, when overwhelming, rapidly becomes the “in-which” of existence.\textsuperscript{135} When terror is the very environment, very little provocation is required to elicit anxiety, and traumatized people need far less convincing that a situation is real, or really threatening.

Even as the graphics artist at the ICT aspire to photo-realism, such perfection is unnecessary in Virtual Iraq. Rizzo readily admits that compared to the popular FPS game \textit{Call of Duty}, for example, Virtual Iraq’s graphics are “primitive”;\textsuperscript{136} but no matter, because here, what really matters is what the person is seeing ‘in his head’ rather than on the screen. Much of the success of Virtual Iraq relies on the imagination of its patients, and so the simulation is designed to prompt and support it. Notoriously difficult in any instance, exposure therapy can be all but impossible with combat veterans because many of them quickly evolve “emotional detachment as a psychologically adaptive defense during deployment,”\textsuperscript{137} and Virtual Iraq is designed to override that reflex with undeniably evocative stimuli.

Although my emphasis is on the visual, in Virtual Iraq, sight is always acting in concert with other senses that, for some users, may be more evocative than it is. In describing the importance of the olfactory and auditory components of Virtual Iraq, Rizzo has noted that smell is an important trigger because it is connected directly to the limbic system,\textsuperscript{138} and mentioned during my visit that sounds\textsuperscript{139} often provoked the physical symptoms of anxiety (as verified by the Wizard of Oz) more acutely than sights alone. Still, in VR, the encounter with the visual is more intense than in any other media

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{134} Rizzo, “Virtual Iraq.”
  \item \textsuperscript{135} Massumi, “Fear,” 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{136} Rizzo, “Virtual Iraq.”
  \item \textsuperscript{137} Reger and Gahm, “Virtual Reality Exposure Therapy,” 944.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} In some ways, this verifies the hunch of critics of early cinema, who became especially concerned about its influence with the advent of the talkies.
\end{itemize}
form,\textsuperscript{140} and moving images remain a necessary element of Virtual Iraq. They reflect and animate the narrative that the patient provides about his or her traumatic experiences, and provide a crucial augmentation of whatever pictures s/he might be able to conjure in her head. They are unrelenting in a way that the imagined scenes of trauma upon which standard imaginal exposure therapy relies are not, and so the simulation as such could not exist without them.

Reflecting on my visit to the ICT, I am struck by how difficult it is for me to be critical of it, a failure of my faculties similar to my experience of watching  \textit{United 93}. Even though I have an inkling of the critiques that could probably be brought to bear on their work (the convergence of war and entertainment, the spectacularization of warfare, and so on), I find it difficult to refute the documented clinical efficacy of Virtual Iraq with any kind of argument. It is hard to be unimpressed by the technological marvelousness of the simulations and the ambitions\textsuperscript{141} that their creators have for them. In addition to ongoing improvements of Virtual Iraq and trials to determine its effectiveness, ICT researchers are exploring two possible expansions: its future potential for proactive use as a device to prepare soldiers for combat stress and so ‘inoculate’ them against PTSD prior to deployment\textsuperscript{142} and the translation of Virtual Iraq to Virtual

\textsuperscript{140} Crawford, "\textit{Unheimlich Maneuver}," 977.

\textsuperscript{141} As a logical continuation of the ICT’s general commitment to replacing human teachers with virtual ones, the clinician training on how to use Virtual Iraq may soon be getting an upgrade. One of the two original patients, Justina, has since joined up and become Sergeant Justina, who helps train military psychiatrists on how to deal with soldier-patients who have survived a sexual assault in the military. In addition to this, she is currently being recruited for a possible mission during which she will train clinicians on how to use Virtual Iraq for their real patients.

\textsuperscript{142} A different approach to this problem appears in the work of Atkinson, Guetz, and Wein, who developed a mathematical model (as yet unpublished but showcased in an op-ed column in the \textit{New York Times}) to predict the long-term incidence of PTSD among OIF servicemembers. A consideration of the technical details of their model is beyond the scope of this reference, but one of their findings merits attention. Whereas many clinicians have suggested that one reason for the high incidence of combat stress injuries in the GWOT is requirement that personnel complete multiple combat tours with short periods of rest in between, their model suggests a hidden benefit to this practice. Atkinson, Guetz, and Wein describe their findings as follows:

The heterogeneity of threshold levels among servicemembers suggests that although multiple deployments raise an individual’s risk of PTSD, in aggregate multiple deployments lower the total number of PTSD cases by [approximately] 30% relative to a hypothetical case in which the war was fought with many more servicemembers (i.e. a draft) deploying only once ("A Dynamic Model for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," 1).
Afghanistan by modifying the landscape, architecture, and traumatic stimuli of the simulation. This project is more straightforward than the first, and also has a distinct urgency, as Afghanistan becomes a new old front in the GWOT.

In all of these simulations, the visual works both as a stimulus and a diagnostic tool, an instrument that provokes the revelation of physiological truth and documents it. Representational and imaging technologies enable clinicians to chart the precise dynamics of the “embodiment of war trauma” in which the mind agitates or harms the body. Generally unconcerned with readily visible symptoms of anxiety, these devices focus on control of the imagination and the monitoring of indications that would otherwise be undetectable. So that it might do its diagnostic work, Virtual Iraq must distill trauma into symbols, offered back to the patient individually or in combination, but always as remedies for themselves.

The visual richness of Virtual Iraq is matched by its visual productivity. Capable of translating images into anxiety and anxiety into visual representations, those data can be visualized once again in the graphs that Virtual Iraq’s adherents use to verify the success of their efforts. For individual patients, anxiety becomes output visualized on a computer monitor, trauma a downward-sloping line on a graph. In the aggregate, all of this becomes data, rendered visually in slides and charts that Virtual Iraq’s creators use to document the success of their efforts. Throughout this process, trauma is transformed from a condition of interiority to an object of display, a verifiable thing that behaves in generally predictable ways. If Virtual Iraq has done its work well, the data it generates will show that trauma is being defused, PTSD symptoms reduced to ‘sub-threshold’ levels. Trauma cannot be erased—after all, once a person has been identified as potentially traumatized, she can never score 0 on the PCL—but Virtual Iraq promises that it can, at least, be screened out.

Thus, this new tempo of operations results (at least theoretically) in a smaller population with a higher incidence of combat stress; the ‘damage’ is localized and contained enough that it might be more efficient to fight a war in this way.

144 It has also been a site of copious discursive production, and is the subject of dozens of articles, in popular magazines and scholarly publications, and television reports, including a story by Sanjay Gupta and a Nightline report. The latter followed the treatment of a soldier with PTSD who reported, after Virtual Iraq, that he was back to “80% of who [he] was before deployment”: a clear, quantitative self-diagnosis.
“PTSD_Intense”
   Among the clips that Rizzo provided me is one titled “PTSD_Intense.” This dense, minute-long sequence seems to combine all of the possible triggers into one. There are gunshots and casualties as the convoy drives past a grove of palm trees into a narrow street bisecting a town that is presided over by a massive statue of Saddam Hussein. Heedless of the gunshots and exploding vehicles (and the slumped, bleeding comrade in the passenger seat), the Humvee driver presses on. As he leaves the city behind, the desert opens up again, nothing but sand and a road sign in the distance.

   I have watched this clip again and again, and the more I think about it, the more I get the sense that in addition to being a diagnostic, perhaps the culmination of some soldier’s treatment, it is also a parable about trauma and recovery. ‘PTSD_Intense’ depicts a concatenation of terrors, under a warning label that is something like a movie rating, but aligns them in a narrow corridor, so that the only way past them is through them. Getting out is one thing, the main thing, but then what? Turning back would be unwise, likely suicidal, so there is nothing to do but keep driving forward in your bullet-riddled vehicle, full as it is of wounded passengers, onto the flat, straight road ahead, hoping that once you’re able to see the sign, it will be printed in a language you can read.

Consumerist Post-Script: Despite quadrupling my original bid, I lost the first auction for my Security Check-In playset, and two more after that. A few weeks (and more dollars than I’d like to admit) later, however, I prevailed, and I must say that my new acquisition is all I hoped it would be, and more.
Chapter 4: Temporal

One way to describe the GWOT would be to construct a chronology of key image-events, to identify and then to analyze a series of discrete scenes around which its visual discourse coalesced for a time. Such a story would begin, of course, mid-morning on Tuesday, September 11th, 2001, scan slowly over the coming months, back and forth between the World Trade Center site and Afghanistan. It would pause at the nighttime apprehension of a bedraggled, pajamaed Khalid Sheik Mohammed on March 1st, 2003. There would be footage of predawn ‘Shock and Awe’ on March 20th, the dramatized rescue of Pfc. Jessica Lynch on April 1st, the dethroning of Saddam Hussein’s statue in Firdos Square on April 9th, and President Bush’s kind-of-funny-in-retrospect “Mission Accomplished” address off the coast of California aboard the USS Lincoln on May 1st, 2003. It would include the carnivalesque display of the corpses of Uday and Qusay Hussein in late July, the rows of flag-draped coffins on a transport plane arriving at Dover Air Force Base in April 2004, and on the assortment of Abu Ghraib snapshots leaked later that month. Then there would be the grainy cell phone video documenting the execution of Saddam Hussein on December 30th, 2006. And so on. At the end, there would be a towering stack of empty frames, waiting to be filled in. Such a chronicle, expanded spectacle by spectacle, would seem both orderly and comprehensive. But that is precisely the problem.

The most consistent gains made by the GWOT have been calendrical, as it accumulates days in a steady forward movement. Yet even as this excursion passes casualty milestones while exceeding unsavory benchmarks of months and years, it founders in discourse and in memory. Some scenes seem to last forever, while others
dissipate as quickly as they appear. Some weeks have one story after another, or we go months without meaningful news. Sometimes we forget, sometimes we remember too much, sometimes the present is indecipherable under the screens of pasts and futures.

This is the temporal register of terror, for which there can be no orderly visual narrative; nonetheless, American visual culture of the GWOT is shaped in significant measure by efforts to forge one. I understand these endeavors as *temporal practices of the visual*, efforts to bring order, sequence, and systematicity to what Jill Bennett describes as the traumatically “compressed space of the present,”¹ where the remembrance of past terrors and anticipation of future ones crowd out everything else. Unlike the acquiescent nature of diagnostic practices, which seem to accept that terror’s power will exceed the capacities of its spectators to deflect it, temporal practices are more aggressive, more confrontational, more combative. Temporal practices refuse to abandon their mission, and their practitioners struggle diligently to revise the disorderly times and unwieldy sights of terror into logical and sequential narratives. This work has taken place in a variety of formats and genres, which indicates that it is motivated by a sense of urgency and that no method has so far been satisfactory. This practice becomes compulsive: terror insists on being imaged, and then on being imaged again and again. Throughout this iteration, terror has bled from medium to medium, all of which have struggled (and occasionally appeared to master) its time.

Defined as it is by the context of the GWOT, this endeavor is a decidedly contemporary one, but it is not without precedent. Early modern producers of visual culture were preoccupied with what Mary Ann Doane describes as the “representability of time,”² and the goal in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was to develop media that could capture its passage and show its duration. This temporal-representational challenge becomes even more acute in the GWOT, because its visual culture must confront the sense that time is neither logical nor linear nor progressive, lacking as it does promises of order, closure and improvement. Consequently, David Campbell has argued that the only

---

¹ J. Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 17.
² Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 3.
way to repair the ‘broken’ time of September 11th is to “begin systematizing” it. Such emplotting of American history, if it begins on September 11th, is impossible by definition. For that day, and more precisely, its images, became an agonizing interchange, readjusting the relationships of American citizen-subjects to past and present and catching us indefinitely in the looped footage repeated and repeated.

I begin my exploration of these dynamics by mapping out analytical frames for interpreting them, in which I chart the politics of temporality at their coordinates: visuality; the nation-state and its citizen-subjects; terror and trauma; and war. With that framework in place, I briefly consider the series 24, taking its popularity as an index of the importance of temporality in terror. I then turn to a peculiar technology for the imaging of terror, the use of reverse motion. I analyze the use of this technique in an advertisement for the terror drama Sleeper Cell, which undoes a car-bombing on a city street, and in the flipbook sequence at the end of Jonathan Safran Foer’s 9/11 novel, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, in which a man falls upward into the World Trade Center window from which he had jumped, an anonymous figure enacting the familiar wish to rewind and so undo this horrible death. This desire to proleptically retrace the history of American terror found its official articulation in 2004 in The 9/11 Commission Report. In 2006, The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Interpretation (by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón) rendered it visually by transforming the document into a graphic novel, remaking it within a genre uniquely suited to creative representations of time and its strangeness. The adaptation is non-fiction, but its format offers a license to experiment. Conversely, there could be no such flexibility in the analysis of the tape that Osama bin Laden released in September 2007, the final site of temporal practice that I consider here. Most discussions of the video glossed over its content to focus speculatively on its temporal provenance. The fixation on such trivialities as the color of bin Laden’s beard was perhaps sadly comic, but the effort to provide a definitive timestamp to this recording reflected a persistent need to finally make sense of the disorderly calendar of terror in the U.S. I argue that the absurdity of this discourse reflects a common inability on the part of the state and the media to cope with the vexation of time that the video’s star embodies.

3 Campbell, “Time is Broken,” para. 2.
Visually, and conclude the chapter by considering what this might portend for the future (if such a thing can be said to exist) of the GWOT.

**Visuality as a Practice of Temporality**

The visual is constitutively temporal, and visuality, as the transfer point between sight and the social, is contingent upon and productive of conceptions of time. The desire to make images is motivated by a poignant awareness of the passage of time, an anticipation of a future nostalgia. In this way, when a visual technology mediates the present, it does so by combining past and future. According to Mary Ann Doane, with the emergence of visual cultures of photography and film, time emerged “very insistently as a problem of representation,” and her description of modern visuality suggests that most of the technical and aesthetic innovations of that period were driven by a desire to capture and represent time. But time is not visible. In and of itself, time is not something that can be seen—it can only be experienced. At best, we can sense or perceive it by monitoring visual markers of its passage, and the desire to image directly that which can only be detected symptomatically is a founding paradox of visual culture.

This poses a particular problem for photography, the signal achievement and paradigmatic form of modern visuality. Photography is a medium that derives its power from its ostensible indexicality—its apparent ability to portray scenes exactly as they were. However, photography was and remains inadequate to the task of depicting time, even as technology evolves and enables image-makers to capture smaller and smaller increments thereof. From its inception, photography was a new “temporal experience,” a way of rendering the present for the future, and providing that future with a record of what will become its past. This is photography’s ultimate power: it shows something that was, but may not longer be. Photography gives scenes a temporal and spatial mobility they had not had before. But it only works this magic individually, delivering the past to the present one frame at a time. Motion in a single photograph is only a blur, and so the

---

4 Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 34.
5 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 492.
6 Ian Jeffrey, in ReVisions, provides a useful history of the practice of ‘chronophotography’ (39ff.)
7 Batchen, Burning With Desire, 92.
8 Baer, Spectral Evidence, 7.
passage of time can only be represented by a series of photographs together. And so, the momentary image that photography transports is one of stillness, of time frozen.

America confronted this aporia directly in a moment of national crisis, as American photography found its ideological and forensic purposes during the Civil War. It became a nexus of life and death, protracting and blurring the bonds between the dead and the living, transforming the photographed war dead into “corpses that will never decompose,”9 endowing them with immortality and, in turn, with new social, cultural, and political meanings. Battle photographs conveyed the realities of war with an eloquence and intensity that words could not manage. And although these scenes were occasionally orchestrated or embellished,10 for the North and the South alike, the resultant images served as proof of collective sacrifice and became keepsakes11 for the grieving nations to which they belonged.

Photography’s potential for dual use as a bureaucratic device and a sentimental artifact enabled it to become a powerful tool for the nation-state’s effort to construct coherent, meaningful versions of the past, even as the image and its audiences always threaten to elude government control. From their earliest incarnations, images of the national dead have enmeshed the citizen-spectator in the nation-state affectively and physically. Early battle photographs were displayed publicly and ritualistically, window dressings designed to arrest foot traffic; when the spectator stops to look at photographs of the dead, “her body stills also,”12 a temporary reenactment of the absolute stillness in the scene she confronts, synchronizing her corporeal immobility to that of her fallen countrymen.13 As photography evolved into moving pictures, the image expanded its capacity for this kind of integration. By participating alternately in the permanent

---

9 Nudelman, John Brown’s Body, 103.
10 Bresheeth, “Projecting Trauma,” 61.
11 Likenesses also had the potential to help identify the War’s dead and wounded. Faust recounts an 1868 instance in which a deathbed photograph was adapted into a drawing and published in Harper’s Weekly in an unsuccessful effort to determine the man’s identity posthumously. Thousands of women wrote in response to the image, trying to claim the man for themselves and their families (This Republic of Suffering, 129-130).
12 Samuels, Facing America, 75.
13 Hariman and Lucaites, in their study of ‘iconic photographs’ and democracy, note that truly powerful images have the power to “delay or stop time” altogether (No Caption Needed, 205), as our looking arrests us and the images transport us to the places that they depict.

188
stillness of the photograph and the ineluctable forward motion of the film, citizens could experience the nation as both transcendent of time and progressing with it. From the masculinist actualities of the Spanish-American War\textsuperscript{14} to the ubiquitous newsreels of WWII and beyond, these visual experiences illustrated and orchestrated national belonging, helping individual citizen-subjects position themselves with respect to national pasts, presents, and futures, and orienting them to the feeling of history moving around them, nudging them gently forward.

**Time Management: Nation-State, Citizen-Subject, and Temporality**

In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty defines the colonial project as an effort to forcibly reorient the perspective of colonized countries toward modernity, prosecuted in part through a violation of the temporal sensibilities that had ordered societies before they were colonized. Every moment is marked by profound “heterotemporality,”\textsuperscript{15} with each place having its own temporal rhythm determined by its social, cultural, and economic conditions. This means that national and cultural differences are articulated in part through temporal dissimilarities, varying beliefs about history and constructs of time. As the legacy of the homogenizing impulse of modern colonialism, postmodern globality is a period of uneasy temporal unity across nations, states, and cultures. “Like a photograph in multiple exposure,”\textsuperscript{16} it is a multiplicity of coexisting presents. Despite powerful globalizing forces and institutions that seek to impose cultural and economic (and, hence, temporal) homogeneity, within this shared landscape there persist idiosyncratic temporalities, unique to each nation, state, and citizen, which occasionally come into violent and terrifying conflict.

Nations are built on and through the passage of time,\textsuperscript{17} and the nation itself is constructed out of temporalities: past, present, future. According to Benedict Anderson, each of these corresponds to specific populations to whom the nation has specific

\textsuperscript{14} Whissel, “The Gender of Empire.”
\textsuperscript{15} Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 239. See also Bhabha, “DissemiNation,” 313.
\textsuperscript{16} Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror*, 5.
\textsuperscript{17} N. Johnson, “From Time Immemorial,” 89.
obligations: the Dead, the Living, or the Unborn. The military is often tasked with maintaining the connections between these groups; the war dead of the nation’s past purchased the freedom that the living presently enjoy, while the soldiers among them risk becoming the dead that future generations will remember as their noble ancestors. Similarly, Alain Badiou argues that

The soldier is composed of time ... It is because war, modern war does not comprise brilliant battles with great warriors, but a long period of suffering for millions of anonymous soldiers. Yet this time creates something beyond time; this death creates something beyond death.

Long-suffering soldiers purchase the nation-state’s future, while guaranteeing that those generations will have a heroic past to celebrate. As the nation commemorates and honors its dead, it coheres around common memories of past sufferings, and simultaneously reinvents and reorients itself through “retrospective illusion.” National histories tell the story of a preordained path to the present, a temporal wish shrouded in stories of wars and famous men.

Nations operate both on circular clock time, as in the regularization of commemorative rituals, and progressive calendar time, as they project themselves into past and the future; in the end, the state controls both. This might be expressed in banal ways, as by setting curfews or initiating daylight savings. Occasionally, this control can be explicit, as in the designation of the Prime Meridian, where authority over time corresponded directly to the state power of England. Often, however, the state’s control over time is subtler and more profound, particularly in its determination of memory and ‘the past.’ Overall, the state’s objective, like that of the nation, is a historicist one, a need

---

19 Badiou, “The Contemporary Figure of the Soldier,” n.p.
20 Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’un nation?”
21 Balibar, “The Nation Form,” 86.
22 N. Johnson, “From Time Immemorial,” 92.
to mold time into history, neither of which is a natural phenomenon, both of which have a distinctive ideological weight.

When something is amiss, this reshaping becomes even more important to the state, and so can become more burdensome for its citizens. In *Who Sings the Nation-State?* Judith Butler muses on the double entendre of being ‘in a state,’ and she considers the similarities between being figuratively in a state—feeling “upset, out of sorts”—and literally, politically in one, the ways that belonging to a state can confuse or unnerve us. Through its temporal manipulation of terror, the state can accentuate this disorientation even further, because citizenship requires subjection to the state’s control over time, and partaking of it in tandem with fellow nationals. The nation-state combines the affective history of the nation with the temporal regulation of the state to create a unitary experience of time for its citizen-subjects.

Anderson theorizes citizenship in part as membership in two kinds of ‘serialities,’ bound and unbound. The bound seriality is a technology of “governmentality,” in which the state delimits and disciplines membership, as through a census. Alternately, unbound serialities are forms of co-presence, participation in tasks that are open to everyone and unaffected by the number of participants, like reading the newspaper. Each of these serialities has a temporal component: the citizen in the bound seriality is the sole occupant his own spatial and temporal part of the state, while the unbound offers the experience of simultaneity. In the GWOT, membership in the bound seriality of American citizenship is policed by restrictions on immigration, increased demands for identifying documents, and new travel regulations, all of which circumscribe the body’s range of motion spatially by delaying it temporally. The GWOT likewise reinscribes membership in the unbound seriality, primarily through visual rituals of simultaneous viewing of the sights of war (9/11, Shock and Awe, Abu Ghraib), which are made all the more poignant by virtue of being shared. In turn, individuality becomes a function of involvement in a traumatized national community.

---

28 Ibid., 29.
State and national temporal imperatives imprint the citizen’s subjectivity. According to Merleau-Ponty, there is an essential link between subjectivity and temporality,29 which means that that consciousness is uniquely impacted by experiences of time. Societal norms of temporality change with circumstance, and full subjecthood in each requires mastery of those rhythms. One could not be, for example, a successful modern subject with a premodern temporal sensibility, because it would be impossible to cope with the relentless temporal linearity of modernity by relying on the cyclical conception of time that typically governed life before industrialization.30

We are always calibrating, adjusting ourselves to the temporal demands of our environments,31 and endeavoring to synchronize our ‘internal clocks’ to external (cultural, social, political) schedules. This axiom begins to illuminate the relationship between time, subjectivity, and trauma. Descriptions, both clinical and otherwise, of trauma are often expressly temporal, describing it as a state (!) that is “marked by a radical disruption of memory, a severing of past from present and, typically, an inability to envision a future.”32 Life with trauma means adjusting to the vicissitudes of its temporality.

**Memory, Trauma, and Terror as Temporal Disruptions**

As a convulsive reaction to years of humiliation, terrorism is a paroxysm of history and memory. Historical time, the velocity of the past, is unpredictable to begin with, and terrorism makes this uncertainty even more pronounced. In retrospect, historical time appears “intermittent and variable.”33 There are lulls (times when there is no ‘history’ to speak of), punctuated by especially dense periods of political and cultural activity (times when there is almost too much). Common sense and lived experience disconfirm the calendar’s “lateral compartmentalization of time,”34 and everybody knows that some days are bigger than others. On a calendar, every day has a square that is

---

30 Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.
34 Helfand, *Screen*, 5.
identical and firmly bounded. Such a device has no way of conveying their scale, and so cannot account for the difference between an eminently forgettable day and one whose happenings bleed into all the days that follow, whether through the materiality of its consequences or the persistence of the memories it creates.

Although many people will have similar memories of the same event, individual memory is ultimately private,35 the “subjective dimension of time itself.”36 Memory is the implement with which individuals and collectivities hammer the passage of time and what happened within it into coherence. It has dual functionality: retrospective memory is the process of recalling and understanding the past, while prospective memory is the capacity to translate that recollection into predictions about the future.37 For marginalized groups, memory is often marked by its divergence from official ‘history.’38 That is, the distance between one’s memory and one’s national history often measures the space between her and full citizenship. Blurring “now” and “not now,”39 memory elides past and present. If a citizen’s now/not-now is out of step with the history of her nation, if her retrospection is at odds with the prospection of the state, she is unlinked, and the state is unconcerned, too busy: “Not now!” All memories obscure the now/not now division, and remembering subsumes the now to the not-now upon which the subject is focusing. Still, it is usually possible to return to the real present by suspending a memory, to snap oneself out of a daydream. Trauma has an even greater temporal reach than memory in general. It is far less yielding, disconnecting the body from the mind;40 the traumatized mind is lodged in the dangerous past, so preoccupied by intrusive sightings of the (figment of the) traumatic event that it is unable to perceive the relative safety of the present.

Unlike memories, whose power and clarity can dull with time, like images degraded by wear or neglect, trauma is untroubled by temporal distance, the “traumatic

35 Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 288.
36 Schwarz, “‘Already the Past,’” 140.
37 Cohen, Memory in the Real World, 26.
38 Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 286.
39 Scott, The Time of Memory, 54.
40 See Goldberg and Willse (“Losses and Returns,” 282) for an analysis of this sensation among veterans of the GWOT.
past” leading straight to the “bleached present”⁴¹ of the post-trauma. In this way, trauma is a “failed experience” because it renders impossible the transformation from event to discourse, leaving the afflicted subject perpetually “stalled”⁴² at the point where the trauma was born. So, to Ulrich Baer, trauma is an “index of historical reality,”⁴³ proof that something terrible happened, even if it is not happening anymore, like a photographic archive of an otherwise forgotten act of violence. Symptoms and sensations of trauma can appear long after the traumatic stimulus and, as Marianne Hirsch contends, at a generational remove, no less acute, or perhaps even more so, for the passage of time,⁴⁴ in large part because images persist to antagonize their viewers anew. Trauma is marked by duration, the vastness of its temporal expanse.

Although both colloquial and scholarly usages of the terms suggest that they are interchangeable, terror and trauma have distinct temporal registers—terror is the founding moment (the instant, for example, on 9/11 when everything changed); trauma is the long consequence (the compulsion to revisit and relive it). Unlike trauma, terror is characterized by its suddenness: it is immediate and precise. As the quintessential American example of terror, ‘9/11’ was marked the feeling of “instantaneity” that results from terror’s “disallowance of the deferral of experience.”⁴⁵ The sight of terror, whether accessed directly or through the media, is discrete and searing. In the terrifying collision with overwhelming sensation, violence forces its way into our fields of vision, wholly unexpected and utterly jarring. The sense that “even pulverized,” the Towers are still here⁴⁶ is an echo, a reverberation of that initial shock. When anyone speaks of “September 11th,” it is a citation,⁴⁷ a reference to the original instant of terror, the source of the trauma that comes later and its endless cycling-through.

Terror in the United States is marked by singularity, but this is not the case elsewhere. In the U.S., terror happened one time, and the subsequent trauma is a

---

⁴¹ van der Kolk and van der Hart, “The Intrusive Past,” 177.
⁴³ Baer, Spectral Evidence, 11.
⁴⁴ M. Hirsch, “Surviving Memory.”
⁴⁵ Saltzman and Rosenberg, Epilogue, 272.
⁴⁶ Baudrillard, Power Inferno, 18.
⁴⁷ Derrida op. cit. Borradori, Philosophy in a Time of Terror, 81.
perseveration over it. In other national spaces (like Israel/Palestine), terror is a regular occurrence; however, insofar as my definitions of trauma and terror are applicable cross-nationally or cross-culturally, I believe that the temporal distinction between terror and trauma is still valid in such a context. Unlike the U.S., plagued by a sole terror and an interminable trauma, in other, more terrorized places, trauma is ongoing, and punctuated with new terrors that compound one another and their traumatic consequences. In such locales, terror is a feature of everyday life; all of the attacks might run together to give the illusion of an ongoing terror (just as a series of still images can be compiled into a moving one), but to the extent that each is uniquely frightening, each is distinct. It is trauma that persists.

Beyond being temporally precise, America’s terror is also spatially localized, even as it spreads outward to permeate other domains and ultimately echoes back as trauma. Terror, in the American context, is sited primarily at “Ground Zero.” In spatial terms, zero is something and nothing, a placeholder, but an empty one. Temporally, zero marks a spot between negative and positive, an interrupted sequence, an aborted temporal progression. Likewise, the Towers, which had been relatively anonymous, nondescript for most of their three decades of existence, became legible primarily in their absence after the attacks.

Yet in addition to being nothing, the Towers are/were also twice as much. Their “tautology of form” is material, as they were perfect replicas of one another.

---

48 ‘Trauma’ and ‘terror’ may vary by cultural context, but the clinical literature on trauma and PTSD suggests that a complex of symptoms is common to all survivors of trauma, including intrusive memories and hyperarousal. Unfortunately, further exploration the question of cultural specificity is outside the purview of this chapter.

49 In her study of contemporary Israeli cinema, Raya Morag describes the Palestinian Intifada as a source of chronic trauma for Israelis, and argues that at a result, images of attacks are suppressed in visual discourse while their distinctive and terrible sounds are often silenced in representation (“Chronic Trauma,” 121).


51 This, according to Walter Benjamin, is the only way for a building to gain attention; in the flashbulb instant of catastrophe, buildings become backdrops to the devastating scene (Ibid., 169). See also Morton, “Document of Civilization and Document of Barbarism,” for a discussion of the architectural experience of the Towers.

52 Baudrillard, Power Inferno, 14.

53 Bradley Butterfield glosses the ineluctable doubleness of the Towers as follows: “The Twin Towers, like the twin political parties in the U.S., represent a balance of power, two forces locked in opposition. But
Anthropomorphized and grieved as lost “twins,” that designation applies to their form, but also to their simultaneity, a shared date of birth and a common history. In their double tautology, they are endlessness incarnate, both because they are haunting (even pulverized . . .), and because image of their destruction is endlessly iterable. Commenting on the repetition of the images of 9/11 and the repetitiousness of the political discourse about it, Retort wrote: “The Towers keep falling.” The Towers fall, and then they are resurrected again, only to collapse anew in memories and in pictures. Temporality, in terror, is shot through with futility.

Wartime and War Time: Temporality and the GWOT
All wars have unique, distinctive temporalities, and all wartime is essentially “not time as it was heretofore known and expected to be.” In general, the war time of a particular conflict is the aggregate of all the temporal rhythms that it disturbs in all the bodies of all the people that it affects, while its visual culture mimics this oddness. In her study of the ‘battle time’ that emerged during the Civil War, Cheryl Wells charts the unique temporalities of that conflict, and argues that they threatened to disrupt the 19th century’s “progression” toward an “orderly” and systematic American society. Battle time was contradictory. It was marked on the one hand by a new obsession with time, evidenced in soldiers’ demand for personal timepieces, and defined, on the other, by a flagrant disregard for the temporal systems that ordered antebellum society: patterns of work and leisure, waking and sleep, weekdays and the Sabbath. This pervasive disorder linked the battlefield to the homefront, and the temporal relentlessness of war militarized everyday life, while the frozen present of the war photograph brought the battlefield endlessly home.

like the Democrats and the Republicans, both towers are virtually identical, and their dualistic logic leaves no room for remainders” (“The Baudrillardian Symbolic,” 18).
54 J. Bennett, “Tenebrae after September 11th” 186; and Leach, “9/11.” 176.
55 Retort, Afflicted Powers, 5.
57 Wells, Civil War Time, 5.
58 Ibid., 53.
Contemporary media conspires to create what Jacques Derrida calls the “plupresent,” a hyper-present in the sense that there are so many of them and they all seem exceptionally real. The postmodern surfeit of images has concentrated into a relentlessly visible war, unfolding in the plupresent tense, in a new stage of the long intimacy between visuality and the present. Like the Civil War, the GWOT is characterized by its temporal disjointedness. It brings together different temporal frames in a compound fracture: the pre-terror past, the endless present in the moment of terror, and the circuitous, redundant time of trauma and war of inestimable duration. Each of these time zones has a corollary in images. The past is enshrined in panoramic views of the Manhattan skyline intact. The present is the 24/7 news cycle that corresponds to the 24/7 duty of the soldier, in which no hour is guaranteed to be quiet or safe. The future, if it is not blank, or blurry, is perhaps a redux of the past, in which everything is rebuilt, but fortified. It is imaged, for example, in the misty dreamlike realism of the plans for the memorial on Ground Zero, populated by citizen-mourners, standing still/still standing at the site of ‘Reflecting Absence,’ where the only thing to see is what is missing, and there is no need to worry about what else will suddenly appear.

Degree of terror is a function of speed, and speed is, in many ways, a defining element of contemporary warfare. According to Paul Virilio, the blur of fast motion now does the work that camouflage used to do. The velocity of American terror is that of an errant commercial airliner, eluding radar and scrambled fighter jets, tracked on the speedometer of a blue autumn sky. The choice to commemorate terror by date rather than place derives in part from the fact that it happened at multiple sites, but I would argue that the discourse of ‘September 11th’ is a kind of name-calling that puts the unquantifiably fast into a more manageable chronology of history. The trick was for the Bush administration to portray 9/11 with a “sense of rupture,” which licensed a slew of executive privileges apparently mandated by those unprecedented events. This power-

59 Stiegler and Derrida, Echographies of Television, 9.
60 Plans for the site are available at http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/fin7.html.
61 Virilio, War and Cinema, 76.
62 Hark, “‘Today is the Longest Day of My Life,’” 121.
63 McAlister, “A Cultural History,” 95.
grab was then papered over with a highly visible run-up to the War on Terror, a spectacle of preparation, the inverse of the surprise and improvisation of September 11th.

Although its apparent endlessness makes the GWOT a political liability, its pace is an antidote to the speed and suddenness of terror. Its stasis mimics that of trauma: hence, perhaps, the anxiety provoked by the talk of timetables and deadlines. The traumatic suspension and the military stalemate mirror and naturalize one another recursively. War, in this context, is not the acceleration of reality that Paul Virilio describes in *City of Panic* — quite the opposite. This is a war entrenched by slowness. Characteristic GWOT practices like indefinite detention hybridize time and torture. They make the business of war easier for the state and also make a kind of sense in a context where ‘moving on’ is impossible and perhaps undesirable, for the U.S. fears that if the future arrives too quickly, it will only imitate the past.

Easily matching the languor of trauma, the GWOT state also shares its flinching anticipation of the future, trying to outmaneuver coming dangers by preempting them. In this way, Michael Dillon’s argument that the chief task of contemporary states is the governance of contingency acquires a new resonance—it is a reflex not just of statecraft but also of trauma. Over time, the state has proved itself amenable to the interminable present of trauma, and has learned to legislate in accordance with its glacial temporality. The Bush administration did this masterfully, an adaptation that is especially evident in its doctrine of preemption. That new approach to geopolitics was not so much about securing the future as about putting it off, decelerating time so that the future and whatever terrors it might usher in arrive with a manageable slowness.

---

65 Virilio, *City of Panic*, 34.
66 Dillon, “Governing Through Contingency.”
67 Elizabeth Alexander’s analysis of the courtroom replay of the Rodney King videotape is again enlightening. She notes it was frequently manipulated before being played, often shown one frame at a time. This freeze-frame, she suggests, undermined the narrative and affective power of the tape to depict wrongdoing by the LAPD officers (see “‘Can you be BLACK and Look At This?’”). As scenes of violence are stripped of their momentum, they lose their impact.
“You Can’t Kill Jack”: Time, Terror, and 24

This wish is not exclusive to the architects of war. Whatever popular support they garnered signals a common desire to slow things down, a need that resonates throughout the visual culture of the GWOT and in the television series 24 in particular. The long-running show, which will begin shooting its eighth season in May 2009, tells the story of terror-fighter extraordinaire, Jack Bauer, and each season stretches one of his workday missions into 24 hour-long episodes. 24 is enabled in the first instance by a late-capitalist approach to temporality, which sees time as a “commodity” that can be parsed into “equivalent intervals”;68 the logic of a day divided into 24 identical hours provides coherence to the show, even as the relentless demands of Jack’s work deviate from the traditional allocations of work and leisure.

Time is the ordering principle of this show, while timing makes it compelling. 24, like its coeval generic counterparts Alias and The Agency, was “already set for [its] fall debut before 9/11,”69 but it has nevertheless become a hallmark of post-9/11 and GWOT popular culture. Much has been made of the “eerie precognition”70 of this crop of shows. Although they were in development long before 9/11, their appearance after the attacks lends them a kind of weight that they might otherwise have lacked. Although these shows had their premiers briefly delayed and their content slightly altered in deference to post-9/11 grieving, the happenstance of terror bound them tightly to the attacks. As a consequence of their totally coincidental emergence, something about these shows seemed right or fitting. Both because they cohered with prevailing ideas about when and how to memorialize, and because they enacted the very things that Americans were supposed to be mourning, they seemed to have been meant for an immediately post-9/11 era, even if that kind of terrorism seemed remote when they were originally conceived.

When 24 finally did premier in November 2001, FOX placed it in the “most contested time slot of the season,” Tuesdays at 9:00p.m.71 This gamble succeeded less on

68 Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, 110.
69 Britton, Spy Television, 4.
70 Hark, “‘Today is the Longest Day of My Life,’” 121.
71 Britton, Spy Television, 252. September 11th, 2001 was, of course, also a Tuesday.
the public desire for stories about fighting terror than on its wish for a way to recover from the acute temporal shock of 9/11. If terror is instantaneous, 24 is its opposite. Before 9/11, the plan to risk so much on 24 was remarkable because the show was an “experiment on several levels,” including the omnipresence of the clock that seems to hold 24 to its promise of verisimilitude, the use of split-screen presentation, and its tailoring to large-screen televisions.72 Perhaps the apparent timeliness of the show made it seem like a safer bet.

For fans of the show, both scholarly and otherwise, this combination of accidental timeliness and artistic uniqueness made the show both praiseworthy and compelling. Scholarly response to the show has been equivocal but profuse, and this voluminous commentary has turned the show into a crucial touchstone in academic debates about media and the GWOT. Commentary on it tends to focus either on its aesthetics or its ethics, but rarely seems to address how these might inform one another. Ideological critiques of the show often condemn its stylization and legitimization of torture, its trade in problematic stereotypes of gender and race, and its valorization of violent revenge.73 Underwriting these worries is a concern that 24 is dangerous because it has become so culturally significant, and that through the force of popular assent, 24 threatens to license the state’s use of unsavory counter-terror techniques by glamorizing them. Whether 24 is a hit because of or despite its ethical dubiousness is beyond the scope of the present inquiry. Nonetheless, I suspect that the fact that foxshop.com sells t-shirts emblazoned with pink “I ♥ Jack Bauer” graphics and olive-drab gear that promises “Guns Don’t Kill Terrorists – JACK DOES” is likely an important clue to the appeal of the show.

TV critics have focused more on the formal elements of the show and less on its larger political ramifications. In a brief commentary published in The New York Times on September 9, 2001, critic Caryn James was basically ambivalent about FOX’s upcoming series. For her the temporal element of the show was a “blatant gimmick,”74 although she found Jack Bauer to be an “unexpectedly sympathetic hero.”75 In a much

72 Ibid., 251.
73 See, for example Caldwell and Chambers, “24 After 9/11,” and Monahan, “Just-In-Time-Security.”
74 James, “A Time for Drama,” para. 1.
75 Ibid., para. 4.
longer cover story published on November 4, 2001, Bernard Weinraub mused over the hype surrounding the show’s upcoming public premier and captured the new critical zeitgeist. He noted that “[24] has plenty of pitfalls and the potential to fail, but critics who viewed the pilot episode were impressed not only by its timeliness but also by its almost non-stop action, which makes it surprisingly escapist too.” By the measures that are salient for industry executives and observers, 24 was an unequivocal success.

Ultimately, though, the confused origins of 24 make its ripped-from-the-headlines appeal seem specious, and its guarantee of ‘real time’ action is equally conditional. Although early reviews of the show questioned the wisdom of the omnipresent ticking clock, once the show actually aired (after September 11th), Weinraub lauded it as the very “pulse” of the show, because it ensures that not a moment is wasted. This guarantee is actually a ruse, however, for although each hour-long episode unfolds over the span of 60 minutes, an hour of television is not equal to an hour of television show. With commercial breaks, each hour of Bauer’s day is about 45 minutes—which is particularly true when a viewer watches the series on DVD—and so each day is roughly 18 hours of his life. The show creates its own reality and its own time through manipulation, with real-time achieved by casuistry, a false temporality masquerading as something else.

Although they provide an important interpretive context, neither of these claims about 24—that it was not an intentional response to 9/11 and that it is not really real time—is a revelation. But for precisely that reason, it is significant and surprising that the show has come to be so closely associated with the GWOT. The fact that its premise is popular despite its obviously false pretenses suggests that there is more at stake here

---

76 Weinraub, “A Fantastical Plot,” para. 1.
77 Stiegler and Derrida point out that there can never be any such thing as truly ‘real time’ media (Echographies of Television, 129), because there is always an element of falsity in representation, and always at least an infinitesimal lag between the event itself and its subsequent appearance on the screen. Doane is equally skeptical about the possibility of real time, arguing that its “apparent plenitude” obscures the reality that it is “haunted by absence,” that of the uncaptured moments of action between frames (The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 172).
78 Weinraub, “A Fantastical Plot,” para. 6.
80 Ina Rae Hark argues that the show was not as popular as it might appear. She suggests that although it achieved a great deal of success among high-earning 18-49-year-old viewers, its popularity was relatively low overall (“Today is the Longest Day of My Life,” 121). I do not question the validity of her data, but am also persuaded by the view that 24 is a “cultural phenomenon” (Peacock, “It’s About Time,” 5). If it is
than topicality and stylistic innovation. *24* works because it fulfills a particular wish to stall and thus undo a coming terror. Indeed, it is telling that the DVD box set includes alternate endings.\(^{81}\) This indicates that the appeal of the show lies in something other than its narrative, which is ultimately adjustable and thus superfluous.

The show enacts a temporal wish about terror in part through its visual rhetorics. Its vaunted split-screen format mimics the 24/7 stream of news media,\(^{82}\) particularly in the saturation coverage that followed 9/11. Ina Rae Hark argues that *24* evokes 9/11 not in plot but in the ways that it “mirrors the television news coverage in the aftermath of the tragedy.”\(^{83}\) The entertainment value is located not in its story, dialogue, or characters (though Jack Bauer has quite a following), but elsewhere, in its visual tricks, which succeed in part because of the practice audiences had for engaging this kind of format on 9/11. What *24* provides is not (only) a parable about fighting terror, but a vivid set of screens upon which to examine it by parsing it into increments. This dissection of terror means that trauma is distilled into moments and scenes. If one “cause of trauma is … the impossibility of experiencing, and subsequently memorializing an event,”\(^{84}\) viewers of *24* have no such difficulties. The pace and depth of terror in *24* makes terror small, digestible, and readily assimilable into the pleasure of watching television. Although the preponderance of split-screen imaging can bewilder,\(^{85}\) confuse, or annoy the viewer, the long history of split-screen aesthetics in Western art indicates that the use of multiple screens can help highlight relations between events,\(^{86}\) weaving them into a narrative at precisely the moment where they seem to fracture. Terror, then, as the ultimate temporal rupture, is protracted into a months-long television event.

Such elongation intensifies the temporal dimension of terror. Film is constitutively heterotemporal, as Mary Ann Doane observes. It is comprised of the irreversible time of the camera/apparatus, the narrative time of the diegesis, and the

---

\(^{81}\) Britton, *Spy Television*, 252.
\(^{82}\) M. Allen, “Divided Interests,” 36.
\(^{83}\) Hark, “‘Today is the Longest Day of My Life,”’ 123.
\(^{85}\) M. Allen, “Divided Interests,” 41.
\(^{86}\) Ibid., M. Allen 39.
various temporal circumstances of reception. Typically, in classical cinema, these times are entirely divergent; in live television programming, more overlap is possible. In television viewing of 24, these times are perfectly, intentionally synchronized, the relentless forwardness of the recording matches the strict linearity of the narrative (made wider through split-screen, branching out rather than looping between past and present). This unusual synchrony is perhaps why time, in the series, seems “hyper-real rather than real,” dense and unstoppable.

This also means that casual viewing of 24 is unlikely. Its demanding aesthetic means that it is virtually impossible to watch the show absentmindedly, and its narrative intensity and compressed action means that it must be viewed faithfully, reproducing the rapt attention of audiences to 9/11. But more importantly, this also means that its episodes must be viewed sequentially. As the premier of the first season approached, 24’s creators expressed some nervousness about the demands of both time and attention that the series would place on its viewers, and they planned to rerun episodes multiple times and on a regular schedule, a process that maximizes the opportunities for 24’s viewers to learn that temporal order can be restored, terror undone, trauma denied.

Because this promise can only be fulfilled with significant effort on the part of the viewers, there is something compulsive about the show. This is evidenced in part by the devotion cultivated among its fans, which seems to surpass the usual audience affection for television shows. Moreover, this is an obsession that requires repeated indulgence. Not only must 24 be watched regularly, it must also continually retell its story. As another foxshop.com t-shirt reminds us: “You Can’t Kill Jack.” So far, Jack Bauer has

88 Digital photography, of course, means that this is now a more metaphorical property than a literal one. Nonetheless, the idea of a film that cannot be rewound or re-used remains compelling.
89 The widespread availability of DVR technologies changes the television viewing experience somewhat, but even the capacity to pause live television, for example, does not threaten the forward momentum of the narrative.
90 Furby, “Interesting Times,” 69.
91 Ibid., 59.
92 Weinraub, “A Fantastical Plot Made Real,” para. 15.
93 Fans of the show can buy a wall calendar of ‘Jack Bauer’s Deadliest Enemies,’ another visual artifact that works to restore temporal order and predictability, even as every month promises a new threat.
94 Scholars of media and popular culture who write on the show are not immune to this. Many of them are confessedly enamored with the experience of the show, even as they critique its message.
had seven exceedingly long days (indeed, the longest of his life), and FOX tells fans that he can anticipate at least one more. Instead of being diminished by repetition, this iteration of terror mutates instead from one threat to another, its story continually reenergized.

**Where Will You Be? : Reversing Terror in Sleeper Cell**

Telling the same story over and over again is one thing—rewriting it from end to beginning is another, and the enactment of this rewind-to-redo wish is another significant motif in the temporal image culture of the GWOT. In his study of terror and the sublime, Gene Ray introduces the concept of the ‘hit,’ the moment of encounter with terror, so powerful it arrests subjects into “compulsive repeating: replay, rewind, replay.”95 In its continual reenactments, 24 addresses the first and third of these needs. Other temporal practices meet the second, rescripting terror by rewinding it, so that its end becomes only the beginning of the story. Two short texts in particular, a commercial for the terror drama *Sleeper Cell* and the flipbook sequence at the end of Jonathan Safran Foer’s 9/11 novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, make this desire explicit.

Reverse motion is nothing new. It is one of the earliest special effects ever to be mastered in the cinema,96 and its durability suggests that it addresses an abiding curiosity what would happen if time, or life itself, could be rewound and then done over. Reverse motion here, however, is not just a neat visual trick. It is the cornerstone of a narrative that seeks to undo trauma and arrest loss. Both of these sequences depict terror, a car-bombing and a 9/11 ‘suicide,’ respectively, but backwards, so that the bombing ends before it begins and the falling man moves upward into the window from which he jumped. Terror in each case results in life rather than loss.

Unlike *24*, which is remarkable for its extraordinary duration, these texts are exceptionally short, less than a minute and fourteen pages, respectively. They are brief relative to the larger texts of which they are a part, a television series and a novel, and they are one of the fe

---

media that matches terror in duration, each depicting only a few seconds of activity, which is all that it takes for terror to arrive. Compared to the extended gaze commanded by 24, these sequences require a very different visual commitment. They can be apprehended with only a glance, but the glance, because of its brevity, situates spectators temporally, in an “intense momentary time, and out of a continuous distended time.” In this way, these sequences trade in the temporality of terror, slowing it down not so much to prevent as to erase it.

These sequences, in their economy, realism, and temporal logic, invoke the film genre of the actuality. One of the earliest forms of motion pictures, actualities were short films made for small-screen viewing and designed to provide a real-time depiction of a particular action or scene. Actualities demonstrated the technological capabilities of filmmaking and its capacity to relay a story that evolved over time and space, a perfection of the indexical properties of the photograph. Even though they had tiny, linear plots, they were designed less to tell a singular story than to provide a loop of film that could be shown and enjoyed over and over again.

Although the genre was founded in relatively simple motion studies, as it evolved, its narrative structures evolved, and later actualities often told compacted stories of violence and destruction. Actualities, in the intensity of their focus, were archetypes of the “extreme temporal and spatial condensation” of the cinema, and these sequences are likewise large and small at once. The actuality, during its heyday, was a favored technology for the nationalist articulation of militarism, whiteness, and masculinity, which were made all the more vivid for being shown in a moving, realist format. Other exemplars of the genre focused on electrocutions, which “signifie[d] not only a technological form of death but also a compression of time and process” and thus showcased of the unique temporality of film. This focus on cause and effect motivated

---

98 Ellis and Wexman, A History of Film, 2.
100 Whissel, “The Gender of Empire.”
101 Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time, 151.
the 1901 short entitled *A Mighty Tumble*, a silent film of a building’s demolition.\textsuperscript{102} Similar controlled explosions still make the news on a regular basis\textsuperscript{103} (and often, with no trace of irony about the collapse of the World Trade Centers), another legacy of the appeal of the actuality, although the genre proper has long since disappeared. At first, actualities were featured attractions in early movie theaters and vaudeville arenas, but as motion picture technology progressed, their novelty eroded and actualities were demoted to “chasers” between other entertainment acts.\textsuperscript{104} Similarly, the reverse-motion texts I consider here are ancillary to larger works. The genre eventually became obsolete, supplanted by or elongated into classical narrative film.

Like their generic predecessors, these reverse motion sequences of the GWOT enact the “contradictory dream of re-presenting the contingent,”\textsuperscript{105} capturing and reproducing that which by its nature is ephemeral and singular. In this, they mimic the defining “novelty” of the attacks on New York, namely that they could be, and regularly are, looped.\textsuperscript{106} Allen Feldman describes the work “video extraction” that sutured the images of 9/11 into the now familiar loops of film, arguing that they “created a temporal stasis”;\textsuperscript{107} as contemporary versions iterations of the genre of the actuality, these sequences signal not a break but continuity and endlessness. They reproduce the temporal intensity of terror, even as they dilute it.

Similarly, the Showtime series *Sleeper Cell: American Terror* has an unusual temporal format. From its first broadcast in 2005, episodes have aired in a week’s worth of consecutive nights as a miniseries, resulting in a short, dense season. The show focuses on Muslim African-American FBI agent Darwyn Al-Sayeed, tasked with infiltrating a terrorist cell in Los Angeles, headed by Islamist Faris Al-Farik. The short 2006 promo for the second run of the miniseries (its final to date) reverses a car bombing

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 206.
\textsuperscript{103} Interested surfers can go online to watch local news footage of the post-attack demolition of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, forward or backward. In these sequences, “the gaze itself implodes” (Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 207), drawn into the rubble.
\textsuperscript{104} Ellis and Wexman, *A History of Film*, 6.
\textsuperscript{105} Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 144.
\textsuperscript{106} Virilio, *City of Panic*, 48.
\textsuperscript{107} Feldman, “The Actuarial Gaze,” 212.
on a city street, propagated by a cell that regrouped after the defeat of its predecessor in the first season.

Verisimilitude is engineered into the show. Unlike 24, which claims ‘realness’ through form rather than specific content, Sleeper Cell explicitly invokes the Arab terrorist, making real an enemy who is usually only allegorized in 24, where the bad guys hail from all over the world. In this show, the tension between terrorism and Islam is a key plot device. Promotional materials for the show emphasize its authenticity, earnestly citing the employment of ‘real Muslims’ as writers, advisors, and actors.108 Their unique perspective credentials the effort to tell the story of what would happen if an Al Qaeda cell was able to mobilize in the U.S., while also purportedly lending insight into the unique struggles and divided loyalties that a Muslim FBI agent would face if he was tasked with crashing their party.

Whereas the show itself promises authenticity, the commercial is realistic, but embellished. It is a CGI-rich mini-narrative that begins with birds flying backwards to re-alight on the train tracks off of which they flew in panic, and moves rapidly, precisely backward to Darwyn watching the terrorist prepare to remotely detonate the rigged vehicle. The minute-long spot is technically masterful, equally visually impressive as it is cognitively difficult, grating as it does against our sensibilities about terror and its irreversibility. The ad transforms the most terrifying kind of attack into a circus of special effects, and inverts the hackneyed claim that 9/11 imitated a disaster movie, instead making a miniature disaster movie imitate real terror.

Relations of visuality are predominant in the advertisement, which is structured around tools and technologies of vision. Multiple points of view accentuate perspective and provide continual invitations into the scene. Shiny surfaces (like the glass on the outside of a high-rise building) first mirror the explosion and shatter because of it, and then un-mirror the explosion as the reflection of the flames slides off the pane, which then fuses back together. This motif underscores the extraordinary nature of the sight to which viewers now have access, as we are seeing more than we could ever see unaided. This is the full reality of terror, which otherwise arrives faster than our eyes can perceive.

108 Showtime, “Muslims in TV.”
it. The visual appeal trumps the cognitive weirdness of watching backwards what we are so accustomed to seeing forward, but the excess of things to look at keeps us from thinking too hard, until the whole scene bounces off the rearview mirror of the pre-/post-explosion car and telescopes into Darwyn’s binoculars, where he waits for what is about to (not) happen. In the trailer, terror is explicitly a visual phenomenon. The commercial explains very little about the plot, focusing instead on the spectacle. For all the series’ claims to insight about terrorists, the advertisement conveys nothing but the overwhelming symbolic affront of terrorism and the pleasure of seeing it undone: parked cars settle back down to earth, the pigeons resume their perennial urban vigil, flames recede off of the American flag.

Even as it rewrites terror’s ending, the *Sleeper Cell* preview preserves some of terror’s temporal oddness. Terror “cannot be thought until it moves.”\textsuperscript{109} It is discernible only in activity, and terror here is expressed in motion. It unsettles everything, but unevenly. Within the overall backwardness of the text, things happen at multiple speeds: there is the frame-by-frame slowness with which the car is reassembled, as it seems to draw the explosion back in, the normal speed with which city life progresses once the explosion is past/future, and the blur of motion with which spectators return to Darwyn’s binoculars at the beginning/end of the sequence, where he sits in a van a few blocks from the scene, with the terrorist whose thumb is poised over the red button on the handheld detonation device. Finally, the whole scene cuts to an interrogative, unmoving and lettered in blue on a black screen, “When The Next Attack Happens, Where Will You Be?” Thus, terror here is reversible, but—strangely—not preventable. The lexicon of foreign policy is instructive here; Eric Patterson argues that America should pursue the objective of “[c]ontainment, not rollback”\textsuperscript{110} in its GWOT, as the former is the only reasonable goal because the terrorist threat is no longer eliminable. Accordingly, *Sleeper Cell*’s is a fantasy not of eradicating terror, but of experimenting with it, inventing alternate endings for an otherwise relentless teleology.

\textsuperscript{109} Routt, “Who Dances When Terror Strikes?”, 100.

\textsuperscript{110} Patterson, “Just War Theory in the 21st Century,” 130.
This desire to rewrite the story of terror has lately acquired an echo in foreign policy objectives. Throughout his presidential campaign, Barack Obama emphasized the necessity of redirecting American attention to Afghanistan so that the U.S. and its allies might ‘finish the job’ there. On March 27, 2009, President Obama announced a “comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” This foundation of this strategy is an increased American military presence in Afghanistan, support for the Afghan security forces, and an expressed commitment to rebuilding civil society there and to “inves[ting]” in “the future” of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This future, in Obama’s estimation, has been impossible to realize because of the past. Citing commanders’ complaints that they have been unable to marshal the manpower and resources necessary to win on that front because they have been bogged down in Iraq, Obama outlined plans to deploy 21,000 soldiers and Marines to Afghanistan in the coming months. These may not be the very same fighters who have been waging the GWOT in Iraq, but this is a mission that will reroute and redirect personnel and equipment, in an effort to repair the consequences of what he characterized as six years of neglect, to revisit the origin of the terror and begin again, so that the U.S. might bring this story to an end. Ultimately, the goal is “to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future.”  

“Passing Like a Hand Waving From a Train that I Wanted to be On”: Trauma and Temporality in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close

Jonathan Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close takes an approach to temporality that is as experimental as that of the Sleeper Cell commercial, and temporal play is a constitutive element of the text as a whole. This, Foer’s second novel, tells the story of Oskar Schell, a vegan (except for ice cream), pacifist nine-year-old boy that is anxious and precocious in equal measure, whose father died in the World Trade Center. As the grandchild of two survivors of the firebombing of Dresden (whose first-person narratives stories are interspersed with Oskar’s), Oskar has a genetic predisposition to trauma, and gets different weights of what he calls “heavy boots” when he encounters

---

111 Emphasis mine.
something sad. Snooping around his father’s closet one night, riddled with guilt because
he didn’t answer the dead man’s last phone call home, Oskar finds a key with no lock and
no explanation. Surreptitiously canceling his weekend French lesson, Oskar and the
occasional sidekick roam around New York City, tracing an alphabetical route around the
bewildered, grieving city, looking for the lock, which he imagines will expose something
important about his dad. There is no great revelation, not even when he goes and digs up
his father’s empty coffin, and the book ends only with a fantasy of terror rewound, in
which Oskar imagines reversing 9/11 all the way back, until the hijacked plane that killed
his father went back to Boston112 and everybody was safe.

Oskar is a funny, fanciful child of a rather eccentric lineage, and Foer accents the
idiosyncrasy of his characters by developing a novel with a unique structure and format, a
surprisingly visual work of literature. The novel is littered with images, often
reproductions of pages from Oskar’s scrapbook, “Stuff that Happened to Me,” which is
somewhat mis-titled, because much of the content did not. Oskar’s image-collecting is at
odds with his grandmother’s relation to sight; her eyes, she repeats talismanically, are
“crummy.” Despite the running motif of blindness,113 Foer often shapes the type itself
into a visual art. The book contains blank and nearly blank pages to convey the silence of
Oskar’s mute grandfather; reproduces pages of digits when he tries to spell out his
feelings for Oskar’s grandmother by dialing corresponding numbers into a phone; and
reduces and eventually eliminates the spaces between lines of text (until there is nothing
but a nearly black page, as if someone had run the same sheet through a typewriter again
and again) when he finally, torrentially tells the story of meeting his grandson. This all
makes Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close distinctive, but the most striking visual
element of the text is the flipbook at the end, where Oskar has torn the pages of a 9/11
falling man out of his scrapbook and pasted them back together in reverse order.

This is a fitting end to a novel that is temporally playful throughout. Although
there are regular flashbacks to the era of World War II, most of the book’s action takes

112 Foer, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, 325.
113 Sightlessness is a less pronounced, but still significant, theme in Foer’s first novel about the Holocaust
and founding traumas of Jewish identity, Everything is Illuminated.
place in the two years following September 11th, 2001. This time frame permits the book some flexibility, for those months were a kind of limbo, the “unique time between a traumatic event and its symbolic impact, as in those brief moments when we have been deeply cut, but before the full extent of the pain strikes us.” It is difficult to imagine an equally fluid text about the event beginning years after the attacks, when the symbolic significance of them had finally become plastic.

Time itself is a key motif in the text. When Oskar arrived home at 10:22 a.m. after an early dismissal from school on September 11th, he “look[ed] at [his] watch a lot,” checking it against the timestamps of his father’s increasingly frantic answering machine messages. Oskar listens to his father’s messages compulsively (having secretly replaced the machine with another identical one and hidden the original in his closet), bruising himself as he rewinds and replays his father’s frantic phone calls home. Ultimately, he is able to use the final message to calculate the time of his father’s death: 10:28 a.m., when the Tower collapsed.

Yet time, and the limitations it imposes, is also insignificant in the novel. Transitions forward and back, from 1940s Dresden to New York City in 2001, are seamless. Subsequent traumas can rewrite their predecessors, confusing chronology and cause-and-effect, and in the novel, the traumas of Dresden and New York City are intermingled, so that each seems to predestine and compound the other as they converge around the bodies of Oskar’s grandparents. Oskar, for his part, copes with the malleability of (post-)traumatic temporality in characteristic fashion. One of his pastimes is writing letters to celebrities and famous intellectuals, especially Stephen Hawking, whose own work is deeply concerned with revising our understandings of time. Finally, when Hawking actually does send Oskar a personal response, he closes with a meditation on their shared temporality, despite their different time zones, and writes of them

---

114 Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real!, 45.
115 Foer, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, 14.
116 Ibid., 302.
117 Read, “Representing Trauma, 238.
“sharing this clear and beautiful morning,” though he knows that Oskar is still asleep far away.\footnote{Foer, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, 305.}

Hawking’s perspective on time aligns with that of Oskar and his grandparents. While Oskar spends his sleepless nights thinking about inventions that would have saved his father (like a shirt made of birdseed so that the birds would have swooped the people falling from the towers away and a skyscraper that could open a hole in the middle for planes to fly through), his grandparents dwell almost exclusively in the past. Oskar’s grandmother is untroubled by this temporal mismatch, and Oskar has inherited his penchant for the backwards from her; she writes of a lengthy dream she had of Dresden, in which “all of the collapsed ceilings formed above us,”\footnote{Ibid., 306.} putting the world back together until the time of Adam and Eve.\footnote{Ibid., 313.} That a single civilian family should suffer Dresden and September 11th is the traumatic excess of the text. At points, this spills over and becomes almost comic, as when Oskar brings a documentary on Hiroshima to his grade school show-and-tell,\footnote{Foer, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, 189.} and when Oskar’s incompetent therapist, Dr. Fein, wrongly diagnoses his manifestations of trauma as hormonal symptoms of puberty.\footnote{Ibid., 201.}

Although the manifestations of trauma vary in the text, for the most part the Schell family expresses their trauma in a language of temporality. First, terrormorphs into trauma as a site of temporal rupture: for Oskar, September 11th, 2001 is not September 11th, 2001, but is only “the worst day.” Alternately, trauma changes duration: as she recalls the interval between the day between when she saw last saw her (future) husband in Dresden and the moment she saw him writing at a bakery, Grandma describes seven years that “were not” years at all, not seven, not seven hundred,\footnote{Ibid., 81.} simply not. Finally, terror incinerates time in an instant; Oskar’s grandfather, because he survived Dresden, has no time to spare, and his fondest wish for his wife and son is that “we could...
have wasted time, I want an infinitely blank book and the rest of time.”124 Here, trauma is a circumstance in which all the components of a life, of a history, of a time remain, but with their meaning rearranged125 and recombined.

The most vivid depiction of this is the novel’s closing flipbook. Like so many other pictures in the novel, these 14 pages are from “Stuff That Happened To Me.” Whereas Oskar usually collects pictures in an effort to document his life fantastically but precisely, here he subverts that impulse and resequences real images to reorder his life into a fiction, demonstrating that the inevitable forward motion of time is often the only thing separating us from our fondest desires. Throughout the text, Oskar is burdened by knowledge, things he knows about but wishes he didn’t (“like how women who live together have their menstrual periods at the same time”126) or realizes that he shouldn’t. The images of the people falling/jumping from the towers are in the latter category. Oskar has seen them, but knows that he should not have. He is reminded of their forbiddenness when he has to access foreign media to see the videos of the bodies falling,127 because they have been censored in the U.S.128

Animating the flipbook, then, places the American reader in a disorienting position, a spectatorship as guilty as Oskar’s. It is the form of the book, insofar as a novel demands to be finished, which requires that we look, and that we participate. In this way, the demands of citizenship are contradictory: on the one hand, the good citizen must look away out of respect for the victims, on the other, she must apprehend the full scope of the tragedies. It is likely that we have all seen images such as these. Or at least, we think we have: with a scene so vivid, so simple, and so terrifying, it is hard to distinguish ‘real’ from ‘false’ memories, to determine which ‘stuff’ really ‘happened’ to ‘me.’

Insatiably curious Oskar finds a news clip of a 9/11 suicide-jumper and breaks it down into discrete images, printing them out and examining them microscopically,

124 Ibid., 281.
125 Bracken, Trauma, 1.
126 Foer, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, 1.
127 Ibid., 256.
128 Susan Lurie provides a vivid account of the dynamics of national identity spectatorship in her analysis of these images (“Falling Persons and National Embodiment”).
looking not so much for his father but trying to find out “which way of dying was his.”

The man whose fall was captured first appears in a “Stuff That Happened To Me” montage of images that includes turtles mating and plans for a paper airplane. The man appears in two single frames, once from afar in mid-flight, and then once in a close-up so tight and pixelated that he is almost unrecognizable. By manipulating these images, Oskar fractures their realism, reducing the terrible indexicality of the footage to its ultimate meaninglessness, at once relying upon and obliterating the truth that it tells.

Oskar returns to the falling man at the end, methodically piecing his fall back together and upward, so that on the first page of the flipbook, the man is only half visible the bottom right corner of the page, precipitously close to falling off of it completely, but by the end, he has disappeared, presumably returned safely up back through the window and inside the building. In a sense, this is just another of Oskar’s imaginative labors. But the late letter from Stephen Hawking suggests otherwise.

Earlier portions of the novel are punctuated with reproduced form letters from the physicist, thanking the writer for their letter and wishing for the opportunity to respond later. Oskar often tells Hawking of his nonstop inventing, and when he finally does write back, he asks, “What if you aren’t inventing?”, suggesting that Oskar can make things real. With this provocative question, Hawking legitimizes Oskar’s frantic imagining. Like the spectator to a film or reader of a novel, Oskar was drawn to the fiction of his inventions, which he often concocted to comfort himself so that he could finally sleep. Whatever visions might have troubled him while he rested were out of his control and, for the time, beyond his capacity to discern dreams from reality. Hawking’s question sustains this indeterminacy into waking life, for purposes that are therapeutic and, more importantly, productive.

By composing his flipbook, Oskar is constructing the only thing he can, building a private memorial. Hard as he tries, all the birdseed shirts and magical skyscrapers he invents and invents cannot save his father, but he can do this. Of course, a crudely

---

129 Ibid., 257.
130 Ibid., 59, 57, 56, 59, 62.
131 Ibid., 305.
realistic reader would realize that even if he did save the falling man from his headlong rush into the ground, it is unlikely that he would have survived the collapse of the Towers that followed. Oskar’s flipbook is a different kind of composition. It is a way of participating in the temporal rush of September 11th; on that morning, Grandma recalls, “Time was passing like a hand waving from a train that I wanted to be on.” With the flipbook, Oskar has sutured “Me” onto it, not derailing it, but simply reversing its direction.

Oskar chose, in his creation, to preserve the motion of the fall. Rather than reproducing the frames back-to-back, so that the reader would have to turn the page and interrupt the graceful, terrible flight, by creating a flipbook, Oskar has reproduced a temporal conundrum: the book moves forward, the man moves back. Oskar has not created a photo album of the falling man, a collection of images in which the temporal jab of the punctum is death. Instead, he has realized Barthes’ promise that photography speaks of “resurrection,” if an imperfect one. As the simplest form of motion picture, an ancestor to the actuality, the flipbook makes the reader (flipper?) the cinematographer, creating the illusion of motion in a scene that can be repeated again and again, at whim. Like all of the excerpts from “Stuff That Happened to Me,” the pages in the flipbook are numberless, leaving the reader to create their own sequences, their own version of forward progress. Here, Oskar has transformed the “pure contingency” of the photograph, in this case his horrible fortune of bearing filmic witness to this event, into a permanent artifact, stretching and replicating the scene, “reproducing [it] to infinity.”

Such reproduction, however, does not happen with the flipbook merely through looking at it. Passive spectatorship yields nothing but a black-and-white image of a blurry figure in midair, moving asymptotically away from the side of a building. This illusion will not work without physical activity on the part of the viewer, who must fan

132 Ibid., 224.
133 Mulvey, “The Index and the Uncanny,” 147).
134 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 82.
135 Ibid., 28. Giorgio Agamben outlines a similar analysis of the gravity of photography, arguing that a single small thing, when captured on film, becomes “charged with the weight of an entire life; that insignificant or even silly moment collects and condenses in itself the meaning of an entire existence” (Profanations, 24).
136 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 4.
the pages with her thumb. Touch and sight are required together. Because flipbooks are designed to be viewed again and again, they become totemic, acquiring value through their repetition. They have this in common with actualities, which are descended from flipbooks and also ancestors to this flipbook in particular, but throughout this confused lineage the temporal contingency of the photograph remains salient. Unlike actualities, where the pace of the image is out of the viewer’s control, the speed (and thus success) of the flipbook is literally in the viewer’s hands.

Action in this case is imperative, required, compelled. He is falling from the building and we must intervene. He is falling and we must intervene. He is falling and we must intervene. We cannot just watch, cannot just passively consume. Benjamin writes that

> the tasks which face the human apparatus at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation.\(^{137}\)

And here we are. The worst day is no time for just sitting there: do something. Save someone. Intervene must we and falling is he.

This labor, perhaps, is a compensation for the forbidden look at the falling man. This is duty. Obligation. With enough pictures and a big enough volume for Stuff That Happened, anyone could rewrite everything, keep trauma permanently at bay. Trauma’s defining characteristic is the “inescapability of its belated impact,”\(^{138}\) but if time is slowed and stretched enough, it would never have to happen. Sooner or later, later would become sooner, and eventually before.

The popularity of the book, a *New York Times* bestseller, suggests that many Americans are persuaded by this promise. This translates into citizenship as an exercise in suspension, both of time and disbelief, a turning around, a look backward, a faith that the course of history itself can be rerouted. With enough people working to put things back together (with enough birds pecking away at the seeds on a shirt), it seems, the past

---


becomes just future disaster, narrowly averted, the only evidence of which is a handful of feathers, drifting down from the empty sky and landing in the converging shadows of two identical buildings.


Although far more pragmatic in its execution, The 9/11 Report shares in at least part of the premise of the Sleeper Cell advertisement and Foer’s flipbook. Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, in compiling the Commission’s findings, expressed a faith in the power of retrospective inquiry to avert future disasters, if not the disaster of 9/11. Nonetheless, despite its ultimate futility, which is rooted in the fact that it can only ever be an exercise in “hindsight,” The 9/11 Report expresses a clear will to knowledge, a sense that with enough facts, a kind of mastery over terror will be possible. 9/11, Kean and Hamilton write, “was a shock, but … should not have come as a surprise,” and the report parses the difference carefully.

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close is a story whose beginning is known, but whose ending is designed to be unpredictable; the Report and its adaptation have an opposite narrative task, to tell a story with an all-too-familiar ending but murky beginnings. Knowing the ending changes the temporal experience of reading: there is no rush, whether literal or figurative, and the pleasure of the text derives from its details, rather than any kind of suspense built into the plot. Although the authors repeatedly critique the administration and the intelligence community for squandering time by ignoring signs of the impending attack, and this sense of time running out provides some tension, this is hardly a stimulating text. But the dullness of the document is not a liability. Quite the opposite. Its tedium is what makes it appealing, because that is what makes it safe, and safety is a primary reason that “[r]eenatment is a cathartic means for people to find closure in an event.” Meticulous reconstruction can be therapeutic.

---

140 Ibid., lxxii.
141 Sturken, Tangled Memories, 43.
Kean and Hamilton, and the Commission for which they speak, try to achieve this objective by sifting a mountain of information into a slow-moving linear narrative replete with temporal signposts. Even as the narrative necessarily moves back or laterally in time (when it needs to depict simultaneity) and space (when it needs to narrate something that is happening overseas, as in their explanation on the origins of Islamism), the overall progress is straight and forward, an inevitable plodding toward a totally unsurprising ending. Inclusive of notes and appendices, *The 9/11 Report* is nearly 600 pages long. Its copious detail and extraordinary length prevent it from being frightening, insofar as fright is a consequence of speed, of a stimulus arriving too quickly to be comprehended. Likewise, there is no room for terror here, even if it saturates every page.

Kean and Hamilton provided a sequel to (and further insulation against terror in) the Report with a meta-textual analysis of its history and composition, entitled *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission*. There, they affirmed that the Commission’s goal was “to respond to a brutal attack on our democratic society with a value of democracy itself.” Responding to the needs of ‘the families,’ the survivors of people who died on September 11th whose activism resulted in the formation of the Commission itself, the panel produced a report that provides an excruciating account of the whole story of September 11th. The document was completed ‘without dissent,’ and covers Al Qaeda’s preparation for the 9/11 attacks, the attacks themselves (in the first chapter, “We Have Some Planes” and then again in Chapter 9, a discussion of the response to the attacks, entitled “Heroism and Horror”), and a plan for the future, built around an overhaul of the intelligence community.

In the history of presidential commissions, the one tasked with investigating 9/11 was extraordinary both in its duration of 603 days and the resistance it encountered from the executive branch of government. Despite this Commission’s urgent agenda, as a genre, reports from presidential commissions do not make exciting reading. They are

---

142 Caruth, “Parting Words,” 80.
143 Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, 324. Here again is a valorization of the American nation (for which ‘democracy’ is a metonym) linked to a critique of the American state, as both the report itself and *Without Precedent* are critical of the government’s inability to prevent or respond effectively and appropriately to the attack.
constitutively bureaucratic documents, usually emerging from some kind of scandal (Watergate), tragedy (the Kennedy assassination), or unpleasantness (employment discrimination). Their immediate goal is to uncover and then publish the information they set out to find, but their ultimate mission is to prove that government works. They are homeopathic remedies, in which the ailment and the cure are almost identical: the state. That is, the very thing that puts everything right (good government) is a modified version of the very same thing that failed (bad government). They are generally grim documents, the products of labor and determination, and require corresponding fortitude of their readers. Pleasure in general, according to Elizabeth Cowie, requires some kind of preceding unpleasure,\textsuperscript{145} and the Report is a gently paced relief compared to the onrush of sensation on September 11\textsuperscript{th}. It is the contrast between the Report and the thing that inspired it that makes it readable at all, but this is not the case with the \textit{Graphic Adaptation} by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón. Released in 2006, some two years after the original, the much shorter volume tells the same story as its predecessor, but does so in a way that is uniquely engaging, and explicitly visual.\textsuperscript{146}

Despite the fact that the state represents itself and its work with utmost seriousness, the somber work of American government has always been shadowed by the comedic. Political cartoons have a long history\textsuperscript{147} and gained prominence when so many other visual media did, during the Civil War.\textsuperscript{148} They are by now a staple of political discourse in the U.S. Typically, however, these serve a critical function, using caricature and satire to express a political position.\textsuperscript{149} The tenor of the \textit{Adaptation}, by contrast, is far more earnest and not sardonic at all. Although the report upon which it is based is

\textsuperscript{145} Cowie, “The Lived Nightmare,” 29.
\textsuperscript{146} In this depiction I depart cautiously from the work of graphic novel scholar Charles Hatfield, who argues that the genre is essentially literary (\textit{Alternative Comics}, x). Particularly in comparison to the original report, the \textit{Graphic Adaptation} is strikingly … graphic.
\textsuperscript{147} Robertson, \textit{The Language of Democracy}, 182.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 188. The Civil War is a turning point in American visual culture for many reasons, this among them. Prior to that era, Robertson writes, commentary of this nature would have been made in writing (even though the technology to reproduce images was available), because editors sought to avoid “excessive illustrations in serious journals.”
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 182-183. The incendiary potential of such expression was starkly demonstrated in the 2005 controversy over the “Danish cartoons.” In the worldwide skirmishes that followed their publication, more than 50 people were killed (Steuter and Wills, “Infestation and Eradication”).
critical of the government, it is not meant to be amusing. This graphic novel should not be confused with its single-frame kin, for in its comic conveyance of the intricacies of terror, the Adaptation uses the “trivial as a carrier of the tragic”\(^{150}\) as it transposes the structure and content of the original report into panels of comics.

The translation takes place through the textual and visual features of the graphic novel. The language of the Commission coexists with the onomatopoetic vernacular of the comic; at times, Jacobson and Colón reproduce and illustrate whole passages of the original report, even as the Towers fall with a R-RRUMBLE and then a FLAMM! at the far end of page 6. Moreover, the artists leverage shared visual lexicons of terror as they transform the figures populating the report into heroes and villains. The former are knowable by their FDNY uniforms, and their goodness is recognizable in their doomed, determined faces aboard United 93. Alternately, the latter appear in the familiar montage of the hijackers’ grim passport photos, the distinctive figure of Osama bin Laden, and huddled, indistinguishable masses of ‘Arabs’ when they depict scenes in the Middle East.

All of this is part of the familiar iconography of the comic. Unlike 24, the ad for Sleeper Cell, and Oskar’s flipbook, which portrays ‘real’ sequences of terror indexically, and the original 9/11 Report, depicting it symbolically by abstracting it into words, the Adaptation draws terror iconographically, using drawings to represent it rather than imaging it directly.\(^{151}\) The iconographic nature of cartoons might keep them from being visually realistic, but does not necessarily undermine the experience of reality, or realness, that they provide. Paul Ward argues that realism is possible in animation, comics, and cartoons, and is established through the indexical precision of the narrative, rather than that of the images.\(^{152}\) The apparently frivolous quality of the genre should not overshadow this potential, because the graphic novel is uniquely suited to the task of explaining 9/11. In their preface to the Adaptation, Hamilton and Kean write that the

---

\(^{150}\) Lamasanu, “Graphic Novels’ Representation of 9/11.” Similarly, in their overview of the history of political cartoons, Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills comment on the genre’s ability to accommodate the “strange bedfellows of humor and outrage” (“Infestation and Eradication,” 11).

\(^{151}\) See Ward (“Animated Realities,” para. 5) for a useful gloss on the application of Peirce’s icon/index/symbol typology in the analysis of animation.

\(^{152}\) Ward, “Animated Realities,” para. 2.
graphic novel is designed to “help the rest of us to understand what happened that day
and in the years leading up to it.”153

In part because they are reminiscent of childhood, graphic novels can be uniquely
everative of memory.154  Like memory, they are often iconographic, fluid, and defined by
temporal laxity. Similarly, in their use of repetition, graphic novels mimic the sensations
of trauma.155  Graphic novels have something timeless, if not anachronistic,156 about
them, as their formal elements have remained essentially unchanged throughout the
history of the genre. Comic time itself is characterized by ‘weirdness,’157 passing at
sharply different rates within the same text, or even on the same page. Most definitions
of the genre emphasize its unique knack for the “representation of time … of temporal
sequence through multiple images in series,”158 and so while the Adaptation appears
somewhat disorderly compared to the close-typed identical pages of the original Report,
the graphic novel is very well-equipped for its purpose.159  Indeed, one of the hallmarks
of the genre is that the narrative always takes “temporal predominance”;160 the
Adaptation will not be swayed from telling the story of 9/11, and easily recaptures the
relentless forward movement of the plot (here a double entendre) in the original text.

According to Samuel Weber,

Wartime is a time that disrupts the notion of temporality as irreversible
flow of linear progression. It is a time ‘out of joint,’ a time in which
succession is subordinated to a quasi-simultaneity.161

The calm and orderly 9/11 Report thus could not have been written in the time of
wartime, with all its temporal disarray. It does not provide an account of wartime as
much as it does a timeline of war, a very different operation. The 9/11 Report is dogged

154 Punter, The Influence of Post-Modernism, 211.
155 Lamasanu, “Graphic Novels’ Representation of 9/11.”
156 Punter, The Influence of Post-Modernism, 209.
157 McCloud, Understanding Comics, 94.
158 Hatfield, Alternative Comics, 41.
159 It is telling that Michael Allen compares the format of 24 to a graphic novel (“Divided Interests,” 41-42)
and the series was turned into one in the UK (Peacock, “It’s About Time,” 5).
in its effort to provide chronological order. Wherever possible, precise times are given (the time that air-traffic control lost contact with a flight, the time that FDNY initiated their response, etc.) For each of the hijacked flights, the original Report includes a minute-by-minute timeline and an approximate map of the altered flightplan. Because each of these happens on a separate page, however, it is difficult to get a sense of the full picture of what happened that morning. In this case, the need for a linear narrative that unspooled one skein of the story at a time made true simultaneity impossible. All that is conveyed is, in Weber’s terms, quasi-simultaneity, a contrived account of a temporally dissonant series of events. This early example is a blueprint for the rest of the text. Most of the middle chapters provide a discrete linear story of a particular aspect of the time before the 9/11 attacks, writing only one at a time and holding the others in temporary abeyance; likewise, Without Precedent concludes with a lengthy timeline of the Commission’s history, one event following another.

Overall, the tense of The 9/11 Report is ‘meanwhile.’ For example, in Chapter 7, “The Attack Looms,” the hijackers are arriving in the U.S., taking pilot lessons, going to the gym, transferring money, at the same time that “The System Was Blinking Red” throughout Chapter 8. All of the events are fitted into a progressive history, a linear movement through to Chapter 10, “Wartime,” which provides a meticulous account of the steps leading to the initiation of the GWOT. At 20 pages, this chapter is by far the shortest of the report, and reads at first like a narrative of the President Bush’s calendar for September 11th, 2001, and ends with a brief accounting of early successes in Afghanistan, after which the “global conflict against Islamist terrorism became a different kind of struggle.” The next chapter is more reflective, appropriately titled “Foresight—and Hindsight”; I am interested in the decision to put temporal and visual metaphors side by side.

163 In May 2005, the New York State Museum installed a 36-foot timeline of the events of September 11, 2001 on the Church Street World Trade Center viewing wall. This illustrated chronology plots all the events on a single axis, from 6:32 a.m. (sunrise) to 11:29 p.m. (Governor Pataki’s inspection of the site). Compared to the separate timelines in The 9/11 Report, this single, linear view lends more momentum, and hence more affective power, to the narrative of that day.
Sight and time are separate in the original report, but intimately related in A Graphic Adaptation. In a graphic novel, time and motion can only be conveyed iconically.\textsuperscript{166} Words, for example, introduce a sense of time in a frame because they happen at the speed of sound and reading.\textsuperscript{167} Similarly, motion lines can convey speed and direction, while sizing the gutters (the blank spaces between panels) differently can help to delineate intervals, and provide an interpretive point of reference for determining the speed of the action in the panels that they separate. In this way, time in graphic novels is relative, and relational. Thus the genre is also uniquely suited to portraying simultaneity, cause-and-effect, and lapse.

Most striking in this regard is the early depiction of the hijacked flights, a “time line showing the simultaneous histories of the four hijacked airplanes as they began and completed their horrendous missions.” This begins on page 6, but folds out to cover five pages, front and back. These black pages (unusual in a text that is printed on white paper, except for one page about the rise of Islamism, also printed on black\textsuperscript{168}) are divided into horizontal quadrants, separated by white lines, one segment for each flight. Scanning the page from top to bottom demonstrates the thickness of time, what is happening at each moment, while reading left to right, pulling out the pages, literally unfolds the story of each plane. Each segment is bounded, except for explosions and the collapse of the towers, which bleed onto multiple panels.

This first timeline is heavily illustrated, populated with the stock characters of graphic novels, while a second timeline, which begins on page 8 and follows the same format, tells the story of “Improvising a Homeland Defense,” recapitulating the previous timeline but using text to pinpoint moments of “Awareness, Notification, and Response.” There are far fewer people here and the illustrations are spare, using box cutters to symbolize the time of takeover, large black spaces to indicate radio silence. This time line is spare, visually, until at the end, it explodes into pictures: a shadowed, smoky

\textsuperscript{166} Unlike analog animation, in which a fast movement through a series of still images engages the perceptual phenomenon of Persistence of Vision to ‘trick’ the viewer into seeing motion (Heckman, “Suspended Animation,” para. 2), comics and graphic novels must rely on other sensory habits of their readers to convincingly depict movement between still images.

\textsuperscript{167} McCloud, Understanding Comics, 95.

At this point, the experience reading of the graphic novel begins to resemble that of reading the original report, insofar as the layout is more straightforward, and mimics the left-to-right, left-to-right motion of reading the original text. The pace, however, is different. At approximately 115 pages, the adaptation is a fraction of the length of the original, even as it conveys roughly the same information. The primary difference is the efficiency of the medium—Jacobson and Colón can quickly represent visually what the commission had to render painstakingly into words. The volume serves the same pedagogical purpose, to “encourage our fellow citizens to study, reflect—and act,”169 but executes the mission differently.

‘Reading’ the adaptation is a little bit more exciting than reading the original, and has a temporality all of its own. This is true of graphic novels as a genre;170 because of the variation in speed and interval within them, because they have so much detail, and because they require two kinds of interpretation at once, reading them is a very involved process. In that act of reading, the reader sets the pace of the action. Unlike a photograph, which is characterized by suddenness171 and is meant to capture a single moment to be consumed with a single look, each panel of a graphic novel is designed to have a slightly longer duration, determined by the time that it takes the eye to scan the page.172 The length of an event in any graphic novel is determined in a fundamental way by the reader. If I pause to look at the intricacy of the drawing of the U.S.S. Cole in the frame that depicts the attack on it,173 I prolong it, or if I skim over the panel depicting the ease with which the hijackers moved through security on that Tuesday morning,174 I replicate the cursory glance of the checkpoint screener. Either way, I am uniquely

169 Ibid., x.
170 Punter, The Influence of Post-Modernism, 211.
171 Metz, “Photography and Fetish,” 218.
172 McCloud, Understanding Comics, 97.
174 Ibid., 5.
sutured into the story of terror, exercising a small but crucial degree of control over it. The adaptation interrupts the headlong rush of images that constitutes terror, breaking it into pages to be consumed slowly, one at a time, at a speed totally controlled by the reader and her ability process visual stimuli.

By providing readers with this degree of agency over terror’s happening in the narrative, and returning terror to the more familiar terrain of the visual, the graphic adaptation makes terror vivid. But the relative obscurity of Jacobson and Colón’s text, particularly in comparison to the best-selling popularity of the original report, raises an interesting question about the consumption of terror and the favored mode of participating in it. Considering the length, detail, and (ultimate) predictability of *The 9/11 Report*, its popularity is somewhat puzzling. American presidential commission reports have never had a wide or dedicated readership, nor have they ever been intended for one: hence the ‘executive summary’ with which they usually begin. Rather than being valuable for its content, I would wager that much of the significance of the text derived from what its content represented: a faith that the greatest riddle ever confronting the American nation-state (why do they hate us?) had been solved.

Before the report’s release, the Commission’s Staff Director, Philip D. Zelikow, announced that the panel had contracted with W.W. Norton to generate a low-cost, mass-market paperback version of their findings.¹⁷⁵ This agreement was meant to enable widespread national access to the text, and had the potential to be a uniquely lucrative royalty-free contract for the publisher. The unusual terms of this arrangement and the surprising choice to choose a publisher before the report had been finalized, a reversal of the usual progression for this type of publication, suggest a prescient anticipation of demand on the part of the Commission. And they were right. The best-selling popularity of the text might signal a significant increase in civic literacy, an awakened historical or political consciousness of the American people. Without totally discounting that interpretation, I suggest that the book also served another function, that it became a kind of fetish object, a comforting reminder of the government in control. If people were reading it from cover-to-cover, this would have required a significant commitment of

¹⁷⁵ Shenon, “9/11 Panel Chooses Publisher.”
attention and time, a durable, intimate connection between them and the nation-state. As pulpy, portable versions of the text proliferated, it is easy to imagine readers tucking them into pockets and backpacks, killing free time (at work, at the doctor’s office, maybe even at the airport) with a few pages here or there.

Compared to the hard-cover, high-gloss, and significantly more expensive Graphic Adaptation (the list price of my copy was U.S. $30.00, compared to the $6.99 I paid for my 9/11 Report), the original document is a populist artifact. The Graphic Adaptation is technically masterful, but harder to read, requiring (as graphic novels do) a more focused and sustained attention and a particular kind of patience, even though it is a shorter, more compact text than the original. There is also something qualitatively different about holding an illustrated history of terror (blood, smoke, women with torn clothing) and possessing a sedate, orderly treatise on it.

Although the graphic adaptation received an official seal of approval in the form of a laudatory and validating preface from Hamilton and Kean, it remains supplementary. The potentially terrifying visual is relegated away, onto whatever shelf would hold books under the heading “Current Affairs/Graphic Novel,” while The 9/11 Report itself (at least according to the back cover of mine) “will become a part of American history.” By purchasing this document instead of its lavishly colored doppelganger, the reader chooses the state and, more importantly, its imposition of order onto a bizarre and unwieldy time.

Sowing the Sea: Timing Osama bin Laden

When the state’s desire to provide appropriate temporal structure to its GWOT is surpassed by its capacity to do so, odd things can happen. This was precisely the case in early September 2007, when Osama bin Laden released his first video since 2004. In this video, originally posted on al-ekhlaas.org, an Islamist website hosted on an American server,176 bin Laden delivers a 27-minute assessment of the state of the American union, spoken in Arabic and subtitled in English.177 As its title—“The Solution”—suggests, he offers some ideas on how Americans might make things better, namely by widespread

176 MEMRI, “Special Dispatch #1079.”
177 The video is available through the Internet archive at <http://www.archive.org/details/The-Solution>.
conversion to Islam, which he posited as a solution for everything from high taxes to global warming. Unlike the sanctioned catharsis of the controlled return to the time of terror provided by texts like *The 9/11 Report*, the state stammered as it tried to make sense of bin Laden’s return to the screen, and the media did as well. Most commentary on the video overlooked the perspicuity of the video’s content and focused instead on the altered color of bin Laden’s beard, which became the locus of suspicion about the temporal provenance of the video. Such an arguably misplaced focus inadvertently reveals the urgency of the temporal crisis that terror provokes. Whereas the previous artifacts I have considered are all representations of terror, whether iconic, indexical, or symbolic, in this video, terror appears directly and unmediated. It overwhelms critical faculties, jamming all of the devices that we usually employ to consume media successfully.

Bin Laden’s aphoristic thesis is that the United States, in its GWOT, is “like the one who plows and sows the sea,” working with equal measures of diligence and foolishness, and ultimately reaping nothing but wasted effort. Generally, bin Laden provided a relatively coherent critique of American foreign policy, and endorsed such prominent antiwar Leftists as Noam Chomsky. Although the CIA and other sectors of the intelligence community used the occasion to make a renewed call for vigilance, the video contains no direct threats to the U.S. Instead, “The Solution” is predictably pessimistic and pedantic, and provides a sweeping indictment of the pervasive materialism and corporatization of American media, culture, and government.\textsuperscript{178}

Visually, the video is rather dull. Most of the video a still image of Osama bin Laden—wearing a saffron-colored garment with white trim and a matching cap, seated at a table in front of a brownish cloth backdrop—accompanied by an audio track of his

\textsuperscript{178} Citing the breadth and content of bin Laden’s argument, at least one observer—motivated in part, no doubt, by a general habit of discounting the intelligence of ‘terrorists’—suggested that he had a ghostwriter. The AP/FOXNews and *The Telegraph* (UK) hypothesized that bin Laden had help from Adam Gadahn, a Californian charged with treason in 2006 for his role as the star of a series of Al Qaeda videos (about whom much more in the next chapter). These two articles are the only that cite the skeptical unnamed ‘former senior intelligence official.’ *The Telegraph* seems to have picked up and reprinted this account from the AP story published by FOX, and does not provide any additional evidence besides this official’s hunch. See FOX’s “New Usama Bin Laden Video Urges Americans to Convert to Islam” and Tim Shipman’s “US Loner Helps bin Laden Taunt Bush.”
address. There is slight movement perceptible (a few gestures and shifts in position) during a total of 3.5 intermittent minutes of the tape, otherwise, he is unmoving, petrified. As an explanation for this poor image quality, the AP story picked up by FOXNews suggested that it was a result of Al Qaeda and its communication division, As-Sahab, passing the video through a number of different sites in an effort to ‘wash’ it of a digital fingerprint. Throughout, bin Laden makes a direct address to the camera; when the image is frozen, his voice is oddly disembodied as he stares out beyond the frame. The jarring sensation of watching a still image speak compounds the temporal conundrum provoked by the visage delivering the oration.

At the heart of this mystery is an apparent disconnect between the content of bin Laden’s speech and the face that delivers it. His skillful references to contemporary American politics—including the ‘disappointing’ but unsurprising failure of the newly-elected Democratic Congress to end the War in Iraq—signaled that it was a new message. Despite the clear textual evidence provided by his speech, however, early reports said that it was unclear when the tape was made, though they acknowledged that the image of bin Laden in the video matched a current still photo available on some Islamist websites. Al-Jazeera, in its coverage of these developments, classified this fretting

---

179 Hill writes that this video contained no moving images (Re-Imagining the War on Terror, 140). This is, as far as I can see, incorrect, if he is referring to “The Solution.” His endnotes seem to indicate that he is speaking of only video, when in fact bin Laden released two in less than a week: “The Solution” on September 7, 2007, and another on September 11, 2007, in honor of Waleed al-Shehri. If Hill is talking about the latter video, he is correct, as it only contains a still photograph of bin Laden. But that is somewhat beside the point, because his appearance in this photograph is identical to that from the video of four days previous. This error of fact seriously undermines the argument that Hill seems to want to make. He suggests that Osama bin Laden might actually be dead (have been dead) and anticipated his death by preparing a collection of videos to be strategically released by his followers; Hill takes the lack of moving images as support for this hypothesis.
182 Reuters, “Osama bin Laden Video Released” and New York Times, “New Osama bin Laden Video Said to Be Near.” To date, the only other scholarly treatment of bin Laden’s cinematic activity in September 2007 that I have found is Hill’s. His reading of the resulting media discourse is entirely opposite from mine. Hill contends that journalists and politicians wanted to believe that Osama bin Laden was alive, and so were eager to take his references to current events as evidence of that (Re-Imagining the War on Terror, 140). He argues that there was “little mention” of how suspicious bin Laden’s appearance was, and says that there was no effort to verify that the voice on the tapes was, indeed, bin Laden’s. This seems to me to be a misreading, though the disagreement between our arguments might be attributable to the difference in our frames of reference: my survey focused on American media, while Hill is writing in the British context.
somewhat bemusedly\textsuperscript{183} under the heading ‘Speculation.’ The confusion eddied around bin Laden’s beard, which was both shorter and darker than it had been three years before. Had he traded his Kalashnikov, the journalists and officials seemed to wonder, for scissors and black hair dye?

This absurd possibility accented the strangeness of the sequence of events surrounding the release of the video itself compounded the strangeness of the sequence of events surrounding the release of the video itself, which “made waves even before it appeared.”\textsuperscript{184} In its early edition on September 7, 2007, the \textit{New York Times} reported that Al Qaeda’s “media arm” had made a statement indicating that a new video featuring Osama bin Laden was forthcoming. At this point, the exact chronology of events becomes a bit unclear, appropriately enough. FOXNews, along with other sources, suggested that U.S. intelligence sources managed to obtain a copy of the video even before it was officially released, so that they were analyzing it even before the rest of the world knew it existed. At some point around the actual release of the tape, there were widespread server crashes on many of the main Islamist websites; further ‘speculation’ abounded about whether Al Qaeda had sabotaged itself in an effort to prevent any further leaks, or whether it was the consequence of a U.S.-sponsored counterterrorism hacking operation.

For all of this drama, however, the appearance of a new Osama bin Laden video should not have come as a surprise as the sixth anniversary of 9/11 approached. Although this release made “a bigger splash” than some of his others,\textsuperscript{185} bin Laden has a documented tendency to commemorate September 11\textsuperscript{th} in one way or another, and his last video before this one corresponded with the 2004 anniversary of the attacks. Even beyond his keen recollection of his own actions, bin Laden has a good memory for other historic dates, and he comments on the recent anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima

\textsuperscript{183} Simultaneous readings of Al-Jazeera and American network news content are amusingly illuminating. For example, shortly after the release of the 9/7/07 video, American news sources were fawning all over the analysis provided by the SITE Institute, a now-defunct organization that had been a clearinghouse for primary source information about the media activity of so-called terrorist groups. Wryly conveying SITE’s earnest analysis of bin Laden’s beard, the news organization described it diacritically, as an organization that “‘monitors ’terrorist websites’” (“US ‘Analysing New Bin Laden Video.’”)

\textsuperscript{184} Hosenball and Isikoff, “A New Tape,” para. 3.

\textsuperscript{185} AP, “New Usama bin Laden Video,” para. 22.
and Nagasaki (on August 6th and 9th, 1945, respectively). Terrorists in general have a surprising knack for timing things right; mid-morning, for example, would have been the time that most of the U.S. and the world was awake on Tuesday, September 11th, 2001. Accordingly, worries about repeat attacks tend to spike around their anniversaries, a perverse faith in predictability in a time whose rhythms are otherwise incalculable. Although Osama bin Laden jumped the gun by releasing this video early, he did not let the 2007 anniversary go unremarked, and released another video on the 11th, a eulogy for 9/11 hijacker Waleed al-Shehri, as a preface to a recording of al-Shehri reading his last will and testament. “The Solution” itself is peppered with references to ‘the 11th,’ but is oriented overall to the present state of things.

Without seeking out the video itself or a transcript thereof, a casual consumer of news would know very little about its content, but would likely find a painstaking exegesis of bin Laden’s facial hair. Indeed, the foremost popular American news sources—on the radio, television, or the internet—said very little about the content of the speech and quite a lot about the beard behind it. Of all relevant mainstream news reports, the online coverage by the AP/FOX was by far the most thorough, and that 30-paragraph story was anomalous among its much-shorter peers. Observers have long commented that, despite a carefully coordinated Al Qaeda media apparatus, Osama bin Laden just cannot get Westerners to listen to him: all Westerners are willing to do, it seems, is look.

So what, finally, about the beard? Amongst the jokes from intelligence officials about Just for Men, cracked “only half in jest,” the AP/FOXNews report once again

186 Debatin, “Plane Wreck With Spectators,” 164.
188 Part of the temporal experience of the GWOT, Hill argues in Re-Imagining the War on Terror, is that of waiting for future attacks.
189 Among these is a declaration that Americans are complicit in the murderousness of the GWOT because we did not impeach President Bush during his first term and indeed reelected him to a second. According to bin Laden, in so doing, we gave him a “mandate” to continue his policies. Hence, for bin Laden, our eschewing responsibility for the War’s casualties is like him professing his innocence for 9/11, “were I to claim such a thing.”
190 Bergen, Schuster, Nasr, and Eedle, “Al Qaeda’s Media Strategy,” 118. See also Hill, Re-Imagining the War on Terror, 33.
stands out for the detail of their coverage. In reviewing the video, they noted that Osama bin Laden’s beard was shorter than it was in 2004 and “apparently dyed, since in the past it was mostly gray.” They continued: “He speaks softly, as he usually does, and has dark bags under his eyes, but his appearance dispelled rumors that he had died.” Scrutiny on this order has a long history.

Whenever a racialized other appears to pose a threat to the American nation, his body becomes a site of unique fixation. Moreover, the sense that bin Laden seemed, somehow, to have gotten younger is perhaps a contemporary manifestation of the tendency to examine the criminal body for signs of “‘atavism.’” Bin Laden, all of this anxious coverage seemed to imply (however quietly), had somehow managed to reverse time. More broadly, all this worry, that bin Laden showed clear signs of vitality, dark circles not withstanding, just as much of the global intelligence community had been quietly hoping that he had died, reflects the paradoxical “threat to life that life itself poses” when the life in question is a dangerous one. Bin Laden, by his sheer persistent survival, imperils so many others, a threat even more acute now that he looks comparatively more youthful.

But it is not his life alone that is troubling here. Maureen Dowd, for example, in her September 9th, 2007 column on Fred Thompson’s announcement of his presidential run (in which he downplayed the threat posed by Osama bin Laden), described the video in typically florid prose. She called it “another creepy, fruitcake manifesto, [in which bin Laden] was wearing what seemed to be a fake beard left over from Woody Allen’s ‘Bananas’ and bloviating …” Media commentators often describe bin Laden “via a recourse to a lexicon of the ghostly,” but Dowd’s word choice here is especially telling. The term ‘creepy,’ as Dowd employs it, is arguably a synonym for

---

192 AP, “New Usama bin Laden Video,” para. 16.
193 We might also consider Heidegger’s essay, “The Age of the World-Picture,” in which he comments on the elision of visuality and epistemology, so that ‘getting the picture’ is literal in two ways at once (56).
194 Horn, The Criminal Body, 12.
197 Hill, Re-Imagining the War on Terror, 26.
‘uncanny’—a blurring of strange and familiar, refracted in terms of past and present. More precisely, the creepy sensation of uncanniness arises when a corrupted version of the past escapes from its temporal confines and unsettles the present. Bin Laden’s face has become iconic, an instantly recognizable harbinger of terror. Here we have that, but also something amiss, and the real problem with this video, I suspect, is not bin Laden’s beard, but the backwards movement in time that it represents.

Many news stories featured side-by-side before-and-after images of bin Laden, so that we could all squint and shake our heads in unison with the befuddled intelligence officials, aligning a still from his 2004 video with one from the 2007 message. The Telegraph, for example, provided a pair of images, with the caption “Image Conscious,” but omitted the dates, as if the relative position (left for old, right for new) of the pictures was proof enough of time’s passage. Rendering bin Laden as a still photograph returns him to a familiar mode of representation, far tamer than his assertive presentness in the video. It places him back within the purview of a medium that cannot, by its nature, depict time or its oddness, and so returns him to the realm of the sensible and orderly.

Of course, there is something oddly appropriate about bin Laden’s transformation for a war without end. Commenting on the video, President Bush called it a “reminder of the dangerous world in which we live” and, presumably, a justification for the continuation of the GWOT. Bin Laden, however, suggests that the U.S. should reevaluate its war plans, and listen to the soldiers, paying—with their “blood, nerves, and shattered limbs”—the ongoing price of American involvement in the Middle East. Either way, the literal backwardness of bin Laden’s video is a powerful assault on any narrative of American counterterrorist progress in the region, and seems to show that the same war of attrition that has so depleted the American people has served to invigorate their foe anew.

Already, in his filmic incarnation, bin Laden reaffirms both his presence (in the world of the living) and his absence (from U.S. authorities). Cinema is defined by the

---

“absence of the object seen,” and bin Laden’s insistent appearance underscores, paradoxically, where he is not. According to Metz, this tantalizing property is why cinema is such a powerful cultivator of desire, because it always shows the thing that can never be directly encountered or, in this case, captured at all. This elusiveness is directly compounded by the beard, which explains in part why it became such an object of fixation. Bin Laden’s new look is more than just a disguise, another tactic for evading capture (if it is even either one of those things). For in what the beard represents, it does protect him even more from the U.S. (even, paradoxically, as it makes him more visible). He has placed himself further away from the U.S. on a linear continuum of time, and in so doing, seemed to transcend human finitude itself.

That the American media was so stymied by this video, repeating the same speculative analyses again and again, suggests that a kind of trauma resulted from it, for which the only cure can be an unequivocal timestamp on his image. For Cathy Caruth, the origin of trauma “is an encounter that is not directly perceived as a threat to the life of the organism, but that occurs, rather, as a break in the mind’s experience of time.” Thus, it is significant that bin Laden’s video contained no threats, and indeed suggested no new perils, but one American official still characterized the content of bin Laden’s address as typical “‘ranting and raving.’” I imagine that someone else is feeling a little bit hysterical, too. The lack of familiar affronts might have been a relief, were it not for the nagging, uncanny indicator that bin Laden had not yet been wearied by the prolongation of the GWOT. So the video became a terrifying reminder of all that remained to be done, and a traumatic suggestion that it might the U.S. forever or, somehow, longer, to do it.

201 Eduardo Cadava argues that photography enables us to anticipate our own absence (*Words of Light*, 8), as a way of prompting us to mourn our own deaths, a time when we will exist only through images. Perhaps the anxiety around bin Laden’s video is also, in this way, existential.
203 Caruth, “Parting Words,” 79.
Hurry Up and Wait

My grandfather is a veteran of World War II, but a latecomer. Sent to the South Pacific after the War had all but ended, his job was basically to mop up, to begin undoing the damage that the War had done. His military career was beginning just as the War was ending, and history was moving on. Now, nearing 90, he remains temporally mismatched. As I was researching this chapter, he was being diagnosed with dementia. In part, I would wager, this is because he has always been kind of a quirky fellow, and so behavior that is baseline ‘normal’ for him is often unsettling to uninitiated strangers, including medical professionals. Officially, however, the diagnosis was based on his tendency to confuse now and then, becoming inconsolably and often belligerently fearful because he believes himself to be back on those decimated islands. Plagued by these sensations in his waking life and haunted by night terrors in is sleep, had he fought in a later war, he almost certainly would have been diagnosed with PTSD. But in many ways, I think his puzzlement about past and present is logical, because his military career was so temporally paradoxical. Even beyond his movement against the current of history, when asked about his time in the military, my grandfather summarizes his Army service as follows: “Hurry up and wait.” Part of his difficulty was managing these contradictory demands, which also correspond to the two most agonizing ways to pass time: rushing and doing nothing, with the only reward for one being the other.

Likewise, the visual culture of the GWOT must manage two divergent temporal registers: the instantaneity of terror and the prolongedness of trauma. Despite their different durations, both of these are equally capable of scrambling past, present, and future. The diversity of strategies, of visual practices, for confronting this disorientation suggests that none are fully effective. All of this is a continual effort to adapt, as all organisms must, in order to survive, to the distinctive (dis)temporality of terror, a wish to save time, to protect it from the disorder of terror.

As the vehicle that conveys so much terror, as a mode of communication that has an intimate, constitutive relation to time, the visual is a logical accomplice for this process. But it is also an unreliable one. All of the GWOT’s temporal practices of the

---

205 Block and Zakay, “Retrospective and Prospective Timing,” 59.
visual have a stuttering in common. This stuttering has a variety of temporal grammars. It unwinds terror haltingly. Or it backtracks, approaching terror again and again to start over. Or it proceeds methodically, one scene at a time, diligently working through. Ultimately, however, in order to repair the terror they represent, these texts (and their audiences) must relive and, hence, renew it. David Campbell argues that the state is (a) performative, that it must continually assert and reproduce itself in order to exist and to remain meaningful. Terror and trauma both disturb the smooth, orderly, predictable repetition, jamming the mechanism, introducing uncertainty. The entrance of the state into the fray of time, terror, and visuality is a concession to this stuttering, these scenes where history gets stuck. The state tries to make order but trips over something trivial, gives up, blames the image itself, moves on.

For a time, all this is good entertainment. Properly managed, the visual crisis wrought by terror can spark innovations in form and content or an occasion to mock the most frightening man in the world. In the end, however, it is something simple, a still image, that most basic of visual currencies, where the system breaks down, where an orderly visual narrative once and for all becomes impossible, proving finally what we had suspected all along. For a time, all of this is acceptable. The nation feels entitled to a moment to catch its breath, recover, regain its equilibrium. This is depressing, surely, but an important step in the linear process of grieving. The state could use a rest, too. This long interruption, this tense pause, is a time for gathering potential energy and nursing a grudge.

Eventually, when enough is enough, when life must finally go on and move forward, the state decides there is no more time for mourning. The objective, though, is not the resumption of the normal pace of life, but a move to what Giorgio Agamben describes as a very particular kind of “standstill,” an exceptional exercise whose visual manifestations I will consider in more detail in the next chapter. Achieving this stasis, in which the law itself is put on hold in the name of a national emergency so that a kind of

---

207 Agamben, *State of Exception*, 41.
order can be restored, kills time in order to save it. Such an enforced hiatus is the easiest rejoinder to the chaotic temporality of terror.

And so the state grows restive, gets impatient, eyes the clock.
Chapter 5: Juridical

On October 11, 2006, the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) made a stunning announcement: for the first time since the era of World War II, it was charging an American with treason. That American, Adam Yahiye Gadahn, known to Ayman al-Zawahiri, other Al Qaeda members, and much of his audience as Azzam al-Amriki (Azzam the American), was being indicted on the basis of his appearance in a series of five Al Qaeda “propaganda videotapes.” Although Gadahn’s conduct was certainly extraordinary, the real shock was the invocation of treason, a concept that had been legally dormant in the U.S. for more than 50 years.

This chapter is a consideration of the implications of Gadahn’s indictment, an effort to understand the circumstances surrounding it and to theorize about the disjuncture between his actions and the government’s response. Indicting Gadahn for the crime of treason is a juridical practice of the visual, a state effort to confront the visual threat that he poses by leveraging legal and, more precisely, extra-legal powers to govern, discipline, and contain it. When other practices prove inadequate to the task of

\[ \text{footnote} \]

1 Al-Zawahiri is the long-time ‘deputy’ of Osama bin Laden. There is evidence that a tactical and ideological rift developed between these two men in the years following September 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2001, but he remains a highly visible fugitive in the GWOT.

2 USDOJ, “U.S. Citizen Indicted.”

3 The Gadahn videos are part of a much larger genre of jihad videos. Jihad videos range from the simple, polemical delivery of information to the extraordinary violence of taped executions. Despite their occasional sloppiness and technical roughness, most jihad videos are carefully and thoughtfully produced; many of them are skillfully edited and surprisingly cinematic. The genre has its origins in Iran; during the 1970s, the Ayatollah Khomeini repeatedly released audiotape sermons, which were widely circulated among his followers. During the 1990s, Osama bin Laden reinvigorated this distribution strategy with his messages, of which there are an estimated 250,000 copies. Perfected by militants in Bosnia and further refined in Afghanistan and Chechnya (Pintak, Reflections in a Bloodshot Lens, 174), the emergence of the jihad video as a cultural form is the latest stage in this evolution. Today, jihad videos originate from Islamist communities everywhere. As they have proliferated, they have also become a more recognizable genre to those outside the communities in which they are produced.
combating terror in visual culture, the juridical remains. Most scholars contend that the charges against Gadahn are largely symbolic, but despite this or, indeed, because of it, the case illuminates much about the legal and representational histories of treason in the U.S.; the changing nature of ‘threat’ and the pivotal role of the visual in the GWOT; and the state’s efforts to manage imaged, embodied terror.

“Aid and Comfort”: The Charges Against Adam Gadahn

The indictment in United States of America v. Adam Gadahn begins with background information: a recapitulation of the events of September 11th, 2001 and an assertion of Al Qaeda’s responsibility for them. Such a preface implies a great deal about the stakes of this case. In criminal proceedings, as Elaine Scarry observes, the plaintiff is always the state, no matter who the actual victim of the crime is. Here, the United States has literally been wronged on multiple occasions, beginning on September 11th and then repeatedly thereafter, each time Gadahn appeared on camera. The treason charge pertains to a pattern of visual activity that started on some unknown date, and the formal indictment ends with a citation of Gadahn’s September 11th, 2006 video. These cinematic activities provided the USDOJ with enough evidence to support the treason allegation, but if they needed more, Gadahn could provide it, as his film career continued after the indictment. Gadahn released new tapes on May 29th, 2007; January 7th, 2008; October 4, 2008; and April 12, 2009, and some suspect that he has also assisted his compatriots—including Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri—with their video releases as well.

5 This video got more attention than some of his previous releases, primarily for Gadahn’s reference to the April 16th, 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech; Gadahn intimated that Al Qaeda had plans for the U.S. that included even more spectacular carnage than that caused by Cho Seung-Hui.
6 This video, “How to Prevent a Repeat of the Gaza Holocaust,” made even fewer headlines than Gadahn’s previous releases, which is surprising because it is by far the most ambitious film that he has released to date. It is nearly 90 minutes long (feature-length), and sophisticated in composition and narrative. Gadahn narrates the piece, which begins with an accounting of American military conduct in places like Germany, Japan, and Vietnam, citing the fire-bombing of Dresden, the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the use of Agent Orange and depleted uranium in Iraq as evidence of American barbarism. The film contains montages of interview and archival footage and condemns American conduct, even as Gadahn argues that the West “has begun to stagger.” The video can be downloaded in its entirety from the Internet Archive at http://www.archive.org/download/GazzaHolocost/Gaza.Not.Again.Eng.med.rm.
Public knowledge of Gadahn is sketchy, largely because of the media’s relative silence on the case. We know the basic story of his past, but what we have been told has been filtered through the lens that nations tend to apply to all cases of treason, namely the search for biographical information that might explain the traitor’s actions and intentions, although such an analysis often relies upon conjecture and can distract the public from the true significance of the case.

Gadahn, known variously as Abu Suhayb Al-Amriki, Abu Suhail Al-Amriki, Abu Suhayb, Yihya Majadin Adams, Adam Pearlman, Yayah, Azzam al-Amriki, and Azzam the American, was born on September 1, 1978 and raised on a goat farm in rural California. His father, Phil, was born to the Pearlman family, a comfortably middle-class Jewish family, but he had a conversion experience as a young adult, and like Gadahn’s mother, remained at least nominally Christian throughout Gadahn’s upbringing. Gadahn was homeschooled, but as an adolescent, he left his rural community and moved in with his grandparents and then became a Muslim during a period of involvement with the Islamic Society of Orange County. His early life contains very little of note, but it is often the case that a society’s most vilified members are otherwise among its least remarkable subsequent explanatory narratives bridge the gap between mundane reality and dazzling fiction.

Gadahn’s actual story quickly became more interesting in the late 1990s, when he left the U.S. for Pakistan, his last known whereabouts. Though he maintained intermittent contact with his family until 2001, it is widely presumed that his involvement with Al Qaeda began soon after his arrival. By early 2004, he was wanted by the FBI for questioning about his alleged attendance of an Al Qaeda training camp and his translation work for the organization. Gadahn appeared in his first jihad video in October of that year, and there, he declared that he had joined Al Qaeda, which he

---

7 Fine, Difficult Reputations, 40.
8 Carlton, Treason, 5.
9 Gadahn’s exact place of birth remains unclear. Khatchadourian cites Gadahn’s father, who indicates that Adam was born in Oregon, but other accounts say that he was born in California.
10 Fine, Difficult Reputations, 1.
11 The media’s emphasis on this coheres with a pattern, beginning in the U.S. with depictions of Benedict Arnold, of representing traitors as estranged from their families (Fine, Difficult Reputations, 47).
described as “‘a movement waging war on America and killing large numbers of Americans.’”12 Shortly thereafter, in November, the government publicized intelligence speculating with confidence that Gadahn was the star of the video.13 According to the indictment, Gadahn released four more videos in the next two years. By October 2006, the USDOJ could finally and publicly confirm that the mysterious, apparently American figure who had been known for some time only as Azzam the American was indeed Adam Gadahn of Orange County, California.

With his identity verified, the USDOJ was able to complete its narrative14 about the legal status and ramifications of Gadahn’s actions. Consequently, the rather owlish Azzam the American has now incurred three charges, detailed in the indictment: Treason (USC Title 18, Part I, Chapter 115, § 2381), Providing Material Support to Al Qaeda (USC Title 18, Part I, Chapter 113B, § 2339B), and Aiding and Abetting (USC Title 18, Part I, Chapter I, § 2),15 though I will deal only with the first of these here. The text of the indictment meticulously references and excerpts passages from his video messages. In so doing, it offers evidence in the law’s favored mode of “haunted repetition,”16 calling specters in order to banish them, rearticulating the unspeakable crimes so as to enumerate and prosecute them, a naming that intends to air the wrongs for punishment, but which might also reinvigorate them.

The indictment cites the following as evidence of Gadahn’s treason: his October 27, 2004 declaration of membership in a group at war with America; his September 11th, 2005 warning of attacks on Los Angeles and Melbourne; his July 7th, 2006 admonition to Muslims that they should not “shed” any “tears” over attacks on Western targets; his September 2nd, 2006 doom-saying about the state of America’s “war machine”; and finally, his September 11th, 2006 reflection on 9/11, in which he refers to the U.S. as

---

13 Ensor, “Intelligence Points to Californian on Terror Tape.”
14 For a consideration of narrative’s place in the law, see Korobkin, “Narrative Battles in the Courtroom.”
15 I accessed selected sections of the United States Code (USC) and the Constitution through Cornell Law School’s Legal Information Institute, online at law.cornell.edu.
“enemy soil.”\textsuperscript{17} Although the FBI surmised that Gadahn attended an Al Qaeda training camp,\textsuperscript{18} and thus presumably would have been capable of inflicting more than rhetorical damage, this is not mentioned in the treason indictment, and is only implied in the other counts. Thus, Gadahn’s traitorousness is a designation based solely upon his appearance in these video communiqués, entirely upon infractions committed in the visual realm.

Among all the crimes for which Gadahn is indicted, treason is unique. Indeed, among all criminal acts in the U.S., treason is the only one whose punishment is stipulated in the Constitution.\textsuperscript{19} Yet despite the absolute and foundational importance of treason to American law, most experts agree that its meaning and utility are determined largely by context.\textsuperscript{20} American treason law was imported largely from British high treason statutes, an adaptation that is particularly ironic because the earliest authors of American law could themselves have been charged as traitors to the Crown.\textsuperscript{21} English treason law, modeled on that of the Romans, was officially codified in 1352\textsuperscript{22} and has, since its inception, included “hostile thoughts”\textsuperscript{23} and sentiments among its actionable offenses. Although the American doctrine coheres with this application in spirit, distinguishing such rhetoric from that which is shielded by the First Amendment guarantee to freedom of expression can be difficult. In a landmark 1969 ruling on seditious speech, the Supreme Court decided \textit{Watts v. U.S.} and held that “crude political hyperbole”—in this case, a threat against the life of President Johnson—was a protected form of speech, or at least not grounds for criminal charges. The USDOJ interpreted Gadahn’s videos differently, and has taken their content as a significant affront and a legitimate threat.

In the United States, the crime of treason is outlined in Article III, Section 3 of the Constitution. The description is a bit narrower than its British precedent, a remnant of

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Op. cit.}, United States District Court for the Central District of California. “United States of America v. Adam Gadahn (SA CR 05-254(A)).”
\textsuperscript{18} Evan Kohlmann reasons that this is unlikely, and his motivation for debunking this claim seems to be a wish to undermine Gadahn’s credibility as a terrorist and perhaps also to expose the gullibility of the American intelligence officials who believe him (“Adam Gadahn: Myths and Facts”).
\textsuperscript{19} Quan, Fisher, and Reddy, “Gadah is Traitor, US Says.”
\textsuperscript{20} Carlton, \textit{Treason}, 1, 244.
\textsuperscript{21} Fletcher, \textit{Romantics at War}, 121.
\textsuperscript{22} Carney, “The Enemy Within,” 27.
\textsuperscript{23} Fletcher, \textit{Romantics at War}, 118.
the authors’ effort to insulate themselves against accusations of treason, and reads as follows:

Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort. No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act, or on confession in open court.

The United States Code reiterates and expands this:

Whoever, owing allegiance to the United States, levies war against them or adheres to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort within the United States or elsewhere, is guilty of treason and shall suffer death, or shall be imprisoned not less than five years and fined under this title but not less than $10,000; and shall be incapable of holding any office under the United States (18 U.S.C. § 2381).

Notwithstanding this pithy discussion of legal parameters and this succinct demarcation of right and wrong, the Constitution is utilized by actors and institutions who often disagree about its meaning, intent, and application. As a result, the history of the history of treason in the U.S. is complicated and often unclear. Even The New York Times has struggled with its chronology of treason cases, and needed to offer a subsequent correction to the details of the article it ran upon Gadahn’s indictment. Most historians agree that the last American treason case was Haupt II, decided in 1952, which pertained to a family’s actions during the Second World War. In the years since, the government has refrained from accusing anyone of what is arguably the most serious crime that a citizen can commit.

24 Fletcher, Romantics at War, 128; “Corrections.”
25 Hans Herbert Haupt was a young man recruited by the Germans for sabotage. Upon returning to the U.S. via U-boat, he headed to Chicago to find his parents, Hans Max and Emma, who housed and supported him. Following a 1942 Supreme Court decision, the younger Hans and seven co-conspirators were executed for their crimes. For sheltering his son while allegedly aware of his wrongdoings and helping him to find a car and employment, Hans Max was first condemned to death and then, on appeal, was sentenced instead to a $10,000 fine and life in prison. In 1943, he launched an unsuccessful appeal of his conviction, and though the Supreme Court in 1947 acknowledged that there was some misconduct during the case, it maintained that this was not sufficient to overturn the conviction. Ten years later, President Eisenhower commuted his sentence to 13 years but did so on the condition that he return to Germany. Haupt was released from prison and then deported (“Corrections”; Fletcher, Romantics at War, 127; Haupt v. U.S.)
Despite the gravity of treason and its centrality to the documents upon which American jurisprudence is founded, like all other statutes, the “authority” of treason laws “rests only on the credit granted to them,” and treasonous acts matter only as much as the justice system decides. Moreover, the same dilemma that inheres in any prohibitive injunction operates here. According to Walter Benjamin, God’s commandment against murder, for example, always precedes the act, but once the crime has been committed, the commandment has failed, and matters now only in and for the conscience of the killer, which means that it must be (violently) reasserted later. Any prosecutorial invocation of the law reveals the inadequacy of its preventative mechanisms. This makes the moment of indicting citation a perilous one, in which the power of the law contingent on the willingness of the government and the populace to expend the effort required to operationalize the law and its penalties anew.

On the whole, treason cases in the U.S. are infrequent. They tend to multiply during times of extreme national duress, perhaps because in these instances the symbolic and political necessities offset the symbolic and political costs. Among the reasons that they are “so rare” in general is the difficulty of meeting the Constitutional evidentiary standards. Moreover, the U.S. has, since WWII, tended to enter conflicts without officially declaring war. Such a lack of ‘real’ conflict confuses the task of officially defining enemies both internally and externally, and might make it less worthwhile to do so. It is always risky for a government to confess that it has errant subjects, and when there is no real war afoot, the costs of amassing and publicizing the kind of evidence required for a treason case might outweigh the benefits. For a variety of reasons, then, the restrictiveness of the legal definition of treason has prevented widespread prosecution under its terms.

The American public, on the other hand, has been far less hesitant to brand disloyalty as treason; such popular designations are far easier to apply than their official

28 Out of the 39 treason cases before Gadahn’s, 17 were raised between 1838 and 1871 (Carney, “The Enemy Within,” 35).
29 Vinciguerra, “Satisfying the Constitution on Treason,” para. 4.
30 Carney, “The Enemy Within,” 20; see also Fletcher, Romantics at War, 128.
counterparts. Even when there was widespread accusation, as of the 21 GI ‘turncoats’ in the Korean War\textsuperscript{31} and of Jane Fonda during Vietnam, no one since the Haupt family has been formally charged. The case of Jane Fonda provides an interesting point of comparison for Gadahn’s actions. In the contexts of two unpopular wars, Fonda’s radio broadcasts were somehow excusable, while the combination of Gadahn’s rhetoric and his insistent appearing were not. Gadahn does not speak or seek to present himself as an American, but Fonda always remained legible as a citizen/American, as her clear physical (phenotypical) difference from the North Vietnamese for whom she spoke would have prevented any kind of confusion about who she ‘really’ was; Gadahn, on the other hand, is immersed in and largely indistinguishable from the enemy for whom he appears, in this way, his treason becomes an embodied, undeniable fact. Gender also differentiates Fonda from Gadahn: even if a nation-state was to admit that it was threatened by a woman, it would be deeply embarrassing to admit that such a threat was serious enough to be treasonous. Overall, in the intervening years between Haupt II and Gadahn’s indictment, there have been a number of arguably more serious transgressions, including a spate of espionage cases\textsuperscript{32} in the 1980s,\textsuperscript{33} where the charge of treason could have been levied and was not.

Most notable among these was the 2001 capture of John Walker Lindh, who was apprehended in Afghanistan after being injured during the American invasion. Though he claimed, upon interrogation, to have been affiliated not just with the Taliban but with Al Qaeda itself, his subsequent allegations of malfeasance and torture by American agents after his capture compromised the government’s ability to prosecute all ten charges upon which he was originally indicted. Furthermore, Lindh was portrayed both by his family and, in turn, by the media as a damaged young man, sickly and isolated through most of his childhood and enfeebled as an adult. As if to prove the accuracy of these depictions, Lindh claimed that he did not understand the nature of the Al Qaeda

\textsuperscript{31} Besides traitorousness, other popular explanations for their refusal to repatriate to the U.S. at the end of the war included personal “quirks” and Communist brainwashing (Zweiback, “The 21 Turncoat GIs,” para. 4; para. 2).

\textsuperscript{32} The Defense Personnel Security Research Center (PERSEREC) maintains an unclassified database of espionage cases from 1947-2001.

\textsuperscript{33} Herbig, “A History of Recent American Espionage,” 39.
camp he admitted to attending, and that he did not realize that the ‘jihad’ they preached meant war with America. All of these circumstances aggregated into a persuasive and durable narrative of exoneration; for example, Raffi Khatchadourian, writing for The New Yorker about Adam Gadahn, painstakingly distinguished Lindh’s actions from treason, arguing that even though he fought for the Taliban, he “never plotted against America.”

In this assessment, versions of which reverberate throughout the scanty literature on Gadahn, actions matter less than thoughts or intentions, and the strangeness of this logic highlights the often irrational nature of treason charges.

Eventually, having already pled ignorance, Lindh pled guilty on two relatively minor counts in a plea bargain. The government offered Lindh the deal “on the eve of an evidence-suppression hearing” about the case, but also included a gag order. Sentenced despite tearful objections in 2002, he will likely serve 17 years for the two crimes to which he agreed to confess, aiding the Taliban and carrying a weapon in the process. Because he had been in the custody of the authorities since his capture, Lindh’s access to the media was tightly controlled, and he communicated to the American press and public only at their behest. He appeared on command rather than at his own volition; in this, he is essentially different from Gadahn.

Perhaps because his image was so manageable, because his wild-eyed and bewildered countenance contrasts so sharply to Gadahn’s unnerving deadpan, the government assiduously avoided designating Lindh as a traitor. The relevant USDOJ press releases indicated that the apparently harmless quisling had been charged, among other things, with ‘conspiracy to kill Americans,’ a crime which technically did not

---

34 Khatchadourian, “Azzam the American,” 2.
35 In a comparison between John Walker Lindh and Yaser Hamdi, Jane L. Twomey argues that the government’s relative leniency in sentencing Lindh was a result of his class and racial privilege (“Lessons from Sacco and Vanzetti,” 133). Without discounting the salience of these markers, I object to her depiction of Lindh’s treatment as immeasurably more fair than that of Hamdi. Although the government was surprisingly easy on him, Twomey’s portrayal overlooks the likelihood that Lindh was tortured and the evidence that his case was mishandled. These aspects of Lindh’s story do not preclude acknowledgment that Hamdi was also victimized.
36 C. Savage, Takeover, 108.
37 Candiotti, “Walker Lindh Sentenced to 20 Years,” para. 2.
38 C. Savage, Takeover 109.
exist. George P. Fletcher aptly described the government’s treatment of him as “avuncular,” and the first-term Bush administration domesticated him, in Slavoj Žižek’s terms, into a new kind of homo sacer that is the “privileged object of humanitarian biopolitics,” whose body is the object of both ministration and incarceration. Accordingly, there was no substantive investigation of his questionable treatment during interrogation, but the government was also relatively timid in their handling of the case, repeatedly implying that he was a hapless “victim of circumstance,” rather than a willful traitor. All of this suggests that ‘treason’ is largely a matter of convenience, context, and narration, a set of legal criteria shot through with representational dilemmas.

“An American Citizen Who Made a Choice”: Why Call It Treason? Fundamental to the notion of traitorousness is the individualism of the traitor. The nation-state must be able to identify the traitor as a competent individual, willfully distanced from his/her community and estranged from his/her government. It must also be able to establish that the alleged traitor was a competent, cognizant actor, a person fully capable of self-determination who chose “to engage in [unlawful] activities, fully aware of their significance—the true mark of a villain.” Although Gadahn’s case was reshaped to these demands with relative ease, it would have been very difficult for the government to meet these informal criteria for charging Lindh with treason.

The cases of Captain James J. Yee and Lieutenant Colonel William H. Steele follow the course that the administration established in its treatment of Lindh. In September 2003, the U.S. military charged Yee, a Muslim serving as a chaplain at Guantánamo Bay, with a variety of infractions, ranging from adultery to espionage. By March of the following year, however, the military had dropped all accusations. Official documents cited a concern about publicizing classified information during a trial, while

---

39 Fletcher, *Romantics at War*, 129.
40 Ibid., 131.
42 Fletcher, *Romantics at War*, 131.
43 Ibid., 118.
44 Fine, *Difficult Reputations*, 41.
most observers suggested that the high-profile case had devolved into a “lingering embarrassment”\textsuperscript{45} for the Bush administration, as Yee became a minor celebrity.

Yee resigned from the military with an honorable discharge, and the service was apparently free of subversive activity until October 2005. This is the beginning of the yearlong period of treachery cited in the May 2007 indictment of Steele, a former commander and known advocate for detainees’ rights at Camp Cropper, a detention facility in Iraq. Steele, whose case was referred to a court-martial that June, was charged with nine different crimes, including illegal storage of classified information; possession of pornographic videos; mishandling of government funds (particularly provision of Cuban cigars for Saddam Hussein); conduct unbecoming of an officer (fraternization with a detainee’s college-age daughter); “maintaining an ‘inappropriate relationship’ with an interpreter”,\textsuperscript{46} and the capital offense of “aiding the enemy,” following from allegations that he allowed detainees unmonitored, undocumented cell phone access. When the indictment was announced, observers surmised that prosecuting it to a death sentence would unlikely,\textsuperscript{47} reflecting the challenges associated with proving disloyalty, and the even greater difficulties of demonstrating beyond a reasonable doubt that such misconduct constituted a verifiable threat to the state. Predictably, during his court-martial in October 2007, Steele was acquitted of aiding the enemy, even as he was committed of a “federal espionage based offense by having unauthorized possession of classified information,”\textsuperscript{48} among other offenses.

Yee’s and Steele’s cases, interesting in their own rights, also illumine two key dimensions of Gadahn’s indictment. First, although the military suspected Yee and Steele of exceedingly serious crimes, espionage and aiding the enemy respectively, it did not explicitly accuse either one of treason. Indeed, the military cited Yee and Steele for laundry lists of offenses, but seems to have avoided raising the specter of the ultimate crime against the nation, reinforcing the symbolic uniqueness of treason and also of Gadahn’s case. Secondly, all three men are alleged to have committed visual offenses;

\textsuperscript{45} Lewis, “Charges Dropped Against Chaplain,” para. 2.
\textsuperscript{46} Cave, “American Colonel Accused, para. 3.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., para. 7.
\textsuperscript{48} Multi-National Force - Iraq, “Court-Martial Results.”
among other things, Yee and Steele were incriminated for possessing pornography. In their cases, however, the visual infractions were peripheral to the most serious counts; conversely, the visual is at the core of the narrative of Gadahn’s wrongdoing. Gadahn has usurped the visual from the nation-state, which believes itself to be the rightful wartime possessor of the domain of the image, and in so doing, he demonstrated his unfitness for membership in it. That such arguably trivial misbehaviors as possessing pornography can be appended so readily and so freely of irony to much more serious accusations indicates a concern about the visual conduct of those who are entrusted with representing and defending the nation-state. Visual violations of this agreement, as in the cases of Yee and Steele, became tantamount to far more serious breaches of trust. These cases reveal the federal government’s strategic interest in the visual in times of national distress, and Gadahn’s case reveals the searing intensity that this focus can acquire.

Americans have a tendency to construct convenient and simplistic narratives about terrorism, circulated quickly and ubiquitously through the media, and this habit shapes the case against Gadahn as a traitor/terrorist. These myths are appealing because they promise solutions to the urgent and perplexing problem of terrorism, and more precisely, entail remedies that the U.S. can mete out. By isolating singular and direct causes, they indicate clear and promising targets. They are especially tantalizing in a war against an enemy apparently without precedent in brutality and unpredictability.

The ease with which terrorism can be represented as spectacularly, horribly “new-fangled”⁴⁹ has made it a favorite topic of the media, which continues to seize on even the smallest bits of news and the remotest of threats. The exaggerated attention that terror usually receives further underscores the peculiarity of Gadahn’s case; on this landmark in the War on Terror, the media has been uncharacteristically quiet. Gadahn’s indictment should be nothing if not newsworthy, combining the story of a remarkable legal development with the drama of betrayal on a national scale, and yet, coverage has been sparse.

Of course, the media has not been absolutely silent, and the frequency and depth of reporting on Gadahn have increased since the indictment was announced, but the

---

⁴⁹ Retort, *Afflicted Powers*. 
magnitude of the charge itself surely warranted more press than it received at first: passing mentions on NPR, a scattershot collection of parenthetical references in stories on related topics, and a handful of articles in newspapers here and there. The most detailed portrait of Gadahn comes from a biographical essay in *The New Yorker*, but it focuses as much on Gadahn’s adolescent interest in death metal as on anything else. The fixation on such arguably irrelevant but supposedly telling minutia reflects the popularity of ‘profiling’\(^50\)—the criminological scrutinizing of and hypothesizing about quirks and embodied signs—as a law-enforcement and crime-prevention strategy. Notwithstanding this journalistic inspection, the public still has very little meaningful information about their enemy, but the question of why Gadahn was charged with treason also provides an indirect answer to the riddle of why the media seems to care very little about him. Both of these puzzles have a common solution in the inapplicability of our most cherished myths to the drama of Gadahn’s actions and to the persona he has constructed.

Equally as puzzling as the media’s disinterest in Gadahn is the pattern of the coverage that he has received, namely that print media outlets have paid him far more attention than their image-laden counterparts. Gadahn’s press dossier consists mainly of references in magazines, newspapers, and radio broadcasts, and he is largely absent from television; some Internet news stories include outside links to his films, but these are extraneous to the texts themselves. The precise reason for this counterintuitive allocation of publicity remains unclear, but I attribute it to the lack of anything spectacular about Gadahn’s appearance or video productions. In light of the state’s need for a spectacular victory in response to the spectacular defeat of September 11\(^{th}\)\(^51\), Gadahn’s dullness translates into a lack of newsworthiness.

All in all, Azzam al-Amriki’s on-screen presence is surprisingly benign. Though the content of his speeches is deeply, and sometimes violently, critical of America and its “Coalition of Terror,”\(^52\) his demeanor is calm. He often addresses the audience from an

---

\(^{50}\) Valverde, *Law and Order*, 131.


office, seated at a desk with a computer. His English is free of marked accent, though he does depart from Westernized pronunciations of proper nouns like place names. Heightening his appearance of relative harmlessness is the fact that he seems to have a slight speech impediment—his enunciation is careful and a bit unnatural. Gadahn’s manner is professorial; he addresses the camera with a composure strangely reminiscent of the many experts interviewed on American news about the War on Terror. With relatively minor sartorial and rhetorical modifications, Gadahn could pass easily for an American critic of the war, as he regularly proffers arguments that are “articulate, reasonable, and troublingly persuasive.” Overall, the unarmed Adam Gadahn is far different than the “caricature” of terrorists so often presented in the media, and is largely unrepresentable within the prevailing schemas.

Ayman al-Zawahiri’s introduction of Azzam the American in their July 2006 video dramatizes this difficulty of explanation. Zawahiri presents Gadahn as “our brother,” which is straightforward enough. But Zawahiri continues by describing the erstwhile Californian “as one concerned about the fate which awaits his people.” But who, in this instance, are Gadahn’s people? There are two mutually exclusive answers: Al Qaeda or Americans. He sounds like us but talks like them; he is dressed like them but still looks inexorably like us. Gadahn is both and thus, in a way, neither, and his simultaneous doubleness and nothingness haunts the indictment and the discourses surrounding it.

Zawahiri’s ambiguous designation reflects the complexity of Gadahn’s situation and the murkiness of treason in any case, difficulties which are further compounded by their coexistence with popular and administrative desires to isolate clear origins of terrorism. Such efforts simplify the myriad dynamics which coalesce to make terrorism seem like a necessary and viable political strategy, but despite their limited explanatory capacity, narratives about the origins of terrorism have almost limitless ideological and

53 Khatchadourian cites interviews with Gadahn’s relatives who claim that in their last contacts with him, he had developed (or affected) an accent in his English; this is not my assessment of his videos at all.
54 Stern, “Al Qaeda, American Style,” para. 4.
55 Pintak, Reflections in a Bloodshot Lens, 124.
political utility, and so they proliferate. In the process, they constrain discourse and representations, delimiting the stage upon which Gadahn appears and the terms by which he is interpreted and, consequently, interpellated.

Generous readings of terrorism include the claim that it emerges from impoverishment, whether of resources, education, or opportunity; this relationship of causality is often cited to explain treason as well.\(^5^8\) Despite the persistence of this myth and the war-weary appeal of the simple solutions it entails, its premises are generally disconfirmed by the situations of many notorious terrorists, the majority of whom are both well-educated and affluent.\(^5^9\) Gadahn himself is aware of this fiction, and in his September 11, 2006 address, he reminds his audience of its flimsiness:

Look at the [9/11] pilots …. All of them had lived and studied in the West. All of them had the world within their reach, if they had wanted it. But how could they live with themselves, if they were to enjoy this worldly life while their Ummah burns?\(^6^0\)

The etiology of disadvantage applies no more to Gadahn. Although the family goat farm might not have been the lap of luxury, there is no indication that Gadahn was beset by frustrated ambitions or bereft of alternatives to working for Al Qaeda. Indeed, the cleanly modern setting from which Gadahn addresses his audience is not unusual for jihad videos made for similar purposes, and bespeaks nothing of scarcity or deprivation. And so there is no choice but to dismiss this first myth.

Another rather evenhanded approach to terrorists and traitors alike is the suggestion that they are somehow ignorant, whether because they have been brainwashed (how the media depicted the Korean War turncoats) or because they lack capacities for discernment and judgment (as in the portrayal of John Walker Lindh). This myth suggests that if terrorists knew the real truth, they would act differently. And though many Americans would likely object to Gadahn’s July 2006 characterization of Western involvement in the Middle East as “100 years of blood-soaked colonialist history,” his

\(^{58}\) Carlton, *Treason*, 2.

\(^{59}\) Pintak, *Reflections in a Bloodshot Lens*, 112.

obvious fluency with complex political questions indicates that he is not an automaton, but is rather possessed of agency and intelligence. Gadahn’s actions, therefore, do not fit into either of these more sympathetic frameworks for understanding anti-American sentiment and behavior.

Some might prefer rather less tolerant explanations; chief among these is an association of Islam with violence. The course of action dictated by this supposition is to deal with all Muslims as potential terrorists, to confront them militarily and preemptively, and to emphasize the relative peacefulness and rationality of Christianity and Judaism. In this instance, Gadahn’s biography is confounding, and his generally quiescent demeanor is inassimilable to the spectacular images of violence and chaos employed by the government and the media to represent this dichotomy. First, Gadahn professes allegiance to a peaceful version of Islam, but not a pacifist one, a religion willing to respond with force, but only if provoked. On the fourth anniversary of 9/11, Gadahn described his comrades in the following terms:

We love peace, but when the enemy violates that peace or prevents us from achieving it, then we love nothing better than the heat of battle, the echo of explosions, and slitting the throats of the infidels.61

And for those unconvinced by his depiction of Islam, there is a second rebuttal: Gadahn was born into a Jewish family. Certainly, one might counter that he became violent and traitorous after his conversion to a violent and traitorous faith, or that he was inherently violent and traitorous and hence drawn to Islam. Either way, both explanations are tautological and ultimately unsatisfactory, though they might be expedient in certain circumstances. In the end, such an argument only displaces the question of the origins of Gadahn’s terrorism/treason onto other myths, equally as unconvincing.

Some might say that all terrorists are foreign, that they come from somewhere else to harm Americans. This notion is based first of all on the premise that the state itself does not employ terror; indeed, official histories assert that “no government instigated Terror in fascist Europe or North America, no matter who may have trembled


252
there when the state was out.”62 This epistemology automatically diverts the search for terror outward, and the preventative measures that follow from its assumptions are increased border security and tightened regulations on travel and immigration. But this explanation can be disproved by a host of counterexamples, not the least of which is that Osama bin Laden and other Islamist leaders have repeatedly and successfully sought to recruit supporters within the U.S.63 The presence of enemies animates the state’s political life,64 but effecting such demarcation in Gadahn’s case is nearly impossible, because he is only a compelling villain if he is an American. In order to invoke this myth, we would have to say either that Gadahn is not quite an American (which means that he cannot quite commit treason), or confess that he is at once an American, a terrorist, and a traitor (which means that there might be bigger problems). In this way, Gadahn is an ontological disaster of representation: he is both/and and is therefore neither/nor. Such logical wrangling means that this popular myth, too, is out of contention.

While all of these misconceptions have their adherents, the final story about the origins of terrorism is among the most persistent, in part because this fantasy, that terrorists hate our freedoms, received the most official validation at the outset of the GWOT. We can refute this immediately with the common sense assertion that Islamists want the same freedoms that Americans do,65 like justice and self-determination. It is also impossible to derive an easy parable about the superiority of American life from Gadahn’s case. Former Deputy Attorney General Paul McNulty repeatedly emphasized that Gadahn is an “American who made a choice”66 to forsake America, and this makes him even more of an enigma. Gadahn had all of our freedoms and opted to forsake them, and even if one were to claim that his choice to do so was illogical, that reasoning would lead back to the dilemma of his rationality.

63 Emerson, American Jihad, 128.
64 Schmitt, The Concept of the Political.
65 Pintak, Reflections in a Bloodshot Lens, 107.
Gadahn must be portrayed as a rational actor in order to qualify as a serious and, more to the point, prosecutable enemy; Lindh was not depicted in these terms, and thus had to be treated with leniency. Judith Butler has analyzed the Bush administration’s comparison of suspected terrorists to the mentally ill, noting that the defense officials used this analogy to justify its detention policies. Apologists for practices like indefinite detention argued that, much like those people with mental illnesses who cannot control their violent impulses, actual and potential terrorists must also be locked up to minimize the danger they inherently pose to others; in either circumstance, they claim, confinement is both involuntary and necessary. A related but converse logic was operative in the decisions on how to handle Lindh, and informed the choice to treat him as if his presumed mental infirmities stripped him of both volition and accountability. This claim was repeatedly reinforced by the most heavily circulated images of him, which played on the trope of the deranged but securely restrained mental patient. The difference between the two approaches to dealing with these defectors mirrors the two primary courses that the state has delineated for dealing with Islamism. Just as it vacillates between paternalist, reform-oriented stances and aggressive, militaristic postures, it treats Lindh as an errant but reparable child, but confronts Gadahn as a threat to be eradicated, an enemy and a threat, rather than a prodigal and a nuisance.

When all of these strategies have failed, the charge of treason is all that remains. The variety in the biographies of traitors reveals that “there are no certain predisposing factors behind the act of treason,” and charging Gadahn thusly makes it possible to avoid of the difficulties of explaining his behavior. This option is not without its perils, but calling his actions ‘treasonous’ instead of simply ‘terrorist’ also allows talismanic myths about terrorism to remain intact. Moreover, Gadahn’s visual departure from popular images of terrorism threatens to reveal their speciousness and exaggeration—better to outlaw it. Gadahn confounds the tidy us/them narratives, both verbal and visual, which scaffold all War on Terror rhetoric to such an extent that he is nearly unintelligible

---

68 A classmate in John Mueller’s seminar on threat perception in international relations offered this very astute observation.
within that representational system. He is perplexing almost beyond all recognition, and if he is perceptible at all, it is only because the archetype of traitor is more flexible than that of terrorist.

Yet discursive impasses alone do not explain why Gadahn was charged with treason, as opposed to something else, or nothing. So we must also consider the broader political context in which Gadahn’s behavior was evaluated. Prior to indicting Gadahn, the Bush administration had acted with surprising restraint in dealing with dissenters from its terror policy; besides name-calling and innuendo, there had been few repercussions for openly voicing disagreement with official doctrine. But there were, in the autumn of 2006, a number of exigencies that likely factored in decision to issue an indictment for Gadahn. There is a clear historical pattern in the relationship of treason to the larger political climate, namely that it tends to take a “minor role” during periods where the “authority” of the government is unquestioned.70 In this instance, the administration was facing a number of uncertainties, and there are three major pressures that combined with representational dilemmas to make a treason indictment for Gadahn seem both logical and necessary.

First, there was the matter of the upcoming 2006 midterm election. Although the precariousness of the Republicans’ position was not fully apparent until well after the indictment had been announced, the looming vote could not have been entirely irrelevant. The Bush administration established a pattern of securing political offices “through appeals to voters’ visceral emotions and deep-seated anxieties,”71 and there was no indication at the time that these provocations would begin to yield diminishing returns. Gadahn’s symbolic status as a traitor and the lack of clearly visible differences between him and his fellow Americans had the potential to elicit the kind of fear of a persistent and mutating terrorist threat that the Bush government had been able to channel into trust72 and agreement.

70 Carney, “The Enemy Within,” 35.
71 Haynes, The Age of Anxiety, 514.
72 Stone, Perilous Times, 555.
Demonstrations of authority and competence were especially necessary in light of the second circumstance: an emerging quagmire in Iraq. A treason indictment had a double potential to ameliorate the negative political consequences of this predicament. First, it could signal administrative rigor and vigilance, to demonstrate government competence. Additionally, treason cases can serve to galvanize national identity and feelings of patriotism, and indicting Gadahn could have amplified popular loyalty both to the nation-state and its epic but unfortunate mission. Benedict Arnold, for example, was indicted during an ebb of American morale during the Revolutionary War, and that case is emblematic of a pattern. The USDOJ’s decision to issue a press release indicates that it expected the media to seize on Gadahn’s story and to cultivate its regenerative political rewards for the administration. In light of this assumption, the widespread media and popular disinterest is curious. It suggests that the first set of circumstances (rhetorical) conflict with the second set of imperatives (political) and make it difficult to predict the benefits that might accrue from prosecuting a treason case in an already vexed political climate.

Corollary to the government’s need to shore up popular support was the imperative to prove that its preventative actions were yielding results, and this is the final pressing deficiency that an indictment of Gadahn could have remedied. Given that the massive expenditures for the GWOT have yet to ferret out many important terror suspects, Gadahn’s case provided an opportunity for anti-terror officials to prove that they had really been accomplishing something, that they have been “on the job,” skillfully defusing and aggressively prosecuting a real threat. Treason cases construct individual traitors as “synecdoche” for the trends and movements they represent. In this way, a prosecution of Gadahn could readily be portrayed as a decisive victory against all of Al Qaeda, which he embodies, ventriloquizes, and images. Indeed, when McNulty described Gadahn’s decision to eschew America, he claimed that

74 Mueller *op. cit.*, Quan, Fisher, and Reddy, “Gadahn is Traitor, US Says.”

256
Adam Gadahn is a U.S. citizen who made a choice to join and act as a propagandist for [A]l Qaeda, an enemy of this country responsible for the horrific deaths of thousands of innocent Americans on Sept[ember] 11, 2001.76

The placement of the comma in this sentence introduces ambiguity into its syntax, so that the “enemy” could either be Al Qaeda or Gadahn. Although the indictment itself is bound by historical fact and so cannot endow Gadahn with any culpability for the 9/11 attacks, this sentence elides him neatly into responsibility for them.

Gadahn’s indictment helped reinforce the idea of a nation beset, a vision of America that had long worked to Republican advantage. McNulty’s contention that Gadahn’s actions constitute a crime against “America itself”77 clarifies the stakes of pursuing him, even as it exaggerates and metaphorizes them. If Michael Ignatieff’s observation that the stars of jihad videos, like the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, seem to “understan[d] us better than we seem to understand [them]”78 is accurate in general, then it becomes particularly chilling here. The only response to this recognition can be to exclude Gadahn permanently from the American nation and to make his perspicacity, or, more precisely, his broadcast of it, illegal.

**On Ethnicity and Precedent**

Questions of Americanness in this case are linked tightly to questions of race, ethnicity, and national belonging. Gadahn’s status as a traitor locates him within the history of other betrayals of the state; however, most of the instances where this kind of subterfuge became visible were those where it mapped on to racialized narratives about national loyalty and worthiness for membership in the state. Gadahn’s case therefore resonates with those of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, and these connections indicate that there is a pronounced, if variegated, ethnic precedent at work.

Under the clear light of revisionist historiography, the trial and executions of Sacco and Vanzetti are emblematic travesties in an era that was “one of the most

---

76 USDOJ, “U.S. Citizen Indicted on Treason.”
78 Ignatieff, “The Terrorist as Auteur.”
repressive periods in American history.”79 Their capital conviction on the grounds of largely circumstantial evidence and despite ample records of judicial misconduct80 for a robbery and murder likely as much to do with their ethnic (Italian) and political (anarchist) status as with their actual guilt. As a result, their plight became a touchstone for the Left. The extent of this mobilization seemed to correspond directly to the degree to which they were hypervisible as foreign, the same dynamics, of course, that made them so easy to convict.

By the time Sacco and Vanzetti were executed, however, the Red Scare had largely ended, and the state seemed bashful over its “excesses”;81 it was sated, until another opportunity presented itself in the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Like Sacco and Vanzetti, it is unclear whether Julius and Ethel Rosenberg actually passed nuclear secrets to the Soviets, the transgression for which they were executed in 1953.82 There is far less ambiguity about their Communist beliefs. Whether or not they were innocent martyrs to the state or disloyal culprits rightfully punished for their crimes against it, the spectacles of their imprisonment and execution helped distract most Americans from what Joyce Nelson identifies as the real threats to the nation’s security, nuclear proliferation and the collaboration of American business leaders with the Nazis.83 More than their crimes, their ineluctable alienness made this sideshow compelling.

Although Gadahn’s guilt, or at least commission of the acts of which he is accused, is obvious in comparison to that of Sacco and Vanzetti, their common adherence to vilified political doctrines (perhaps the Islamism of today is equivalent to the anarchism of the 1920s) makes them readily indictable. In both cases, popular sentiment and official statutes facilitated the processes by which these average men could acquire the status of spectacular criminals. Policies like those codified in the Espionage (1917), Immigration (1917), Sedition (1918), and Deportation (1918) Acts and the USA Patriot

---

80 Topp, The Sacco and Vanzetti Case.
81 Ibid., 17.
82 Ethel’s guilt is even more questionable than Julius’s. There is evidence that she was imprisoned in an effort to gain leverage over Julius, on the assumption his wife’s imprisonment would motivate him to confess. This strategy failed, either because Julius was intransigent or innocent.
Act (2001)\textsuperscript{84} and the Military Commissions Act (2006) were designed to expand the legal authority of the government to confront a threat that seemed to lack precedent and limit. This commonality compounded the ambiguous citizenship status that these suspects share, though the trajectories of Sacco and Vanzetti and Gadahn go in opposite directions, with Sacco and Vanzetti coming too America and Gadahn fleeing from it. In fact, this might explain the vast difference between the amounts of publicity that the three men received. While Sacco and Vanzetti became a fashionable cause, almost no one (comparatively) is interested in defending Gadahn. It was easier, perhaps, to support Sacco and Vanzetti because doing so entailed recourse to the ideal of a just and pluralist America, a place where immigrants come for opportunity and ideological freedom. Absent that narrative, Gadahn becomes unremarkable, because he is utterly unfathomable.

Gadahn also shares a difference with the Rosenbergs: religious deviation from the Protestant norm, which modifies their relation to the state. Indeed, whereas the Rosenbergs only violated this standard once, by their Jewishness, Gadahn is doubly different: a Jew by birth and a Muslim by choice. Whereas Judaism was the most “alien” religion of the 1950s, U.S. strategic interests in Israel in the Middle East have, according to Andrew Ross, resulted in a normalization of Jewishness and transfer of xenophobic hostility onto Islam.\textsuperscript{85} Like that of the Rosenbergs, Gadahn’s Jewishness, insofar as Jews have always been marked as radically different from white, Christian Americans, may have made it easier to for the government designate him a traitor,\textsuperscript{86} even as it increased his public relations value for Al Qaeda. Like Al Qaeda today, the 1950s CIA also had an ironic appreciation for the weight of Jewish identity, and a declassified document from 1953 suggested commuting the sentences of the Rosenbergs if they would agree to leverage their visibility and religion to convince other Jews to abandon Communism.\textsuperscript{87} Although we cannot account precisely for the amount of legal difference that their

\textsuperscript{84} Twomey, “Lessons from Sacco and Vanzetti,” 128.
\textsuperscript{85} Ross, “The Work of the State,” 298.
\textsuperscript{86} Thanks to Cindi Katz for reminding me of the importance of religion here.
\textsuperscript{87} Cook, “The Rosenbergs and the Crimes of a Century,” 25.
religious difference made in the indictments of these three Jews for crimes against the nation, neither can we assume its irrelevance.

Despite the varied circumstances, disparate crimes, and uneven allocations of publicity among these extraordinary convicts, such historicizing of Gadahn’s case reveals the persistence negotiation between citizenship, ethnicity, and criminality on the part of the state, questions that are as much representational as they are legal or political. Such processes, however, are ultimately inconclusive, as all of these cases lack closure, despite the finality of their outcomes, and this unrelenting ambiguity reflects the continual recalculation of the relationship between citizenship, threat, and difference.

Photographs, Aliases, and a Full Description: Gadahn-as-Image

Apart from the benefits that inhere in identifying a traitor, which can achieve a momentary resolution of these questions, there are dangers in this process as well. Although the “threat potential of treason” is always “perceived as very great,” disloyalty begins to seem especially scary when the nation is at war. Yet the government must not overstate its case, and tread carefully so as not to appear weak and reactionary. The fact that, in 2002, the government was “afraid to invoke the stigma of treason against someone who openly fought for the enemy” suggests that the decision to prosecute for treason is more complicated than it might seem. A government incurs a number of risks in publicizing the actions of its traitors. There is first the delicacy of declaring that it is threatened, which implies a corresponding vulnerability. Second, there is hazard in the admission because it implies the imperfectness of national loyalty (and so threatens to become contagious) and imperils a “society’s definitions of itself.” Such dilemmas might also explain the paucity of attention paid to this case; less dexterity is required when the enemy is easier and safer to depict.

In 2004, Gadahn articulated his most graphic threat on Al Qaeda’s behalf, promising that “[t]he streets of America shall run red with blood … casualties will be too many to count and the next wave of attacks may come at any moment.”

---

88 Ben-Yehuda, Betrayals and Treason, 108.
89 Fletcher, Romantics at War, 212.
90 Fine, Difficult Reputations, 35.
this threat was among those statements repeated in his indictment. Excluded, equally predictably, was his July 7, 2006 narration of the carnage that America has inflicted on his people; stoically, he addresses the camera and recalls, “‘I've carried the victims in my arms – women, children, toddlers, babies in their mother's wombs.’”91 Embedded in these two utterances are the dual aspects of Gadahn’s threat: he is both the Al Qaeda militant willing to launch attacks on the “enemy soil” of America and the West, and the voice of a cogent critique of American policy. The extent of the damage that either Gadahn could inflict is probably quite limited, but that is largely beside the point. After all, as Jessica Stern observes, “Mr. Gadahn's speech is revolutionary—not because it warns about blood-curdling terrorist strikes to come, but precisely because it doesn’t.”92 Indeed, the relatively tame and unspecific content of his threats suggests that there is more at stake here than what he says, or what he does, both of which could have been otherwise adjudicated. Gadahn’s primary affront is not so much military or political as it is symbolic and visual.

As the screen upon which the calculation of the hazard embodied by Gadahn is carried out, the FBI’s webpage on Most Wanted Terrorists is a technology of visualization. The page features thumbnail portrait of two dozen of the world’s most dangerous men; each small photo is linked to the full wanted poster. Here, Gadahn finds himself among five Saudi Arabians, four Egyptians, three Lebanese citizens, three Kenyans, two Palestinians,93 two Yemenis, one Philippine citizen, and one Libyan. There are two other Americans: Abdul Rahman Yasin, an epileptic native of Bloomington, Indiana, wanted for nine crimes in connection with the February 26, 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, currently carrying a reward of $5,000,000 and not charged with treason; and Daniel Andreas San Diego, an “animal rights extremist” added to the list on April 21, 2009 with much fanfare as the “first domestic terrorist” to be included among the ranks of these other fugitives.

92 Stern, “Al Qaeda, American Style,” para. 3.
93 It is noteworthy that, when it is expeditious, one can be a citizen of a state that does not technically exist.
Particularly interesting here is the logic of selection organizing this virtual rogues’ gallery. Most of the wanted posters feature multiple images of the fugitives; there are three photographs of Gadahn. Reading them from left to right (as opposed to reading them right to left, as one would in Arabic or Hebrew) places Gadahn in a reverse chronology of appearance from ‘most’ to ‘least’ threatening; the leftmost picture shows a bearded, turbaned Gadahn looking away from the camera, a sharp ideological contrast from the rightmost picture of a slightly chubby young man with the long hair one might expect for a guy with Gadahn’s taste in music. Thus, it should surprise no one that the FBI webmasters selected Gadahn’s most aberrant image for its iconographic depiction of him as a Most Wanted Terrorist among the visual litany of surly mugs. Part of the difficulty that inheres in efforts to visually detect a potential terrorist (as through forms of racial profiling or more advanced biometric technologies) among the general American population is that these actors are often trained to perform assimilation and blend in.94 This three-photograph sequence shows Gadahn’s evolution away from embodied normative Americanness, rearticulating the wish that terrorists will be readily distinguishable, even to the untrained eye. Moreover, in choosing the image that looks least like us/most like them, the FBI made a calculated choice visually emphasizing his embodied (and performed) terrorist-ness over his traitor-ness. The presumable deliberateness with which this photo was selected is a stark contrast to the apparent randomness behind the designation of his criminality.

Gadahn’s FBI status, presumably a direct index of how dangerous he is, reflects the uncertainty of his legal designation. In the days following his indictment, he was promoted to the rank of ‘Most Wanted Terrorist’; since then, however, that position has been returned to Osama bin Laden. Although highlighting the threat Gadahn poses might be politically advantageous, it is also risky to name someone the ‘Most Wanted,’ because not catching him can look like an especially dire form of incompetence. The brief elevation of Gadahn’s status and his subsequent demotion reflect his ambiguous role,

94 In a gloss on a training manual for the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), Joseph Pugliese summarizes their dilemma as follows: “Ubiquitous and unknowable precisely because of his or her undetectable impersonation of exemplary citizens beyond suspicion, the terrorist is at once everywhere and nowhere; the terrorist is simultaneously anyone and no one” (“Biotypologies of Terrorism,” 55).
which is further expressed by the relatively low reward offered in his case. According to
the law’s strange market logic, Gadahn is worth a paltry $1,000,000, a stark comparison
to bin Laden’s $25,000,000 value. The $24,000,000 separation between these two Most
Wanted Terrorists captures the arbitrariness of the system of threat quantification and the
extent to which this is about something other or more than terrorism.

All of this procedural inconsistency further underscores the deeply symbolic
nature of Gadahn’s indictment, apparent also in the legal and logistical obstacles to
prosecution. First, there is the matter of finding him, a task which has proven especially
difficult when it comes to Most Wanted Terrorists. Then, if the authorities found him,
they would have to prove that he has not already renounced his citizenship in order to
try him as a traitor, as treason is predicated on the question of allegiance. On the other
hand, because Gadahn is not able (or not inclined) to respond to the charges against him,
they acquire a kind of power they might not have if Gadahn could make a formal reply.
The omission of cross-examination after victim-impact statements in criminal cases, for
example, means that the plaintiff’s claim of harm becomes, according to Elaine Scarry,
unchallenged “material reality”; here, the litany of Gadahn’s wrongdoing becomes fact
without official contestation.

Given this, I would not say that the indictment was futile, despite the clear
improbability of an immediate concrete reward, nor are there any grounds on which to
claim that its authors were disingenuous. Perhaps the more interesting question is this: if
we take for granted their tacit contention that Gadahn poses some kind of threat, would
the charge of treason defuse it? If Gadahn were capable of launching the kind of large-
scale attack that would validate his prophesies, simply deeming him a traitor would be
unlikely to have any effect. Even the reward associated with his capture does not

95 As of April 21, 2009, when the FBI added Daniel Andreas San Diego to its list, Gadahn had the second-
lowest reward among all of his most wanted brethren. San Diego, at $250,000, is by far the least valuable
fugitive, and with the exception of the $25,000,000 rewards for bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, all of
the other suspects are worth $5,000,000.
97 Fletcher, Romantics at War, 119.
necessarily make his situation any more unsafe, as the significantly larger bounty for bin Laden has yet to realize any results.

Beyond the hazards of credibility that it involves, there is also an atavism in this definition of treason, an expansive category of understanding that seeks to account for a diverse “spectrum” of betrayals.\(^9\) It is heir to a tradition that began with Henry IV, under whose reign the “idea that the spoken word could be treasonous”\(^10\) emerged; alternately, in the U.S., the inclusion of words and thoughts in categories of actionable offenses is predicated on a distinction between these speech acts and those protected by the First Amendment.\(^11\) All in all, the closest parallels to Gadahn’s case would be those of the so-called ‘radio traitors’ of World War II, like Lord Haha and Tokyo Rose,\(^12\) while similar subsequent transgressions, like those of Jane Fonda, were not called treason. And so, there is a way in which Gadahn’s indictment represents a return to a legal mindset sensible for 50 years ago, and rooted in a time even older than that.

This thoroughly retrograde approach to treason is mismatched against the newness of the medium that Gadahn employs to deliver his messages, which are accessible all over the world, to anyone, via the Internet. The global nature of the media means that the United States cannot control information the way it once did,\(^13\) particularly because Americans and Islamists are “gathered around distinctly different electronic public spheres.”\(^14\) Simply treating his videos like radio broadcasts from the 1940s, when both warfare and mass communication were radically different, is shortsighted. This administrative myopia is especially limiting because Gadahn mobilizes the visual with such dexterity. Indeed, I argue that the actual threat here is Gadahn’s appearing, and that his image, more than his person, is the ultimate, if unacknowledged, target of the indictment.

---

102 Ben-Yehuda, *Betrayals and Treason*, 199ff. The generic term ‘Tokyo Rose’ was applied to a number of female radio personalities who broadcasted pro-Japanese propaganda during World War II. The most famous of these is Iva Toguri; though convicted, President Ford pardoned her in 1977.
104 Ibid., 238.
For a state to retain its military and political dominance in the postmodern era, marked as it is by a ubiquity of media and a surfeit of images, it must manage visual and strategic objectives at once.\textsuperscript{105} Previously, state power would have been enough to ensure control over the flow and content of images. Propaganda and censorship, for a long time the choicest cultural weapons of statecraft, are no longer wholly adequate for the governance of a population, like that of the U.S., whose access to the media is largely unregulated. The juridical practice of the visual operative here is designed to respond to the uncontrollable image landscape of the GWOT. It is a last resort, a demonstration both of the state’s power and its desperation as it confronts visual landscapes populated by the extra- or non-state actors that also dominate its military agenda. It is part of the massive, coordinated security complex that seeks to “make terror at least governable”\textsuperscript{106} by expanding the jurisdiction of various state bureaucracies to encompass it. Unlike the more diffuse \textit{Global War} on Terror, this engagement sights a single figure as an abode for terror, targeting a human repository for a demonstration of its capital biopolitical authority. ‘Security,’ in the age of empire, referred primarily to the defense of acquired land. With the decline of this mode of geopolitics and the subsequent ascendance of the nation-state as privileged mode of organization and the concomitant focus on the management of population(s), the focus of security shifted off of territory and onto life, and beings.

While the biopolitical state operates by governing the generalized body of the citizen and the population into which it multiplies, its legal mechanisms are activated around specific individuals. Such procedures are efforts to divest these criminals of the violence with which they might threaten the state itself;\textsuperscript{107} Haverkamp and Vismann argue that this legal action is built upon a desire for control over their physical bodies.\textsuperscript{108} In this case, however, the traitor is a representation, a textual and, more precisely, visual corpus. Elaine Scarry identifies a related dynamic in her assessment of the links between lingual sentences (in which the judge utters a punishment) and criminal sentences (the

\textsuperscript{105} Retort, \textit{Afflicted Powers}.
\textsuperscript{106} Dillon, “Governing Terror,” 8.
\textsuperscript{107} Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 280.
\textsuperscript{108} Haverkamp and Vismann, “Habeas Corpus.”
penalty thus prescribed). In this judicial performative, the sentences become indistinguishable, as the legal decisions are “inscribed into the defendant’s body”;\(^\text{109}\) Gadahn’s case is a visual equivalent of this process, an engraving that affixes both to his physical person and its terrifying filmic simulacrum.

After all, the ‘real’ Adam Gadahn is nowhere to be found, lost to his family and to his justice system. Instead, there is a textual composition based heavily upon speculation and shifting signifiers. Gadahn himself has never been apprehended, detained, or questioned by American agents, and his physical person is wholly absent, entirely elsewhere, literally out of state. He exists (and, therefore, commits treason) only through his videos. In this way, insofar as the image always “announces” the absence of its audience from its subject\(^\text{110}\) and the distance between its subject and its audience, Gadahn is gone as soon as he appears.

Upon the flickering foundation of his communiqués, the USDOJ has fashioned a national golem. It assembled Gadahn through a hefty indictment and a wanted poster detailing his physical specifications, and then issued a press release that directed the audience of citizens to the FBI website for “photographs, aliases, and a full description” of Gadahn. A starkly literal reading of this wanted poster, one which refuses to understand that the government photographs merely stand in for the person they depict, suggests that the actual fugitive, the thing that is truly ‘wanted’ here, is the imaged Gadahn, rather than Gadahn himself.

What, then, is the law to do, as it confronts Gadahn and the resultant dilemmas that are simultaneously ontological and prosecutorial? Visuality has always been anxiety-provoking for the Law,\(^\text{111}\) even as they have had a long-standing and intimate relationship. The visual has been a central preoccupation of criminology since the late 19\(^\text{th}\) centuries: ‘scientific’ studies of deviants, physiognomic indices of degeneracy, and Francis Galton’s “composite photographs” of ethnic types\(^\text{112}\) all informed the theory and practice of criminal justice. Courtroom use of photographic evidence became common in


\(^{111}\) Mitchell, “Picturing Terror,” 290.

\(^{112}\) Valverde, \textit{Law and Order}, 64.
the 1880s, and with the development of mechanized surveillance, artifacts like closed-circuit television images acquired an evidentiary weight of their own, beyond the ‘illustrative’ or supplementary position\(^\text{113}\) that they had previously occupied.

All of this supports the contention that “the concern with and proper regulation of images is central (indeed foundational) to law,”\(^\text{114}\) which suggests that it should be adept at handling precisely the sort of challenge that Gadahn presents. After all, the law is rich with the language of sight,\(^\text{115}\) even as it promises a blind(folded) justice; to this, the treason statute is no exception. Moreover, the work of Elizabeth Alexander, Ardis Cameron, Laura Hyun Yi Kang, Saidiya V. Hartman, Shawn Michelle Smith, Alison Young and others all prove that the American legal system has long employed the visual as a mechanism for the formation, regulation, and discipline of its subjects, particularly those marked as deviant. Yet those habits relate primarily to the governance of actual beings, actors in the physical custody or domain of the law. Gadahn’s situation is fundamentally different, for the suspect is physically absent, beyond the reach of the law, but also strangely, virtually, insistently present, as he insinuates himself again and again into its field of vision. Confronted with this circumstance, the law responds reflexively but contradictorily; it simultaneously wishes to relegate him, to banish him, and to compile him, to bring him into being, so that it might conquer his body and finally arrest his (capacity for) image(-production).

Such conflicting ambitions confuse the juridical response to this series of visual infractions. The indictment and the discourse surrounding it tell a story of zeroing in, the logic of honing and targeting that, according to Samuel Weber, orders America’s War on Terror.\(^\text{116}\) In such a system, targeting is essential to “political action and self-definition,”\(^\text{117}\) and often becomes more meaningful than the strikes that follow from it. Yet this indictment misfires; it cannot but misfire. As an anachronistic rejoinder to a postmodern infraction, its calibration is all wrong: spatially, temporally, visually. It aims

\(^{113}\) Ibid., 154-155.
\(^{114}\) Yelle, “Law’s Trouble with Images,” 270.
\(^{115}\) Felman, “Forms of Judicial Blindness.”
\(^{117}\) Ibid., ix.
at a figment. It lags behind,\textsuperscript{118} the essential ponderousness of the law (witness the two years intervening between the tentative identification of Gadahn as Azzam the American and the finalization of the indictment) doomed to be outrun again and again by Gadahn’s image, which can appear with digital instantaneity, and Gadahn himself, who can move with clandestine freedom through a region inhospitable to his American pursuers.

This indictment misunderstands the nature of the image, presuming that prohibition is the same as erasure, and reasoning incorrectly that because the law composed Gadahn-as-image, it can control him. Western justice systems banished images decisively during the Reformation, and mandated that “the law was now to be presented entirely in language and justice dispensed only through language rather than appearing in images, which might overwhelm through dazzlement.”\textsuperscript{119} Although courts had to acknowledge advances in technologies of the visual in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, by persistently relegating images to the realm of the irrational, the law deprived itself of an opportunity to develop systems for adjudicating them and so is ill-equipped for a villain like Gadahn.

Unlike the visual, unlike Gadahn, the law is plastic. When Moses, as W.J.T. Mitchell contends, came down the mountain with the law in hand, and found the people bewitched instead by the tangible, visual idol, the law “shattered,” not the golden calf. Moses’ ferocious response, immolating the calf, melted but did not totally obliterate it. For Mitchell, this parable shows that the image is indestructible, that it always “comes back to life, appears again in a spectral form,”\textsuperscript{120} more abiding, more pervasive.

Though scoured or bleached, the image remains perceptible and elusive. And so the law, which is already outpaced by image saturation,\textsuperscript{121} is further overextended here, having both to produce Gadahn and to prosecute him. In this visual instance, a juridical action will ultimately become its own collateral damage, as every strike against Gadahn (each press release, each enumeration of his crimes, each citation of his messages)

\textsuperscript{118}Thanks to my seminar colleagues at the 2007 Futures of American Studies Institute for reminding me of this temporal mismatch.
\textsuperscript{119}Jay, “Must Justice Be Blind?”, 24.
\textsuperscript{120}W.J.T. Mitchell, “Picturing Terror,” 290.
\textsuperscript{121}Spiesel, “A Las Meninas for the Law.”
simultaneously creates and diffuses him, endlessly reproducing the terror he appears to embody, replicating his image into a spectrum of dazzling, kinetic fragments.

**Visibility at the Climax of Terror**

This juridical practice of the visual will always fail on its own terms. Gadahn-as-image is impervious; Gadahn-as-image is fundamentally elusive; Gadahn-as-image will always win. The image will forever outstrip the institution, and in that way, the fate of the signifier ‘Adam Gadahn,’ who looks like both the nondescript white kid from California and the GWOT’s most terrifying phenotype, is certain. There remains, however, the referent, Adam Gadahn the being. He is, in many ways, both of those things, and is therefore both more and less problematic for the legal apparatus than the version it has visually engineered, both more and less dangerous in person than he is on camera. The movie star Adam Gadahn has neither the wish nor the desire to hide; he has eschewed the kerchiefs that obscured his face in his earlier films, and the absence of shrouds has transformed him (back) from ‘them’ into ‘us.’ The real Adam Gadahn, in his ethnic and national liminality, could camouflage himself almost anywhere, could freely oscillate between hypervisibility and complete transparency.

Gadahn’s shape-shifting play between sign and signified makes him an especially infuriating fugitive. Practically speaking, every day that Gadahn goes without capture haunts the USDOJ and the agencies responsible for locating him with the public relations threat of another failed manhunt, the type of highly visible ineptitude that an administration risks every time it flaunts its anti-terror capacities. But these very agencies, so long denied the victory of a truly spectacular arrest, if they ever were to apprehend him, will have an essential capacity over his body that they will always lack over his image: the sovereign, executive power to make him disappear.

Let us imagine that the real Adam Gadahn somehow finds himself in American custody. Such a capture would be quite a coup, a victory both strategic and symbolic.

---

122 The two most meaningful arrests of the GWOT to date have been Khalid Sheik Mohammed and Saddam Hussein. Neither of these men looked particularly terrifying at the times of their capture, and so neither victory made for particularly splashy or dramatic image headlines.
123 I am extraordinarily grateful to Don Pease for guiding my thinking in this direction.
No doubt it would require a massive coordination of intelligence, a large measure of tactical skill, and the cooperation of the national authorities in whatever country Gadahn has chosen for a hiding place. Perhaps the media would find such a story more compelling than they have found the earlier chapters of this saga; perhaps the popularity of the War would increase by a discernible measure. But any satisfaction would necessarily be short-lived, as it would require the U.S. to confront the messy quandaries of citizenship provoked by Gadahn’s misplaced allegiances.

By indicting him as a traitor, the USDOJ has already indirectly confirmed Gadahn’s American citizenship and so entitled him to certain rights before the law. Hence, upon the hypothetical return of the captive, one might envision the legal system springing into action. Attorneys would be appointed, press releases issued, statements taken, evidence amassed. Maybe Gadahn would plead, or maybe a tense and lengthy trial would ensue; barring some unforeseen and unfathomable loophole, Gadahn would likely be convicted of one, two, or all three of the crimes of which he was accused, and could accordingly be fined, or imprisoned, or put to death. No matter the outcome, the proceedings would be a choreographed production of justice, a revelation of the marvel of due process, a display of the rights afforded to Gadahn as an American citizen. If Gadahn had been apprehended during the Bush administration, such an official, high-profile case would have provided an occasion to assert the legality of their GWOT policies. If he is found while Obama is in office, trying Gadahn in this way would enable this government to underscore the differences between its approach to fighting terror and that of its predecessor in a concrete—rather than rhetorical—way. In either case the traitor would serve a crucial representational purpose for the state.

Alternately, if Gadahn could be adjudicated as a terror suspect,124 his fate would be determined in many ways by the legacy of George W. Bush’s 2006 Military Commissions Act. When President Obama signed the executive order mandating the

124 The March 13, 2009 report that the Obama administration filed with the Supreme Court on the federal government’s detention authority at Guantánamo Bay signaled their departure from the language of ‘enemy combatants.’ Instead, the document asserted the President’s authority to detain those who had “substantially supported” the Taliban or Al Qaeda. Although this is a highly symbolic lexical difference, the document does not give any indication that it corresponds to a substantive conceptual or procedural change.
closure of the detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, he also suspended ongoing military commissions. However, in May 2009, Obama announced his intention to retain the military commissions system but signaled that he would make procedural changes to make the process fairer to suspects and consonant with American law. Drafted in the wake of a handful of unfavorable Supreme Court rulings, most significantly, *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld* (2004), *Rasul v. Bush* (2004), and *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* (2006), the MCA sought to mitigate the limitations on executive power that these rulings established and sharply delimited the rights of prisoners held at facilities like Guantánamo Bay. Its summary introduction and quick passage amplify Andrew Ross’s contention that there are some trials “in which the interests of the state become particularly self-evident.”

In *Hamdi*, the Supreme Court ruled that as an American citizen, Yaser Hamdi (a Baton Rouge native born to Saudi Arabian parents and apprehended in Afghanistan as an alleged Taliban fighter), was entitled to due process. Although this ruling was delivered through a “fractured and confusing set of opinions,” it nevertheless meant that he could not be subject to indefinite detention. Hamdi was released (or deported, depending on one’s perspective) to Saudi Arabia on the condition that he relinquish his American citizenship and abide by a series of travel restrictions. On the same day, in *Rasul v. Bush*, the Court asserted that because the U.S. had sole jurisdiction over Guantánamo, American laws applied there. Roughly two years later, the Court ruled, on behalf of Salim Ahmed Hamdan, that President Bush’s plan to use military tribunals to try detainees at Guantánamo was both domestically and internationally unlawful. Scholars, activists, and the media alike interpreted this decision as a serious setback for the Bush administration.

---

125 Ross, “The Work of the State,” 292. The obverse of Ross’ argument is also true: in the avoidance of certain trials, the state makes its desires clear. We see this, for example, in the offer of immunity by State Department officials to the employees of Blackwater USA in October 2007. These deals would effectively prohibit interested Justice Department parties from prosecuting the crimes of which they are accused (Johnston, “Immunity Deals Offered”).


127 In his analysis of the dissenting opinions from the Supreme Court, Charlie Savage urges against unbridled enthusiasm about the *Hamdan* ruling, arguing that these contestations are official documents in support of expanded wartime presidential powers (*Takeover*, 276-277).
The MCA was an effort to mitigate the limitations on executive power that this ruling established. Approved by the House of Representatives shortly after being drafted, the Act acquired the status of law, and so became a fundamentally active document, because enforceability is essential rather than external to the law, although it is now, perhaps temporarily, dormant. When in force, the legislation was all the more potent because it reflected the concurrence of the legislative and executive branches of government. With the policies and procedures of traditional civilian legal proceedings suspended, these commissions circumvent the “spectacle, delay, and security risks” of trials in civilian courts. They consolidate power while minimizing the perils of visibility that are so keen in a war where everything is imaged.

Accordingly, these specially appointed military courts were also governed by revamped evidentiary standards. Typically, the rules of evidence are strict, and are meant to confine the inferences that a judge or juror can draw from a particular bit of information. Not here. Under normal circumstances, there is a clear legal separation between clue, evidence, and testimony; for example, the video that figured so crucially in the policy brutality hearings that followed from the beating of Rodney King, could only be evidence, not testimony, even as it provided more conclusive evidence than any human witness might. The meaning of the video could not be taken as self-evident because it could not speak (image?) for itself or for the people represented within it. Instead, it had to be analyzed in excruciating detail, in fraction-of-a-second intervals, by the live people in the courtroom. In *U.S. v. Gadahn*, the evidence/testimony separation collapses, with Gadahn’s videotaped messages standing in for an address to the court. Such a slip is permissible, perhaps, because Gadahn’s is a treason with so many witnesses, millions more than the two required by the Constitution. Before so many eyes, there can be neither argument nor denial because the crime and the confession are entirely coincident.

130 Ibid., 134.
In addition to being lax, these new evidentiary standards are also lopsided, providing military intelligence with almost unlimited control over the government’s acquisition of evidence and the accused person’s access to it. This latitude, always convenient, would be especially useful in the prosecution for crimes with rigorous evidentiary standards, like treason. Government secrecy is essential to these commission proceedings; this clandestinesness enabled the Bush administration, for example, both to protect and profit from coerced confessions.\footnote{Swift, “The American Way of Justice,” para. 23.} Security clearances in these cases function like one-way mirrors; bizarre occlusions result, so that defendants can be (and are) prohibited from seeing records of their own interrogations because they cannot be vetted to view the information that they yielded and the techniques utilized to elicit it.\footnote{Ibid., para. 27.} These commissions provided not justice, but the possibility to use dubiously obtained evidence,\footnote{Ibid., para. 24.} through an elaborate management of sight, access, and visibility. Through this new visual epistemology, law is inverted; what was absolute becomes relative, and what was essential becomes optional, discretionary. As of this writing, the precise contours of the Obama-era military commissions remain unclear, though there are important limits on the use of hearsay and evidence obtained dubiously. Without any tribunals completed under these new regulations, we have no way of knowing—yet—how these restrictions will modify the process or its outcomes.

Among the provisions specified in the MCA was the annulment of a variety of rights, including that to a speedy trial. President Obama, hours after taking office, stopped the military commissions that were already underway. Officially, the move was “described as a pause in all war-crimes proceedings there so that the new administration can evaluate how to proceed with prosecutions.”\footnote{Glaberson, “Obama Orders Halt to Prosecutions,” para. 2.} But it also afforded the state time\footnote{The Obama administration asked for an additional 120-day delay in pending tribunal cases when it announced in mid-May 2009 that it would keep the Military Commissions system intact with procedural modifications (Baker and Herszenhorn, “Obama Planning to Keep Tribunals,” para. 2).} to reconfigure itself and get oriented toward the law, and to terror, and to the way the two terms might mediate each other. However, by interrupting proceedings (such as they
were), President Obama occasioned a further delay in the disposition of these cases, a prolongation arguably enabled by the notion that the right to a speedy trial is negotiable.

When the MCA was first adopted, the suspension of this right further normalized the practice of indefinite detention (without charge, without counsel, without time limits) as a mechanism for the prosecution of the GWOT. Such restrictions were enabled by a revised understanding of habeas corpus. This modification was made explicit in Section 7 of the MCA, which circumscribed the capacity of detained non-citizen combatants to file standard habeas corpus petitions, which meant that they were required instead to wait for special military tribunals (called Combatant Status Review Tribunals, or CSRTs) to convene and determine their legal status.

CSRTs were the focus of the Supreme Court’s June 2008 decision in *Boumediene v. Bush*. In a 5-4 ruling, the Court found that CSRTs were an inadequate substitute for the standard process for hearing habeas corpus petitions, and gave Guantánamo detainees access to the federal court system to contest their imprisonment, rebuking the Bush administration and the expanded authority it had claimed. A victory for detainees and their lawyers and for petitioners who are unsure why they are being held, the mandate that federal courts immediately begin processing habeas corpus petitions had the potential to radically expand the legal recourses available for their defenses. Although the ruling might have been able to countermand the perverse “legal innovation” that is the policy of indefinite detention, it also “left some important questions unanswered” about how, precisely, this new (old) system would work.

The outcome of the *Boumediene* case became even murkier when Obama took office. As a precursor to his January 22, 2009 order to shut down Guantánamo Bay, late on Tuesday, January 20, the administration “ordered an immediate halt to the military commission proceedings for prosecuting detainees at Guantánamo” but also “filed a request in Federal District Court in Washington to stay habeas corpus proceedings

---

137 This ruling is not so unequivocal as it might appear. In the majority opinion written by Justice Kennedy, the Court noted that the CSRT process should remain “intact” (“Boumediene v. Bush,” 66). In fact, they ruled that “Except in cases of undue delay, federal courts should refrain from entertaining a combatant’s habeas corpus petition at least until after the … CSRT … has had a chance to review his status” (66-67).


139 Greenhouse, “Justices, 5-4, Back Detainee Appeals,” para. 5.
there,"\(^{140}\) a move that was likely to affect more than 200 habeas corpus cases. The ends of this decision may, eventually, come to justify the means, but in the interim, whatever progress might be made in this effort is mortgaged against the rights of detainees to contest their imprisonment, a rearticulation of state authority over the bodies imprisoned there, albeit an apparently well-intentioned one. And so, for a detained Adam Gadahn, the *Hamdan* ruling and the *Boumediene* decision would likely have mixed consequences. If he were apprehended and detained, they might limit the amount of time that he could be held, but there could be no question about why\(^{141}\) because the evidence is everywhere visible. Hence, there would be no need for a habeas corpus petition like the ones protected in *Boumediene*.

Even though the *Boumediene* decision might ultimately have important consequences for the military commissions system established by the MCA,\(^{142}\) it did not directly affect them at the time, and the USDOJ executed its expressed plans to proceed with the commissions it had scheduled\(^{143}\) to try those accused of terror-related war crimes, beginning on July 21, 2008 with the trial of Salim Hamdan.\(^{144}\) The proceedings concluded with a guilty verdict on the charge of providing material support to terrorism, and an acquittal for the more serious charge, conspiracy. As a result, Hamdan was sentenced to 66 months in prison, with credit for the 61 he had already served, and the perceived laxity of this sentence exercised many observers. Four months after the


\(^{141}\) In *Munaf v. Geren*, decided on the same day as *Boumediene*, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously on the salience of habeas corpus and once again countermanded the Bush administration’s wishes. They found that two American citizens being held in by the MNF in Iraqi prisons were entitled to file habeas corpus petitions, on the grounds that they were held by U.S. forces. However, they dismissed the petitions themselves in part because the men did not dispute that they had committed crimes. This ruling, which received far less attention than *Boumediene*, may be instructive here, because it demonstrates that there is no reason to entertain a habeas corpus petition from someone who is clearly (or at least presumably) guilty.

\(^{142}\) Shapiro, “Q&A.”

\(^{143}\) Greenhouse, “Justices, 5-4, Back Detainee Appeals,: para. 23; Shapiro, “Q&A.”

\(^{144}\) A full consideration of the Hamdan case is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is worth noting that these proceedings, too, were governed by rules of the visual. News agencies reported that the closed-circuit television system relaying scenes of the courtroom to reporters outside of it had a 20-second delay so that any information that would imperil national security could be edited out. Additionally, the Office of Military Commissions, citing the prohibition against publicizing images of prisoners of war, required that Hamdan approve court sketches of himself before their dissemination (C. Williams, “The Agency Name”), while Evan Kohlmann, witness for the prosecution, was commissioned to develop a film entitled “The Al Qaeda Plan,” which contained graphic images of Al Qaeda attacks (C. Williams, “Guantanamo Jurors”).
verdict, Hamdan was transported to a prison in Yemen, where he served the final month of his sentence before being released on January 8, 2009. This particular outcome notwithstanding, it is important to recall the contention of Charles Swift, Hamdan’s Navy attorney about military commissions in general. He characterized them as “legally pointless”\(^\text{145}\) on the whole, because international law holds that even acquitted enemy combatants can be imprisoned until the end of hostilities, a prospect that seemed to appease at least some critics of the verdict.

In the two possible scenarios we have so far considered, the outcome would vary by Gadahn’s national affiliation. In either instance, however, at least one of the state’s desires would remain unfulfilled, for there is ample evidence that the state desires both the appearance of justice and the pleasure of extralegal vengeance.\(^\text{146}\) Managing these competing wishes would have been challenging for the Bush administration, but would require an exacting political calculus on the part of the Obama administration. In addition to the imperative to refute the naysayers who describe him as inadequately proactive—or dangerously negligent—in fighting terror, the new President is also accountable to constituents who want him to undo the GWOT policies of the Bush administration. The compromise solution, so far, has been to officially revoke the procedures associated with the Bush administration while leaving open the possibility that such otherwise objectionable measures can be reinstated with a presidential order, if national security mandates it. So, for example, Obama can undo his own ban on coercive

\(^{146}\) Here, the case of Jose Padilla revelatory, and clarifies of the specific nature of the trade-off that the law requires of the state. One the one hand, his federal conviction on terrorism charges including conspiracy to murder, kidnap, and maim people in a foreign country (for which the maximum penalty is life in prison) “salvaged a case that had severely tested [the Bush administration’s] approach to terrorism” (Goodnough and Shane, “Padilla is Guilty on All Charges,” para. 9). Padilla, an American citizen, had been detained in military prison before being turned over to civilian officials for trial. Authorities did not investigate his lawyers’ contention that he had been tortured while imprisoned, and the jury’s swift guilty verdict for Padilla and his co-defendants, Adham Hassoun and Kifah Jayyousi, seemed to validate the Bush administration’s aggressively vigilant approach to terror suspects. However, some observers noted that the verdict poses a challenge to those policies, because it implies that the established court system is prepared to deal effectively with crimes of this nature. Given all of this, it is noteworthy that President Bush’s first choice to replace outgoing Attorney General Alberto Gonzales in the fall of 2007 was Michael Mukasey, a judge associated with this and other so-called ‘terror cases’ (Stolberg and Shenon, “Bush to Name Ex-Judge”), effectively strengthening the links between the sovereign and “the law.”
interrogation techniques and questionable detention policies if military officials were to capture someone like Osama bin Laden.\textsuperscript{147}

Moreover, the executive order mandating the closure of Guantánamo and the CIA’s network of secret prisons does nothing to solve the logistical problem posed by the continual capture of enemy fighters and terror suspects, an automatic outcome of the continued prosecution of the GWOT. So, even as the detention camp closest to American soil becomes obsolete, there remains Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan. This site, home to a prison that is currently holding roughly 600 people, was (purposefully) untouched by Obama’s much-vaulted order to close Gitmo. Charlie Savage points out that “The [Obama] administration had sought to preserve Bagram as a haven where it could detain terrorism suspects beyond the reach of American courts.”\textsuperscript{148} In early April 2009, a federal judge contravened the Obama administration and ruled that non-Afghani prisoners captured outside of Afghanistan and held at Bagram were entitled to the right of habeas corpus, the selfsame right upheld last year on behalf of prisoners at Guantánamo. Savage reported that, in February, representatives of the Obama administration had told that judge that they concurred with the position of the Bush administration on Bagram, maintaining that U.S. courts did not have jurisdiction there.\textsuperscript{149} The ruling was a rebuke to the anti-terror authority claimed by the Obama administration, but it was narrow, applying only to a very small subset of the population there. However, it might pertain to Gadahn, were he captured: he is a non-Afghani, believed to be residing in Pakistan. This would mean that his rights would be protected by this contested decision. (If he were captured in Afghanistan, however, the ruling would not automatically apply.) Not withstanding these variations, however, ultimately, all of these detention sites are part of the same system; they are of a piece and complementary—so that Bagram could do the work that Guantánamo no longer can—even as they are kept legally separable by administrative decree.

\textsuperscript{148} C. Savage, “Judge Rules Some Prisoners,” para. 4.
\textsuperscript{149} C. Savage, “Obama’s War on Terror,” para. 4.
If, upon capture, Gadahn’s citizenship remains salient, as in the first option where Gadahn is tried as a traitorous citizen, the state gets to demonstrate its strict lawfulness, but then necessarily forsakes its baser inclinations—it would be able to act publicly, but only with restraint. If Gadahn could somehow be divested of his citizenship, and so enable the second course of action, the state would have more latitude in prosecuting its case and find an occasion to demonstrate its seriousness about fighting terrorism. In so doing, however, it would lose its traitor, while also inviting scrutiny over its handling of the suspect and the case; alternately, it could proceed covertly, an option that might be convenient and gratifying but not terribly glamorous. Thus, in both cases, the state would be bound to and limited by Gadahn’s citizenship and by the notion of citizenship in general.

Frustration, in this instance, can be the only outcome for the state hamstrung by its own criteria of belonging. However, the destiny of a state must not depend on its citizens, and so it must devise a way to operate apart from these strictures, holding the variable of citizenship constant by placing it in abeyance, relegating it to irrelevance if not obsolescence. The state is unaccustomed to thwarted desires, and so is endlessly flexible in its capacity to develop technologies for realizing them. It is possessed of a potent performative ability, an arsenal of utterances, edicts, and appearances through which it can change its shape and nature; Judith Butler argues that the revocation or suspension of the established law is precisely such an exercise. When the state declares a legal emergency, and so superannuates the law itself, it “reanimates a spectral sovereignty within the field of governmentality.” In the process, it transforms a leader into a sovereign, imbuing him at the “climax of terror” with stark authority to be the ultimate arbiter of ‘justice.’

And so we can envision a third scenario, parallel to the other two, a shadowy inverse of those progressions. This would be a negative of those spectacles, proceedings

---

150 In a symbolic gesture animating his January 7th, 2008 video address, Adam Gadahn tore up his American passport. When interviewed about this dramatic flourish, one official responding cynically that it was unnecessary, because, as a treason suspect, his passport is already “void” (Op. cit, AP, “Spokesman”).
151 Butler, Precarious Life, 61.
carried out under the “night visibility” of the spectral.\textsuperscript{153} In this eventuality, Gadahn’s case would be adjudicated elsewhere, in the dark, adjacent space of the state of exception. This terrain is one of collapse, where executive, legislative, and judicial powers\textsuperscript{154} shift from inseparable to indistinguishable. Here, authority of and control over the law transfer exclusively to the executive branch, which assumes sovereign status in the name of emergency. In this circumstance, “it is impossible to distinguish transgression of the law from execution of the law, such that what violates a rule and what conforms to it coincide without any remainder.”\textsuperscript{155}

The Constitution, in this case, would no longer be essential. After all, the prime justifications for the expansion of executive power in the U.S. rely on reinterpretations of the Constitution, either by making the argument that the president has ‘inherent’ powers beyond those specified by the Founders,\textsuperscript{156} or through invocation of the Unitary Executive Theory, built on the writing of Alexander Hamilton in \textit{Federalist 70}. Although the post-9/11 Bush administration was among the most aggressive in carving out territory for executive authority, the Obama administration has not, as of this writing in May 2009, signaled an intention to break with this revised understanding of presidential power. For example, the March 13, 2009 statement on detention authority continues to invest the President with the power to determine who can be detained at Guantánamo, so long as he makes the decision in consonance with international laws of war and the 2001 Authorization of Military Force that empowered the president to take military action against Al Qaeda. Through such processes, the granting of a citizen’s rights becomes an act of clemency rather than a standard procedure.

The processes by which the law is decided and implemented would facilitate this revocation. Modern justice systems, as Carl Schmitt observes in “Statute and Judgment,” are largely consensual; judicial decisions are evaluated by a communal standard, so that the validity of a legal opinion is determined by the degree of concurrence it might elicit. Interpretive decisions with which other judges agree are termed right and applicable, so

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Agamben, \textit{State of Exception}, 7.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} Agamben, \textit{Homo Sacer}, 57.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} C. Savage, \textit{Takeover}, 123.
\end{itemize}
that it is oddly possible for a ruling to be both ‘correct’ and “contrary to law.” In the rulings themselves, there is a liminal moment, after which the law is reinstated in slightly modified form. According to Derrida, the law must always have the appearance of newness, so that any judge’s decision will simultaneously “preserve the law … and also destroy or suspend it enough to have … to reinvent it in each case …” In the interim between the end of the trial and the issuance of the court’s decision, the law rests before being reactivated, awaiting a decision and a minor, but crucial, alteration. The fundamentally subjective nature and essential malleability of the law coalesce in the imperative that it continually be reiterated, and also leave it vulnerable to radical revision, if not outright usurpation.

Whereas in other circumstances, rulings affirming the salience of the law’s protections would be a major hindrance to the dispensation of punishment to Gadahn, for the sovereign they are nothing but a minor and temporary inconvenience. In the extraordinary circumstance of the state of exception, “the ‘law’ is surely there to be consulted, as international convention is there as a kind of model, but not as an obligatory framework for action.” They law can also be an expedient alibi in the achievement of exceptional governance, as sovereigns often provide a legal justification for their entitlement to rule. Once the state of exception is achieved, however, law is nothing more than a relic, for the state of exception governs in large part by tantalizing with the memory of the rights that it has abdicated and the promise of their future reinstitution.

---

158 Although my integration of their work in this suggestion suggests that Derrida and Agamben are commensurable, and my tendency to do so reflects a commonly assumed Benjamin-Derrida-Agamben genealogy, Adam Thurschwell (“Cutting the Branches”) suggests that Agamben had a persistent disagreement with Derrida over the relative importance of philosophy and politics.
160 Most scholarship on the state of exception portrays the eviction of the law as unequivocally lamentable. In this model, the rule of law seems ideal because the rule of the sovereign is so much its opposite. The genealogy of this epistemology is logical given that Agamben seems to “presuppose” that law is “pure” (Kiesow, “Law and Life,” 252), because he recognizes that it is corruptible.
161 There are significant problems with this rather abstract view of law; scholarship in critical legal studies reminds us that the law is a technology of power and injustice, while the historical record shows that for some groups, life is a permanent state of exception. In my model, law is at least implicitly synonymous with justice: I let my argument stand, then, in full recognition of the empirical evidence against such an equation and in so doing, reaffirm the absolute necessity of achieving it.
162 Butler, Precarious Life, 84.
163 Fitzpatrick, “Bare Sovereignty,” 59.
At this juncture, ‘sovereignty’ becomes a brutal double entendre, so that sovereign rule begins to seem both synonymous with and indispensable to the preservation or protection of state and national sovereignty.163 This is the logic underwriting the claim by the executive branch—first staked by the Bush administration and so far retained by President Obama—that it needs the authority to oversee the processes by which terror cases are adjudicated, because it bears the responsibility for guaranteeing the safety and impenetrability of the country. Without widespread assent to this logic, Gadahn’s citizenship would remain both a fact and a liability. And for the state that lacks the capacity to alter either one, his status could be catastrophic. For the state of exception, however, his situation is a mere technicality. The primary representational and legal dilemma that would otherwise be provoked by his citizenship, that he cannot be a traitor unless he is a citizen, and vice versa, would no longer be problematic, as his citizenship would be nothing more than a means to the end of possessing him indefinitely. Ultimately, the sovereign can cancel out both the reality and the risk of Gadahn’s nationality, trumping both with the discursive and legislative declaration of a national emergency, localized in this case around the figure of Gadahn.

Rather than being recognized and tried as a citizen of this country, Gadahn could thus be included via a “relation of exception.”164 His membership in the state would be intricately predicated on his excludability from its rights and privileges, and his appearances would be refracted through this peculiar register of unbelonging. If the state were to pursue this course of action, instead of controlling Gadahn through discursive containment (as by relegating him to the category of ‘traitor’), it would ensure that he was far more literally, bodily confined.

“Imprisoned … Under this Title”?
Gadahn would be hidden from the law, as from everything else. The bond between the sovereign and the detained homo sacer is an allotment of visibility: the sovereign is spotlighted, ubiquitous, hypervisible, while his subjects are sequestered, kept

---

163 Butler, Precarious Life, 55.
164 Agamben, Homo Sacer, 18.
totally out of sight. This logic of the unseen informed the Bush administration’s preference for coercive interrogation techniques that leave no permanent physical traces,\textsuperscript{165} no evidence, nothing to see. Yet although the places reserved for such secrets are far removed from the sovereign himself, they are nevertheless linked directly and invisibly to him, as he is the only one who can provide a way out. Agamben is emphatic about the intimacy between \textit{homo sacer} and the sovereign; the fact that John Yoo’s infamous ‘torture memo’ was a justification of prohibited interrogation techniques in terms of the president’s inherent wartime authority\textsuperscript{166} reveals the essential role that the eminently disposable \textit{homo sacer} plays in the sovereign’s rule.

A captive Gadahn, detained at an unbridgeable distance from the justice system, would be literally without recourse to the law. For the law, in the GWOT detention facility, like Guantánamo or Bagram, occupies the intractable position of “being in force without significance.”\textsuperscript{167} The sovereign has not written it out of existence, but has rendered it superfluous, for he does not need to govern bare life justly in order to govern it effectively. The scrabbling existence evoked by the image of bare life would be literalized in Gadahn’s case, as he would almost certainly be imprisoned, lacking protection under his nationality (which could be summarily erased) or international law (which the Obama administration maintains enables it to detain those who have supported terrorist organizations). The meanness of existence in the facilities commandeered to hold such people is by now an open secret. Under the tyrannical oversight of “petty sovereigns”\textsuperscript{168} with outsized powers, places like Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and Bagram rapidly became “legal black hole[s],”\textsuperscript{169} where both the law and the prisoners disappear into the dark gravity of the emergent. But this blackout is not always absolute. Abu Ghraib produced a hypervisible image archive, while Guantánamo Bay has become legible worldwide through images of jump-suited detainees and barbed-wire fences. And

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{C. Savage, \textit{Takeover}, 215.}
\footnote{Ibid., 79.}
\footnote{Agamben, \textit{Homo Sacer}, 54.}
\footnote{Butler, \textit{Precarious Life}, 57.}
\footnote{Swift, “The American Way of Justice,” para. 51.}
\end{footnotes}
so it is significant that Bagram, as perhaps the new, favored destination for GWOT prisoners, has generated no familiar scenes and achieved no such iconicity.

_Law_-enforcement is in many ways a technology of the spatial\textsuperscript{170} and the corporal;\textsuperscript{171} the state of exception exaggerates this through the creation of spaces that are, for all practical purposes, nowhere, inhabited by bodies that might as well be no one. By a series of convenient bureaucratic happenstances and legislative maneuvers, Guantánamo Bay, for example, became “unique place on the planet,”\textsuperscript{172} off of U.S. soil and on the territory of a state with which the American government has no formal relations; according to the Bush administration’s logic, it was outside of all jurisdictions, a legal no-place. If housed at another, similarly lawless site, Gadahn could be stripped of the provisions explicitly dictated for prisoners of war, including those pertaining to the visual, which protect POWs from being rendered as spectacles but also mandate that they remain visible and identifiable to international agencies.

From the moment of arrival at such a facility, Gadahn would be removed from the realm of law. In this way, Gadahn thus situated would indefinitely serve a sentence other than the one dictated by the USC. All of the penalties for treason that it outlines (death or imprisonment and a fine and prohibition from ever holding office) are to be carried out, in the document’s language, “under this title.” Yet the very condition of possibility for all of these consequences for Gadahn is the suspension of law, of the title in its most general sense. Gadahn cannot, therefore, be detained under a title of any sort because titles have ceased not to exist but to matter. Of course, the literal outcome is the same: imprisonment is imprisonment. The qualitative difference, however, retains its meaning, as the product of an extraordinary configuration of the state and its relationship to law; Gadahn in such a circumstance would be punished not under a legal title but under something else entirely.

Whereas the during the Bush administration, terror suspects were removed from the protection of the law, the Obama administration has set about the task of re-extending

\textsuperscript{170} Moran, “The Gaze of Law,” 107.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{172} C. Savage, _Takeover_, 145.
the law to domains from which it had been stripped, like Guantánamo Bay. In some ways, these are encouraging developments. However, any optimism I might have about them is tempered by an argument that Judith Butler recently advanced, in which she differentiates herself from Agamben. Although there are substantive points of agreement between them, she distinguished her positions from his during her lecture on the forthcoming sequel to *Precarious Life*, entitled *Frames of War*. Whereas Agamben focuses his analysis on what Butler calls the ‘retraction of law,’ Butler explains that in her two most recent books, she is concerned with the ways in which the law (or, more precisely, legal coercion) administers precariousness. For Agamben, a ‘bare life’ is one that has been excluded from the protections of the law, while Butler wants to explore the possibility that a bare life is “saturated by power” rather than exterior to it. This implies that even if, or when, the law returns to places where it had previously been annulled, the reinstatement is no guarantee of civil liberties, or even of justice.

**Disappearing Adam Gadahn**

Part of the awful convenience of the solution of imprisoning Gadahn accordingly is that it would enable the state to have the double fulfillment (justice and vengeance) that it has so far been denied. Gadahn could either be placed beyond the pale of justice so that his treatment would not disturb it or processed under its newest iteration. Simultaneously, there is ample room for the sovereign to fulfill his wishes. The strange ampleness of the state of exception means that there are plenty of places to disappear or, more precisely, to be disappeared into. American law under normal circumstances is a technology of visibility, and its meticulous regulations of disclosure, evidence, transparency, and witnessing reflect this preoccupation; in other words, rights and regulations about appearance and showing are the nexus between the juridical and the visual. Within this schema, we might understand habeas corpus safeguards as devices that protect rights related to when and where one appears. They mandate that the party

---

173 Butler, “Frames of War.”
175 Agamben claims the advent of habeas corpus signals the replacement of citizenship with bare life and so implies that we ought to be skeptical about the intent of these laws. Fitzpatrick argues against that
holding the body of the accused do so publicly, in plain sight of the law. This imperative guarantees the right of a citizen to appear as she wishes, without worry of undue interference from the state, because the state should only be able to apprehend and hold her if it can demonstrate its reasons for doing so. This set of guidelines has figured repeatedly as a site of administrative concern and intervention by Presidents Bush and Obama about where and how they are to be observed,\(^{176}\) and this activity underscores the centrality of the visual to this war, and also to the state of exception.

Although the visual is essential to exceptional governments, whether in the pageantry of sovereign rule or instrumentality of sovereign control, the connection is tactical rather than predetermined or consistent. Thus, under certain circumstances, the sovereign mandates exposure of the bodies he controls; the excruciating attention that the Nazis paid to the bodies of the people they encamped is one example of the sovereign powers of scrutiny afforded by the state of exception. Alternately, in Gadahn’s circumstance, the visible/visual—perhaps even more so than the traitorous—is the enemy, and so as soon as such a system got custody of Gadahn, it would disappear his person. It would disappear his person as retribution, because it can do nothing but the opposite to his image, which has already been heavily circulated, and which remains fundamentally iterable.

Even as Gadahn could get permanently and deliberately lost in the labyrinthine system replacing justice, his images would remain uncontrollable by juridical practice, regardless of the change in the status of their referent, an autonomous aftereffect. Indeed, one might imagine that a solidification of Gadahn’s literally outlaw status could increase the popularity of his extant videos. Like every other visual practice of terror, the juridical is self-perpetuating, endlessly reproducing the need for itself.\(^{177}\) The difference that would be made by having Gadahn in custody is largely a spatial one, changing the

---

\(^{176}\) For a discussion of the relationship between otherness, spectrality, and the observation of the law, see Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, 120). In their formulation, the specter haunts by watching over us as the law would, holding us endlessly to account.

\(^{177}\) This dialectical formulation is akin to the model proposed by Retort in their consideration of the relationship between the state and the spectacle, in which each pole depends upon and threatens to engulf the other (*Afflicted Powers*).
distance between him and his image, dislocating his capacity to render himself visually again and again. Indeed, the only recourse available to the juridical in this instance would be a spatial one; it can do nothing about his afterimages, but it can remove him from sight and protract his eclipse indefinitely, denying the spotlight and resolution that a trial might provide, that the law guarantees.

In addition to its capacity to create the figurative death of indefinite detention, the state always has the authority to exact literal, biological death, particularly of traitors (the USC stipulates this as the first penalty for treason), without declaring an emergency. The death penalty is the “very principle,” the ultimate essence, of the established law. That system aims at the promotion and preservation of life; in order to be justifiable or legal within it, death must occur only in the service of life. To override the popular ethical squeamishness that might attend such an exchange, discourses about capital punishment are often “disembodied,” articulated in abstract languages of executive “method” and ultimate fairness.

Such discussions are augmented by a careful management of the killing’s visuality, which occurs in a space of public secrecy before a selected audience of spectators, whose detachment the state has repeatedly sought to ensure by parsing out just how much suffering they might be able to bear witnessing. Through all of this orchestration, execution is transmuted into a social good, a confessedly unsavory procedure enabled by a calculus that equates the death of one person to the security of

---

178 Hill makes a similar argument about Osama bin Laden, arguing that even if he died, he would retain a ghostly power from beyond the grave through his audio and video messages (Re-Imagining the War on Terror, 42).
179 This is, perhaps, the only way to regulate jihad videos and their producers. In May 2008, Senator Joseph Lieberman petitioned the CEOs of Google and YouTube to delete all “terrorist content.” Both companies rebuffed him, and many of the criticisms of Lieberman’s mission, in addition to making tepid defenses of free speech, that easy access to these videos was crucial for academics and national security analysts alike, who use video releases to track the activity of terrorist groups. Lieberman, in favoring absolute repression, underestimated the lure of surveillance. There was not sufficient political or popular support for this effort to pursue the matter further.
181 Green, “The Suffering Body,” 185. The Supreme Court QP Report on Baze v. Rees (2007) reflects this trend in its consideration of whether or not death by lethal injection constitutes cruel and unusual punishment, which is prohibited by the Eighth Amendment. The two-page document does not question the acceptability of execution, but rather the merits of this particular means thereof.
182 Essig, “This is Going to Hurt,” para. 7-9.
many. Death is the gory link between the everyday state and its exceptional annex. In
the former, death is normalized; in the latter, it is simply normal.

Death is always lurking, lodged everywhere in exceptional governance; the
sovereign who rules the *homo sacer* is the highest representative of a thanatopolitical
system. In the non-emergency state, on the other hand, the law stutters through capital
punishment:

\[
\ldots \text{[I]n any other legal act, law reaffirms itself. But in this very violence}
\text{something rotten in the law is revealed, above all to a finer sensibility,}
\text{because the latter knows itself to be infinitely removed from conditions in}
\text{which fate might imperiously have shown itself in such a sentence.}^{184}
\]

When the sovereign does not have full authority over it, capital punishment is something
of a risk, revealing vulnerability in the state in much the same way that indicting a traitor
does. But death does not signify the same way in the state of exception as elsewhere.
The ‘death penalty’ itself ceases to exist under such a regime, because life is no longer
guaranteed—survival and death hinge equally and unsteadily on sovereign whim.\(^{185}\)

The only way that the sovereign could make executing Gadahn meaningful would
be to reinvoke the law and its authority to kill. The death penalty, if it is to signify, has to
be an act of deliberate justice, rather than random violence. But if it seeks to eradicate
*homo sacer*, the state of exception confronts a paradox. In bare life, “the rule of law over
the living ceases,”\(^{186}\) because the essence of *homo sacer* is the indifference of his
death.\(^{187}\) The sovereign’s dilemma is that the death penalty can only serve its legal

\(^{183}\) Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 122.
\(^{184}\) Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 286.
\(^{185}\) President Bush’s support for capital punishment was well-documented. President Obama’s position is a
bit more variegated. Quoting an oft-cited passage from *The Audacity of Hope*, MSNBC reported during the
2008 presidential campaign that Obama is in favor of the death penalty in the case of crimes “‘so heinous,
so beyond the pale, that the community is justified in expressing the full measure of its outrage by meting
out the ultimate punishment.’” The article referred specifically to Obama’s disagreement (in accord with
John McCain) with the Supreme Court’s decision to ban capital punishment in cases of child rape, and
other analyses suggest that Obama considers acts of terrorism to be similarly heinous and thus punishable
by death. As an Illinois state senator, Obama was an advocate for reforming the death penalty, and
authored a mandate requiring that police interrogations be videotaped (MSNBC, “McCain, Obama
Disagree”).
\(^{186}\) Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 297.
\(^{187}\) Agamen, *Homo Sacer*, 73.
function if the killing it mandates has social meaning and can be conducted accordingly before an audience comprehending of the spectacle. So if the state wishes to remain viable and potent, it must do something else.

When, in the late winter and early spring of 2008, the blogosphere seized enthusiastically on Pakistani news reports rumoring that Adam Gadahn had been killed in the Predator strike that killed Al Qaeda field commander Abu Laith al-Libi, the U.S. government denied the reports with bureaucratic equivocation. The politics of this disavowal are complex, but the denial itself reveals that this traitor is wanted alive rather than dead. On May 18th, 2008, Evan Kohlmann, writing for Counterterrorism Blog, wagered publicly that Adam Gadahn was dead,188 citing the notable lack of English subtitles on As-Sahab videos released after the strike. Less than three weeks later, the Associated Press reported189 that the FBI was launching a new publicity campaign in Afghanistan that it hoped would yield their elusive suspect, whom it still considered a fugitive, in the “absence”190 of any clear confirmation that he was dead. This was apropos of nothing—no new intelligence on Gadahn’s whereabouts, no new videos released, no indication that he posed a greater threat than he did before. There was a different motive force. As it circulates the “matchbooks, handbills, and posters”191 that comprise its new counterterrorism effort, the FBI proliferates Gadahn’s image, almost as if it wishes to reanimate him, to superstitiously ward off his death.192

Likewise, when rumors of his death again surfaced in September 2008, the government continued to evade them. In its September 8, 2008 “Middle East Digest,” the State Department included the transcript of its Daily Press Briefing, which included the following exchange:

QUESTION: Reports (inaudible) saying that Adam Gadahn may have been killed in an airstrike.

MR. MCCORMACK: I hadn’t seen that. I hadn’t seen that.

188 Kohlmann, “Where’s the Beef?”
189 AP, “FBI Boosts Effort.”
190 FBI, “Publicity Campaign Launched.”
191 Ibid.
192 Hill makes a similar argument (on flawed premises—see note 180 in Chapter 4) about bin Laden.
QUESTION: Adam Gadahn?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yes, sir, in the back.193

Without belaboring this brief exchange, I think it significant that the State Department spokesman, Sean McCormack, responds to this query with the language of sight and feels compelled to repeat his denial, almost wishfully, and then moves on quickly to something else. During the same briefing, McCormack repeatedly responds to questions about which he was unsure with the same wording, but this is the only instance in the briefing when he repeats his assertion, and the only time he does not offer to follow up and return with more information for the journalist.

In any event, the state’s continued surveillance effort was vindicated on October 4, 2008, when Gadahn reappeared in a new on-line video194 entitled, “The Believer Isn’t Stung from the Same Hole Twice,” gloating over the U.S. financial crisis and condemning Pakistan’s cooperation with U.S. airstrikes on Pakistan’s tribal areas. As President Obama proceeds with his coordinated, covert military operations inside Pakistan, in which missile strikes figure prominently, Gadahn will, presumably, find many more occasions to make movies.

The law that issues the prohibition against treason might wish to kill Gadahn, but the state of exception threatened by the visual, the government that indicts a moviemaker, wants only to hide him, to seclude him in an anti-spectacle of misery.195 Indeed, the state of exception needs to hide him, an imperative passed from President Bush to his successor. In part, this is because it can ill afford the publicity of a trial. In particular, this is because it must to keep him alive (however meanly) so that it might continually cultivate the pleasure of actively disappearing him, a punishment apropos of a war

---

194 The video is available online through The Internet Archive, at <http://www.archive.org/details/As-Sahab-Foundation-for-Media-Production-1>.
195 In this regard, it is telling that Ali Hamza al Bahlul, a Yemeni detained by the U.S. in part for his status as a ‘propaganda chief’ for Al Qaeda, designated as such for his alleged production of a recruiting film about the attack on the USS Cole, was sentenced to life in prison. Yet while this might have had the potential to provide support to the Bush administration’s defense of the military tribunal system, Bahlul boycotted the process, refusing to participate in his defense and demanding that his attorney remain silent during the court proceedings, thus nullifying any public relations value his incarceration and hearings might have had.
without end. So it is that in the October 11, 2006 USDOJ press conference announcing the indictment of Gadahn, McNulty explained it by exhorting, “It’s time now to get the message out to get this person in our custody”: no mention of a trial, no promise of a conviction, no suggestion of an execution. Just custody. This is an exception to the exception, because it is a systematization not of death but of disappearance. Whereas in other circumstances, the greatest expression of sovereign power is killing in the blasphemed name of the law, here, it is the creation of a law that so expands the invisible realm of deadness that killing is unnecessary. Such a punishment is safer for the state, and even more predictable than death, because instead of creating an execution scene that it must direct and police, it erases everything, putting truth to its favored lie that ‘there is nothing to see here.’

Dead, Gadahn would not matter, and thus neither would the state, and so it would have to keep him alive. Thus, any decision to spare a captive Gadahn’s biological life should not be confused with amnesty, or taken for evidence that the steady rule of law has been restored, for in sustaining him, the state could both exercise control over his image-making capacity and exact retribution for that very potency. If it could do this, then, the state could finally accommodate its needs and its wants at the same time. Simultaneously, however, Gadahn’s parallel visual life would remain inextinguishable, the catalyst that triggered this process in the first place remaining endlessly reactive.

\[197\] Rancière, *Disagreement.*
Conclusion

First, they took my flip-flops. Escorting me to a row of plastic chairs, they said I would get them back once they had been inspected. Two agents huddled over my sandals while I sat in the appointed place, trying to keep my feet from touching the airport floor. They determined that my shoes were safe and sent me back through the metal detector, which sounded its alarm. Although my shoes had been vetted, they were not returned, as the agents led me, still barefoot, to another plastic destination, this time the floormat with outsized feet painted on it, and began to wand. Yet again, I set off the detector. The TSA officer eyed me, and told me not to move while he called for female reinforcements. More wanding, more alarms, and a small uniformed crowd was gathering around me. Behind them, an even larger crowd of spectators was amassing. Someone was dispatched to get my bag off the conveyor belt; someone else took me by the elbow; a third someone, when I inquired, told me I could not have my flip-flops back yet. They led me through an unmarked door and into a windowless room: metal desk, metal chairs, and (seriously) a single bright light hanging from the ceiling. They called the sheriff. She—regulations stipulated that all of this had to be handled by women—asked me if there was anything I wanted to tell them. No. The original TSA officer asked why I was setting off the metal detectors. This had never happened before, and I didn’t know. Another pass with the wand, same result. Everyone put on their latex gloves. They began a more direct inspection, but of course, found nothing. Back to the handheld metal detector. No change. Very personal questions. I insisted that I didn’t have anything untoward; this affirmation of my innocence led, ironically, to an even more invasive search. I stopped protesting.
Less than two years had gone by after September 11th, and I intuited that the best strategy was compliance, so I gave up asking for my shoes. The women looked at each other. I wanted to go home. Eventually, I forgot my bare feet altogether, when I began to sense that things were going to get even more surreal very soon, unless somebody did something to interrupt the momentum that this search was gathering. They asked me again what I was concealing. Still nothing. Repeating the same inspections over and over was not yielding any results, and their metal detector kept insisting that I embodied a threat; they would have to find some other way to ferret it out. They were struggling to remember the protocol for situations like this, and finally one of them said that maybe they should try another metal detector.

It was the same routine, but this time, the device remained silent, and my captors were magically transformed. They were jocular; now that I wasn’t going to blow anything up, we could be friends. After all, they already knew me very well. One of the TSA officers set my sandals on the floor before me, making sure to align the flip-flops with my feet; the sheriff held my bag while I dressed. A third woman told me that they would be sure to mention, in the report that she would have to prepare, how patient and agreeable I had been. As they opened the door, she put her hand on my shoulder and thanked me. She smiled kindly and told me that I had “really done a service for my country today.”

It was August 2003, the summer before I began graduate school, and I made it home without further incident. For awhile, all of this was just a dinner-party anecdote. But it was also a moment of interpellation, and a corporeal one. That long hour of my life brought everything into focus; when I eventually returned, as a student, to the question of terror, I realized that my ability to make sense of it was dependent, in a fundamental but obscure way, on what had happened that afternoon. Whatever feelings I had previously had about September 11th, whatever my assessments of American foreign and domestic policy—they had been diffuse, scattershot. And then, courtesy of this retinue of female strangers in navy uniforms, I, too, became a citizen-subject of terror.

There is a connection, albeit a circuitous one, between that afternoon and this one, which I have passed trying to draw closure to this text. I feel strongly that my capacity to
discern what I have spent the previous chapters documenting—the earnest but misbegotten spectatorship of the illuminating; the therapeutic compression of the dimensional; the quantifying impulse of the diagnostic; the orderly wish of the temporal; and the desire of the state that drives the juridical—has its origins in the interior view of the whole system that I was afforded on that day. Although nothing like that has happened to me since, and I pass unimpeded through most security checkpoints (regularly courting another disaster by travelling with suitcases full of books on terror and a laptop full of videos that depict it), that interpellation was instant and permanent. Even if I fancy myself a critic of the GWOT state, that identity is nonetheless, or even more so, dependent upon it. These sites of visual practice work in a similar way. They are points of entry, often alluring ones, into the community of the terrorized nation-state. The types of visual practice to which they correspond are the various routes by which this membership can be achieved. Whatever the outcome, even if it is dissent, engagement in these practices entails mastery over terror, and yields an identity, a subject-position, derived from that confrontation.

So far, I have considered each mode of visual practice separately, and analyzed them discretely. But they are all commensurable, and they do—occasionally—coincide. The airport checkpoint is the prime site of this convergence, a liminal place where all of these modes of visual practice coexist. Terror is the structuring absence of this threshold, and its absolute prohibition (don’t even joke about it) makes terror, paradoxically, omnipresent. Certainly, most trips through the checkpoint are unremarkable, interrupted by no more than minor delays or random additional screenings, and everyone is polite and agreeable, happy to follow orders as long as they get to their gate on time.

This is, of course, the only reasonable way to behave, a strategic masquerade engineered to elicit the desired reaction from the people that stand between us and our destinations. Commenting on the affective consequences of the increasingly elaborate and anonymous systems that govern our everyday lives, Kathleen Woodward writes about the feeling of ‘bureaucratic rage,’¹ the impotent form of anger that consumes us when we find ourselves totally at the mercy of strangers whose job is to interface with the

public on behalf of a totally alienating system. Of course, this rage can never be vented at its actual targets, only suppressed into a performance of “calm patience,” because acting on our true feelings would be utterly counterproductive. As a superficial concession to traveler annoyance, the checkpoint is governed by a set of norms and procedures that smooth the relationships between travelers and the TSA, between citizens (or non-citizen visitors) and the state. Gramsci observed that as civil society becomes ascendant, we often witness “the coercive element of the state withering away by degrees.” Consequently, everything at the checkpoint is routinized and mostly genial. Power, as Foucault argued, operates through “partners,” and the pervasive checkpoint rhetoric of cooperation to assure safety and efficiency makes this collaboration seem natural and mutually beneficial, even though everybody understands that the partnership is fundamentally unequal.

The airport checkpoint is the place where American terror began and, also, the place where it could have been prevented. It would be absurd to blame everything on the overworked, undertrained screeners at Logan, Newark, and Washington Dulles; so much had to happen before the hijackers bypassed them. Still, the airport checkpoint has been the target of the most comprehensive federal overhaul, and has become a recognizable symbol of the national security state. In *Lost Bodies: Inhabiting the Borders of Life and Death*, Laura Tanner writes about the medical office waiting room, documenting the objects, sensations, emotions, and behaviors that make the experience everywhere identical; my consideration of the airport checkpoint proceeds according to a similar methodology. I am not referring to any checkpoint in particular, but to an essential

---

2 Woodward catalogs a range of bureaucratic feelings, including panic and relief. These emotions are both personal, insofar as they are deeply felt, and impersonal, in that they are generic, or common to all subjects of these bureaucracies. They are also mediated, as the systems that orchestrate all of these behaviors screen bureaucrats from the public (*Statistical Panic*, 171). Because the checkpoint bureaucracies are structurally the same at every airport, it is possible to generalize responsibly about these experiences.


5 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 217.

6 In a passing reference, Tanner compares the waiting room to the airport, but does not explore the comparison much further (*Lost Bodies*, 68).
uniformity—despite minor regional differences in procedure and appearance—derived from their common “visual cultures of risk.”

**Illuminating**

Security at the airport is all about exposure, of finding the hidden, the invisible, and the undetectable. Feldman argues that contemporary “risk” is “that which transcends human perception in everyday life, despite its immanence in, and parasitic relationships to the everyday.” The job of the airport screener is to decipher which everyday objects pose a threat. From the special flashlight that he can use to detect fraudulent IDs to the x-ray that enables her gaze to penetrate the sides of purses and briefcases, these are technologies designed to augment sight and aid in the assessment of risk. In the illuminating practices I described in Chapter 1, non-state actors seek to use the power of the visual visual against the state in the name of their own citizenship. Alternately, at the airport checkpoint, agents of the state employ the penetrating visual in the name of protecting their own citizens. Airports themselves have always been vaguely uncomfortable places, nowhere that anyone would want to stay any longer than necessary (despite the enticements of food, drink, and commerce), and there is no pretense that the security process is not irksome, or even intrusive. At the checkpoint, there are merely efforts to mitigate its unpleasantness: the option to have your screening done in private, the requirement that physical inspections be done by agents of the same sex, the partitioning of separate security lines for first-class passengers or expert travelers. Here, in a banal way, is the phenomenon that Baudrillard describes when he writes: “All real violence is diverted by the question of transparency—democracy trying to make a virtue out of the disclosure of its vices.”

All illuminators, from the anti-war activists waving placards adorned with photographs of tortured Iraqis to the TSA agent that rifles through my personal effects, have ostensibly good intentions about protecting the nation-state, but only the latter group

---

7 Feldman, “The Actuarial Gaze.”
8 Ibid., 205.
is the subject of widespread derision and critique. The difference lies in the identity of their objects. When Americans become the objects of surveillance, when their intimate business becomes a visual artifact for a stranger’s consumption—that is when we object. The same terrorized, inflamed form of citizenship enables both kinds of illumination, but only one seems objectionable. What would it mean if the same person who consumes the Abu Ghraib images with relative ease, transforming them into symbols for her cause, articulates that other part of the American anti-war critique, the one concerned with the domestic erosion of civil liberties, and objects to having her bags or her person searched at the airport? Such an objection might be justified, but it would also be, in a fundamental way, unfair. Any platform that sees these two protests as complementary is blinded by a racist logic of equivalence that likens comparatively minor nuisances suffered by American citizens to gross violations of bodily integrity inflicted upon non-American prisoners.

*Dimensional*

The checkpoint is a richly iconographic space, and there is very little representation that is realist. Instructional posters show travelers in silhouettes, while flat-screen plasma televisions show looped videos demonstrating security procedures with featureless passengers emptying their bags and removing their shoes again and again. Everything is drawn in the bureaucratic hieroglyph of road signs that someone, somewhere has designed intentionally in an effort to provide visual guidance for the process of becoming a visual object.

The x-ray is the only technology that is indexical, and even the most advanced of those screens cannot provide a photograph-quality view of the contents of a bag. It is indexical in the sense that it generates a representation that is derived directly from the properties of the objects that it is imaging, but does not render them as they are, but according to a special color-coded system that identifies their contents. Despite this, there remains something superfluous about the x-ray, a way in which the fantasy about the technology itself overshadows its rather limited capacity. When an x-ray image is unclear, the next step is to re-run it; after that, it is a direct, manual, visual inspection,
through which everything that had been rendered only in shadowy outlines takes shape. Until that point, however, the visual work of the checkpoint occurs largely in two dimensions.

Every traveler knows the purpose of all these security measures, though mentioning them is forbidden. The artifacts, the signs, and the flat screens all transform those reasons into non-threatening symbols, the shorthand visual language by which the state regularly communicates with its citizens. Like their counterparts in virtual reality and computer imaging or their progeny in FlatDaddy (who would be unable to conceal any contraband on or in his body), airport dimensional practices render terror cartoonish. Promoting security becomes a matter of following simple instructions, conveyed in simple images that are the opposite of the unforgettable sights of the day that occasioned all of this, or the war that it began.

Diagnostic

In the years since September 11th, “[t]he identification of evil [has become] an increasingly urgent, if anxious, task of the dominant,”11 but that can only ever be a matter of guesswork. Compared to that, identifying a material threat is easy. In general, assessing a threat requires separating what is dangerous from what is not; at the airport checkpoint, the parameters for this calculation are different, so much so that otherwise harmless things, in certain quantities, become a danger. Screeners must be alert to all of this, and must be able to translate a mass of data quickly into a diagnosis of risk. Screening procedures make this work orderly; technologies make it faster and more precise. The x-ray transforms objects into images, and skilled screeners will be able to decipher these cryptic signs, parsing out what is threatening and what is innocuous.

Like the non-visual stimuli that augment scenes to make Virtual Iraq so compelling, non-visual technologies also enhance the screeners’ ability to detect a threat. They are necessary because there are dangers that no one would be able to see. And so the metal detector interprets pulses of electrical current to find hidden metallic objects; x-ray systems are designed to provide color-coded images so operators can determine what

might potentially be explosive; and trace detection systems can identify suspicious residues swabbed off bags or freed from passengers’ bodies by short bursts of air in specially-designed portals.

All of these devices, deployed with increasing urgency after September 11th, are a legacy of a changing epistemology of airport security that has its roots in the 1970s, when hijackings became an increasingly common hazard of air travel. The emergence of this new peril occasioned a shift, as Alastair Gordon reports, to a paradigm in which all passengers are “guilty until proven innocent.” Everyone is a potential terror suspect, until machines and their human operators prove otherwise, a ritual that must be repeated every time they want to fly. Like other diagnostic practices of the visual, here everything goes more smoothly when people comply. When you remove your shoes without being told, carry only approved quantities of liquids and do so in a separate bag, divest yourself of coats and metal watches, everyone gets where they are going faster. Knowing what you can and cannot take past the checkpoint is a cognitive form of citizenship, and the reward for these small preparations or changes in routine is a quicker arrival at your destination. But doing so requires entertaining the possibility, even for a moment, that you, that anyone, could be a threat, and regulating your own behavior accordingly.

Temporal

Airports would be impossible without an orderly temporal system: arrivals, departures, travel plans—all of these are contingent upon a shared and uniform conception of time. The quality of an airline is determined, in part, by how often its flights are on-time, and, since the 1930s, travelers have consistently reported that they prefer airports that privilege speed and shorten the time it takes them to get on the plane. Before September 11th, speed was paramount; it is now secondary to safety. Everything takes longer, and part of the trade-off for living in a nation-state that is protected from terror (unlike those destinations listed on the ominous warning signs) is delay. These new rhythms have a specific relation to the visual. The speed of the conveyor belt is timed so that the screener running the x-ray will be able to get a full

---

13 Ibid., 79.
picture, and the equipment itself enables operators to stop or re-run bags easily, to pause or rewind the scene. More broadly, a speedy trip to the gate requires following the rules by making oneself more legible to surveillance.

Acculturating oneself to these new rhythms is part of citizenship. Unlike time at the gate or even on the plane, where travelers can occupy themselves with other things, it is almost impossible to multitask at security. Like time spent in waiting rooms, as Tanner observes, these minutes often feel “wasted”;\textsuperscript{14} compelled to do nothing, we are totally at the mercy of others, who are keeping us from where we want to be. However, the slow forward movement of the security queue is precisely the pace of a terrorized nation-state orienting itself in the world; by falling into line, even impatiently, we accept the primacy of the state’s demands over our own needs, agendas, and individual peregrinations. In this way, the time is not lost, but simply repurposed.

\textit{Juridical}

The slowness of the security line stands in sharp contrast to the speed with which officials can, at least theoretically, respond to a threat detected in the process. Functionally, the airport checkpoint shortens the circuit between the state and the visual. Machines devised for precisely such a purpose and operators trained to utilize them transform travelers into subjects that are variously positioned on a matrix of threat. In general, juridical practices of the visual have a limited scope, as it can be difficult for the state to access threatening images. The checkpoint, however, exists to display them, and operates consensually. It garners consent in trade for the universal promise of going somewhere else. But departure is not the only potential dividend.

For the Americans stripping and shuffling shoelessly forward, this is a ritual of citizenship, in which the promise of belonging serves as compensation for inconvenience and minimally traumatic violations. Navigating these checkpoints is proof of our post-9/11 expertise, our ability to function as citizen-subjects of this GWOT state. Simply submitting to these measures may not be a service to the country, exactly, but the act of following the rules is a tacit acknowledgment of their validity. Successful passage is also

\textsuperscript{14} Tanner, \textit{Lost Bodies}, 65.
proof of our innocence, our lack of culpability for any terror, any death. Marita Sturken theorizes that this innocence, a position outside all of the messy business of politics and history, is an especially appealing retreat for Americans living after 9/11.\textsuperscript{15} At the same time, the pervasive skepticism of the checkpoint can be contagious. Just as the tedium of the doctor’s office waiting room prompts us to internalize the medical gaze, to worry about our bodies even if we know that we are healthy,\textsuperscript{16} the architecture of the checkpoint and the doubting, securocratic air of the screeners might make even the most innocuous traveler start to wonder, if only fleetingly, about their own guilt or complicity. This spontaneous form of self-regulation can only serve to make the screeners’ task easier, which in turn helps the whole system run that much more smoothly.

As unsettling as all of this can be for those of us who live here, the uncertainty is exponentially greater for non-Americans. They are subject to the same security measures, caught in the same network of visual practices, but without even the modest protections afforded to Americans. Reporting on the 10-day detention of an Italian visitor to the U.S., Nina Bernstein observed that, “because such ‘arriving aliens’ are not considered to be in the United States at all, even if they are in custody, they have none of the legal rights that even illegal immigrants can claim.”\textsuperscript{17} The flipside of duty-free shopping, which is the only real perk of being at the airport, is a general deterritorialization of that space, a transitory and exceptional location where certain laws do not apply because there is no territorial authority to apply them. For those from elsewhere, who are just passing through the checkpoint and the country, the best they can hope for is that this will be a temporary indoctrination, a fleeting encounter for which there can be no reimbursement (except the relief of unimpeded passage), a single moment of being imaged and interpellated into someone else’s terror.

\textsuperscript{15} Sturken, \textit{Tourists of History}.
\textsuperscript{16} Tanner, \textit{Lost Bodies}, 78.
\textsuperscript{17} Bernstein, “Italian’s Detention Illustrates Dangers,” para. 8.
Upon clearing security, however, all of this recedes into memory, the sensations of the checkpoint dissipating in the wide bright corridor of the concourse, with its neon vista of trinkets and junk food, where everyone has in common an imaged and verified harmlessness.


—. “Photography, War, Outrage.” PMLA 120, no. 3 (2005): 822-828.


—. “United 93.” Cineaste 31, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 73-75.


11’09”01. Directed by Youssef Chahine, Amos Gitai, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Shohei


Fine, Gary Alan. *Difficult Reputations: Collective Memories of the Evil, Inept, and


Academy of Political and Social Science 588 (July 2003): 73-89.


Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 1996.


—, Sam R. Sharar, Barbara Coda, John J. Everett, Marcia Ciol, Todd Richards, and David R.


Kozol, Wendy. LIFE’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism. Philadelphia:


Lang, Berel. “Is It Possible to Misrepresent the Holocaust?” In History and Theory:


Lubell, Sam. “*Reflecting Absence* Chosen as World Trade Center Memorial.” *Architectural
Record 192, no. 2 (February 2004): 21.


Matus, Jill L. “Dickensian Dislocations: Trauma, Memory, and Railway Disaster.” In


MEMRI (The Middle East Media Research Institute). “Special Dispatch #1079: Osama bin


Messer, Lesley. “J-Prof’s FOIA Suit Nets Soldiers’ Photos.” Editor and Publisher 138, no. 9 (September 2005): 10.


Morris, Rosalind C. “Theses on the Questions of War: History, Media, Terror.” In *Terrorism*,


Pugliese, Joseph. “Biotypologies of Terrorism.” *Cultural Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (September


Retort (Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, Michael Watts). *Afflicted Powers: Capital and


Stoltz, Gregory Ian. “Arabs in the Morning Paper: A Case of Shifting Identity.” In *Discourse,*


Taylor, Philip M. “The World Wide Web Goes to War: From Kosovo to the ‘War’ Against


This Film is Not Yet Rated. Directed by Kirby Dick. New York, NY; IFC, 2006.


von Alphen, Ernst. “Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma.” In *Acts of


—. “The Others: Mourning the Dead, Wherever They May Be.” In Abuse Your Illusions: The


