Apprehending Abu Ghraib

by

Danielle Taschereau Mamers
Bachelor of Arts (Honours), University of Alberta, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Political Science

© Danielle Taschereau Mamers, 2009
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without the permission of the author.

Supervisory Committee

Apprehending Abu Ghraib

by

Danielle Taschereau Mamers
B.A, University of Alberta, 2007

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Arthur Kroker, (Department of Political Science)
Supervisor

Dr. Warren Magnusson, (Department of Political Science)
Departmental Member

Abstract

Supervisory Committee
Dr. Arthur Kroker, (Department of Political Science)
Supervisor

Dr. Warren Magnusson, (Department of Political Science)
Departmental Member

This thesis is a critical assessment of the role of photography in representing suffering and death. Drawing on the images of torture from the Abu Ghraib prison, I argue that the ways in which things become visible structure our affective and ethical dispositions, with crucial implications for our ability to attend to the suffering of others. In the first chapter, I examine the political importance of photography in its capacity to differentially represent vulnerable lives. In the second chapter, I illustrate the ways in which the prison photographs made visible the violent exploitation of Iraqi civilians, contrary to the official narrative of liberation offered by the Bush Administration. Finally, in the third chapter, following Judith Butler, I implicate the viewers of images of suffering in order to illustrate their roles in perpetuating norms of visibility, as an opening to the consideration of lives which remain unseen. I conclude that photographs open an important reflective space for considering the differential distribution of vulnerability.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee ii
Abstract iii
Table of Contents iv
Acknowledgments v
Introduction 1
Chapter One 10
Part One – The Limitations of War Photography 11
Objectivity 11
Instability of meaning 13
The media cycle 16
Part Two – The Potential Capabilities of War Photography 19
The spark 20
Depictive Efficiency 22
Part Three – The State's Interest in the War Photograph 25
The state and its image 25
The state and the 'seen' 30
The state and the 'unseen' 34
Chapter Two 39
Part One: Context 41
The photographs 43
The scene 44
The (tortured) subjects 46
The photographers 47
The 'click' 49
The 'THUD' 51
The media release 53
Part Two: Grappling with 'meaning' 56
'Official' narrative 57
'Unofficial' Narratives 60
Policy: Seymour Hersh and Mark Danner 61
Psychology: Errol Morris 63
Chapter Three 66
Part One: Azoulay and the Spectator-Citizen 68
Citizens, divided 69
Photography as social relation 71
The active spectator 75
Part Two: Butler and Vulnerability 79
Normative frames 81
Precarious lives 85
Derealized lives 89
Part Three: Accountability 92
Conclusion 96
Bibliography 101

Acknowledgments

Completing this project would not have been possible without the support of my advisor, Professor Arthur Kroker. I would like to thank him for his patience with me as I fumbled through the early stages of trying to articulate my ideas, for his invaluable advice and comments on my work throughout the writing process, and for his encouragement as I continue on to new projects. I would also like to offer my profound thanks to Professor Warren Magnusson. In addition to meticulous editing, he offered me a wealth of historical information to contextualize my thinking about photography and many gentle reminders that the state and politics are not quite as simple as I might like them to be.

My cohort at UVic has been one of the most stimulating and inspiring groups of people I have ever met. I would like to thank them for providing a challenging and supporting space for working through my ideas over the past two years. Many of them have read drafts of this thesis or listened to presentations of the arguments at various stages and have provided a great deal of helpful feedback. I owe them all many thanks for two years of friendship, 'productive' distractions, and support of all sorts.

I would like to thank my friends further afield, particularly Don Carmichael and Chris Emmerling, who both read early versions of the first two chapters and provided advice at a critical period. I owe them my profound gratitude for their encouragement, their friendship, and their willingness to let me test out my ideas over a few pints.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Community Programs Branch for providing a stimulating and supportive work environment over the past year. Their work has taught me invaluable lessons about the crucial importance of thinking seriously about vulnerability, the many ways that violence appears (and is cleverly made to disappear), and the often devastating effects of the differential recognition of suffering. I owe particular gratitude to Monica Blais, for consistently asking me about the status of my thesis and always offering her kind reassurance that completion would, eventually, be near.

My endless gratitude and love goes out to my parents, Anne and Lem, for helping me to appreciate the kindness and beauty in my world and for providing me the support and stability that has allowed me to undertake and complete this project. As always, Kirsten and Phil deserve so many thanks, for their humour, their patience with their nerdy older sister, and their willing complicity in all of our pranks.

And lastly (and always), Thea – for always reminding me to pay attention to the visual and to attend to the challenge of seeing differently.

Introduction

"There have been disappointments. Abu Ghraib obviously was a huge disappointment during the presidency. … I don't know if you want to call those mistakes or not, but they were—things didn't go according to plan. Let's put it that way."

– George W. Bush, January 12, 2009, at his final presidential press conference, responding to whether he had made any mistakes during his presidency.

In the fall of 2003, Iraqi inmates at the Abu Ghraib prison were tortured and photographed. American military personnel were both the torturers and the photographers. In the spring of 2004, the photographs were published in the American media and the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal began to unfold in the United States and around the world. This thesis attempts to understand the role of photography in the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib and its role in the broader context of the frames of war. I will argue these photographs, in inciting a plurality of responses from spectators, create a space for critical reflection, from which political or moral responses to their depicted suffering may eventually flow. That such responses are neither inevitable nor mandatory does not diminish the critical and political potential of war photography. Rather than tracing the political, legal, and military decisions that set the stage for torture at Abu Ghraib or the psychological conditions of the soldiers who engaged in torturing the prisoners in their charge, I will turn my attention to the photographs and their circulation in the mainstream American news media.

The Abu Ghraib photographs prompted a critical consideration of the Bush Administration's detention and interrogation policies and practices, which had been operating below the radar of media and public discourse prior to the release of the photographs. In an unprecedented depiction of the human costs of the Iraq war, the

photographs provided evidence of brutality that prompted audiences to begin asking questions, trying to make sense of what had been allowed to occur. However, the task of 'making sense' is made difficult by the paradoxical nature of both the photographs and the multiple responses they evoke. The photographs played two roles. At once, the photographs they were both a tool used by military personnel in humiliating prisoners prior to and during interrogation, and a spectacle of cruelty and utter degradation. Further, the images evoke a plurality of responses, from curiosity and intrigue to shock and fascination to empathy and pity, which are likely shifting over time and between individuals. That the photographs fulfill both of these roles concurrently and evoke persistently contradictory responses presents a significant and productive complication. Rather than attempt to reconcile the opposing roles the same set of images fulfill in military and civilian contexts, I will engage with the paradoxical character of the photographs directly, arguing that their plural interpretations offer a window into contradictory invocation of the regulative norm of the 'human' in calls for violence and for its cessation.

The centrality of photographs to the scandal indicates an enduring power of images to elicit political and ethical responses to the suffering they depict. However, in the broader context of the invasion and occupation of Iraq, photographs, and the socio-cultural norms that contribute to their framing, were also central to the dehumanization of the Iraqi population. In this thesis, I consider the role of war photographs in the processes of the producing an image of war for distant spectators. The role of photography in this process is neither objective nor singular. Rather, photographs contain an internal frame that can work to display the suffering caused by war as well as

dehumanize the populations on which suffering is inflicted. As such, photographs can be resources for both opposition to and support for war and other campaigns of violence and that this resource is used by governments, journalists (both professional and amateur or civilian), and spectators. I will discuss the ability of photographs to evoke a plurality of interpretations, and argue that this produces a vital site for discussion and potentially contestation, situating photographs within a space of public discourse that gives them a political purchase that runs deeper than simply an instance of media spectacle. I will present the multiple and divergent responses to the Abu Ghraib photographs as an example of the continuing role of still images of suffering in the framing of violence and its justification.

Following Judith Butler, I will argue that dehumanization through framing occurs through the symbolic identification of a life with evil or through a radical effacement that removes a life from visual representation altogether, both of which amount to the disavowal of a human whose life is vulnerable and whose death is grievable. The same process of framing also promises our humanization, as members of a western audience largely protected from injury. In turning a critical eye toward the visual norms that frame our lives and disavow the lives of others, I will argue that photography provides a vital resource for contesting the justifications given for torture and the violent exposure of other lives to injury in the putative service of protecting our lives. The power of photography as a resource rests in its ability to draw the interest of spectators, to arrest the flow of accepted rationale for the suffering they depict for the briefest of instances. As both a cleavage in and an element of the discourses of war, photographs like those from Abu Ghraib provide a space for reflection and create the conditions for potential

understanding by opening a space for discussion. While a political or moral response to the suffering these photographs depict may not be inevitable or in any way guaranteed, this uncertainty does not diminish their potential and, by extension, their continued importance as an object of inquiry.

In studying the Abu Ghraib photographs, I am attending to a small subset of the larger genre of war photography. From gathering visual intelligence about enemy territory and positioning to guiding weapons to measuring their effects and analyzing results, the military has been the primary producer and audience of war photography. While the vast majority of photography produced by the military is for internal, strategic purposes and does not circulate outside of the military apparatus, propaganda for civilian populations is an important secondary use of some of these images. However, the military does not fully monopolize the production of war photographs, as there are journalists operating in warzones who also produce their own images. Technological developments have produced faster, smaller, more lightweight cameras which have made it easier for war reporters and photographers to produce and circulate photographs and increasingly difficult for militaries and governments to contain unwanted images. Increasingly discrete digital cameras, particularly those used in cell phones, extend the field of war reportage beyond the realm of professional journalists to any civilian possessing a camera phone. Combined with the ever-increasing speed and scope of internet connectivity, camera phone technology has enabled participants and bystanders to provide coverage of the conflicts they are party to, extending their representations even further beyond the reach of state strategies for containment and control of photographs. However, such attempts by states to curate an image of a war that corresponds to and

corroborates a particular narrative persist regardless of technological shifts. For example, following the failure of American military and political authorities to effectively control the photographs and video footage produced by journalists covering the Vietnam War, the Gulf War press pool system provided journalists with limited and often delayed access to the campaign. During the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, hundreds of journalists were embedded directly in battalions. While the embed program provides journalists with a 'close up' view of the war, they are privy to scenes of war at the discretion of the military. Contractually obliged to exclude particular information and images and subject to various restrictions due to security and strategic concerns, embedded journalists' access is limited to a particular perspective, structured by the military.

My interests rest in this particular moment in the history of war reportage and the resulting photographs intended for news media circulation, the visual environment into which the Abu Ghraib photographs were released. Due to their graphic depictions of torture, the photographs are exceptional in a visual environment largely bereft of images of the war's casualties (both civilian and military). However, the photographs are anomalous for reasons of their production. Though taken by military personnel, they were not taken for strategic military use. Though they exposed misconduct, they were not taken with the intention of exposé. Though intentionally circulated openly among military personnel, they were never intended for open circulation in the media. Given their persistence in the media cycle, the photographs have been touted by many as the iconic images of the Iraq war and occupation. But in many respects, their iconicity is unintended. Despite their central role in military tactics of humiliation and control within

Abu Ghraib, the media release of the photographs was an accident, running counter to a carefully produced narrative of a war of liberation with a series of intended icons already lined up: the felling of Hussein's statues, the 'rescue' of Jessica Lynch, or, later, smiling voters with fingers dyed purple. While breaking with the intended framing of the war (a welcomed liberation), the photographs directly depict the constitutive outside of these frames (a relentless domination). As such, the Abu Ghraib photographs provide an avenue into broader discussions of the dehumanization of Others (in this case, the Iraqi Other) in the service of violence.

My analysis of the Abu Ghraib photographs focuses on them as still images. The photographs have been circulated through a variety of visual communication media, from their initial release on a television news magazine they have appeared on newspaper, magazine, and book pages, in documentary films, on computer monitors via thousands of websites, and on the walls of art galleries. Despite reproduction in these multiple forms, the still images themselves are the objects of consistent consideration. Further, while 279 photographs and 19 videos from the Army's internal investigation were eventually released, mainstream news media coverage of the scandal has returned repeatedly to a handful of photographs and has left the videos all but absent from reportage. Though television and internet video have come to play a dominant role in contemporary war coverage, I will argue that the photograph continues to significantly shape conceptions and memories of war for civilian audiences. In an environment of relentless moving imagery, the still photograph retains a unique ability to crystallize an instance for ready remembrance. Despite the surfeit of visual media audiences contend with on a daily basis, photographs work much like quotations, providing "a quick way of apprehending

something and a compact form for memorizing it" (Sontag 2003, 22). Given the repeated and continually recurring media focus on the still photographs at Abu Ghraib, I will analyze the images as such. Without excluding considerations of the broader context of their circulation, I will focus on their interpretation as still photographs.

A central figure in my analysis of the Abu Ghraib photographs is the audience that viewed the photographs upon their release to mainstream news media. While they were initially released on an American television new magazine, they quickly circulated around the globe through both traditional and non-traditional media outlets. As a result, their audience is also global. Indeed, the US military has claimed that the circulation of the photographs in Iraq and across the Middle East has fuelled anti-American sentiment in the region. Tracing the global circulation of the photographs and their subsequent political implications is an important aspect in understanding the scandal and its effects; however, given the constraints of this thesis, I will be limiting the breadth of my project to an analysis of how the photographs have been circulated and taken up by 'western' and specifically American audiences.[1] As the putative beneficiaries of the strategies of torture and humiliation involving and depicted by the photographs, this particular audience is crucially important. However tenuous the lines of communication between citizen and state representatives might be, American citizens continue to be better positioned to contest policy decisions attributed to their security, to national security, than are the populations subject to the effects of such policies.

---

[1] I have been purposely casual with boundaries of this audience population. While I have observed the unfolding scandal in Canada, I am concerned about overstating the distinction between an 'American' audience and a 'Canadian' audience drawn along state borders. Despite differences between both groups, I think there is a danger in excluding myself, as a Canadian, from the American media scene and from the norms of recognition and practices of apprehension involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal. While Canada may not be in Iraq militarily, we are deeply caught in the logic of national security, discourses of derealization and dehumanization, and receive considerable protection by virtue of the exposure of others.

In the first of three chapters, I describe the limitations and potential political capabilities of photography for communicating the human costs of war, drawing on the work of Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and John Taylor. Later, turning to David Campbell and Jenny Edkins, I describe the state's interest and interventions in the development of its own visual representation, paying particular attention to the role of cultural governance in the development of potential alternatives to government produced narratives of war. In the second chapter, I outline the events that occurred at Abu Ghraib, drawing on the notions of evidence and unstable meaning developed in the first chapter to articulate the plurality of interpretations incited by the photographs' publication. I also describe the reports and 'official' response from political and military elites that followed, as well as two 'unofficial' responses that employ journalism and documentary film to communicate alternative interpretations and analyses of the torture that occurred at the prison. In the third chapter I return to theories of photography, using Ariella Azoulay and Judith Butler to develop a more robust conception of the spectator and to further explore photography's potential for demanding accountability from representatives of state power, but also from ourselves, as spectators and participants in the visual norms operating in a photograph's representation of the Other. In a turn towards the cultural site of politics, I argue that the acts of seeing and photographing provide a site for re-evaluating our practices of framing and our relationships, as protected citizen-spectators, to state power. The route to opposing a politics of domination involves a shifting our practices of seeing, to move towards a recognition of our complicity in practices of dehumanization, and changing our comportment towards state power, to move towards a more equitable distribution of protection of corporeal

vulnerability. Photography, I argue, provides an important site for beginning the analysis necessary for such a project, as it cuts through the discourse of security and dehumanization to provide a space for reflection on suffering and its rationalization.

Chapter One

In this chapter, I will outline the limitations and potential capabilities of photography to communicate the human costs of war to those who are removed from the lived realties of violent conflict. My interests lay in war photographs as circulated in the news media, rather than those used internally for strategic military purposes. I will also discuss the interest of governments in their visual representation, particularly in the context of war, and how its interest translates into direct and indirect interventions in the production, distribution, and interpretation of war photographs. When circulated through news media, war photography creates a context for looking at images of the suffering and death produced by violent conflict. Such images open the possibility for distant (in the context of this thesis, 'western' and specifically American) viewers to move towards an appreciation for, or at least a consideration of, vulnerability and how it is differentially distributed and experienced. Despite the troubled relationship between photography and evidence, photographs articulate the existence of what they depict. Perhaps imperfectly, a photograph certifies that what it depicts has existed and does so with an immediacy and efficiency that few other forms of representation achieve. Photographic depiction is also persistently evocative, inciting pluralistic and often contradictory responses. At once a single photograph might repulse and shock as well as inspire curiosity or concern. Further, responses to photographs vary among audience members and shift over time: a photograph that initially shocked might recede into banality over time and an image that inspired complacency in one context may become incendiary in another. I will use the description of photography in this chapter as the foundation for my analysis of the publication and interpretation of the Abu Ghraib photographs in the following chapter,

and for my argument that photographs can provide a space for reflection that is crucial to developing a new kind of politics, developed in the third chapter.

Part One – The Limitations of War Photography

Our understanding of war, as an audience without direct experience, is largely a product of the impact of images circulating through various news media sources. Our image of a war is one *viewed through* the eyes and cameras of photographers. Frequently press photographers produce the images that fill the media coverage of war, but in the case of the Iraq war, civilian or military photographers have produced many of the decisive images. Whether taken by civilian, military, or press photographers, images of war are not neutral representations, devoid of interpretive framing. Rather, the experience of distanced seeing that photographs provide is conditioned by a series of complex limitations inherent to the medium as a mode of representation. While war photographs continue to function as evidence of violent campaigns as they unfold, the visual testimony they provide is limited by concerns about objectivity and instability of meaning, which are characteristic of photography generally. Circulating within a larger media cycle, driven by a hunger for fascination, shock, and horror, war photographs serve as brief flashpoints in a system where any prominence is fleeting. To ‘see’ a war through the news media’s photographic record continues to be a powerful experience. These limitations form the background against which I will consider the potential capabilities (both communicative and political) of media-circulated war photography.

Objectivity

The development and accessibility of technology that can manipulate photographs with ever-increasing ease and precision serves as an obvious limitation to the possibility

of accepting photographs as evidence, unproblematically. However, the framing of photographs provides a stronger limitation to a photograph's ability to communicate evidence – a limitation fundamental to the medium, regardless of various technological developments.

Through the relation between a subject before a camera and the image that is then produced, photographs assert that what they depict once existed, for a time, before the camera's lens. Describing this link, Barthes describes the photograph's subject as "not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph" (Barthes 1981, 76). When discussed in the basic terms of mechanical and chemical processes, the photograph and existence of its referential subject are inseparable, resulting in the photograph's ability to bear witness, for at least a split second of time. Barthes describes this fundamental quality of photography with the phrase "*that-has-been*" (Barthes 1981, 77). In doing so, he does not endow photographs with unmitigated evidentiary weight extending beyond the moment when it was taken. Instead, *that-has-been* is interpreted as an index of the referent, a trace or mark left behind, much like a footprint. The subject is the photograph's condition of possibility and, by extension, the photograph provides a trace of a subject's existence in the visible, physical world. However, the photographic trace is not objective or neutral, but a framed image, a chosen image, one among a host of other possible images (Sontag 2003, 46).

The tension between recognizing the framed, interpretive nature of a photograph with a limited range of meaning and this evidential role is rooted in a lack of direct experience. Despite a recognition that the camera's frame is able to depict by virtue of its

exclusions, that which is excluded is not always self-evident. In opening a space for discussion when made public, war photographs also render silent the subjects they exclude. As such, any discussion of the suffering a photograph bears witness to should be accompanied by an inquiry into what is absent. Never benign or neutral evidence, never "simply a transparency of something that happened" (Sontag 2003, 46), all photographs build an interpretation into what they depict. And yet, war photographs continue to play an evidentiary role, certifying the existence of what falls within their frame, corroborating the suffering of others. The photograph remains, at best, an approximation of seeing, something that comes close to being present at a scene by inciting our imaginations, as spectators. In looking to photographs as evidence, I accept the substitution of my presence at the scene for the photographer's – she was there, I was not. The power of the photograph persists because we often lack an alternative way of certifying experiences or events to which we are not party.

Instability of meaning

The meaning of a photograph is unstable, without narrative explanation, and is prone to being taken up in unanticipated ways. The meanings produced by photographs in this system are notoriously unstable, with much hinging on the intertextual context within which war photographs appear. In the context of news media, a photograph is almost exclusively accompanied by a caption, alongside an article with a headline. Each of these textual elements attempts to anchor the meaning of the photograph and structure the audience's interpretation. While captions have, as Benjamin suggested,[2] become all but obligatory in the inclusion of photographs in the news media, the veracity of these

[2] Benjamin argues that after Atget's publication of photos of Paris streets were first published around 1900, "picture magazines began to put up signposts for [the viewer], right ones or wrong ones, no matter. For the first time, captions have become obligatory" (Benjamin 1968, 226).

identifying, contextualizing phrases cannot be guaranteed as there is nothing intrinsic to the photograph that protects it from misinterpretation or from being taken up in unanticipated ways. As John Taylor suggests, "[t]here is nothing inherent in photographs as indices of what-has-been that determines their meaning, and nothing in documentary as a mode which prevents it from becoming part of the cultural fantasies of the victors" (Taylor 1998, 38). The photograph cannot protect itself from misinterpretation or from being taken up in unanticipated ways, nor can the photographer retain control over her photographs. Once published, as the photograph "will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it" (Sontag 2003, 39). Attempts to assert and maintain a singular interpretation of a photograph through its caption are bound to be ineffectual, given the plurality of its interpretations and the inability to contain its circulation.

In addition to concerns about objectivity and framing, the instability of meaning further limits the capacity of photographs to serve as comprehensive evidence of the scenes they depict. While a photograph may visually testify to the existence of something or someone before the camera, it is vulnerable to the interpretive work of textual elements. In the context of war, the political reasons for which a given photograph is taken up ranges from their always somewhat politicized use in mainstream news media to their overt use as propaganda by parties directly involved in the conflict. When used as political propaganda, a photograph is unprotected from the distorting effects of captions or other textual elements. For example, during the Balkan wars, both Croats and Serbs circulated the same photographs of children killed in a shelling incident, claiming the young victims as their own. Both parties demonstrated that due to the

instability of the photograph's meaning and the alterability of its caption, "the children's deaths could be used and reused" (Sontag 2003, 10) in the service of competing political agendas.

Photographs are also open to direct manipulation, a practice that has become increasingly simple and is common throughout the history of war photography. From the alleged staging of Capa's 1937 'Death of a Republican Soldier' to the manipulation of a photograph by Sepah News, the media arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, in July 2008, which was altered to depict the launching of four, rather than the original three Iranian missiles, instances of proven manipulation tend to cast a shadow of potential doubt over all photographs. Even when correctly captioned or unaltered, an audience's knowledge that any given photograph could be open to misinterpretation or manipulation places all photographs in a position of suspicion, thus limiting their evidentiary function.

The unstable meaning of photographs is linked to the incompleteness of the information they transmit. Alone, photographs remain relatively inarticulate. The context that provides meaning to what the photograph depicts often arrives through narrative explanation, be that the written text of a caption or news article or the verbal account of what was occurring when the photograph was taken. The inability of a photograph to speak for itself, to give an account of the broader social context of what falls within its frame, to provide a history of what it depicts, is regularly identified as a considerable limitation to the ability of a medium to provide meaningful evidence. Unlike the narrative work of history, which is capable of contextualizing specific personae and instances within broader social, cultural, and political contexts, photographs are limited to mute, visual tableaux. As such, a photograph may illustrate a particular

instance of a broader event or condition, but is unable to independently articulate the connection between the image and its context.

To recognize this instability and incompleteness is not to reject the possibility of producing meaning through photographs. In fact, perhaps photography's role in producing meaning is rooted in its instability and tendency to evoke plural interpretations. When the instability of meaning and the corroborating qualities of photography are considered together, their political potential comes into view. The publication of a war photograph marks its entrance into a sphere of (potential) public debate, which may be limited to a discussion of the image's veracity and framing, but may also extend into political, ethical, and moral concerns over the conflict it illustrates. When the visual evidence of bodies disappears, the victims are no longer the locus of ethical or political debate. They become phantoms – impossible to verify or locate (Taylor 1998, 179). What remains unseen becomes incontestable.

The media cycle

As spectators, the members of the western audience I am concerned with access war photographs primarily through the news media. Moving at an extremely rapid pace, the news cycle is driven by a perpetual hunger for the fascinating, the horrifying, and the shocking. Appearing in the news media, war reporting and photography circulates within the broader landscape of the western entertainment industry – one that includes film, television, magazines, newspapers, books, and advertisements of all kinds. However sombre a news item may be, it appears within a wide swath of other media items vying for audience attention. As such, the photographs selected to illustrate a news item are selected not only for their capacity to visually communicate key aspects of the story, but

also for their ability to intrigue and fascinate an audience of consumers. In this context, war photographs cannot just depict death, they must do so in a way that sells, providing a touch of pathos without profoundly unsettling viewers. With visual elements playing an ever-increasing role in how events are reported, the sheer number of images that pass before audiences on a daily basis is staggering. Repeated exposure to images of suffering and destruction may transfix audiences for a brief period of time, but sensationalism and visual bombardment may also lead to numbness and desensitization. In *On Photography*, Sontag suggests such saturation of an audience's visual field with war photography precludes the possibility of producing a political or moral response to the horrors these images depict. Given the ever-increasing speed of the news cycle and decreasing historical and social context provided in news items, she claims "photographs of the slaughter-bench of history will most likely be experienced as, simply, unreal or as a demoralizing emotional blow" (Sontag 1973, 19), crippling or numbing audiences.

Viewers may be shocked, but are not likely to be driven insane by photographs of unspeakable acts happening to others, elsewhere, as such horrors "are not a permanent state, nor disabling; they may even be entertaining or boring" (Taylor 1998, 7). An audience can look at such images with fascination, titillation, disgust. The photograph protects the viewer from the direct gaze of the photographed person. In person, prolonged staring at another's suffering may be generally regarded as rude or even reprehensible, but "there is more leeway in looking at pictures, since the sense of obligation and even possibility of action is weakened by distance in time and place" (Taylor 1998, 41). Despite the speed of the news cycle, individual photographs invite prolonged investigation, should viewers desire to allow their eyes to linger. Given the

absence of direct contact between viewer and the photographed person, photographs can "absolve viewers of blame or invite them to accept responsibility" (Taylor 1998, 41). Images of suffering or death do not automatically elicit a moral or political reaction. Photographs are released into a social and media environment where images of suffering can evoke pleasure, excitement, voyeurism, fascination, compassion, pity, concern, and a host of other reactions. In this environment, reception of such images can be unpredictable and even contradictory, often unfolding in ways inconsistent with their publisher's intentions. Audience reactions are far from uniform, varying between individual spectators and over time. As such, Taylor suggests, "[i]t remains impossible to be sure exactly which pictures, if any, release guilt, shame, and empathy, or encourage direct action" (Taylor 1998, 5).

Just as photographic meaning is incomplete and unstable, its reception by audiences is also uncertain. Photographs of death and suffering in war might have the potential to incite a political or ethical response, but they may also feed the culture of fascination at the suffering of others (particularly distant others) that drives Western news media. To be sure, the context in which a photograph is published can affect its uptake. Perhaps longer stories that provide more background to the suffering depicted can build up a nascent political or moral position, as Sontag suggests (Sontag 1973, 17). However, I can look at a photograph, even pore over it, without attending to the textual elements surrounding it. While narrative may provide the historical, cultural, or political details that have the potential to make audiences understand the photograph's context and the particular character of the injustice or suffering it depicts, uptake of these details cannot be guaranteed. The news media is not received by a singular, uniform Viewer. Instead, it

is accessed by a multiplicity of individuals, each with particular perspectives that shift over time to integrate varied experiences, structuring their reception of a given news item or photograph. An excess of photographs of death and suffering may indeed desensitize audiences to the horrors of war, but it is also conceivable that the accumulation of such images might provide a body of evidence around which political positions are galvanized. War photographs may not make inevitable or mandatory a political or moral response to the suffering they depict, but they do create a possibility for such a response by creating a space for reflection.

Part Two – The Potential Capabilities of War Photography

Objectivity, unstable meanings, and incomplete information limit the ways photographs function as evidence and, in some cases, are cited as reasons to disregard photographs as a site of potential political and ethical concern. However, if these limitations are considered characteristics of a medium rather than as its inadequacies, we can begin to explore photography's potential. In the context of war and the representation of its casualties and costs, photographs have the potential to prompt discussion, evoke affect, and incite imagination. Each of these potential capabilities presents the possibility of considering the rationalizations provided for the suffering that accompanies war and the unequal distribution of vulnerability and protection. While sustained consideration of the political and ethical aspects of war will require resources beyond visual representation, war photographs present an important avenue into such a project.

The spark

Photographs may be unable to communicate historical contexts or systemic political issues, but they provide an account of a particular instance and instant of history. The explanatory deficit of photographs is often cited when dismissing their potential political and ethical value. For example, Sontag claimed in her early work that photographs could not be the locus of a political position, could not educate, and could not have meaning beyond a specific situation contextualized by the narrative work of history (Sontag 1973, 17). Three decades later, she reformulated this opinion – not rejecting the limitations she had described in *On Photography*, but finding a way to consider them as traits of photography as a medium rather than as fundamental faults. Short of creating radical social change, photographs still have the power to open up important spaces of potential contestation, inquiry, and critical thought:

> That we are not totally transformed, that we can turn away, turn the page, switch the channel, does not impugn the ethical value of an assault by images. It is not a defect that we are not seared, that we do not suffer *enough*, when we see these images. Neither is the photograph supposed to repair our ignorance about the history and causes of the suffering it picks out and frames. Such images cannot be more than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers (Sontag 2003, 116-7).

In identifying these inherent limitations in the type and extent of information that photographs provide, Sontag opens a limited space within which photographs might operate. Rather than diminishing the political potential of war photographs for their inability to explain the causes of the suffering they depict, they create the conditions for potential understanding by opening a space for discussion – entering the realm of public discourse gives a photograph a degree of political purchase. Photographs depicting the human costs of war present an opportunity for prompting viewers to start asking

questions, ranging from investigation into the causes of such suffering or the rationale provided for why the pain of others serves a broader purpose (such as our 'freedom' or reasons of 'national security') to the simple question: what happened here?

Though a photograph alone may not be able to provide satisfactory answers to such inquiries, it is important not to devalue their role in triggering discussion. The instability of photographic meaning often results in contestation over interpretations of what a photograph depicts. While a photograph depicting a casualty of war might initially provoke a conversation about the image's veracity, where it was taken, or the identity of the corpse, such discussions have the potential to extend to political questions of justice and the unequal distribution of suffering. To be sure, such an extension is never guaranteed, but may be more likely stimulated by photographs than by other forms of representation. Photography is an accessible and direct form of public address – almost anyone can participate in a discussion about a photograph. Given its incompleteness, the visual information a photograph provides can be absorbed in a matter of seconds, whereas a written account of the same scene would perhaps offer richer explanation, but would require a longer commitment of time and attention. The work of seriously considering the political and ethical implications of scenes depicted in war photographs is decidedly less immediate and "is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only a spark" (Sontag 2003, 103). Despite their limited ability to convey understanding about war, the public display of photographs presents an important starting point for considering its costs, its implications, and its rationalization by the parties involved. For example, prior to the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs, discussions of the American military's policy on harsh interrogation and torture largely remained in

the realm of the hypothetical. While debates over the treatment and status of prisoners of the war on terror graced the pages of publications both academic and popular prior to the spring of 2004, it was only after photographs of prisoners in Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib prisons were published that the question of torture became acutely material. When made public, the photographed traces of war become an incitement to discussion: when kept private, their absence "may stop language and create silence and misunderstanding" (Taylor 1998, 50).

Depictive Efficiency

Photography's depictive efficiency makes it a powerful form of representation. Looking at a photograph involves a doubled seeing, which entails both our imagination of the scene depicted and of ourselves. When we look at a photograph, we are seeing a chemically or digitally marked, physical surface depicting an image. At the same time, the photograph incites our imagination, prompting us to imagine ourselves as looking at the scene, thus becoming implicated in the scene (Maynard 1997, 99). As observers, as viewers, we are drawn into the picture, regardless of our absence at the scene when the photograph was taken. In imagining ourselves seeing the photographed scene, Patrick Maynard suggests "we imagine something of our own actual looking, and that is an aspect of our action that we may find fulfilling, enjoyable, uninteresting, unpleasant, distasteful… [this] is what makes a picture graphic" (Maynard 1997, 109). We imagine our responses to our seeing the scene alongside our imagining of seeing the scene itself. This ability to incite vivid imagining and to prompt reflection on our own perceptual activities is part of the deep appeal of photography as a form of representation.

Photography elicits our participation as observers, in ways that make us respond both to what we see and to our own action of observation.

Photography not only amplifies our individual ability to imagine, it also amplifies "the power to incite others to imagine" (Maynard 1997, 95). The power to incite the imaginations of others is unevenly distributed and, given that imagining a particular situation can significantly affect understanding, desire, and behaviour, tends to fall to those with access to the means of producing and distributing photographs on a large scale. While the power to incite imagination can direct others toward new possibilities or to challenge current conditions, it can also become oppressive when the scope of imagination is limited to one possible outcome. In both cases, using photography to incite the imaginations of others has political implications, with potentially liberating or indoctrinating outcomes. As Wim Wenders suggests:

> The most political decision you make is where you direct people's eyes. In other words, what you show people, day in and day out, is political. . . . And the most politically indoctrinating thing you can do to a human being is to show her, every day, that there can be no change (quoted in Strauss 2005, i).

The effects of directed eyes, of limitations placed on what we can see and imagine, are most powerful (and potentially most sinister) when the act of direction goes unnoticed. In the context of press photography, this directing of eyes has a capacity to develop and perpetuate a particular type of imagining of an event or a region through repetition, from which narrow interpretations follow.

The continual citation of images of suffering elsewhere plays a powerful role in cultivating particular understandings of *here*. Suffering becomes localized in foreign and usually poor places, engendering a notion of continual and perpetual tragedy. Photographs of war, genocide, torture, famine elsewhere "show a suffering that is

outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired … [but] confirm that this is the sort of thing that happens in that place. The ubiquity of those photographs, and those horrors, cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward – that is, poor – parts of the world" (Sontag 2003, 71). For example, the myriad photographs of starved bodies and desert landscapes of Africa presented in 'western' media has limited our ability to imagine Africa as something other than destitute, a limited interpretation with overt political implications. While potentially harmful for a host of reasons, the continued circulation of such images still sees them presented publicly, rendering them a potential site for discussion and contestation, a potential opening for reflection and questioning of the sort Sontag describes.

Due to their depictive efficiency, photographs do more than just provide visual information or prompt discussion. They are able to relay affect, which makes them politically contentious – photographs create visual sites around which support or opposition might be galvanized. The particular way a photograph is framed has considerable effects on how observers tend to respond. The seemingly innocuous aesthetic and narrative norms at work in press photography can have significant effects on how a conflict is portrayed. As Judith Butler has argued, there are ways of framing conflicts that bring human suffering into precise focus and create a space to react with outrage at the degradation of life (Butler 2007, 951). However, there are also ways of framing conflicts that occlude the human cost of conflict, through overt omission or a process of dehumanization that casts suffering as deserved or appropriate in one way or another. To put it quite plainly, the likelihood of a moral or political response to suffering, however limited that response might be, relates closely to its visual

representation. When we see images of death and destruction, the "transitive affectivity of the photograph may well overwhelm and numb us, but it may also incite and motivate" (Butler 2007, 955). Potential responses first require that something is shown at all, and then is shaped by how it is represented.

Part Three – The State's Interest in the War Photograph

The parties to a violent conflict, such as war often exhibit a concern with the depiction of the conflict, their role in it, and the role of their opponents. In the context of my thesis, I am interested in the work of state governments in the definition of their roles and their opponents, which may be identified as a cohesive group, such as a military or government, or form a more amorphous enemy, such as the vaguely defined network of terrorists that the Bush administration declared a 'war on terror' against following September 11, 2001. In this section I will discuss the role of war photography in contributing to the constitution of state identity. I will argue that war photography has the potential, through visually depicting the results of military and political actions, to create a space for critical reflection on governments and to work as a resource in contesting narratives produced through governmental discourse. In the context of this chapter, I am speaking about the development of state and image in an abstract sense. Later, in the second chapter, I will be speaking about a specific state (the United States) and a particular government (the Bush administration).

The state and its image

In describing the state's mode of existence, David Campbell argues that we should approach the state as a product of "the continual process that performatively constitutes its identity" (Campbell 2003, 57), rather than something with an ontological

status separate from its multiple constitutive practices. State identity is articulated and rearticulated through an ongoing series of practices performed by the official discourses of government and the unofficial discourses of cultural production. The official discourses of government drive the inscription of boundaries, the identification of threats, and the articulation of a coherent identity of the state. However, these processes can also be located in the 'unofficial' sites of cultural discourses, such as art, film, literature, and news media. Campbell suggests that the struggle for the state's identity is also located in these cultural products and practices of representation – a struggle which involves, but is never fully controlled by, state power (Campbell 2003, 57). To be sure, the 'unofficial' sites of cultural discourse Campbell discusses do not necessarily produce alternative or dissenting narratives. As Althusser has argued, the role of the media is deeply tied to the reproduction of the state power and, ultimately, class power. Operating within a profit-driven system, most media outlets and products are primarily interested in advancing an business agenda (advertising sales) prior to a political agenda (be that the critique or support of a particular government or policy). Althusser identifies the media system and its products as an example of an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), which function as ideology to turn individuals into subjects by interpellation.[3] While the products of

[3] Ideology, for Althusser is "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 1969, 17), not unlike myths. Though alluding to its reality, the relation retains an imaginary character underlies the distortion Althusser claims exists in all ideology. Ideology not only has an ideal existence, in the minds of individuals, but also has a material existence, which takes the form of the various rituals governing the practices and actions of individuals (Althusser 1969, 19-20). For an individual mediated by ideology, her actions, which she experiences as the conscious enactment of her beliefs, are material practices governed by the material rituals prescribed by an ideology that exists in a material ideological apparatus. The individual's actions, which she believes to be the result of conscious thought, are the material iteration of the individual's imaginary relationship to the real conditions of her existence. That is, her internalization of ideological illusion drives her enactment of practices prescribed by the source of her illusion: ideology and ideological apparatuses. This process of thinking and acting, Althusser argues, constitutes concrete individuals as subjects, each of whom are individually and collectively subjected to state power.

discourse may, as Campbell suggests, provide a narrative that departs from that of state or governmental power, these products may also serve simply as reiterations of the conditions necessary for reproducing the political, and thus capitalist, status quo.

The state's interest in its own visual representation rests in a concern with how its relationship to violence is interpreted, by its own citizens and those beyond its territorial borders. Such concern regularly results in an attempt to manage these interpretations by intervening directly and indirectly into the production, circulation, and interpretation of photographs. A state's involvement in a war or violent conflict amplifies these concerns and interventions. In the wake of a crisis such as war comes a period of reckoning, an attempt to make sense of what has occurred, of who is responsible, and of how to move forward. Attempts to make sense of crisis hinge upon the information available. While crises are often characterized by an inability to reconcile contradicting events, states regularly attempt to traverse inconsistent experiences by framing a linear narrative that lends a coherent structure to individual experience. The state-driven narrative of a traumatic event may unfold through the direct address of government personnel, such as the official statements of President Bush broadcasted following the attacks on the World Trade Centre towers on September 11, 2001. However, these narratives are also delivered indirectly through news reports, written and broadcasted, which lend a framework to the comprehension of events after they unfold, providing timelines or describing causal connections between incidences, or while they are unfolding, such as the ongoing reportage that accompanied the build up to and fall out from the landfall of Hurricane Katrina in August, 2005. Though reports are usually informed by interviews with experts distanced from governments, such as academics, scientists, and political

pundits, the narrative produced overwhelmingly reinforce those of the state. The 'sense' that is made of a crisis, then, is one consistent with state sensibilities and one that renders the paradoxical and contradictory experiences characteristic of a crisis indiscernible. The state's involvement in representations of a conflict while it is ongoing does not end when the period of crisis is declared over. Rather, it is at this point that the state's involvement shifts to the management of public memory, which includes the careful occlusion of trauma's centrality to the state's inception and organization. The state is, as Edkins claims, "a contradictory institution: a promise of safety, security and meaning alongside a reality of abuse, control and coercion" (Edkins 2003, 6). As such, close attention is paid to concealing violent realities with the promises of freedom and safety.

The state attempts to be a primary source of order in the lives of its citizens. While the state itself does not determine the meaning of its citizens' lives, it creates a social order that gives context and meaning to individual existence. Individuals and their relationships to one another unfold in the system of hierarchies, categories, and the institutions the state provides. The state and its systems are not solid, independent structures that emanate a fixed social order in which citizens operate. Nor are its citizens historically constant. Subjectivity and statehood arise alongside one another, both produced and reproduced through social practice (Edkins 2003, 11). Edkins explains:

> [W]ho we are, or who we think we may be, depends very closely on the social context in which we place and find ourselves. Our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity: family, friends, political community, beliefs. If that order betrays us in some way, we may survive in the sense of continuing to live as physical beings, but the meaning of our existence is changed (Edkins 2003, 4).

The state and its systems provide a horizon against which individual lives unfold, a process that works back on itself. That is, the state's structural constraints partially form its citizens, but how they operate within such constraint influences these structures. While creating the possibility of meaning for its citizens and providing a context for their lives, the state also issues a promise of security.

A profound power differential exists in the relationship between state and citizen. Though the ways citizens live out their lives may influence the state's institutions in some ways, the state (and its representatives) holds a disproportionate amount of power in the relationship. Power takes many forms in the modern state, but it is definitive when manifested as violence. Drawing upon Max Weber, Edkins describes violence as the prerogative of the state, one it employs both in its establishment and in its maintenance (Edkins 2003, 6). The state uses force to initially establish its sovereignty, through war, revolution or other conflicts, then maintains its power by monopolizing legitimate violence. Modern statehood perpetuates itself in this way by assuming the support of its citizens by way of tacit agreement and obedience, thus internal threats meet the same violence the state uses against its external enemies. Through its monopolization and the legitimation of violence, the state produces forces and is produced by force.

The state provides its citizens with meaning and security, and, ironically, it does so through violence. On the surface, this violence moves outwards, confronting external threats that would attack its citizens. In order to retain this monopoly, the state reserves the right to harm its citizens if they pose an internal threat, or by compelling them to fight. Edkins argues this dual nature of force is at the heart of the state's paradoxical character. She claims that "the modern state, then, is a contradictory institution: a

promise of safety, security, and meaning alongside a reality of abuse, control, and coercion" (Edkins 2003, 6). The power imbalance that structures the relationship between citizen and state comes into sharp focus whenever the state deploys violence internally. When it injures those it claims to protect, the state betrays its citizens, transforming a source of refuge into a site of danger (Edkins 2003, 4). While the state betrays those it designates as citizens and claims to protect - those with permanent political status accompanied by full legal rights and obligations, rights to political participation, and an entitlement to protection in exchange for allegiance - it overtly abandons those it excludes from citizenship. Noncitizens, those with a permanent condition of temporary status, such as those interned at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay and other American-run war prisons, are still subject to state power but are not necessarily extended the (putative) protections offered to citizens. However overt the abandonment of no citizens, sovereign state power remains invested in occluding its violent role. While abandoning no citizens to violence originating elsewhere may not register as exceptional, the mutual abandonment of citizens and no citizens to the violence of the state is a carefully preserved blind spot, which the state continually works to conceal.

The state and the 'seen'

War photography presents the example of a practice of representation where governmental and cultural discourses directly interact. The press photographer captures the performance of governmental discourse, reproducing it as cultural discourse, through avenues like newspapers. As such, the state's actions are performed twice. Considered this way, we can think about photographs of conflict as visual artefacts of the struggle for

state identity. They present a site for studying the power relations at work in framing a conflict, deciding what will and will not be shown, and the stakes of these decisions.

These decisions about what will and will not be seen are made within a system that Campbell calls a 'visual economy', drawing on Deborah Poole's visual anthropology. Responding to a need to examine the intersection of visual images and political ideologies, Poole stresses the material and social nature of representation. As active interventions in the world, "the specific ways in which we see (and represent) the world determine how we act upon that world and, in doing so create the world as it is" (Poole 1997, 7). Rather than focus on a singular 'gaze' or one dominant source of meaning, this system includes the photographers and subjects involved in the production of images, the publishing industry largely responsible for selecting and circulating images as products, and the audience that interprets and values images. Within the system as a whole, "images cannot be isolated as discrete objects but have to be understood as imbricated in networks of materials, technologies, institutions, markets, social spaces, affects, cultural histories and political contexts" (Campbell 2003a, 361). The state is implicated in each aspect of this system, directly and indirectly working to produce meaning and interpretations through images. In limiting what may be seen, the state plays a considerable role in structuring what might be known, and what is considered representable. The limitations imposed by the state come into play in each sphere of the visual economy.

At the level of production, restrictions on the movement of photographers, such as those imposed through the embedded photographer programs in Iraq and Afghanistan, ensure that access to the war is strictly controlled. In permitting what the photographer

will see, the state is able to shape the content and tone of much of the images accessed by the domestic population. As a result, the state does not have to engage in overt censorship or propaganda to manage the interpretation of the war. Instead, by accepting the state-orchestrated perspective and its contractual restrictions, embedded photographers produce mandated photographs that both comply with the state's requirements and build an interpretation of their content.

At the level of the production and circulation of image-products, the state's power varies from the direct, such as the censorship of images of returning coffins of American soldiers, to the indirect, such as the use of discourses of 'taste' and 'decency' to prevent the publication of photographs of casualties. Circulation intersects with assumptions about audience interpretation in interesting ways. At the level of interpretation, power slips from the interventions of state power into a more amorphous form of socio-cultural norms. In this space, discourses of patriotism and heroism can interact with those of otherness and concerns over difference and security. The particular ways that images are framed reflects assumptions about audiences held by publishers, particularly their assumptions about what images will make audiences more likely to purchase news media products, such as newspapers and magazines. For example, when working in Somalia in October 4, 1993, Paul Watson photographed the corpse of Staff Sgt. William David Cleveland as it was dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. His photograph, which would go on to win the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography, was his second attempt at photographing Cleveland's body. Upon realizing that his first shot depicted Cleveland's genitals, rendering it unpublishable in North American news media, Watson re-entered the mob to take a second, more tightly cropped photograph that would fit the

media's sense of 'appropriateness' (Watson 2007, 38-40). In this context, publishing a photograph of the desecrated body of an American soldier would be one thing, while publishing his exposed penis would be quite another. Photographic interpretation and audience attitudes shift over time, much like the substance of what counts as 'tasteful' or 'decent'. A photograph that may have been considered incendiary at one time can become banal, and vice versa. As Caroline Brothers suggests,

> [t]he continuous dialogue between image and culture – not the culture of the photograph's subjects but of the society which produces and consumes the image – offers insights both into the ways these photographs transmit their meaning to their public, and into the collective imagination of that society at that time (Brothers 1997, 12).

Assumptions about shifts in these socio-cultural norms feed not only into how the news media selects and frames photographs, but also into a government's conception of which photographs ought to be excluded on the grounds of being 'unhelpful' or likely to run counter to their objectives.

In addition to audience interpretation and attitude, the technology used in producing and circulating photographs shifts over time. The development of increasingly lightweight and compact photographic equipment, which can be quite inexpensive and easy to operate, has significantly shifted the image of contemporary warfare. While large cameras with complex features and multiple lenses are still found in the hands of professional journalists, relatively low quality digital and cell phone cameras have produced a considerable proportion of the photographs of the invasion and occupation of Iraq and other ongoing conflicts. Coupled with the expanding accessibility of the internet and growth of participatory and user-created media (blogs), online photo and video sharing platforms (Flickr and YouTube) and social-networking websites (Facebook and

Twitter), the influx of digital and cell phone cameras in the hands of civilians has created a new source of media that state power has struggled to contain. Attempts to indirectly control mainstream news media coverage of war through structuring journalists' field of visibility, such as the embedded photographer program, are largely ineffectual in the context of these new forms of media. In lieu of more elegant solutions involving indirect media control, state attempts to retain control over new media accounts of conflict rest in the obvious and heavy-handed, such as filtering websites, tracing and targeting those civilians who circulate images online, and shutting down internet access completely. Photographs taken with civilian digital and cell phone cameras and shared over the internet are not subject to the same constraints as the mainstream news media and, in the cases of currently unfolding conflicts in Iran and China where journalists have been expelled or targeted, have provided crucial coverage of state violence. Fittingly, the image that has been touted the 'icon' of reformist protests in Iran following contested elections in June 2009 is a still from an amateur digital video of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, a nineteen year old university student shot by a Basij militiaman at a protest in Tehran. Despite censorship by the Iranian state-controlled media, the video and the still frame of her spread quickly over the internet and has since become a visual rallying point for the reformist opposition movement.

The state and the 'unseen'

While only one among many, visual representation in the media is a key front in the state's struggle to curate its image. In the case of war photography, this struggle tends to result in the absence of images of injury and death. This visual occlusion can be read as an attempt to represent war euphemistically, concealing the violence central to the

campaign (Scarry 1987, 64). For example, during the first five weeks of the Iraq war, only ten percent of war-related imagery published in major American television, print, and internet news sources contained photographs of the death and injury (Silcock, et al 2008, 42). This absence enhances the American government's ability to assert Iraqi freedom as the goal of their war without attending to the fact that the injury and death of civilians and soldiers is the first step in attaining the purported goal. In jettisoning particular perspectives and images from the field of representability, the state creates a visual outside that is constitutive of the images that *are* represented. While photographs may, as Sontag suggests, be an "invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers" (Sontag 2003, 117), this potential requires that photographs actually be seen.

In the context of the Iraq war and occupation, the 'seen' consists primarily of images of American armaments and soldiers, while the 'unseen' is largely made up of photographs of casualties, of the human costs of the conflict. Coverage of this conflict, like many contemporary wars receiving coverage in the mainstream news media, often replaces images of victims with simplified maps which depict war as an abstract space overlaid with illustrations of armaments and forces represented by geometric shapes and arrows indicating movement (not unlike a meteorological chart's illustration of the direction and speed of high and low pressure airflows). In the emptied and abstracted visual space of these maps, war does not appear awful, its materiality smoothed away by computerized graphics that hint only vaguely at the destruction they represent (Taylor 1998, 164). Casualties within this abstracted space are lost to representation and to memory – a visual erasure directly tied to policy's of deliberate effacement. Making

bodies disappear from the visual representation of war connects to a broader strategy of fostering the notion that contemporary wars fought by Western states "produce 'clean', heroic or invisible deaths and not 'dirty', banal death. The imaginative leap to safety and invisibility requires that wars are re-described as the collision of technical forces and unfeeling materials" (Taylor 1998, 176).

This photographic absence, or the 'unseen', that forms the background for the images of the Iraq war and occupation admitted into the field of representability. The relationship between visible and excluded photographs might be best illustrated by drawing on Foucault's description of silence as an element that functions alongside speech, as one of its constitutive elements. In his discussion of silence, he suggests that "there is no binary division between what one says and what one does not say," and that an inquiry must be made into the ways that the ability to speak is distributed and into the types of discourses that are authorized (Foucault 1990, 27). Similarly, perhaps an inquiry might be made into the distribution of what may and may not be seen, into the reasons for the photographic frame's inclusions and exclusions, and into the discourses that are buttressed by these particular inclusions and exclusions. Like silences, the seen and unseen are not separated by a binary exclusion. Rather, the excluded image forms the constitutive background against which other images become visible and are selected by the interpretive photographic frame, which is both delimited by state restrictions and the workings of the news media's visual economy.

When wars, or other tragedies, unfold at a distance from those who (putatively) benefit from them, the stakes of their representation run high. To hear about an invasion made in the name of one's freedom is abstract, at best. Descriptions of a war's purpose

regularly skip over its more immediate end: the destruction of people and places. The means of achieving these immediate ends become even more obfuscated. The language of 'collateral damage' obscures the reality of dead civilians and destroyed homes. Similarly, in the recent case of Iraq, the torture of Iraqi citizens was referred to as the 'harsh interrogation' of 'illegal combatants'. Descriptions of what harsh interrogation entails were purposefully vague – terms like 'stress position', 'sensory deprivation', or 'rendition' have little weight for those reading about them in North American newspapers. However, the 2004 release of a series of photographs depicting the torture of Iraqi inmates at the Abu Ghraib prison provided visual examples of what such euphemisms actually entail. The publication of the photographs at once provided evidence of crimes committed and prompted a discussion of torture in the North American news media – one that persists five years later.

The power of the Abu Ghraib photographs rests in their ability to certify torture occurring in an American-run correctional facility in a land of their occupation. Press reports of torture without the photographs may have raised some concern in the North American public; however, the publication of photographs prompted public debate (or at least awareness) because of their depictive efficiency. With an immediacy unavailable to other modes of representation, the Abu Ghraib photographs were able to make visible the existence of torture. In the context of a photograph of a slave market, Barthes describes the same process of visual evidence certifying that slavery has existed:

> I remember keeping for a long time a photograph I had cut out of a magazine – lost subsequently, like everything too carefully put away – which showed a slave market: the slavemaster, in a hat, standing; the slaves, in loincloths, sitting. I repeat: a photograph, not a drawing or engraving; for my horror and my fascination as a child came from this: that there was a *certainty* that such a thing had existed: not a question of exactitude, but of reality: the historian was no

> longer the mediator, slavery was given without mediation, the fact was established *without method* (Barthes 1980, 79-80).

While I am offering a more limited conception of photographic evidence, one that does not deny the influence of method and mediation, I share Barthes's notion of the immediacy of a photograph's visual evidence – its capacity to aggressively assert 'this happened'.

The Abu Ghraib photographs certify that torture has existed, not so far from us. In this case, 'far' in terms of time, but also 'far' in terms of our own physical removal from the scene they depict. We are in the photos in the sense that it is 'westerners', Americans in the photographs, enacting the torture. The photos certify that it is something that we do, not only the act of the barbaric 'other' (Saddam Hussein) or the stuff of history, long past (medieval torture). And this makes it something that is more than just news. When we look at these photographs, we do not just observe the visual record of events unfolding in a different land, we see the actions of American soldiers and their results, in the same frame. We see what is being done in the name of 'freedom'. In a period of derealized, distanced war, where the space between aggressor and victim continually grows, these photographs shrink the scope of the war into a more visually manageable space: the torture chamber. The aggressor and victim appear together, in the same frame. The cause and effect of violence is captured – the distancing effect of euphemistic redescription no longer holds (or at least becomes significantly less tenable). These photographs have the potential to make the violence of war concrete in our minds, as the distant audience, and create the potential for critical reflection.

Chapter Two

The now well-known series of photographs depicting the torture of detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq illustrate the potential power of photography, the instability of photographic meaning, and the will to control/contain it in recent history. CBS television and *The New Yorker* first released a selection of these photographs in April 2004 and the images were quickly disseminated around the world. The publication of the photographs triggered a series of investigations within the Department of Defence and prompted the Bush administration to attempt to limit the scope of inquiry to the military personnel directly involved in the depicted abuse. Despite this official narrative, the photographs also prompted investigation by a variety of journalists and filmmakers, including Seymour Hersh, Mark Danner, Philip Gourevitch, and Errol Morris. While varied in their approaches, each of these investigations sought to connect the torture depicted in the photographs to military and legal structures extending beyond Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, and other sites in the global war prison. Both the official and unofficial accounts of what occurred in the fall of 2003 at Abu Ghraib begin with the same set of images. The persistent coverage of the photographs in a wide range of news media sources created a visual cleavage within the coverage of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. The poor quality, highly pixelated photographs taken by soldiers on personal digital cameras spread quickly through multiple news media channels, mainstream and non, prompting a long look at the effects of the ‘war on terror’, but also prompting the deflection of such looking. These contradictory responses to the photographs created a site for publicly discussing the specific tactics used by American soldiers, but also a broader consideration of the war.

This visual site can also, as I will elaborate on in the next chapter, provide a space for reflecting, as distant spectators, upon our ability to apprehend the humanity of the 'other', how the 'other' appears or disappears, and our responses to these images or their absences.

In this chapter, I will provide a brief outline of what has come to be called the 'Abu Ghraib scandal'. I will then discuss the official and unofficial investigations that provided different narratives, each providing a different interpretation of the photographs and the scandal. I will draw on the notions of evidence and unstable meaning developed in my first chapter to discuss the varied interpretations of the photographs. The photographs' media release marked the transition of a previously unseen element of the Iraq war into the space of the 'seen', and appearance that incited a flurry of discussion and interpretation. Though each of these investigations and resulting narratives took the publication of the photographs as their impetus/catalyst, each moves quickly past the photographs. I will attempt to maintain a focus on the photographs themselves, opening questions about their meaning and their implications for their viewers – a group that often falls outside of both official and unofficial narratives of the scandal. While these photographs certainly troubled, and continue to trouble, the multiplicity of gazes that fall upon them, they also hold the potential for cutting through euphemistic descriptions of torture. The representation of the corporeal effects of modern war, displayed with such hideous and uncommon intimacy, open up the possibility of disrupting rhetoric that seeks to distance the cause of 'freedom' from the costs of violence, degradation, and humiliation. While these photographs alone may not establish an ethical position, the

efficiency and forcefulness of their representation have the capacity to trigger multiple lines of questioning capable of disrupting the narratives that sought to dismiss them.

Part One: Context

The 'Abu Ghraib scandal' extends beyond a prison in Iraq, both temporally and geographically, encompassing political and legal decisions made in Washington, DC, detainment and interrogation practices in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba and Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, and the investigative aftermath that followed the torture of prisoners and the publication of photographs depicting the abuse. In what follows, I will describe the scandal, but will begin with and continually return to the photographs. Rather than beginning chronologically with the 372nd Military Police Company (of the 800th MP Brigade) taking over Tiers 1A and 1B of Abu Ghraib prison on October 15, 2003 or with the abuses inflicted on prisoners of Tier 1A from October through December 2003, my account of the scandal begins with the airing of photographs of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib on CBS's *60 Minutes II* on April 28, 2004. From this point, I will trace backwards through the events that lead to the publication of these photographs and forwards, describing the consequences of their publication.

To tell this story, I will focus on the different elements of the photographs: the scene, the subjects, the photographers. I will contextualize each of these elements by describing the different policies involved in bringing them together, establishing the conditions that made torture possible. After creating a portrait of each element, I will recombine them at the moment of the 'click' of the camera's shutter, moving forward in time to describe the aftermath of the distribution and publication of the photographs, paying particular attention to the Taguba report, the outcome of the military's internal

investigation that was leaked to the media at the same time the photographs were initially published.

In moving between the consideration of the images and of the actions they depict, I will attempt to bridge the seemingly intractable gap that discussions of photography frequently fall into: “on one side there is ‘the photograph’ (click); on the other, ‘reality’ (THUD)” (Maynard 1997, 14). Rather than maintaining a strict division between image and reality, I will engage with the photographs as depictions of events that have refused to recede into the background of the media scene, playing an active role in shaping conceptions of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq upon their 2004 release and playing a key role in debates over the release of new torture photographs in the spring of 2009.

In selecting the initial date of the photograph’s appearance as the starting point for my account, I will mirror the ways in which the scandal unfolded for the North American public. While the prisoner abuse occurred six months before the publication of the photographs, it was not until the photographs appeared in mainstream news media that Abu Ghraib became an object of knowledge and concern in North America. The photographs themselves were produced and then circulated within various levels of the military apparatus for months before their publication; I want to distinguish between the simple existence of a photograph and its publication or circulation. The fact of a photograph’s existence prompts a different discussion than the fact of whether others view it. When seen by a large audience, photographs have the capacity to influence and shift discourse, prompting a different sort of discussion among viewers and necessitating a different kind of analysis of their evidentiary role than when circulated as an obscure

but shocking collection seen by just a few people. The publication of the photographs announced Abu Ghraib prison as a site of concern and inquiry, eliciting a series of previously unasked questions: Where is Abu Ghraib? What happened there? How did this happen? Why did this happen? What do these photographs mean? What will happen next?

The photographs

On April 28, 2004 CBS aired photographs depicting torture at Abu Ghraib on *60 Minutes II*. The highly pixilated photographs that appeared on television screens displayed American soldiers humiliating and abusing their prisoners. The segment opened with what would become the scandal's most reproduced and widely circulated image: the man on the box. Shrouded only by a blanket, the man is perched on a cardboard box with arms outstretched, an electrical wire attached to each hand, his head covered by a sandbag. Doubled by his shadow cast against light grey walls by a harsh overhead light, the man is alone in the frame. The second photograph in the segment reveals a pile of seven naked prisoners, also hooded with sandbags. Legs and arms twist together, the prisoners at the base of the pile are pressed into the concrete floor by the weight of those stacked on top of them. Seven tidy piles of clothing line the wall on the right of the frame and a barred door separates the scene in the foreground from a brightly lit hallway that continues on in the background. Behind the piled prisoners, a grinning female soldier crouches and leans forward over the bodies and a male soldier stands behind her. He also smiles, his arms are crossed, and a rubber-gloved hand flashes a thumbs-up sign. Both photographs show signs of careful staging: the action is centered, flashes were used to ensure even lighting, all faces are directed towards the camera

despite several being hooded. More photographs followed, depicting naked and hooded male prisoners simulating masturbation and oral sex, a small female soldier leading a naked male prisoner out of a cell by a leash, prisoners confronted by unmuzzled working dogs, naked bodies cuffed together and piled again.

After the broadcast, the images appeared in *The New Yorker*, accompanied by a series of articles by Seymour Hersh, in the *Washington Post*, and a host of other news sources, American and international, in print, on television, and online. In the weeks following the CBS broadcast, additional photographs were released and further charges were laid against the military personnel they depicted. While President Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, and General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff claimed to have not seen the photographs prior to the CBS broadcast, Myers had requested two delays in the segment's airing after the network informed the Pentagon on April 12 that they were in possession of and intending to air the photographs. Enigmatic and provocative, the photographs broke visually with all previous media coverage of the invasion and occupation of Iraq and eliciting myriad responses and exceeding all attempts to control their circulation and interpretation.

The scene

Taken between October and early-December of 2003, the photographs all unfold in Tier 1A of the Baghdad Central Correctional Facility. Re-opened in the summer of 2003 under the auspices of the American occupying force, the Abu Ghraib prison was a site of brutality and "the scene of some of the worst excesses of Saddam Hussein's regime" (Gregory 2007, 25). Beatings, torture, executions, and burials in mass, unmarked graves were routine. While the torture perpetrated by American soldiers does

not parallel the atrocities that took place under Hussein, it is important to attend to the memory attached to the physical site of the prison. A sign reading 'America is a friend of all Iraqi people' may have replaced Hussein's portrait at the prison's main gate; however, it is unlikely that the occupying force had proven this friendship, let alone extinguished traumatic remains smouldering in the recesses of the individual and collective memories of Iraqis.

Read more broadly, the scene of the photographs extends beyond the walls of Tier 1A and into the prison compound and the occupied country. Throughout the summer and fall of 2003, insurgent mortar rounds consistently attacked the prison. Most vulnerable to these attacks was the prison's 'soft site', a tent facility surrounded by barbed wire, which housed thousands of detainees in addition to those held within the permanent prison structure, or 'hard site'. During this period, an insurgency grew steadily throughout the country, with daily attacks on American troops increasing from an average of twelve per day in August to thirty-three by the end of October (Gregory 2007, 28). Faced with increasing hostility within Iraq and decreasing support for the war in the United States, pressure to attain the intelligence necessary to mount a successful counter-insurgency also grew through the summer. The pressure from the Bush administration to produce 'actionable evidence' led to the adoption of the 'enhanced interrogation' techniques already in place in the interrogation chambers of Guantánamo and Bagram. Relying on the preparation of detainees for interrogation, the 'gloves that had come off' in American-run interrogation rooms were also removed in the cells and halls of Abu Ghraib (Danner 2004, 33).

The (tortured) subjects

The thousands of prisoners that filled the hard and soft sites of Abu Ghraib by the fall of 2003 were designated as 'security detainees' or 'security internees', two interchangeable terms employed in lieu of Prisoners of War. Invoking these terms allowed the withdrawal of Iraqi prisoners from the protections of the Geneva Conventions (Gregory 2007, 31). In his November 2003 inspection of detention facilities in Iraq, Major-General Donald Ryder, the Provost Marshal General, found "117 Prisoners of War, 101 'high value detainees' and 3,400 security detainees" held in American custody, many of whom were incarcerated at Abu Ghraib (Gregory 2007, 32). Of those incarcerated, Ryder's report estimated that "85-90 per cent of those held were in the wrong place at the wrong time and 'were of no intelligence value'" (Gregory 2007, 32). The International Committee of the Red Cross report on Abu Ghraib has also estimated that 70-90 per cent of jailed Iraqis have been mistakenly arrested (Danner 2004, 3). Given the increasing intensity of intelligence gathering at the time, the innocence of these detained civilians was likely to make them more vulnerable to abuse within the carceral system because, as Ryder suggests, "investigators refused to believe they could have been picked up on such arbitrary grounds" (Gregory 2007, 32). The flooding of Abu Ghraib and other prisons with detainees of no intelligence value is largely a result of the 'cordon and capture' method employed by troops through the summer of 2003. Essentially the indiscriminate rounding up and arrests of Iraqi men, the strategy was one of desperation to counter the growing insurgency (Danner 2004, 33). It was ultimately a strategy of weakness, as the invasion of homes and indiscriminate arrests led primarily toward the humiliation and increasing opposition of the Iraqi population.

The detainees whose torture the photographs depict likely provided little to no 'actionable intelligence'. Stripped of rights, likely held without charge, the subjects of these photographs faced indefinite detention at Abu Ghraib. The detained subjects in the photographs, and those who went unphotographed, hardly illustrated the 'ticking time bomb' scenarios that have come to dominate justifications of torture and the limits of enhanced interrogation techniques in America.

The photographers

Seven members of the 372nd Military Police Company appear prominently in the photographs. Directing and capturing the scenes of torture occurring in the prison that fall, these MP guards were the most visibly involved soldiers in the scandal. Purposefully caught on tape, these photographers intended their work to be seen and shared. Generally, their actions have been discounted by government and military representatives as the sadistic whims of a select number of soldiers and are actions unrepresentative of the military or the campaign in Iraq. While these attempts to isolate the work of these soldiers will be discussed in greater detail later, for now it is important to note the independence with which the MP guards were supposedly operating. However, MP guards were actively requested to set physical and mental conditions for favourable interrogation by MI interrogators and Other US Government Agency (OGA) interrogators.

The precedent for such collaboration was set in September 2003, when a thirty member military team led by Major General Geoffrey Miller, Commander of JTF Guantánamo arrived in Iraq to assess existing "counter-terrorism interrogation and detention operations" (Gregory 2007, 33). Drawing on the standard operating procedures

developed at Guantánamo, Miller recommended the integration of detention and interrogation to best exploit detainees for 'actionable intelligence' (Gregory 2007, 33). A closer look at the actions performed and photographed in the night shift in Tier 1A reveals close semblances to strategies actively employed in Guantánamo and Bagram. Further, they display a cultural knowledge of the location of shame and humiliation in Muslim culture, far outstripping what would be expected of young reservists. From nudity to forced masturbation to the presence of female soldiers and working dogs, the techniques employed by MP guards illustrate an attempt to create conditions particularly painful and humiliating for Iraqi detainees, techniques consistent those outlined in Miller's standard operating procedures and abuses reported in other American-run prisons and network of black sites central to the 'war on terror'. As Gregory suggests, "[i]t strains credibility to believe that such a tableaux of intense humiliation and pain – a theatre of cruelty if there ever was one – were nothing more than the artless strategy of a handful of reservists from small-town America" (Gregory 2007, 43-44).

Needless to say, not all soldiers involved in the torture appear in the photographs. MI and OGA interrogators likely played a key role in the torture that was inflicted, but one that unfolded behind the closed doors of the interrogation chamber rather than the open spaces of the cellblock hallways. In distant, more opaque chambers in Washington, military strategists, legal counsel, and politicians were involved in setting the conditions for the photographs, but were far removed from the depth of field of the cameras in Tier 1A.

The 'click'

With each click of a camera shutter in Tier 1A, the moment unfolding before it was captured, frozen in digital tableaux. The broader context of the prison was cropped down to the space of the image, time frozen in a still frame. While the photographs cannot offer complete explanations of what occurred at Abu Ghraib, they preserve traces of the events of the fall of 2003, offering them up as objects of investigation. Representing time spatially, in the flat space of the frame, photography removes the image from a broader flow of events, and sets it up as something to look at, as an invitation for lingering eyes.

The 'isolating' effect of the photograph develops the appearance of the torture as an isolated incident. In lifting a moment out of the flow of time, it also lifts it out of context. Nothing inherent to a photograph identifies its relationship to broader political context, legal decisions, or military directives. As the images are from a discrete number of nights with particular MPs involved, they retain the possibility of limiting the discussion to just a few individuals and their acts. At the same time as they isolate moments, the photographs also promise to continue them. Cameras served the role of the "ultimate third party" in these scenes of torture, constantly reminding the detainee that their "humiliation would not stop when the act itself did but would be preserved into the future in a way that the detainee would not be able to control" (Danner 2004, 19). Photography was integral to the act of torture, a shame multiplier, assuring the continuation of the prisoners' humiliation with every inescapable flash and promises that the devastating images would be circulated to family, neighbours, and enemies. As Butler argues, the torture was *for* the camera, was incited and sustained and extended *by* the camera, and now, "because of the photo, the event has not stopped happening"

(Butler 2007, 961). Perhaps, in their ability to transform a subject into an image, an object, a degree of violence haunts all photographs. This objectification, coupled with the photograph's ability to extend and repeat the scene it depicts through its publication and circulation, makes photography a ready tool for the programme of cruelty implemented at Abu Ghraib. If photography violates its subjects, "by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge they can never have" (Sontag 1973, 14), then using it to repeatedly forcing subjects to see themselves depicted in unimaginable ways after enduring torment (and believing these brutal images would be shared) is surely a violation of the worst order.

At Abu Ghraib, the photograph extended the grip of power from the corporeal (the stress positions, the forced nudity, the simulated sexual acts, the rapes) to the spectral. The reliance on 'no-touch' torture techniques developed during the Cold War, which use disorientation and self-inflicted pain to make the subject responsible for her own suffering, remove the visible marks of external control from the body of the tortured prisoner. As a result, "there is little to betray the existence of the crime unless it is photographed" and, given the muteness of the image, "if it is photographed, the veil of silence envelops the victim again" (Rajiva 2005, 145). Circulated within the prison and then in the broader media scene, the photographs continually draw viewers back into the torture chamber, back into the scene of the abuse. The experience of viewing the photographs *may* elicit important critique and demands for accountability. However, the photographs also fit into a broader visual landscape: abstract maps of an occupied territory carved up by simplistic conceptions of internal conflict form a background for the targets of an air war, for a ruined infrastructure, for a population rendered powerless

and unseen. Power, functioning through the camera, creates and imposes "imagery that effaces and replaces the subjectivity of the defeated people with a new subjectivity, one that defines them both to themselves and others as abject and dispossessed of their very selves" (Rajiva 2005, 145).

The 'THUD'

On January 13, 2004 Specialist Joseph Darby, an MP guard at Abu Ghraib, turned over to the Army's Criminal Investigation Division (CID) a CD full of digital photographs depicting the abuse of detainees. In extending the distribution of the photographs from MPs to investigators, Darby's forfeiture of the disc prompted the full investigation of prisoner abuse allegations at the prison. On January 31, 2004 Major General Antonio M. Taguba was appointed to conduct an investigation into the detention and internment operations at Abu Ghraib from November 1, 2003 to January, 2004, the time of his appointment. In what would come to be referred to as the Taguba Report, an inquiry was made into "all the facts and circumstances surrounding recent allegations of detainee abuse, specifically allegations of maltreatment", as well as into detainee escapes, accountability lapses, personnel training, internal procedures, and the command climate at Abu Ghraib (Danner 2004, 282). While the photographs Darby turned over prompted Taguba's investigation, they were not reproduced in the report itself, due to their sensitive nature and criminal investigations that were active during the time Taguba was preparing his report (Danner 2004, 292). Among the report's findings was a detailed list of the intentional abuses inflicted and photographed in Tier 1A:

- Punching, slapping, and kicking detainees; jumping on their naked feet;
- Videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees;
- Forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing;

- Forcing detainees to remove their clothing and keeping them naked for several days at a time;
- Forcing naked male detainees to wear women's underwear;
- Forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped;
- Arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them;
- Positioning a naked detainee on a MRE Box, with a sandbag on his head, and attaching wires to his fingers, toes, and penis to simulate electric torture;
- Writing "I am a Rapest" (sic) on the leg of a detainee alleged to have forcibly raped a 15-year old fellow detainee, and then photographing him naked;
- Placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee's neck and having a female Soldier pose for a picture;
- A male MP guard having sex with a female detainee;
- Using military working dogs (without muzzles) to intimidate and frighten detainees, and in at least one case biting and severely injuring a detainee; and,
- Taking photographs of dead Iraqi detainees (Danner 2004, 292).

The report also found credible evidence of soldiers committing other abuses, which were not photographed. These include soldiers:

- Breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees;
- Threatening detainees with a charged 9mm pistol;
- Pouring cold water on naked detainees;
- Beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair;
- Threatening male detainees with rape;
- Allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell;
- Sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broom stick; and
- Using military working dogs to frighten and intimidate detainees with threats of attack, and in one instance actually biting a detainee (Danner 2004, 292).

The recommendations included the further investigation of MI personnel to determine the extent of their culpability in the abuse.

A key finding of the Taguba report was the failure of leadership within Abu Ghraib and up to the highest levels of military. Specifically, the report recommended the reprimand of two commanders at Abu Ghraib, as well as the investigation of nine other ranking officers for failure to properly train and supervise the soldiers at the prison. Ultimately, Taguba’s report unsparingly illustrated an environment in which “Army

regulations and the Geneva Conventions were routinely violated" (Hersh 2004, 46). Creating a catalogue of abuses, the report revealed that the exploitation occurred, insofar as it was possible, "with the institutional approval of the US government" (Danner 2004, 11). Following further investigations, two commanders, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski and Colonel Thomas M. Pappas, received nonjudicial punishment and seven MP soldiers and two MI soldiers were court-martialed and convicted of crimes committed in the prison. Despite Taguba's faulting of several commanding officers with failures of leadership, training, and supervision, none have been prosecuted (Walsh 2006).

The media release

The Taguba report informed Washington of the crimes committed at Abu Ghraib, and upon being leaked, it also passed this information to the American public. The details of the report circulated alongside the photographs, cycling through the international media system. Soon after the photographs were first aired on CBS and published in *The New Yorker*, they appeared not only on mainstream televisions shows and newspapers around the world; they also appeared in other mediated spaces, such as a host of internet websites,[4] in the art world,[5] and in a variety of street level media, such as graffiti and activist campaigns.[6] Both in and outside of America, the meaning of the

---

[4] For example, 'The Abu Ghraib Files' at *Salon.com* provides a comprehensive online resource containing all 279 photographs and 19 videos from the Army's internal investigation record.

[5] Columbian painter Fernando Botero produced forty-seven paintings and drawings depicting scenes of prisoner abuse inspired by the descriptions of the torture he had read about in Seymour Hersh's work. The collection, titled *Botero Abu Ghraib*, was exhibited in Europe in 2005 and 2006 and in the United States in 2007. Philip Toledano, a New York based photographer, included several Abu Ghraib motifs in an exhibit called *America The Gift Shop*, which illustrated Bush-era foreign policies in the vernacular of a tourist gift shop. Abu Ghraib related items in the exhibit included a coffee tables, bobblehead dolls, postcards, cookie jars, and a fairground cutout, which reproduced various scenes depicted in the Abu Ghraib photographs.

[6] The Swiss branch of Amnesty International used photographs from Abu Ghraib in a billboard campaign to draw street-level audience attention to visual evidence that torture (and other human rights abuses)

photographs expanded rapidly. Beyond documenting and providing evidence of the torture inflicted on Iraqi detainees in Tier 1A of Abu Ghraib, the photographs were quickly taken up as symbols of the violent outcomes of American imperialism. In this way, the photographs presented a further challenge. Not only did they inform of misconduct requiring a legal solution, they also opened up a site of contested meaning. Donald Rumsfeld and other executives worked to limit the interpretation of the photographs to the evidence of crimes committed by a few 'bad apples', while many others attempted to open up their interpretation, considering them icons of the war in all of its brutality.

The narrative that grew out of the publication of the Abu Ghraib photographs took two distinct but interpenetrating forms, each locating responsibility differently. Lila Rajiva describes these two narratives as a *forensic drama* and a *pulp drama*. Focusing primarily on bureaucratic procedures within American political and military institution, the forensic drama played out as an analysis focused on legal issues, especially the status of the Abu Ghraib prisoners under the Geneva Conventions, and ignored the individual personalities involved. By discounting personalities and emphasizing procedures, the forensic drama attempted to disaggregate personal culpability and "lay blame on institutional factors, on failure of communication, lack of oversight and coordination, or on improper follow-through, and this was precisely how the most dangerous charges facing the administration were finally neutralized" (Rajiva 2005, 34). The pulp drama, on the other hand, focused on the individual low-ranking reservists – the 'bad apples'. In this narrative, "personal character and motivations, racial and religious identity, cultural

---

occurring 'not here, but now'. Other photographs used in the campaign included prisoners held at Guantánamo Bay, child soldiers, and Chinese torture victims.

and sexual elements are emphasized and institutional factors are pushed into the background" (Rajiva 2005, 33).

In the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal, "a national myth of a country that takes on itself the burden of liberating others" began to show signs of wear (Rajiva 2005, 84). The distinct roles of *American* heroism and the *enemy's* villainy began to blur when the villainy became decidedly American. In the continuous shift between the pulp and forensic drama, the heroic language that shapes national myths broke down. When represented as personal villainy, the scandal was cast in the bureaucratic language of collateral damage and intelligence gathering, a cultural critique of poor and uneducated reservists, or a psychological diagnosis of depression and various perversions (Rajiva 2005, 84). This tactic produced a personal narrative, describing the torture as an exceptional misdeed, perpetrated by a selection of bit-players in the expansive theatre of the war and occupation. Conversely, when the scandal was represented as systemic or institutional villainy, the language used to describe what had occurred was no longer personalized, but splintered into "the shapeless jargon of bureaucracy, shifting attention away from the actors to the process, diffusing their responsibility like pixels on a screen" (Rajiva 2005, 84). Through pulp drama's selective ascription of responsibility with clearly identified figures and the forensic drama's diffusion of responsibility beyond the point of apprehension, Abu Ghraib was presented as a limited, sealed event, a "precise punctuation in time and space" (Gregory 6). In employing this concurrent ascription and diffusion, the Bush administration attempted to carefully police the scandal's borders, to ensure that any inquiry into the military, political, and social frameworks that the torture unfolded within would be limited to the actions of a few individuals over a few months in

a few rooms. However, the flurry of interpretative work that was produced following the release of the photographs all-but dashed such hopes.

Part Two: Grappling with 'meaning'

In the wake of a scandal like Abu Ghraib, comes a period of reckoning, an attempt to make sense of what has occurred, who is responsible, and the possibilities for moving forward. The Bush administration's involvement in representations of Abu Ghraib did not end with a singular response to the photograph's initial publication. Rather, it is at this point that their involvement shifted to the management of the collective memory (American and Iraqi) of the scandal, which included the careful concealment of the centrality of trauma to the formation and practices of the state itself. Given that the violent contradictions occluded by state ideology, close attention is always paid to the concealing of violent realities with the promises of freedom and safety. The Abu Ghraib photographs make this contradiction painfully visible, capturing in hundreds of pixelated images "the Janus-face of occupied Iraq, preaching liberation while practicing degradation" (Gregory 2007, 44).

The Abu Ghraib photographs were released with captions, identifying the soldiers involved, but provided limited contextualization. Rather than simply illustrating a news story, the photographs *were* the story and their publication initiated a struggle over their narration and interpretation that included an 'official' story, told through Donald Rumsfeld, the spokesman for governmental discourse. The struggle to establish meaning also included competing 'unofficial' narratives that originated in the sphere of cultural discourse. In any attempt to develop a narrative, the authorial powers involved play a considerable role in the structuring of what might be known, of authorizing particular

accounts of an event. In the case of Abu Ghraib, the Bush administration attempted to monopolize authorial power and to provide a narrative that would direct the interpretation of the photographs and contain their impact, a strategy that might be read as part of a broader attempt to represent war euphemistically, occluding the violence central to the campaign (Scarry 1986, 64).

'Official' narrative

The Bush administration's immediate response to the publication of the photographs was to characterize prisoner abuse as an exceptional situation. These photos were not, as President Bush argued and Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld repeated, reflective of the US Military or consistent with American values (Department of Defence 2004a). Instead, the photographs were dismissed as the actions of a 'few bad apples', a few rogue MPs acting well outside of their mandate. Almost immediately, justice was promised: the perpetrators of the actions displayed in the photographs would be brought to justice through the court system and America would move on. The central feature of this response was to quickly identify soldiers directly involved in the prisoner abuse, to punish them, and to close the issue. The Bush Administration interpreted the photographs from Abu Ghraib, first, as an embarrassment to be managed and, second, as evidence of discrete crimes perpetrated by a small group of soldiers.

In an initial Defence Department briefing following the publication of the photographs, Rumsfeld's comments focused on the aberrant nature of the abuse. He claimed, "the actions by U.S. military personnel in those photos do not in any way represent the values of our country or the armed forces" (Department of Defence 2004a). Though promising to take the necessary steps to hold the soldiers responsible for the

abuse accountable, he refused to describe the misconduct depicted in the photographs as 'torture'. In the same week, Rumsfeld testified before the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, combining apology with a clear articulation of the Department of Defence's interpretation of and response to the photographs. Admitting regret at the damage done to American credibility and operations in Iraq and suggesting the need to review detention procedures, he continued to assert that the abuse of detainees was "un-American" and "inconsistent with the values of our nation" (Senate and House Armed Services Committees 2004, 1). By invoking the patriotic language of American identity and values, Rumsfeld attempted to identify the torturing soldiers and their photographs as elements inconsistent with the purity of American intentions in Iraq and to expel them from the broader narrative of the war effort. He further limited the interpretation of the photographs by warning that America's enemies will use the images to undermine the mission in Iraq, spreading "the false impression that such conduct is the rule and not the exception" (Senate and House Armed Services Committees 2004, 4).

These comments, issued in the days following the initial publication of the photographs, formed the foundation of an 'official' narrative of the Abu Ghraib scandal. The language of exception, central to these comments, characterized all future governmental discourse regarding the photographs. In portraying Abu Ghraib as an isolated incident, the product of irresponsible, or even sadistic, reservists who could be dealt with fairly and expediently through the avenues of established American justice, this narrative limited the implications of the photographs to the content of their frames. Direct responsibility for the crimes rested with those visible within the frame and, as a result, nine soldiers were subject to courts-martial and subsequently punished. The

responsibility of those outside of the frame – MI soldiers, leadership within the prison, and leadership further up the chain of command – remained indirect and punishment was nonjudicial, when delivered at all. The narrative of isolation denied any links between practices at Guantánamo Bay and Bagram Air Base or legal decisions regarding torture within the Bush Administration to the abuse at Abu Ghraib.

The Schlesinger Report, produced by an independent panel established at Rumsfeld's request to review detention practices in Iraq, reiterated the distancing of the abuses at Abu Ghraib from both the enhanced interrogations occurring in Cuba and Afghanistan and the interrogations occurring within the prison. The prisoners in the photographs were not, Schlesinger claimed, presumed to have valuable intelligence and were not the subjects of authorized interrogation. The abuses were not considered within a climate of urgency, which valued intelligence at any cost, enabled the circumvention of the Geneva Conventions, and was supported by a series of legal and political decisions made in Washington. Rather, these abuses were taken as completely isolated, as the "freelance activities on the part of the night shift at Abu Ghraib" (Department of Defence 2004b). According to Schlesinger's report, the central cause of the abuse was a specific, isolated form of sadism peculiar to the night shift: "It was a kind of animal house on the night shift" (Department of Defence 2004b).

Rather than viewed as an icon of the increasing tension in Iraq or as a canary in the mineshaft, Abu Ghraib was dismissed as a place of chaos, distinct from the otherwise normal order of the war. While not intended for public release, the photographs presented the Bush Administration with an opportunity to reiterate an 'official' narrative of the scandal and of the war. The photographs were spectacular, in all of their horror.

Rather than avoid them, the official narrative suggested that we gaze at them directly, as an image of the corrupt morals, extreme sadism, and exceptional violence of a very small group of aberrant individuals. Meanwhile, as our eyes are drawn towards these photographs of abuse, horrors unfolding elsewhere in Iraq receive less attention. In relation to the exceptional, isolated incidents of torture at Abu Ghraib, other forms of violence become marginalized and "the politico-military project of domination becomes contorted into the image of 'liberation'" (Gregory 30). Next to the image of the grinning torturer, how could other soldiers appear as anything but innocuous in comparison?

'Unofficial' Narratives

Counter to the limited interpretation of the photographs and prisoner abuse offered up by Rumsfeld and others, many responded to the publication of the photographs by looking outward and upward, seeking connections between the actions of the Tier 1A MPs and broader strategies of interrogation and torture at work in other US military prisons, such as Bagram and Guantánamo Bay, and to policies originating in the offices of high ranking Pentagon and Attorney General officials. Government and military attempts to contain the photographs were ineffectual and circulation of the photographs far exceeded efforts to inscribe the photographs with a singular meaning or to hamper their spread through multiple media channels. Along with their circulation, the photographs were interpreted and alternative narratives began to flow from 'unofficial' sources, such as Seymour Hersh's and Mark Danner's investigative reporting and Errol Morris's documentary film making, rather than the 'official' sites of governmental discourse.[7] Central to these responses was the identification of a broader culpability, but

---

[7] As discussed in the first chapter, these accounts may diverge from those offered by the Bush administration, but they do not necessarily depart from the reproduction of the state itself and may, by

more importantly, an attempt make sense of the events and to determine how such misconduct could have occurred. While far from uniform, these responses constitute a challenge to the Bush administration's attempt to establish a singular, limited narrative of the events that unfolded at Abu Ghraib prison. Instead, these responses produce a series of alternative narratives, attempting to structure interpretations of the photographs that make closing the issue more difficult. While the 'unofficial' response tends to open up broader questions than those allowed by the 'official' response, they lead in two general directions: policy and psychology.

Policy: Seymour Hersh and Mark Danner

Publishing three articles in *The New Yorker* in the three weeks following the initial publication of the Abu Ghraib photographs, Seymour Hersh established from the outset a counter-narrative to Rumsfeld. Writing at the same time for *The New York Review of Books*, Mark Danner provided another voice speaking in contradiction to the White House. The key premise of both journalists' work in the early weeks of the scandal was to demonstrate that Abu Ghraib was not an isolated incident, but "a concerted attempt by the government and military leadership to circumvent the Geneva Conventions in order to extract intelligence and quell the Iraqi insurgency" (Hersh 2004, xvii). Their articles focus primarily on wading through legal memos on torture, uncovering connections between detention and interrogation techniques in Cuba, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other sites, and extending culpability beyond nine soldiers. Both

---

demanding increased accountability and the re-assertion of liberal principles of contained governmental power, work to strengthen state power and ultimately further secure the means of capitalism. While part of what Althusser describes as Ideological State Apparatuses, thus complicit in the reproduction of state power and the class system, I am also interpreting these 'unofficial' narratives as an important opportunity to think differently about Abu Ghraib. They do not break with the logic of state (that is, capitalist) power, but they do provide a window into photography's power to incite a plurality of interpretations, some of which depart in important ways from the interpretations developed by governing powers.

focus on legal memos and military reports outlining a forensic story of policies and procedures gone awry, but do not intend to obscure the flows of power between institutions and individuals, unlike the forensic story developed by 'official' narratives. Rather, they sought to construct alternative stories, ones that continually returned to a simple truth that had been oft-speculated upon but not publicly admitted by the Bush administration: "that since the attacks of September 11, 2001, officials of the U.S., at various locations around the world, from Bagram in Afghanistan to Guantánamo in Cuba to Abu Ghraib in Iraq, have been torturing prisoners" (Danner 2004, 10). Using connections forged in his career as an investigative journalist, Hersh's work on Abu Ghraib relies primarily on sources within the American government and military, as well as several foreign governments, many of who remain unnamed, to draw out connections between American intelligence before September 11, 2001, the invasion of Afghanistan, and detention policies at Guantánamo Bay. His work situates Abu Ghraib within the context of previous American involvement in Iraq as wells as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East. Alternatively, Danner's account of Abu Ghraib and its connections to American military policies, including the spread of detention and interrogation procedures from Guantánamo Bay to Abu Ghraib and other prisons, is based on a close reading of the legal memos that denied prisoners of the war on terror status under the Geneva Conventions, the memos and other correspondence that legitimized the use of torture (or, 'harsh interrogation'), prisoners' depositions, witness testimonies gathered by the Red Cross, and the three reports produced by the American Military. Both authors position themselves as loyal American liberals, opposed to the

war and positioned to defend the promise and values of their country in the face of an administration gone horribly awry.

Broadly, their responses explore the culture within American legal and military institutions during the Bush Administration, inquiring into shifts within these institutions that led (directly and indirectly) to the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. Unlike the emphasis on the sadistic inclinations of a few army reservists central to the 'official' narrative, Hersh and Danner located the roots of the Abu Ghraib scandal "in the reliance of George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld on secret operations and the use of coercion – eye-for-an-eye retribution – in fighting terrorism" (Hersh 2004, 46). Contrary to Rumsfeld's refusal to refer to the abuse as 'torture', both explicitly named the misconduct represented in the photographs as such. In connecting the torture at Abu Ghraib to the somewhat innocuously titled and described 'enhanced interrogation techniques', this alternate narrative presented the photographs not only as evidence of what occurred in Tier 1A, but as an image of what the new interrogation techniques might actually mean. In a sense, their reporting mobilized the photographs to cut through the euphemistic language that had long cloaked the detention, rendition, and interrogation policies implemented in the 'War on Terror'.

Psychology: Errol Morris

In a book, co-written with Philip Gourevitch, and a documentary, both titled *Standard Operating Procedure*, Errol Morris takes issue with the narrow interpretation of the 'official' narrative of the Abu Ghraib photographs. Though he notes the policy context of the scandal, he turns his attention to the soldiers in the photographs. Rather than dismiss them as 'bad apples' or 'freelancers' with sadistic sensibilities, Morris

delves into their personal psychologies. Rather than internal sources or reports, Morris's narrative is composed from lengthy interviews with each of the soldiers depicted in the photographs, as well as with General Karpinski. His account looks more closely at the photographs themselves, promising to go beyond their visual surfaces and to inquire into the experiences, motivations, and interactions of the soldiers involved. Rather than an apologia, Morris's book and film offer an alternative starting point for answering a common question: how could this have happened? In creating a space for the voices of those most directly involved, he does not abandon considerations of the policies implicated in the scandal, but illustrates the direct effects decisions in Washington had within detention facilities. Morris draws out the effects of a disastrous combination of stress, lack of leadership, and indirect communication, producing a portrait of the mental landscapes of the MP guards who tortured and photographed detainees.

The photographs themselves are a key concern of Morris's work. His motivation to explore the psychologies of these soldiers is rooted in his frustration with analyses that assume the photographs are self-explanatory, are evidence of the most revealing sort. Assuming, instead, that the photographs may also conceal significant information about the context in which the torture unfolded, Morris seeks to move beyond the photographic frame and to re-embed the photographs in the flows of time and space frozen and isolated by the camera. One of his central concerns is the relationship between the soldiers and photography, particularly the soldiers' motivations for taking the photographs. While in some cases they were taken as souvenirs, some soldiers described more complicated motivations for taking photographs of the abuse they witnessed and participated in. For example, Sabrina Harman claimed to take photographs out of a desire to record and

expose the abuse occurring in Tier 1A. She did not, Morris claims, "pretend to be a whistle-blower-in-waiting; rather, she wished to unburden herself of complicity in conduct that she considered wrong, and in its cover-up" (Gourevitch and Morris 2008, 112). Alternatively, Charles Graner took photographs both as souvenirs and to accumulate proof of another kind – not to expose what was occurring, but to have proof of the traumatic experience of war, after being denied PTSD treatment upon his return home after the first Gulf War (Gourevitch and Morris 2008, 134, 137).

In troubling the common assumption of the photograph as evidence, Morris's work opens up a space for critical consideration of the role of images in a scandal that driven by them. However, in attending only to the relationship between soldiers and the photographs, his narrative of the scandal misses another key party: the viewer. The mere existence of the photographs did not elicit much outcry, but their publication triggered a scandal and the subsequent spinning of explanatory narratives. However, the subject position of the viewer has been largely unexplored by the responses to the photographs, both 'official' and 'unofficial'. What does it mean to look at photographs of suffering, especially when so far removed from the horror they depict? Does the visual entrance into the intimate space of torture only result in voyeurism? Or, does the experience of seeing suffering have the potential to open new lines of questioning, both ethical and political?

Chapter Three

In this chapter I will return to theoretical conceptions of photography, attempting to locate the spectator in relation to war photography. Through shifting my focus to the spectator, I consider the role of a party often distanced from the act of photography. I will argue that focusing on the spectator reveals the implication of distant audiences in the images of suffering others. Many analyses of the Abu Ghraib photographs and the ensuing scandal focused on either the photographers and their tortured subjects or the political and military establishment's decisions that lead to the torture depicted in the photographs. Both of these approaches elide the role of the spectator, who is a member of the same audience toward who the 'official' narratives of the Bush administration's interpretation of the Abu Ghraib photographs were directed. To be sure, the spectator remains distant from the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib. However, I will argue that it is a mistake to remove ourselves (the western audience) from the frames at work in their torture. Instead, we must consider taking an active role as spectators, one that recognizes how our socio-cultural norms are implicated in the domination of Iraqi citizens, both incarcerated and occupied, and how we might use torture photographs to call for accountability from those responsible. The photographs might also incite a contemplative exercise, one that begins with the vulnerability of the prisoners in the photographs and extends to a consideration of our own vulnerability and how it is putatively protected/defended through the exploitations of others. Perhaps the consideration of a mutual corporal vulnerability can form an opportunity for fulfilling relationships of solidarity that photography offers.

Shifting towards a consideration of politics at the level of visual culture, in this chapter, I will look critically at our practices as viewing spectators, focussing on the specific site of responses to the photographs and interpretations described in the previous chapter. Drawing attention to the role of spectators in the plurality of interpretations, I will argue that we must draw attention to our involvement, and even complicity, in the process of dehumanization and, not unrelatedly, our acceptance of narratives of national security. As spectators in a visual landscape marked overwhelmingly by a media cycle that moves rapidly, driven by a hunger for fascination and novelty, we are often willing to move past war photographs quickly, without considering their frames in relation to the broader frames of the rationale for and necessity of the conflicts depicted. While the circulation of photographs is uncontainable, they appear in an advertising-driven media economy, largely disinterested in broader projects of critique extending beyond the polemics of editorials. Our resistance to contemplating the framing of photographs and their relation to broader narratives and policies risks closing the critical space war photographs force open, risks abandoning the photographs' evidentiary force and collapsing their multiple interpretations into a single hegemonic narrative produced by the Bush administration. In developing this argument, I will begin with Ariella Azoulay's description of how spectators might look at photographs in a way that brings the vulnerability of photographed persons subject to violence and disaster to the fore, resulting in a vocalization of this suffering on behalf of its silent image. Next, I will turn to Judith Butler, whose recent work provides a nuanced description of how our current practices of seeing connect to the differential allocation of the social conditions necessary for the persistence of vulnerable lives in the process of waging war and the compromising

of the status of its casualties as properly human. Finally, following Butler, I will argue that photographs of casualties, such as the prisoners at Abu Ghraib, provides a valuable resources for seeing differently, in a way that considers the viewer from a critical perspective and begins the project of perceiving the process of dehumanization and reversing its effects. In identifying war photography as a space for critical reflection on rationalizations of suffering and the role of visual depiction in our ability to apprehend dehumanized others, Butler's discussion of the work of framing delineates a path towards developing a different politics. This politics is one cognizant of vulnerability and the crucial practice of critically assessing the depictions of suffering and the frames through which we are able to (and prevented from) apprehending 'others'.

Part One: Azoulay and the Spectator-Citizen

In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay outlines a political role for photography in illustrating and providing evidence of the injuries suffered by individuals and entire populations. In particular, she describes a role for photography in addressing the injuries of no citizens, abandoned and unprotected by sovereign states. The contract she envisions relies on each of the parties to the photographic act (photographer, photographed, spectator) accepting responsibilities specific to their role and being equally capable in fulfilling each role. The civil contract of photography grows out of the conventions that have come to shape photography as a social practice since its invention. The relations between each party to the photographic act Azoulay envisions are open-ended; they are encounters in which none of the parties can determine the fixed meaning of the photographs produced. Further, these unfixed meanings are open to change over time. In its openness, the photograph can be seen as a space of political relations. Unlike

so many political encounters, the relations unfolding in and around this visual space, between the parties to photographic acts "are not mediated through a sovereign power and are not limited to the bounds of a nation-state or economic contract" (Azoulay 2008, 24). In creating a (limited) reprieve from sovereign power, Azoulay claims that photography opens up a potential route to ameliorating the distinctions between citizen and noncitizen established by the state and creating a political community where the responsibility of the governed to one another – regardless of their citizenship status – precedes their responsibility to sovereign power. Directed toward citizens, Azoulay attempts to convince her audience to take on a more active, political role as spectators. In this section I will outline three key aspects in Azoualy's conception of photography's political potential: the division of populations into citizens and no citizens, photography as a space of social relations, and the active role of the spectator.

Citizens, divided

At the core of Azoulay's theory is the notion that all individuals are governed by sovereign state power, but that this governance is experienced differently based on the partitioning of individuals into two distinct groups: citizens and no citizens.[8] Citizens are full members of the state, a membership that is often taken for granted. As residents within a territory and members of a political community, citizens are granted the state's protection from injury in exchange for their allegiance. The state protects citizens from "intentional and discriminatory injury" and responds to other injuries that might befall this population, such as "environmental or mass disasters, which are indifferent to

---

[8] Azoulay also discusses a third population: flawed citizens. This population includes individuals who possess putative citizenship and are provided some access to protection and representation within the state, but are also abandoned to injury in significant ways. For example, Azoulay identifies women in western societies as a flawed population in that sexual discrimination, gender-based violence, and rape fail to register as disasters requiring responses of any significance from state power.

civilian distinctions" (Azoulay 2008, 67-8). The disasters that befall citizen populations are visible conditions demanding urgent responses: "each [disaster] is a fully demarcated area that is turned into a disaster zone for a limited period of time, with various forces – global and local – mobilized to limit the damage and conduct recovery operations" (Azoulay 2008, 51). Responses are made as visible as the disasters themselves, an opportunity to demonstrate state power and to assert necessity.

No citizens are denied membership in the state. In some cases, this is simply because they reside elsewhere and are the protected citizens of other states; however, in the cases that concern Azoulay, they are refugees who are denied access to membership or are those within the state who are stripped of membership and abandoned. The noncitizen who is abandoned by the state, but remains within it becomes functionally "disposed of as if he or she were an unessential excess of the system" (Azoulay 2008, 72). While excluded from the state's protection, the noncitizen remains within the reach of the state's governance. As such, the noncitizen is subject to and unprotected from the decisions and actions of a government that refuses to take responsibility for her. The noncitizen is thus left open to abuse by the government's representatives (the police officer, the soldier, the judge) without refuge or recourse.

Azoulay uses the distinction between citizens and no citizens as the starting point for thinking about a different form of citizenship, one mediated not through the sovereign state system, but through the practice of photography. Conceiving of citizenship in a broader sense, as membership in a group entailing particular responsibilities and delivering corresponding benefits, she claims that participation in the photographic act, as photographers, photographed subjects, or spectators makes one a citizen of photography.

In her theory, the citizens of photography are equal, regardless of their status in relation to sovereign states, in that all individuals have the potential to participate in all three subject positions involved in photography. Photography, for Azoulay is a space of social relation between its participants and a civil space that is open to all individuals, regardless of political status.

Photography as social relation

The invention of photography marked the development of a new visual field and a new form of social relations. Since its inception, photography spread rapidly around the world, creating a mass of images, but also a new encounter "between people who take, watch, and show other people's photographs, with or without their consent, thus opening new possibilities of political action and forming new conditions for its visibility" (Azoulay 2008, 24). This new encounter between people, facilitated by the invention and proliferation of camera technology, involves a series of intersecting responsibilities, rights, and forfeitures. The contract Azoulay envisions is the result of the social practices that have developed alongside the integration of photography into the daily lives of modern individuals. She argues that photographers have largely forfeited their rights to the photographs they take. Rather than a denial of copyright, this forfeiture is a reflection of the uncertain future of any given photograph: the extent of its circulation is indeterminate and often beyond the control of the photographer. In addition to this forfeiture, Azoualy ascribes the responsibility to take photographs, particularly photographs of disaster in order to build a body of evidence that marks the experiences of injured individuals to the photographer. The photographed subject has the right to be photographed, to request that visual evidence of their experience be produced. But she

also forfeits her right to her own image, a sacrifice that opens her up to the violence of photography: even when she is a consenting subject of the camera, photography involves her instrumentalization in order to produce her image. The spectator is responsible for actively engaging with photographs, articulating their context, and providing a voice to accompany their mute visual testimony.

The political possibilities Azoulay locates within these social relations rely heavily on the evidentiary role of photographs – the photograph of suffering testifies to the experience of injury, regardless of its recognition by state power. The tradition of using photographs as evidence, as a record of the past and as a way of preserving memory, is powerful. This tradition has more to do with our comportment towards photography, how we use images, than with the capacities of the technology. Regardless of the limitations of the cameras or the involvement of the photographer, we still tend to consider photographs the way Barthes described them: as the visual traces of an event, of a moment that occurred before a camera's lens, of something that 'was there'. However, the instability of photographic meaning and the uncertainty of a photograph's circulation means that what 'was there' and is visible in a photograph does not have a determinate significance. Rather, the actions of its spectators and the contexts of circulation will continue to impact the reception and significance of a photograph long after the initial interaction between photographer and photographed.

Photography, and the social relations flowing through it, operates at a distance from state power: a state may use photography in governing its population, but it does not monopolize any aspects of the photographic act despite efforts to obscure particular things from view (the unphotographed war casualty) or to disrupt spectatorship through

censorship (the 1991-2009 ban on media coverage of returning war dead in the US). At minimum, photography is a practice "by means of which individuals can establish a distance between themselves and power in order to observe its actions and to do so not as its subjects" (Azoulay 2008, 105), a distance that allows the depiction of state-induced injuries and exploitation of vulnerability. Considered this way,

> users of photography thus re-emerge as people who are not totally identified with the power that governs them and who have new means to look at and show its deeds, as well, and eventually to address this power and negotiate with it – citizen and noncitizen alike (Azoulay 2008, 24).

Citizens can work to fulfill photography's political potential by using images of those struck by disaster to produce emergency claims, which seek to prompt responses (from the state or from other citizens) to the catastrophes endured by no citizens. (Azoulay 2008, 104).

While the distinction between citizen and noncitizen and the social relations between these two populations and the governing sovereign power is conceived in relation to the nation-state, Azoulay does not limit her conception of the civil contract of photography to territorialized states. Rather, she describes the practice of photography and its citizenry as a globalized form of relation that operates through the channels of exchange and association that characterize the international state and economic system, but is not entirely obedient or subject to the regimes of state governments (Azoulay 2008, 132). In their extension beyond state borders, photographs open up a previously unimaginable realm of experience for spectators. With its proliferation, photography provides a visual trace of the existence of people and events from all over the world, bringing them together for consideration. For Azoulay, this reach of photography produces a citizenry, "a citizenry without sovereignty, without place or borders, without

language or unity, having a heterogeneous history, a common praxis, inclusive citizenship, and a unified interest" (Azoulay 2008, 131). In a way that was previously impossible, photography has *visually* tied together the world's population by presenting their images concurrently, creating the groundwork for the citizenry she envisions.

The contract Azoulay envisions turns upon photography's accessibility: anyone *can* be photographed. However, the equalizing quality of photography is not necessarily helpful in fostering egalitarian politics, as photographs can flatten the material differences between the lives they depict, emphasizing visual similarities that may be mistaken for a political and social similitude that may not exist. In helping to create a world that consists of an infinite number of small visual units, photographs can deny the possibility of interconnectedness or singularly situated experiences. As such, photography can lead to assuming similarities that may not exist and to disregarding differences that are significant. When left disconnected from a context, a given photograph can be used in multiple instances and cannot resist the interpretations ascribed to it, as the form itself carries little inherent information. Sontag claims that the industrialization of camera technology has "carried out a promise inherent in photography from its very beginning: to democratize all experiences by translating them into images" (Sontag 1973, 7). Differences between photographs become an aspect of content rather than form. As objects without an essential or necessary context, photographs are interchangeable with one another. The distinct material differences that mark the lives of photographed subjects can be effaced with ease. As such, photographs also have the potential to flatten out experiences, effacing real difference in the subjects they depict rather than capturing the visual traces of their individual conditions. Just as photographs can invoke a plurality

of responses, spectators can imbue an image with multiple, potentially contradictory meanings, which can avoid rather than prompt responsibility. However, Azoulay attempts to guard against this flattening of experiences and erasure of material difference by ascribing an active role to the spectator, charging her with explaining the conditions of photographed individuals and continually reconstructing the context in which a given photograph was taken.

The active spectator

The shift from image to evidence to an emergency claim that conveys a sense of urgency marks a photograph's shift away from aesthetic consideration and into the realm of politics. This shift requires active spectators who are willing to speak to the content of photographs, explaining their context and articulating the injuries and disasters they depict. Azoulay conceives of the process of spectatorship broadly, considering the spectator as one who 'watches' rather than 'looks at' photographs. 'Watching' photographs, for Azoulay, entails the reinscription of the dimensions of time and movement in the interpretation of the still photographic image in a process of reconstructing both the photographic situation and the infliction of the depicted injury (Azoulay 2008, 14). She claims,

> when these photographs [of injured people] are watched, not looked at, when they are read both out of and into the space of political relations instated by photography, they seem – conversely – to testify to the fact that photographed *people* were there. When the assumption is that not only were the photographed people there, but that, in addition, are still present at the time I'm watching them, my viewing of these photographs is less susceptible to becoming immoral (Azoulay 2008, 16).

Azoulay contrasts her notion of active and engaged spectatorship with the passive voyeurism. She admonishes merely 'looking' at an image because it refuses the

photograph's capacity for becoming an emergency claim by preventing the development of the photograph as something more than the instrumentalization of bodies for aesthetic consumption. By watching photographs actively, the spectator attempts to respond in a limited (or sometimes imagined) way to the photographed individual, to reconstruct the space of injury, and to approach the realization of a space where the governed, citizen and noncitizen, can assert a demand to be ruled differently (Azoulay 2008, 16). The first step in asserting such demands requires confronting the representatives of sovereign power with images of their own violence, with evidence of their exploitation of the noncitizen's vulnerability. Photographs of injury can be read as reflections of the state's betrayal, manifestations of violence delivered in lieu of protections promised.

By virtue of being recognized by the state, Azoulay suggests that the citizen enjoys a degree of access to the representative's of sovereign power that no citizens are deprived and denied (Azoulay 2008, 131). While the extent of this access may be limited, this disparity positions spectator-citizens to reconstruct the grievances depicted in disaster photographs and articulate them on behalf of no citizens. The citizen has a responsibility to lend her voice to the silent (silenced) scream of the photograph. As a "statement within a regime of statements," she claims that "[a] solitary image cannot testify to what is revealed through it, but must be attached to another image, another piece of information, another assertion or description, another grievance or piece of evidence, another broadcast, another transmitter" (Azoulay 2008, 191). The responsibility for providing these additional statements, which contextualize what a photograph depicts and develop an indictment of injuring parties, falls to the spectator-citizen. Further, this responsibility ought to be met actively. Rather than being passively

addressed by a photograph, Azoulay suggests that the spectator-citizen is capable of positing herself as an addressee by entering directly into public dialogue by means of photographs and to assume responsibility for articulating what they depict into discourse (Azoulay 2008, 130, 192). In doing so, the spectator-citizen returns the noncitizen to a space from which the state has excluded her: the space of political and ethical concern.

The spectator-citizen makes a tenacious attempt to deny sovereign exclusion by returning the noncitizen and her permanent exposure to injury back into the discursive realm from which she has been removed. However, Azoualy does not directly address the problem of the spectator-citizen speaking *for* the noncitizen. The noncitizen's abandonment by the state excludes her from the political space of discourse, but the spectator-citizen speaking in her stead risks preserving this silence. When speaking to the injuries of another, there is always a risk of reproducing those relations of domination that effectively deny speech in the form of the 'concerned' citizen rather than state power. To resist continued domination, spectator-citizens must not only bring abuses to the discursive fore, but must create spaces that make it possible for the noncitizen to speak to her own injuries. Such efforts might be conceived as a way of returning voice to the excluded, making possible a reassertion of self through the language she has been denied. However, this process is complicated by the relationship between language and power. As language plays a central role in the construction and maintenance of the state and, as a result, the state is heavily invested in ensuring its language is used in particular ways and maintains particular power relations. When the noncitizen speaks with a restored voice, she also adopts a subject position within language, but the language is not necessarily her own. The trauma of abandonment and injury exacerbates this difficulty.

The difficulty of testimony stems from not only the inexpressible nature of pain, but also the conscious limitations that power structures impose upon language. Language is the means that provides the possibility of speech and testimony, but power structures embedded in language limit it in a way that can make speech impossible (Edkins 2003, 188). While the restoration of the noncitizen's voice may be central to the disruption of relations of domination, this speech must be supported by the spectator-citizen, perhaps through a practice of speaking *with*, in solidarity, opposed to speaking *for*.[9]

Despite being rendered invisible by state power, photography and the spectator-citizen are positioned to restore the visibility of the noncitizen through a sustained practice of watching and speaking to images of injury. The spectator-citizen's gaze must also be reflexive, turning her attention to her own privileged political status. The distance photography creates between the state and the governed produces a space for spectator-citizens to reflect on the ways sovereign power is employed in the name of protecting them, as citizens. The well-being of citizens has regularly been the "source for legitimating injury to the noncitizen" (Azoulay 2008, 214), a reality often occluded in disaster photographs. To give voice to photographs of disaster, to transform evidence of injury into emergency claims without attending to the spectator's role, as citizen, in relation to the suffering of the noncitizen, is to avoid the invisible aspects of these images. Just as emergencies befalling noncitizen populations are often excluded from the state's protection/care, the implication of citizen populations in the injury of no citizens is regularly excluded from the photographs depicting their suffering. While this implication

[9] In the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib scandal, a few of these spaces have opened and provided space for the voices of survivors of torture. One of the most prominent, widely circulated examples of these spaces is the "Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the treatment by the coalition forces of prisoners of war and other protected persons by the Geneva Conventions in Iraq during arrest, internment and interrogations" (prepared in February 2004).

is not immediately manifest in the frame, it can *become* visible through the spectator's reconstruction of the instance of injury. To recognize one's implication in the suffering of another is no easy task, and to do the imaginative work required to trace a relationship carefully occluded by euphemistic redescriptions of violence meted out or rationalized with emphatic evocations of 'self interest' and 'security' is harder yet. The careful work of sifting through the rhetoric of sovereign power and recognizing the ways citizens are afforded protections by virtue of the no citizens' abandonment and injury is perhaps the greatest responsibility Azoulay ascribes to the spectator-citizen.

Part Two: Butler and Vulnerability

Judith Butler has addressed relations between protected and injured populations in her recent work, *Precarious Life*, *Frames of War*, and "Torture and the Ethics of Photography". She describes an ethical comportment towards others that recognizes a common, though differentially distributed, corporeal vulnerability. Her discussion of vulnerability is situated within a broader discussion of the visual and narrative frames that shape the realities we take for granted. These frames create the context for our lives, but also lead to, justify, and maintain the derealization of other lives, which denies their status as life. A life is characterized by its precariousness, its exposure and injurability, a condition preceded by its grievability: for something living to appear as a life, it must be apprehended as something that is radically open to loss. The constitution and apprehension of a precarious, grievable life and the conditions of its appearance as such have implications for war, specifically "why and how it becomes easier, or more difficult, to wage" (Butler 2009, 2). The material reality of war, she suggests, is inseparable from the regimes of representation that render it visible. As such, representation is an

important site for developing an opposition to war and to the loss of life (through violence and through derealization) it entails. For some individuals, their vulnerability is protected and the injuries they might suffer are recognized, their deaths grieved. Others are left exposed to violence, their lives derealized, their suffering disavowed, their deaths ungrievable. While the lives of the former group fulfil the normative ideal of the human, the lives of the latter group appear as less-than-human, through either the identification of their image with the symbolically inhuman or their total effacement. In both cases, the possibility of recognizing a human and her primary vulnerability is foreclosed. Butler links these acts of foreclosure and effacement to the state's management of what can and cannot be seen and heard in public discourse. She calls for a sustained consideration of how life and its loss are avowed are central to a future politics that attends to our common corporeal vulnerability, rejecting claims that others must be necessarily exposed in order to ensure our own protection.

The selective and differential framing of lives, their vulnerability, and violence are cultural modes of regulating affective and ethical dispositions, which operate in setting the conditions for war, but also contain the conditions for its opposition. Neither constant nor wholly deterministic, the frames and norms that decide when something living will be apprehended as a life contain within them their own breakages and failures. As such, they also present an opportunity to apprehend the excluded life, the paradoxical entity that is living, but not recognized as a life. These glimpses of the spectral, derealized other, Butler suggests, provide the conditions for critically instrumentalizing or subverting the frames and opposing the violence they sanction. Given the context of this thesis, I am interested in Butler's discussion of visual framing and, specifically, how

she applies it to war photography; however, framing is also at work in other modes of presentation. In this section, I will outline Butler's conception of norms and how they operate within frames (specifically visual frames) to differentially apprehend life, which leads to the protection of some lives as properly human and the derealization of others.

Normative frames

Our ability to apprehend a life depends in part on its production "according to norms that qualify it as a life", which gives rise to the epistemological problem of apprehending life and the ethical problem of acknowledging life and guarding against its injury (Butler 2009, 3). Apprehendable lives, those that appear in accordance with norms that produce and shift the terms of a life's recognition through reiteration, are differentiated through frames from those we cannot apprehend. Rather than deterministic, Butler claims these normative schemes "emerge and fade depending on broader power structures, and very often come up against spectral versions of what it is they claim to know" (Butler 2009, 4). That is, the operation of these norms results in 'subjects' and 'lives' that are not quite or are never recognized as such, but are the suspended and spectral remainders of 'life', ones that both outline and haunt every normative assertion of life (Butler 2009, 7). When this spectral figure appears within the frame, "it must be expelled to purify the norm" and when it haunts the outside, "it threatens to undo the boundaries that limn the self" (Butler 2009, 12). Norms of recognition are neither static nor the product of a singular identifiable power. Instead, they are produced and reproduced through the continual rearticulation of social and political relations. By effacement or exclusion, the norm produces the paradox of the human who is not human, or, the less-than-human. For example, the Abu Ghraib prison photographs make visible the suffering of Iraqi

prisoners, an image that has generally fallen outside the framing of images produced by the military or the work of embedded photographers. In directly including the unrecognizable, these photographs make explicit the images that tend to be constitutively excluded, bringing the questions of recognition to the fore.

In describing the function of norms and frames, Butler distinguishes between the recognition, apprehension, recognizability, and intelligibility of a life. While recognition requires conceptual forms of knowledge, apprehension is less precise and bound up with sensing and perceiving, an acknowledgement that does not entail full cognition. Apprehending a life is not entirely limited by norms of recognition and we can apprehend a lack of recognition. The conditions of recognizability are variably and historically constituted. They are the generalized conditions (terms, categories, conventions, norms) that shape a "living being into a recognizable subject" (Butler 2009, 5). In establishing a subject for recognition, these conditions make the act of recognition possible and, as such, "recognizability precedes recognition" (Butler 2009, 5). Butler's concern with the differentially distributed recognition of lives as lives is not linked to a desire to include more people within existing norms of recognition, but to consider the operation of norms and to explore ways of shifting the conditions of recognizability to produce a more egalitarian set. Given the connection between recognizing and attending to the precarity of a life, the terms of recognizability have consequences for the quality of those lives that go unrecognized. Butler defines intelligibility in relation to apprehension and recognition. While apprehension is a mode of knowing, intelligibility is "the general historical schema or schemas that establish the domain of the knowable" (Butler 2009, 6). Intelligibility sets the path for recognition: "a life has to be intelligible as a life, has to

conform to certain conceptions of what life is, in order to become recognizable" (Butler 2009, 7). As such, intelligibility conditions norms of recognizability, which then condition recognition.

The objects and subjects of recognition and apprehension become visible through frames, operations of power that delimit the space of appearance. Though they do not unilaterally determine the conditions of appearance, frames organize the presentation of their content and implicitly guide its interpretation. The action of the frame, a simultaneous inclusion and expulsion of perspectives, is never a complete process and, Butler argues, calling the frame into question reveals that "the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible and recognizable" (Butler 2009, 9). Like norms, frames are also haunted by their constitutive exclusions. The photographic frame is active, mobilizing norms of recognition to present those deemed the appropriate subjects of photographs and jettison those who are not. In its activity, the frame produces the recognizable human, and her experiences, through inclusion in the camera's visual field, while excluding the unrecognizable human. Butler argues that ideology influences the framing of photography; it is never simply a matter of aesthetic choice. Rather, there is "an active, if unmarked, delimitation of the field itself, and so a set of contents and perspectives that are not shown" (Butler 2007, 953). The entities and perspectives excluded from the photographic record constitute the background of permissible images. Exceeding the frame, these excluded, non-figurable images do not conform to our established understanding of the reality visible within the frame.

Frames are not stagnant or permanent; they shift with their contexts. A photograph is produced in one context, but departs from this initial context and lands in another through its circulation. However, the photograph also produces new contexts each time it lands, by virtue of breaking with previous contexts, thus "becoming part of the very process through which new contexts are delimited and formed" (Butler 2009, 9). In its reproductions and circulation, a photograph moves through time and space, breaking with and creating contexts as it travels. This continually breaking is not just part of the media cycle, but part of the frame's function. A frame's ability to successfully contain and determine what is seen depends upon the conditions of its reproducibility; however, to be reproduced, the frame must break with itself. Breaking from one context and delimiting another, the frame does not fully contain what it attempts to convey. Instead, these breakages call the realities they presented into question, exposing the contingencies of the norms they reproduce and the scope of their delimitations. The Abu Ghraib photographs, for example, were produced in the context of cells and hallways of Tier 1A, but created a new context for observing and exulting in humiliation when they were circulated among the torturers. Further contexts were formed as the photographs circulated through the military chain of command and the news media, creating new contexts that set the conditions for "astonishment, outrage, revulsion, admiration, and discovery, depending on how the content is framed by shifting time and place" (Butler 2009, 11). In significant ways, the plurality of interpretations of photographs stem from the breaking and re-establishment of their frames in the process of their circulation. With each breaking of a frame, new interpretations spring up. The repeated reassertions of particular contexts produce hegemonic interpretations.

The hegemonic status of some interpretations, norms, and delimitations are a result of the process of circulation: the reproduction of the frame reiterates the norm. As the frame breaks with itself to reinstall itself, it creates possibilities for apprehending its exclusions. The spectre that is living, but not recognized as a life, that is produced by and disavowed by norms of recognition threatens to come into view with every break of the frame that seeks to occlude it. In creating new possibilities for apprehending previously unintelligible lives, Butler inscribes these breakages in frames and norms with political potential. The breaking of the frame, she argues, “suggests a certain release, a loosening of the mechanism of control, and with it, a new trajectory of affect” (Butler 2009, 11). Breaks in the frame are opportunities for subversion Producing new frames and norms can enhance the possibility of apprehending instances of living as life. However, if this production is not accompanied by a critical assessment of the functioning of these frames and norms in the reproduction of social orders that require the existence of a marginal, unintelligible other, then it will risk expelling another instance of life beyond the scope of our perceptibility.

Precarious lives

Precariousness is the condition of life as injurable and at once exposed to and dependent upon others. Butler argues that bodies cannot be defined as distinct from the social and political organization through which they assume social signification. Always given over to others, a body is “exposed to socially and politically articulated forces as well as to claims of sociality – including language, work, and desire – that make possible the body’s persisting and flourishing” (Butler 2009, 3). A precarious life, then, implies a life that is conditioned. Never guaranteed, finite lives are exposed to injury and their

persistence and flourishing depend upon the social conditions and networks available. Concern with ensuring the availability of these conditions only develops when a life is valued, when its loss would matter. Grievability precedes precariousness, as the apprehension of death as a loss "makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living, exposed to non-life from the start" (Butler 2009, 15). While precariousness is a condition of life opposed to a problem to be solved, its effects are not uniformly experienced due to the differential allocation of precarity. Intersecting with precariousness, which is a condition of and a way of understanding life, precarity is the "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death" (Butler 2009, 25).

Using precariousness and grievability as a conceptual point of departure of rethinking conceptions of bodies and their access to conditions necessary for their persistence, Butler describes a notion of political community. Our physical vulnerability to and physical dependency on one another is a common condition, but one experienced separately, thus "a condition that cannot be thought without difference" (Butler 2004, 27). Her conception of political community is relational, given our historical formation (we come into being in relation to others) and a normative aspect of our social existence (we are compelled to continually consider our interdependence). Political community forms around a primary tie: our bodily life is vulnerable and exposed to others, as is our political life, and just as the body cannot survive unsupported, unattached from others, neither can our political selves. However, Butler is quick to remind that such a political community cannot be imagined without a consideration of violence, "for violence is,

always, an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another" (Butler 2004, 27).

Butler describes this violence as a "touch of the worst order, a way a primary human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, a way in which life itself can be expunged by the wilful action of another" (Butler 2004, 28-9). When we commit violence, we exploit the vulnerability of another, putting them at risk, causing damage and injury: when we are violated, it is our own vulnerability that is exposed. When we attempt to foreclose our own vulnerability, to protect ourselves completely, and to make ourselves sealed off and secure at the expense of all other considerations, we deny the ways we are given over to a set of primary others from the beginning, by virtue of our bodily needs. However, denying these attachments does not dissolve them. At once attached and exposed, our vulnerability leaves us open to a range of touch, "a range that includes the eradication of our being at one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other" (Butler 2004, 31). While we live with and cannot will away this vulnerability, Butler suggests that we should consider the politics that might develop out of a consideration of the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability and the violence and loss that flows from different degrees of exposure. Certain lives are protected and the violation of their sanctity "will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war," while other lives will not receive such support and "will not even qualify as 'grievable'" (Butler 2004, 32).

Just as our precariousness implies living socially and being simultaneously exposed to and dependent on others, it reciprocally implies "being impinged upon by the

exposure and dependency of others" (Butler 2009, 14). Butler evokes Levinas to enquire into how we understand this relation between precarious, vulnerable, and necessarily attached lives. She describes a response to our primary vulnerability to others by drawing on his non-violent ethics and paying particular attention to the face of the 'Other'. The face, the source of ethical demand for Levinas, does not speak, but conveys the commandment, 'thou shall not kill', without precisely speaking it. As such, the face is not reducible to speech or the mouth words are uttered through. To understand and respond to the face, the face of the 'Other', requires an understanding of the other's precariousness, rather than an extrapolation of our understanding of our own vulnerability. Though the face demands not to be killed, its vulnerability and injurabiity tempts violence, producing a "constant tension between the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflicting violence" (Butler 2004, 137). Levinas's ethics flow out of this tension and present the ethical choice between inflicting violence or restraining aggression. When this tension results in aggression and we realize our power to kill, we lose our apprehension of the Other. For Levinas, we cannot be in relation with the face and able to injure the face concurrently – a situation he also identifies in the situation of discourse (Butler 2004, 188). Discourse and language bring us into relationships with others in ways we cannot control, but have significant structuring effects on our lives.

Discourse, Butler suggests, "makes an ethical claim upon us precisely because, prior to speaking, something is spoken to us" (Butler 2004, 138). Before we assume language of our own, we are spoken to, or addressed, by the Other and only after this primary address does language become useful to us. The address of another is unexpected, something that cannot be controlled and something that marks a deprivation

of will: we do not choose how we will be addressed or when. Through this address, we are "subject to a set of impositions, compelled to respond to an exacting alterity" (Butler 2004, 139), thus establishing our situation in discourse. We cannot conceive of the alterity that exacts our response as wholly distinct from us. Indeed, 'we' is not a unified entity that can recognize itself outside of this relationship, but is "riven from the start, interrupted by alterity" (Butler 2009, 14) and thus, through our obligation to the other, any established notion of a 'we' is disrupted. From the start, we are given over to and shot through with otherness. Similar to Butler's conception of corporeal vulnerability, discourse both gives us over to others from the beginning and leaves us open to a range of interaction (here, it is to speech rather than touch), a range that can be violent at one end and supportive at the other.

Beyond articulating the primary relation between ourselves and the Other and its implications for thinking about discourse, Butler considers Levinas in the context of her discussion of vulnerability and grief because he provides a nuanced way of "thinking about the relationship between representation and humanization" (Butler 2004, 140). Levinas presents the paradoxical situation of, on one hand, the face, which is not exclusively human, as a condition for humanization and, on the other hand, the use of the face for dehumanization (Butler 2004, 141). From this paradox, Butler asks, "how do we come to know the difference between the inhuman but humanizing face…and the dehumanization that can also take place through the face?" (Butler 2004, 141).

Derealized lives

Differentially distributed vulnerability and grievability map onto an ontological consideration of the reality of particular human lives and the derealization of others.

Beyond the violence of derealization itself, those lives that do not register as real (that is, as not properly human) cannot be injured further as they are already negated. Such lives are rendered "interminably spectral" and their deaths are unmarkable, vanishing "not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds" (Butler 2004, 34-5). This derealization or disavowal of certain lives, such as the lives of Iraqi casualties, Butler suggests, is not simply the effect of a dehumanizing discourse, but is the limit of discourse itself. Disregarding certain lives entirely represents a "refusal of discourse that produces dehumanization as a result," a refusal characterized by a repudiation of a common bodily condition or an appreciation of commonality based on vulnerability (Butler 2004, 36). Derealized, dehumanized lives are not publicly grieved when lost, as these losses do not register ethically or politically. Rather, these losses are disavowed and the violence they were exposed to remains unreal and diffuse.

The use of images to evacuate the human must be considered with in a broader context of socio-cultural norms, which establish the limits of what will be considered human, and thus a grievable death. These norms work to produce an ideal of the human as differentiated from the less-than-human. This normative power takes on two forms, both achieving dehumanization. One form results in an image of the less-than-human by producing "a symbolic identification of the face with the inhuman, foreclosing our apprehension of the human in the scene" (Butler 2004, 147). In the second form, which "works through radical effacement" (Butler 2004, 147), there are no images and, by extension, the human and any consideration of vulnerability or grievability are removed entirely. In both forms, politics and power are both at work, regulating what can and

cannot be admitted into public discourse. Such regulation occurs directly, through censorship, but also tacitly, through the frame of what is displayed.

In describing the refusal to recognize an instance of living as a life through the process of derealization, Butler explores the difficulty of identifying something as 'human.' Refusing the universality of the term 'human,' she examines how norms of recognition construct the term, but also work to produce its opposite, the 'less-than-human.' The human and the less-than-human come into being through, and are continually altered by, the interaction of subjects, a process that produces and inscribes norms of recognition. Humanness is a variable prerogative, shifting whenever an individual or group that had previously been denied the status is proclaimed to be human, and again when such status is revoked. When norms of recognition operate to assert an instance of humanness, they also recognize an opposing instance, something alternative to or outside of the norm that determines what will count as human life. As such, the less-than-human becomes the constitutive outside of the human, creating the contrasting background against which properly human lives unfold. Butler suggests, "the term 'human' is constantly producing a doubling that exposes the ideality and coercive character of the norm: some humans qualify as human; some humans do not" (Butler 2007, 954). Whenever norms operate, they are productive of two entities, concurrently. Directly, they produce the human and indirectly, they produce the less-than-human. By determining which lives will qualify as human, norms of recognition also establish which lives are appropriate sites of ethical concern. Norms of recognition frame a range of moral perception.

When certain faces are represented to us as symbols of evil or are radically effaced, we "become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed" (Butler 2004, xviii). To oppose violence and the exploitation of vulnerability, we must develop a keener sense of life, a task Butler claims might be achieved through admitting the images of exposed others into public view so that their suffering might be avowed, their loss mourned/grieved, and their lives valued (and potentially offered some protection). Constraints on what is admitted into the sphere of public debate/consideration are not only limited to content, as is evidenced by the dearth of images of war casualties, but also on what will count as reality and register ethically or politically. Restrictions on what might be seen establishes the lives that will and will not receive protection and whose deaths will and will not be marked. The field of perceptibility constituted by these constraints and restrictions profoundly structures our ability to "think critically and publicly about the effects of war", as well as "our capacity to feel and apprehend" (Butler 2004, xxi). The material reality of war is neither fully determined nor fully separable from the representational regimes involved in its operation and rationalization. Perceptible realities produced by the frames of war and the material realities produced by the policies of war are both modalities of a process that compromises the status of a population as properly living and exposes them to derealized deaths that will not be grieved (Butler 2009, 29).

Part Three: Accountability

Rather than taking up Azoulay's project of developing the notion of a citizenry, I want to look at photography as a route into the project Butler lays out, a way of depicting incidents of dehumanization through derealization. Photographs do this through

providing evidence – evidence of state violence and betrayal, of the exploitation of one life in the name of protecting another, etc. As I outlined in the first chapter, this evidence is imperfect, it bears the marks of the photographer's framing and produces a document with unstable, incomplete meaning. However, these photographs also provide a critical starting point. Like Barthes's photograph of the slave market, our photographs of contemporary atrocity can confront us, can prompt us to ask: what happened here? And then (perhaps more importantly): how did this happen and who is responsible?

In the case of the first question, we might direct our query towards the injured parties depicted in the photograph and to their injurers. This question seeks to reconstruct the depicted scene, to recover the context the image has shed, to begin to put together pieces of multiple, overlapping narratives that trauma has broken open and scattered. The second question falls to a broader group. While the injured parties and their injurers are not necessarily excluded from responding, the question might be extended to those in a position to take responsibility for what occurred, those working within the apparatuses of state and military power. The photographs provide the starting point for a much larger inquiry, one that calls forward the representatives of a political system based on abandonment and exploitation of vulnerability and demands accountability for the injurious practices this system fosters. The question of responsibility ought to take a self-reflexive turn, and extend to us, the western spectators of the photographs, an audience composed of the putative benefactors of the depicted torture.

Our safety, our security, our vulnerability, we were told, was on the line in the torture chambers of Abu Ghraib, and throughout the network of war prisons. The

information gathered through 'harsh interrogation' would be essential in capturing the villains (Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein) and infiltrating their networks (al Qaeda, the Iraqi insurgency) and would eventually make the world safe for America and other western states. In accepting the rationale of national security (explicitly or tacitly), and thus our personal safety, we consented to the war, the occupation, and Abu Ghraib. To be sure, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the continuing occupation of both states, the establishment of the global system of war prisons (both disclosed and secret), and other practices involved in the 'war on terror' were all met with opposition from within the US, in other western states, and around the world. The tenacious critique of and resistance to these practices is not something I intend to dismiss or undervalue. Rather, I am suggesting that, despite opposition to Bush Administration policies and denunciation of torture at Abu Ghraib, we are also complicit in the exposures of other populations to injury. Our complicity rests in our participation in the socio-cultural norms that continually inscribe the ideal form of the human and do so over and against the less-than-human. Through our daily, and potentially unthinking, participation in the norms that render particular lives unseen, or seen only as the symbolically inhuman (the villainous Arab, the Terrorist), we contribute to the naturalization of the frame's operation. This norm is visual, but it manifests in our inability to see neither the derealization of the lives of others nor the disavowal of their suffering. Our not-seeing, Butler argues, has become a condition of seeing, one that results in a failure "to see, to feel, to maintain a moral perception of other persons as persons" (Butler 2007, 966).

The task then is not just to recognize the hooded, bound, ruined bodies in the photographs as the vulnerable bodies of humans whose suffering must be avowed and

deaths grieved, but to also learn to see the frame that blinds us to the derealization of death and the exploitation of vulnerability. Recognizing the suffering that occurred at Abu Ghraib as atrocity does not necessarily reveal the frame that conducted the initial disavowal of the lives of Iraqi prisoners as human. As such, outrage at this set of photographs alone and demands for accountability from political and military powers (both elites and functionaries) is insufficient to the tasks of communicating the cost of policies that protect our own vulnerability through the disavowal of other lives and understanding the frames that ensure the repetition of this disavowal.

Conclusion

Through this thesis, I have attempted to undertake two tasks, concurrently. In undertaking these two tasks, I have sought to articulate a role for war photography in creating spaces, however fleeting, of critical reflection on suffering and its rationalization. The first, and more overt, task has been to outline the role of photography in communicating war to civilian populations through the example of the Abu Ghraib photographs. In tracing both the failed attempts of the Bush administration to contain the photographs through the 'official' narratives of the state and the attempts of 'unofficial' narrators to hold the photographs up for continued consideration, I have sought to draw attention to the multiple interpretations of a set of images. While critical of the torture at Abu Ghraib and the Bush administration policies that allowed them to occur, these interpretations offer only limited comment on the role of the spectator. The spectator that concerns this thesis is a member of the population whose interests and security the invasion of Iraq was supposed to protect. Specific instances of this spectator may be outraged by the invasion and occupation of Iraq and may vociferously oppose the policies that led to the abuse of Iraqi inmates at Abu Ghraib; however, this spectator is also the beneficiary of policies alleged to protect her vulnerability.

And in her protected state, this spectator is the focus of my second task: to articulate a relationship between photographic framing and the ability to apprehend the lives as properly human. Photography, as a social practice and medium of representation, carries with it a host of visual norms, which it continually reiterates. In reiterating innumerable images of humans, photography is used to delimit a field of perceptibility that radically effaces the humanness of lives excluded. When lives are not apprehended

as properly human, they are not only left exposed and vulnerable, but their lives are derealized to the point that their deaths do not register as loss. Excluding images of Iraqi casualties from mainstream news media coverage and the imbuing of the images of other Iraqis with a symbolic evil combine to produce a dehumanizing effect, one necessary for building support (or at least acquiescence) for a war among civilians. These civilians, the spectators I am concerned with, are implicated in these interwoven practices of photography and dehumanization because through them, their own humanity is continually reasserted. The goal of this second task is neither to demonize photography, nor to suggest that taking more photographs of more previously excluded individuals would address issues of delimitation and effacement. Rather, I hope to have demonstrated the complex and powerful ways that photography structures how we understand ourselves and others. In that respect, I have not suggested that photography is the source or solution to the problems of dehumanization and violence in which it is implicated, but that it presents a site for critically assessing our sight.

Photography is a depiction of what has been before a camera's lens, thus producing visual evidence of an occurrence or an existence. But it is also a deeply normative practice, wherein the process of framing an image builds an interpretation into any evidence that might be claimed as the objective product of a camera's operation. Similarly, my work contains both analytic and normative elements. Considering the work of framing and the space for reflection opened by war photographs requires a mode of 'photographic thought', one that does not see the analytic and normative as opposed or mutually exclusive, but as deeply intertwined. The frames at work in photography render vision possible, but do so by exclusion: seeing is also a process of not-seeing. As such,

the ways in which we are able to apprehend the existence of another life, let alone its value, also involves an inability to apprehend. This constitutive relation can be explained analytically or normatively, as there are things we physically cannot see due to the physiological and technical limitations of eyes and cameras, as well as things that remain invisible by virtue of the ideologically driven tasks of occlusion and derealization. To appreciate the complex political life of war photographs, I am suggesting we ought to consider their analytic and normative aspects concurrently.

While the news cycle has moved past the Abu Ghraib scandal numerous times, the photographs persist, five years after their initial publication. In the spring of this year, there were continued debates and legal battles over the release of additional images, from Abu Ghraib as well as several other American-run war prisons. While the initial 'shock-value' of the photographs may have waned due to their frequent re-publication, they continue to have political significance as decisive images of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Beyond Abu Ghraib and Iraq, the role of photography in war has come to the fore in two other major events in 2009: Gaza and Iran. In Gaza, the decisive role of photography was its absence; in Iran, it was its criminalization. Both cases involve attempts to structure the visibility of a conflict by eliminating the production of a body of photographic evidence of violence and suffering. Photographers were not allowed access to the Gazan warzone, sent to observe the war from a hilltop south of Jerusalem to observe the signs of a far away battle (the sound of artillery, the sight of smoke), thus creating a distance that rendered these traces abstract and suffering invisible. A violent crackdown not only on professional journalists, but also on civilians bearing digital and cell phone cameras accompanied reformist protests in Iran following June's contested

presidential elections, resulting in the jailing and torture of many individuals attempting to document the protests. In both cases, the Israeli and Iranian governments were unable to control the production and circulation of photographs completely, and those circulating in mainstream news media have created important, albeit limited, spaces for critically considering the function of both the justifications and visual framing of violence.

A complete consideration of the role of photography and the framing of violence in producing the material conditions and discursive justifications for war, and the subsequent domination, exposure, and suffering of others, extends well beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is my hope that I have begun the process of connecting our practices of framing and seeing to our ability to apprehend the vulnerability and precarity of the lives of 'others', through my limited analysis of the Abu Ghraib photographs and their circulation in mainstream American news media. In articulating this connection, I hope to have also drawn attention not only to the multiple interpretations of the photographs, but also to the reflective space forced open by the appearance of the photographs in the visual space of the war's media coverage and to our role as spectators, caught within the process of framing, but also capable of its critique. The larger project that far exceeds this limited beginning requires taking up a position of vulnerability. In our roles as spectators and as protected, perhaps we must be willing to expose our vulnerability further, to assess our expectations of security at any costs, and to apprehend our complicity in the derealization and dehumanization of 'others'. A productive extension of this project would include an exploration of the photography as a resource in making corporeal vulnerability and the differential distribution of its protection into sharper focus. I am not suggesting a cataloguing of suffering or the continuous

development of new frames, though both of these projects might contain social and political value. Rather, I am suggesting a project that looks to photography as a mode of depicting suffering that carries evidential force and creates a space for reflection on the complicity of our protection and, ultimately, our vision in perpetuating the dehumanization that makes the pain of distant 'others' so difficult to apprehend.

Bibliography

Althusser, Louis. 1971. "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses: notes towards and investigation." *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press.<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>. 08/12/08.

Azoulay, Ariella. 2008. *The civil contract of photography*. Trans. Rela Mazali and Ruvik Danieli. New York: Zone Books.

Barthes, Roland. 1981. *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.

Benjamin, Walter. 1968. "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction." *Illuminations: essays and reflections*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Shocken Books, 217-251.

Brothers, Caroline. 1997. *War and photography: a cultural history*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious life: the powers of violence and mourning*. London: Verso.

---. 2007. "Torture and the ethics of photography." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25(6): 951-966.

---. 2009. *Frames of war: when is life grievable?* London: Verso.

Campbell, David. 2003a. "Cultural governance and pictorial resistance: reflections on the imaging of war." *Review of International Studies* 29: 57-73.

---. 2003b. "Representing contemporary war." *Ethics and International Affairs* 17(2): 99-108.

---. 2004. "Horrific blindness: images of death in contemporary media." *Journal of Cultural Research* 8(1): 55-74.

Danner, Mark. 2004. *Torture and truth: America, Abu Ghraib and the war on terror*. New York: New York Review Books.

Department of Defence. 2004a. "Defence department operational update briefing." May 4. < http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2973> 31/03/2009.

---. 2004b. "Press conference with members of the independent panel to review Department of Defence detention operations." August 24. <http://www.defense link.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2688> 31/03/2009.

Edkins, Jenny. 2003. *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge: University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The history of sexuality, volume one: an introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley [1978]. New York: Vintage

Gourevitch, Philip and Errol Morris. 2008. *Standard operating procedure*. New York: The Penguin Press.

Gregory, Derek. 2008. "Vanishing points: law, violence and exception in the global war Prison." In *Violent georgraphies: fear, terror, and political violence*. New York: Routledge, in press. Downloaded from <http://web.mac.com/derekgregory/iWeb/Site/The%20global%20war%20prison.html> 26/03/2009.

Hersh, Seymour. 2004. *Chain of command: the road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*. New

York: Harper Collins.

Maynard, Patrick. 1997. *The engine of visualization: thinking through photography*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Poole, Deborah. 1997. *Vision, race, and modernity: a visual economy of the Andean image world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rajiva, Lila. 2005. *The language of empire: Abu Ghraib and the American media*. New York: Monthly Press Review.

Scarry, Elaine. 1987. *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Senate and House Armed Services Committees. 2004. "Testimony of Secretary of Defence Donald H. Rumsfeld before the Senate and House Armed Services Committees." May 7. < http://armedservices.senate.gov/testimony.cfm?wit_id=187&id=1184> 31/03/2009.

Strauss, David Levi. 2003. *Between the eyes: essays on photography and politics*. New York: Aperture.

Sontag, Susan. 1973. *On photography*. New York: Picador.

--- . 2003. *Regarding the pain of others*. New York: Picador.

--- . 2004. "Regarding the torture of others." *The New York Times Magazine* 23 May.

Taylor, John. 1998. *Body horror: photojournalism, catastrophe and war*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Walsh, Joan. 2006. "Investigations and other resources." *The Abu Ghraib files*. Salon.com <http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/investigations_resources/index.htmh> 01/04/2009.

Watson, Paul. 2007. *Where war lives*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.