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Visual regimes and the politics of war experience: Rewriting war 'from above' in WikiLeaks' 'Collateral Murder'

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Abstract

War experiences are a material of political currency, invoked, appropriated, and 'written' in particular configurations to sustain, complicate, and contest narratives about war. This occurs through and within the same relations of power that are intrinsic to the conduct of war as war-experiencing subjects comprise a political vocabulary of selves and others that populate and operate within war's wider social (re)production. To track these power relations and consider implications for how dominant accounts of war can be complicated and contested, the article is grounded in an analysis of the visual regimes at work in footage, photographs, and testimony relating to the shooting of a group of people by an American Apache helicopter in Baghdad, Iraq in 2007. The event was publicised on a dedicated website and dubbed 'Collateral Murder' by WikiLeaks in 2010. Analysis of the website reveals how visual modes and the experiences of war subjects accompany each other, revealing war in contrasting locations of sight and violence: the 'view from above', the 'view from below', and the view of the 'on-the-ground' soldier eyewitness. Taken together these discursively produce 'Collateral Murder' and contest the dominance of war known through the experience of those who wage it 'from above'.

Keywords

'Collateral Murder'; War Experience; WikiLeaks; Visuality; Scopic Regimes; Visual Regimes

Introduction

A war exists across, within, and between multiple locations of sight and violence[1] but the lived war experiences and subjectivities that accompany these visual modes and configurations of violence and injury are accorded uneven prominence. The perspective of those who experience 'war from above' in planes, helicopters, and through drones has become the ubiquitous and predominant viewpoint from which modern Western war is communicated and understood, with publics invited to identify with, respect, and endorse the 'selves' that are positioned within war in this way. War experiences, particularly those in the ocular sensory register of what is 'seen' and 'witnessed', are a material of political currency, being erased, invoked, obscured, appropriated, and called upon in particular ways to make sense of, make, and remake war as a thing socially known and in existence. Through the experiences of those who 'live' war, dominant narratives of war can be reinstated, but also complicated, contested, or rewritten. This article inquires into the power relations at work in such interventions through an analysis of the WikiLeaks' release of footage, photographs, and testimony

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[1] With thanks to the anonymous reviewer who helped me clarify my argument in these terms.

relating to the shooting of a group of people by an American Apache helicopter in Baghdad, Iraq in 2007. The event was publicised on a dedicated website and dubbed 'Collateral Murder' by WikiLeaks in 2010.[2]

I analyse how the incident was produced as 'Collateral Murder' through the juxtaposition of contrasting visual perspectives that were situated within broader visual regimes of warfare. These form an account of war that complicates dominant narratives. This analysis allows an exploration of how and with what effect war subjects and the experiences that constitute them are called upon as legitimate conduits for truths about war and are variously written into or out of accounts of war in particular ways and on certain terms through the operation and subversion of particular visual regimes. I consider how these subjects and their experiences comprise a political vocabulary of selves and others that populate and operate within a wider social (re)production of war and its relations of power. To do so, the analysis focuses on the politics of the visual, working with the notion that visuality 'materialises the discursive relations of power that effectively constitute, regulate and determine what it is we see'.[3] Analysis of the visual inquires into 'what is made visible, who sees what, [and] how [are] seeing, knowing and power … interrelated'.[4]

'Collateral Murder' is the phrase used by WikiLeaks to describe the shooting of a group of people, including a Reuters photojournalist, by an American Apache helicopter in Baghdad, Iraq in 2007. On 5 April 2010, gun sight footage from a United States Apache AH64 helicopter, leaked by Chelsea Manning to the whistleblowing organisation WikiLeaks, was made public on the Internet along with stills from the footage and supporting media and documents. The footage – which was released in both a shorter 17-minute and longer 39-minute version – showed the Apache crew firing on and killing a number of Iraqis, including two Reuters employees, in a district of New Baghdad in July 2007. Also presented on the website were photographs taken before and during the attack by killed Reuters journalist Namir Noor-Eldeen and video of testimony by and images of a US soldier, Private Ethan McCord, who had been a member of the unit tasked with the 'clean up' after the attack and was visible in the Apache footage. Three visual configurations were therefore at play in the text. They mapped onto three locations of war experience and violence, and three associated war subjects. The first mode of vision is the view from above: the perspective of the Apache helicopter crew though the gun sight, which would have been their means of seeing the ground far below (Figure 1). The second is the view from below: the perspective of killed Reuters photojournalist Namir Noor-Eldeen (Figure 2) who took photographs up until the moment of the attack (Figure 3), including of the sky; a return of the downward gaze. The third is the view of the 'on-the-ground eyewitness': Private Ethan McCord who is seen briefly in the Apache footage carrying an injured child from a shot-out vehicle. A video of his speech at a peace conference is intercut with photographs apparently taken by soldiers including one of him stained with the blood of the children he carried (Figure 4).

The release of the footage as 'Collateral Murder' was a discursive project to complicate and contest a dominant picture of war. WikiLeaks' aim was to disrupt the sanitising notion of collateral damage, part of the US military lexicon of warfare and the discourse of clinical war 'from above', used to

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[2] WikiLeaks, 'Collateral Murder', available at: {http://www.collateralmurder.com} accessed 6 April 2015. For the purposes of this analysis I have taken the various pages of this website as a single 'text', the various elements within which are analysed to demonstrate the production of the footage it represents as 'collateral murder'.

[3] J. Pugliese, 'Asymmetries of terror: Visual regimes of racial profiling and the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes in the context of the war in Iraq', *Borderlands*, 5:1 (2006), p. 7.

[4] E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 14.

Figure 1. The view from above.
Source: WikiLeaks, 'Collateral Murder', available at: {http://www.collateralmurder.com} accessed 6 April 2015.

describe non-intended casualties of war.[5] According to Heather Brooke,[6] an alternative title considered for the footage was 'permission to engage', but head of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, preferred 'Collateral Murder', saying 'we want to knock out this collateral damage euphemism, and so when anyone uses it they will think "collateral murder"'.[7] On the 'Collateral Murder' website the footage is described as a depiction of 'the indiscriminate slaying of over a dozen people in the Iraqi suburb of New Baghdad, including two Reuters news staff'.[8] Manning leaked the gun sight footage, but it was WikiLeaks that made it 'Collateral Murder'. This was, as this article explores, achieved by making visible three contrasting scopic 'truths' about war through the experiences of different war subjects.

As this article details, the discursive production of the event as 'Collateral Murder' was an intervention that complicated and rewrote a dominant view of war, that of those waging it 'from above'. The analysis considers how the war subjects whose experiences were called upon to produce 'Collateral Murder' comprised a scopically-rendered political vocabulary of selves and others that populate and operate within a wider social (re)production of war. In doing so it ponders implications for how dominant accounts of war, such as that grounded in the 'sky-situated knowledge'[9] of those who experience war 'from above' might be complicated and contested.

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[5] B. Spies-Butcher, J. Paton, and D. Cahill, *Market Society: History, Theory, Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012), pp. 224–5; H. Brooke, *The Revolution Will be Digitised: Dispatches from the Information War* (London: Cornerstone Digital, 2011).

[6] Brooke, *The Revolution Will be Digitised*, p. 91.

[7] Assange is also quoted to this effect in R. Khatchadourian, 'A reporter at large: No secrets, Julian Assange's mission for total transparency', *The New Yorker* (7 June 2010), available at: {http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/06/07/100607fa_fact_khatchadourian} accessed 6 April 2015.

[8] WikiLeaks, 'Collateral Murder'.

[9] D. Matless, quoted in P. Adey, M. Whitehead, and A. J. Williams, 'Introduction: Visual culture and verticality', in P. Adey, M. Whitehead, and A. J. Williams (eds), *From Above: War, Violence, and Verticality* (London: Hurst, 2013), pp. 1–18 (p. 2).
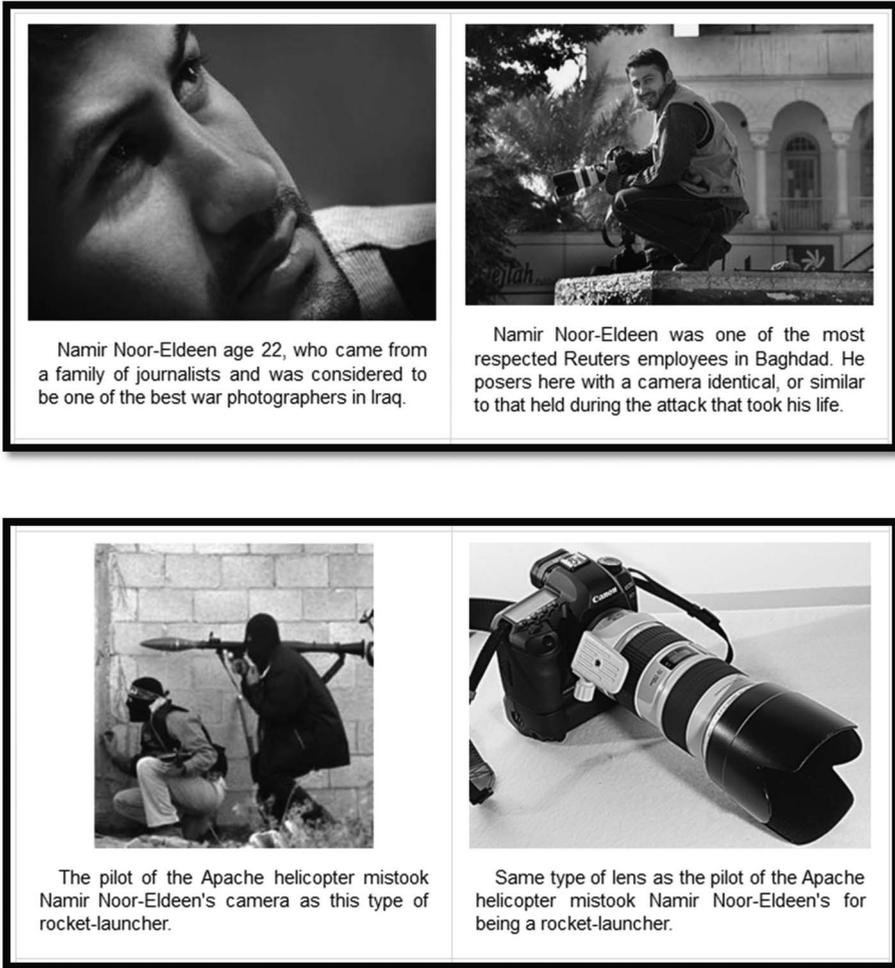
Figure 2. 'Resources'.
Source: WikiLeaks, 'Collateral Murder', available at: {http://www.collateralmurder.com} accessed 6 April 2015.

The rest of the article unfolds as follows. The first section sets out the assumptions that the article operates with, relating, firstly, to the politics of war experience and the social production of war and secondly to how this politics is understood and analysed as a visual practice. This includes a discussion of visuality, visual/scopic regimes, and their analysis as discourse. Secondly I unpack the production of 'Collateral Murder' as a discursive project, outlining how it was unsettling to existing narratives about war. This political intervention was achieved by illuminating three locations of sight and violence. I then analyse each of these in turn: the view from above, the view from below, and the view of the 'on-the' ground' eyewitness. Regarding the view 'from above' I argue that WikiLeaks presented an unsettling alternative account of the experience of viewing and waging war from on high, 'writing' the Apache crew not as all-seeing paragons of American military power – the 'selves' Western audiences are typically invited to relate to and identify with – but as paradoxically blinkered by the visual modes within which they existed. The view from below, through the experience of the killed Reuters photojournalist and the images he took shortly before the attack, brings those people
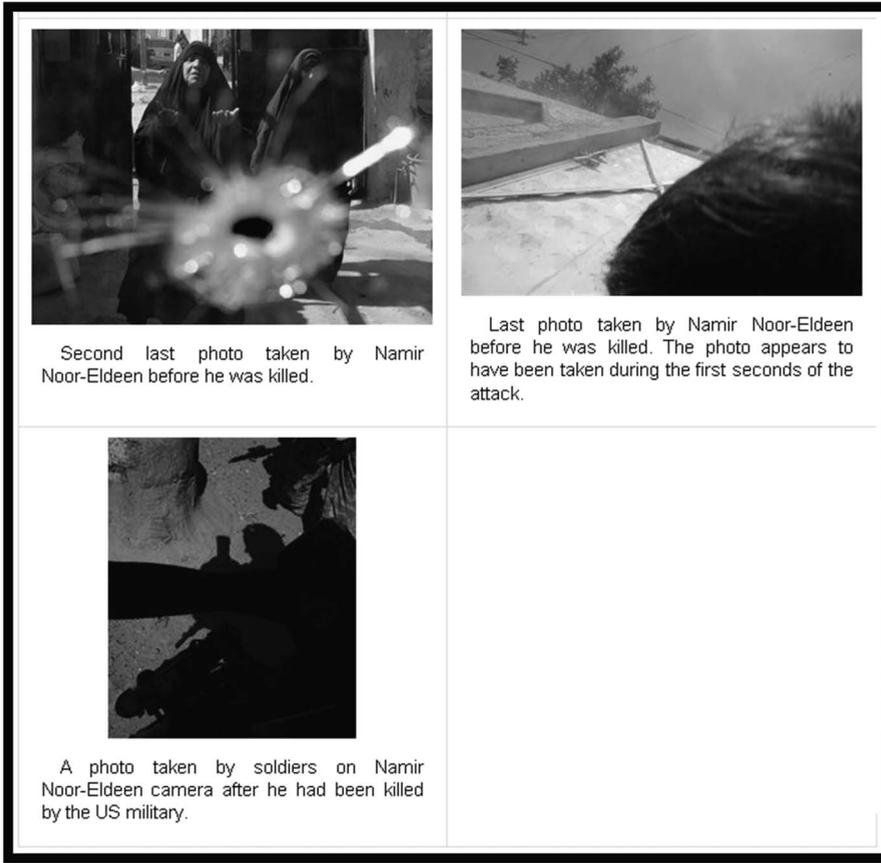
Figure 3. The view from below.
Source: WikiLeaks, 'Collateral Murder', available at: {http://www.collateralmurder.com} accessed 6 April 2015.

who are typically invisible in 'sky-situated knowledge' – the 'enemy' dead and injured – into the account. The final perspective, that of the 'on the ground' soldier eyewitness, draws on a military scopic authority that is shared with the 'view from above', however it does so to challenge sky-situated modes of seeing and violence. At the same time however the perspective destabilises elements of the 'Collateral Murder' narrative. The conclusion outlines implications of the analysis for how the politics of war experiences are accounted for in scholarship.

The politics of war experience and the social production of war

Traditionally war was theorised as a domain of the state, best understood through discussions of strategy, military institutions, and weapons,[10] but there is now an established and wide-ranging literature – from critical geopolitics, feminist IR, and political sociology for example – that focuses on the social production of war. In its various ways such work unpacks 'how the world is thought, said,

[10] C. Sylvester, 'War experiences/war practices/war theory', *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 40:3 (2012), pp. 483–503 (p. 483).

Figure 4. The view of the on the ground eyewitness.
Source: WikiLeaks, 'Collateral Murder', available at: {http://www.collateralmurder.com} accessed 6 April 2015.

[and] written' to constitute the 'reality' of 'here and there, inside and outside, them and us, states, blocs, zones'[11] (and so on) that comprise the terms of possibility for the preparation for, conduct and aftermaths of war. This 'writing' of the world includes the ways in which political 'realities' 'are made and known (if unevenly) through visual images and practice';[12] that is, through particular visual (or scopic) regimes.[13] Categories such as those of 'self and other' work to constitute the terms of possibility for war because, as described by James Der Derian, '[p]eople go to war because of how they see, perceive, picture, imagine, and speak of others: that is, how they construct the difference of others as well as the sameness of themselves through representations.'[14] 'Writing' the world in particular ways therefore populates a political vocabulary of selves and others that underpin war.

War understood in this manner occurs both on the conventionally defined battlefield and beyond it, including in everyday and apparently civilian spaces and on and through lived lives and bodies. War is a lived, experiential social institution;[15] a generative social force[16] that exists and is 'lived' in and

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[11] D. Grondin, 'The other spaces of war: War beyond the battlefield in the war on terror', *Geopolitics*, 16:2 (2011), pp. 253–79 (p. 257).

[12] R. Hughes, 'Through the looking blast: Geopolitics and visual culture', *Geography Compass*, 1:5 (2007), pp. 976–94 (p. 979).

[13] M. Bal, 'Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2:1 (2003), pp. 5–32 (p. 9).

[14] J. Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (2nd edn, New York and London: Routledge, 2009), p. 238.

[15] C. Sylvester, 'War experiences/war practices/war theory'; C. Sylvester, 'Experiencing war: a challenge for International Relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:4 (2013), pp. 669–74; S. Parashar, 'What wars and "war bodies" know about International Relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:4 (2013), pp. 615–30; see also K. McSorley (ed.), *War and the Body: Militarisation, Practice and Experience* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[16] T. Barkawi and S. Brighton, 'Powers of war: Fighting, knowledge, and critique', *International Political Sociology*, 5:2 (2011), pp. 126–43 (p. 126); see also S. Brighton, 'War/truth: Foucault, Heraclitus and the hoplite Homer', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:4 (2013), pp. 651–68.

through the 'range of body-based experiences, close and remote, with collective violence'.[17] 'People live in wars, with wars, and war lives with them long after it ends'[18] and they, as sensing physical, emotional and thinking bodies can touch and are touched by war.[19] Work unpacking the experiential registers of war has, for example, revealed how war exists in the bodily and sensory preparation, conduct and aftermath of war,[20] illuminated how gendered bodies are crucial to the practice of war,[21] and how experiences of conflict produce disciplined subjects.[22] In this article I unpack the wider politics entailed in turning to 'people involved in wars'[23] to access 'authoritative' truths by asking how the category itself, and those constituted within it, function as a site for the reinstatement and contestation of power. Whilst war is, as the work referred to above has shown, experienced across sensory registers, when war experience is invoked and communicated as a political category it is often done so visually. The analysis reveals how the political invocation of war experience works within existing ocular paradigms through which war is understood to be 'seen', and 'witnessed', and is both recorded and conducted through visual modes.

Before proceeding I will elaborate briefly on the methodology used here, particularly how visuality is understood and applied as a facet of the social (re)production of war. Firstly, it should note that the focus of this article is how war subjects and the experiences that constitute them are 'written' or 'scripted' within and against the terms of a wider political vocabulary of selves and others. I therefore attend to the manner in which war subjects are invoked, appropriated, and called upon by others as opposed to how they might 'script' themselves. Following writers such as Veronique Pin-Fat and Maria Stern[24] and Linda Åhäll,[25] I am analysing how the discursive practice of 'scripting' or 'writing' war-experiencing subjects with varying degrees of political agency on certain terms and within particular discursive logics and repertoires functions within a broader writing of the world that socially constitutes war.

I do this by paying attention to the way in which visual regimes and the experiences of war subjects accompany each other to reveal war in contrasting locations of sight and violence. Taken together these discursively produce 'Collateral Murder'. 'Visuality' refers to the ways in which vision is culturally mediated and encompasses those 'things that are visible to us as well as the visual technologies and viewing positions that enable us to see things in the ways that we do'.[26] The visual is a space of power because it 'materialises the discursive relations of power that effectively constitute, regulate and determine what it is we see'[27] and reproduces these relations. An analysis of visuality therefore asks questions such as 'what is made visible, who sees what, [and] how [are]

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[17] Sylvester, 'Experiencing war', p. 670.
[18] Parashar 'What wars and "war bodies" know', p. 618.
[19] C. Sylvester (ed.), *Experiencing War* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 1.
[20] McSorley (ed.), *War and the Body*.
[21] S. L. Dyvic, *Gendering Counterinsurgency: Performativity and Embodiment in the Afghan 'Theatre of War'* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
[22] C. Ryan, *Bodies, Power and Resistance in the Middle East: Experiences of Subjectification in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (London: Routledge, 2016).
[23] Parashar, 'What wars and "war bodies" know', p. 628.
[24] V. Pin-Fat and M. Stern, 'The scripting of Private Jessica Lynch: Biopolitics, gender, and the "feminization" of the US Military', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 30:1 (2005), pp. 25–53.
[25] L. Åhäll, 'Motherhood, myth and gendered agency in political violence', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 14:1 (2012a), pp. 103–20 (p. 105); L. Åhäll, 'The writing of heroines: Motherhood and female agency in political violence', *Security Dialogue*, 43:4 (2012b), pp. 287–303 (p. 290).
[26] Hughes, 'Through the looking blast', p. 978.
[27] Pugliese, 'Asymmetries of terror', p. 7.

seeing, knowing and power ... interrelated'.[28] Crucially, visual regimes – modes of vision[29] – do not simply record or make things (such as the violence of war) visible, their configurations also structure violence as a visual experience and 'utilise the authority ceded to images to further additional political ends'.[30] The '[h]eight and verticality' of the aerial perspective for example, is 'associated with dominance and the projection of force'.[31] As David Campbell and Marcus Power write, a 'scopic regime is a repertoire of perspectival practices ... which establishes the relationship between the observer and observed, producing both subject positions in the process'.[32]

Working with this definition I analyse visual regimes as discursive, tying institutions (broadly conceived, so including war) with modes and configurations of seeing.[33] Particular ways and means of sight, and their disruption, were approached in this article as a facet of the social practices that 'construct and contest the discourses that constitute social reality'.[34] A discourse analytical approach to visuality is concerned with how the production of the visual involves the 'reiteration of particular institutions, and their practices, and their production of particular human subjects'.[35] In practical terms the reading of the text involved a dialogue between the theoretical concepts, the questions being considered and the 'text'. I looked for the ways in which different modes of seeing were juxtaposed in the text (the view from above, the view from below, and view of the 'on-the-ground eyewitness') and how they were linked with and 'wrote' particular subjects in particular configurations to complicate a dominant, sky-situated narrative of war.

Three locations of sight and violence in 'Collateral Murder'

The production of 'Collateral Murder' was achieved out of the building of an unfamiliar and jarring juxtaposition of three war experiences through three visual locations, modes, and accompanying war subjects.

'Collateral Murder': the view from above

In this section I unpack the first view, that 'from above' of the Apache crew. WikiLeaks presented an unsettling alternative account of the experience of viewing and waging war from above, 'writing' the Apache crew not as the all-seeing paragons of American military power that Western populations are typically expected to respect and endorse, but as paradoxically blinkered by the visual modes they operated within.

[28] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, p. 14.
[29] N. Mirzeoff, 'Introduction to part one', in N. Mirzeoff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 53–9 (p. 55).
[30] Hughes, 'Through the looking blast', p. 985.
[31] P. Adey, M. Whitehead, and A. J. Williams, 'Introduction: Visual culture and verticality', pp. 1–18 (p. 2).
[32] D. Campbell and M. Power, 'The scopic regime of Africa', *Observant States: Geopolitics and Visual Culture* (2010), pp. 167–95 (p. 171).
[33] G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies: an Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2012), pp. 173–85; D. Campbell and M. Power, 'The scopic regime of Africa', p. 170.
[34] D. Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), p. 8; Campbell and Power, 'The scopic regime of Africa', p. 170.
[35] Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, p. 173.

The footage produced by the Apache gun sight and disseminated by WikiLeaks was a practice of the aerial gaze.[36] Such a perspective has become ubiquitous in the simultaneous conduct and the representation of contemporary warfare.[37] The view of war from the perspective of those technologies and people exacting violence from above, from bombers, drones, helicopters and so on, has – particularly since the first Gulf War – come to typify both the process and depiction of modern Western warfare. There have been some changes in this time: previously fuzzy black and white images of distant targets are now replaced by images of increasingly high resolution.[38] The regime of aerial perspective has often been accompanied by military and state rhetoric about the 'targeted', 'precision', and 'smart' nature of modern warfare.[39] Deaths are obscured and those who fall outside of the remit of such precision are referred to as 'collateral damage'. Whilst it was situated within this broader visual regime, the Apache footage as presented by WikiLeaks was quite different from the ubiquitous montages of 'from above' destruction usually playing out on television screens.

With its unedited depiction of death the footage was in some ways more similar to that which, during the post-9/11 wars, became a staple of a Western genre of 'war porn' in which ('enemy') deaths are rendered as decontextualised entertainment. At her pre-trial hearing Manning stated that when she first encountered the 'Collateral Murder' footage she did not consider it particularly 'special, as I have viewed countless other war porn type videos depicting combat'.[40] The 'war porn' phenomenon was a part of a broader – generally Internet-based – turn to the 'gritty', the 'real', and the 'first hand' of war and encompasses gun sight footage, soldier body-cam footage, and photographs taken by soldiers which at times document death and violence from the perspective of the perpetrator.[41] Such representations occupy the somewhat extreme end of the scale of the raw, soldier's-eye-view accounts associated with the trope of the (Western) soldier as both fighter and authoritative and respected documenter of modern war.[42]

Whilst the carefully controlled 'official' state-sanctioned depictions of so-called precision war from above that are fodder for the news media and the 'alternative' depictions of the same violence that comprise war porn seem in some regards opposed – a clean versus a bloody view of war – these two

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[36] P. Adey, M. Whitehead, and A. J. Williams, 'Introduction: Air-target distance, reach and the politics of verticality', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28:7–8 (2011), pp. 173–87 (p. 175).

[37] Adey, Whitehead, and Williams, 'Introduction: Visual culture and verticality', pp. 1–2.

[38] Adey, Whitehead, and Williams, 'Introduction: Air-target distance', p. 174.

[39] M. Zehfuss, 'Targeting: Precision and the production of ethics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:3 (2011), pp. 543–66.

[40] The Guardian, 'Bradley Manning's personal statement to court martial: Full text', *The Guardian* (1 March 2013), available at: {http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/01/bradley-manning-wikileaks-statement-full-text}.

[41] N. Roger, 'Abu Ghraib abuse images: From perverse war trophies through Internet-based porn to artistic representations and beyond', in N. Billias and L. Praeg (eds), *Creating Destruction: Constructing Images of Violence and Genocide* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), p. 127; M. Glaser, 'Porn site offers soldiers free access in exchange for photos of dead Iraqis', *USC Annenberg Online Journalism Review* (9 September 2005), University of California School for Communication and Journalism.

[42] I explore the politics of war as experience in this context elsewhere, see J. Tidy, 'The gender politics of "ground truth" in the military dissent movement: the power and limits of authenticity claims regarding war', *International Political Sociology*, 10:2 (2016), pp. x–x; also K. Anden-Popadopoulos, 'Body horror on the Internet: US soldiers recording the war in Iraq and Afghanistan', *Media Culture Society*, 31:6 (2009), pp. 921–38; L. Kennedy, 'Soldier photography: Visualising the war in Iraq', *Review of International Studies,* 35:4 (2009), pp. 817–33; B. J. Muller, J. H. Measor, '"Theatres of war": Visual technologies and identities in the Iraq Wars', *Geopolitics*, 16:2 (2011), pp. 389–409.

visual genres both operate within a common hegemonic scopic mode of 'sky-situated knowledge'.[43] Whether it obscures death and injury or celebrates it as generic entertainment such knowledge elides the experiences of those suffering war from below. Both write a world that is populated by a self, above, and a targeted other, below. It was this that 'Collateral Murder' sought to complicate and contest by revealing how war practised and experienced from above also entails a war practised, experienced, and suffered from below (as I explore in the next section) but also by questioning the 'self' written by dominant presentations of the view of war from above.

In the case of both war porn and material released to the media by the military, the view of war from above is typically presented in short clips; a succession of 'money shots'. A montage of shootings or bombings reduce what are often hours of footage and involvement from many personnel both in the air and at multiple ground-based sites involved in the 'kill chain'[44] to a few seconds and a single, apparently omniscient perspective on a moment of destruction. In contrast, WikiLeaks presented footage that lasted 39 minutes and revealed the dialogue between the Apache crew and others in the kill chain. It showed the crew watching and tracking their targets for many minutes before opening fire on them and interpreting an often-ambiguous feed of images.

The 39-minute footage presents the view of the Apache helicopter's gun sight as a group of people are spotted walking down a street. After deliberation with the chain of command as to whether the necessary threat has been established, the people are fired upon by the helicopter's guns and killed. A van arrives on the scene and is also fired upon. When the US ground-based teams arrive they radio in that two children in the van have been injured. In the third section of the footage a missile is launched into a building, however this part of the footage was not a significant focus on the 'Collateral Murder' website. The footage is partial: there are jumps and although in the long version the material is presented as a continuous record of the feed it has been suggested that significant contextualising information is nevertheless omitted.[45]

Within the footage and radio exchanges recorded on the audio track, a particular narrative of the events, as apparently understood by the Apache crew, is described. This is that following an earlier exchange of fire enemy combatants are spotted carrying AK47 rifles. One individual is then identified as being in possession of a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG). These combatants are fired upon and killed. An enemy vehicle arrives to collect bodies and weapons and is also fired upon. In the fuller form not reduced to clips, the footage depicts the Apache crew as somewhat isolated by their position above a greyscale earth, viewing the urban landscape and those within it through an ever-present crosshairs and operating in a morally, as well as visually, black-and-white terrain of clearly demarcated righteous selves and enemy others. For example, when communications from the ground-based clean-up team alert the crew to the presence of injured children in the fired-upon vehicle, the crew are recorded saying 'well, it's their fault for bringing their kids into a battle'.

The dominant view of war from above 'writes' the Western military subject in particular ways. For example, those who wage war from above are understood to be rational and to have mastery over

[43] Matless, quoted in Adey, Whitehead, and Williams, 'Introduction: Visual culture and verticality', p. 2.
[44] D. Gregory, 'From a view to a kill drones and late modern war', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28:7–8 (2011), pp. 188–215.
[45] R. Adams, 'Wikileaks: Reaction to the Collateral Murder video', *The Guardian* (8 April 2010), available at: {http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/richard-adams-blog/2010/apr/08/wikileaks-collateral-murder-video-iraq} accessed 7 April 2015.

the technologies[46] that they control and which simultaneously enwrap them. These are attributes that are glorified in the context of war as well as being more broadly aspirational within society, forming an idealised 'self' with which Western publics are invited to identify. The 'Collateral Murder' footage portrayed the experience of being a wager of war from above as one not of all-seeing, rational command of information, territory and violence but of a scopic blinkering that is tied to the very visual and violent technologies over which such subjects are supposed to have mastery. In so doing the notion of an 'all-seeing' and clinical view from above was disrupted. Rather than opening up what is visible, war from above is experienced very narrowly. Children from this perspective are unremarkable and unfortunate victims of collateral damage, and the strafing of a city street is understood as a 'battle'. The authoritative perspective of the military personnel tasked with fighting war might not be as authoritative after all, inviting viewers to question whether the view from above is one that they can and should identify with after all.

'Collateral Murder': the view from below

To be 'below' is not the same as to simply be on the ground; it is the scopic truth of looking up, of situatedness beneath and being the target of the destruction of military airpower. The view from below as produced within 'Collateral Murder' does two things. Firstly it compounds the proposition that the 'from above' war experience of the Apache crew is partial and blinkered rather than omniscient and clinical by revealing at least some of those killed to have been civilians. Secondly it writes those people who are typically invisible in 'sky-situated knowledge' – the 'enemy' dead and injured – into the account as individual 'selves' (with names, histories, and lost futures) with whom the audience is invited to identify.

This is achieved by foregrounding one of the killed men, Reuters photojournalist Namir Noor-Eldeen who stands within 'Collateral Murder' for a broader category of those who suffer war from above. Noor-Eldeen's long lens camera, and the claim that the camera was misidentified as an RPG by the Apache crew (see Figure 1), becomes the literal and metaphorical visual mode through which the war experience of the commonly elided receivers of military violence are written into the narrative. This reverses the 'sky-situated' account that produces the 'self' as the Western military with their authoritative view from above and the 'other' as the unseen population of 'below'. The Wikileaks 'Collateral Murder' website 'resources' page (see Figure 2), containing contextualising information, repeatedly presents the image of a camera along with pictures and tributes to the killed Reuters staff, and the injured children. Taken alone, the Apache footage revealed the ambiguities of war viewed from above. With the viewpoint reversed, such ambiguities seem to fall away. The long lens camera is presented as a symbol of the civilian status of those killed, calling upon them – and Noor-Eldeen in particular – as 'selves' rather than distant others. The long lens camera invokes a contrasting visual regime to that of the Apache's camera: that of photojournalism, with Noor-Eldeen written as a consequence as a traditional civilian photojournalist documenter of war.[47] The foregrounding of Noor-Eldeen (rather than, for example, Saeed Chmagh, the second Reuters employee – a driver and assistant – or Saleh Mutashar, the driver of the van and the father of the two injured children) therefore worked within an established political vocabulary of selves and others.

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[46] F. J. Barrett, 'The organizational construction of hegemonic masculinity: the case of the US Navy', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 3:3 (1996), pp. 129–42.

[47] It was not unusual for 'insurgents' to film operations, so even a camera might not be considered an unambiguously civilian signifier. See J. M. Brachman, 'High-tech terror: Al-Qaeda's use of new technology', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 30:2 (2006), pp. 149–64 (p. 155); J. P. Farwell, 'Jihadi video in the "war of ideas"', *Survival*, 52:6 (2011), pp. 127–50.

As a Reuters photojournalist and at just 22 'one of the most respected Reuters employees in Baghdad' Noor-Eldeen was someone who could fairly easily be written within the ambit of 'selves' with whom Western viewers could easily identify.

On the website (see Figure 2) the camera is associated with a representation of an RPG to indicate the apparently similarity of their outline. The juxtapositioning of the camera with a representation of an RPG disrupts what to the Apache crew with their war experienced 'from above' seemed an inevitable and supposedly rational assumption: that the group were combatants. The juxtaposition presents the Apache crew as straightforwardly mistaken: they confused a camera with an RPG. This was not despite their access to the realities of war, but because of it: their militarised interpretations producing myriad threats in the populated streets that are the battlegrounds in asymmetric warfare. Those fighting modern, technologically mediated aerial wars, the 'Collateral Murder' account says, cannot access any reliable authentic truth from their vantage point. The cameras of journalists are, due to the scopic blinkering of the US military personnel cocooned thousands of feet above the ground in their machine, seen as deadly weapons and 'murder' is the result.

Having 'written' Noor-Eldeen (and connotatively the group)[48] as 'civilian' selves rather than enemy others, the experience of these 'selves' is a means to explore war 'from below'. The Apache footage is the gun's eye-view during which we see what the gun sight sees, and as a result what the crew in the Apache are seeing. The juxtapositioning of this with photographs, taken by Noor-Eldeen before and during the attack, and one apparently taken by a US soldier after it with the same camera (see Figure 3), presents an alternative experience of the same incident from a different mode of visuality with a starkly contrasting encounter with its violence. The perspective of those 'below', the conventionally elided Iraqi dead, is put into the account.

On the WikiLeaks website this experience 'below' is produced by the final three images apparently take by Noor-Eldeen with the camera. In the first, two distressed Iraqi women dressed in black are viewed through a bullet-holed window or car windscreen. This image disconcertingly echoes the Apache footage in which people were constantly contextualised by ever-present crosshairs. In the camera image the human implications of such a perspective are revealed: the crosshairs in the centre of the image have become a bullet hole, through which distressed civilians return the perpetrator's gaze. In the second image – the last apparently taken by Noor-Eldeen – the camera has been pointed to the sky. We see part of a human head, disarticulated by the inadvertent composition, intimate and fragile. It juts into the frame along with part of a building against a blue sky in which the Apache is an unseen presence. The downward gaze of the Apache has been returned and the killed, those suffering war 'from below', look back at their killer. In the sequence this photograph is jarring: it is not, like the image of the two women, congruent with the scopic regime of photojournalism; rather than documenting the pain and fear of others the image stands for Noor-Eldeen's final panicked moments of experience of war from below. The final photograph presented, of the ground, is that apparently taken by a US soldier. The making of an authoritative account of war experience is back in the hands of the US military who unwittingly continue to tell Noor-Eldeen's story even after he has been killed. The image they produce is an unclear photograph of shadows cast by other soldiers: shadows of guns, and of an object that echoes the shape of the long lens camera/RPG in the footage. The camera is repeated as a signifier of civilian identity in juxtaposition with US military might.

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[48] Although see Fox News, 'Military raises questions about leaked Iraq shooting video', *Fox News* (7 April 2010), available at: {http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2010/04/07/military-raises-questions-credibility-leaked-iraq-shooting-video/} last accessed 7 April 2015.

The story of the 'Collateral Murder' incident across multiple locations of sight and violence began 'above', with the Apache crew, seeing the ant-like enemy below through the eye of the helicopter's gun. The dirt of that once pixelated street is now, in the long lens camera's final image, revealed in close-up.

By juxtaposing the experience and perspective of the Apache crew with that of the killed Reuters journalist, WikiLeaks destabilised the power relations that privileges 'from above' perspectives – with their entailed locus of 'self' – and obscures the Iraqi dead. However, this occurred within the same visual regimes, with their entailed relations of power, that are the mode for the broader social (re)production of war. WikiLeaks worked with an existing repertoire of selves and others; those experiencing war 'from below' were written into the account through the perspective and experiences of a photojournalist; someone with an existing privileged position at the intersection of 'seeing' and 'knowing'. Whilst this was, as described above, a powerful means of disrupting the dominant sky-situated account, it also worked to write other experiences out of the account. The experiences along with the identities and histories of the other civilians killed in the attack remain fairly unelaborated. The experiences of Iraqi combatants – the men carrying guns who are likely to also have been in the targeted group – remain absent. The point here is not that WikiLeaks' intervention should have been somehow 'done differently' but that it could only be undertaken within the terms of the broader discursive (re)production of war, its vocabulary of selves and others and its configurations of seeing and knowing.

'Collateral Murder': the view from 'the ground'

Initially the WikiLeaks' 'Collateral Murder' website was structured around the juxtaposition of the experiences of war from above and from below as discussed so far. However ten days after the release of the footage by the organisation, a US military private, Ethan McCord, went public about his role in the 'Collateral Murder' incident.[49] In a later press interview he described only becoming aware that the footage was making news headlines around the world when he turned on the TV one day and saw himself onscreen.[50] His version of events, termed 'an eyewitness story' by WikiLeaks was then incorporated into the 'Collateral Murder' website. Footage of McCord recalling his experience of the incident was placed on the homepage of the website, immediately below the Apache gun camera footage. As this section explores, the 'eyewitness' account of the 'on the ground' observer-participant further complicated the account of the attack and introduced additional challenges to 'sky-situated knowledge', including those what worked with a common basis of military scopic authority.

McCord was a member of the ground-based team of US soldiers tasked with the clean-up operation following the 'Collateral Murder incident'. He is, he says, seen in the footage carrying one of the injured children from the destroyed van to US military Bradley and heard trying to arrange a medevac.[51] His statements therefore provide another layer of experience in another location of visibility and situation of power, neither waging war 'from above' nor suffering it 'from below', but 'witnessing' it 'on the ground'. Although he made it clear that he understood himself as a perpetrator

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[49] Iraq Veterans Against the War, 'Veteran of "Collateral Murder" company speaks out', *IVAW*, available at: {http://www.ivaw.org/node/5919} accessed 7 April 2015.

[50] K. Zetter, 'U.S. soldier on 2007 Apache attack: What I saw', *Wired* (20 April 2010), available at: {http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/04/2007-iraq-apache-attack-as-seen-from-the-ground/}, accessed 7 April 2015.

[51] Ibid.

and inextricably a part of the violence unleashed by the Apache crew,[52] describing McCord as an 'eyewitness' as WikiLeaks did, portrayed him as an observer as much as a participant. McCord's experience of the incident is rendered through the scopic regime of the 'fighter-documenter': soldiers who, as discussed earlier, photograph and film their lives on deployment and then disseminate the results through blogs and sites such as YouTube. The footage on the 'Collateral Murder' website, of McCord addressing the United National Peace Conference, is edited to include montages of still photographs of US soldiers on combat operations. There is no direct claim that these are pictures of the soldiers involved in the incident, although this is implied; McCord notes that at one point on the day of the 'Collateral Murder' incident nothing much was happening so he and the other soldiers started taking pictures. Some of the images depict McCord, including one photograph of him stained with, what he says in his testimony to the conference, is the blood of the injured children. Also cut into the filmed testimony are sections of the Apache footage. Writing a soldier-documenter into the account inserted a US military perspective that was much less troubling to accounts of idealised military subjectivity and Western 'self' than the apparently gung-ho and nameless Apache crew whose voices are heard on the gun camera footage.

The reference to McCord as an eyewitness and the extensive use of soldier-created images functions to 'write' him as a subject within a discourse of Western soldiers that understands them not only as fighters but also as authoritative documenters of modern war. These soldiers are written as individuals whose experiences of 'boots on the ground' war give them access to an authentic 'ground truth' that can be an effective alternative or addition to traditional journalism.[53] Through the soldier-authored photographs McCord's visual situatedness with access to a truth on the ground is revealed, and with it a third perspective on the same streets walked by Namir Noor-Eldeen and strafed by the Apache crew. However, whereas in the cases of the Apache gun camera and Noor-Eldeen's photographs the images stood alone, in McCord's case they are part of a narrative of 'eyewitness' through which McCord is written as an authoritative subject with access to a scopic truth that he can retell and to which the viewer is invited to relate. Of those involved in the incident he is the only one who directly addresses the viewer to pass on a 'first hand' account. McCord described the power of this first hand account in a subsequent media interview:[54]

> I am hopeful that the video and our speaking out will help. There's the old adage that war is hell, but I don't think people really understand just what a hell war is. Until you see it first hand, you don't really know what's going on.

The Apache gun camera footage rewrote the conventionally omniscient understanding of war experienced from above, suggesting instead that such experiences are intrinsically blinkered and troubling the writing of Western soldiers as paragons of authoritative martial heroism. The photographs taken by Noor-Eldeen compounded this proposition by suggesting that the RPG (mis)identified by the Apache crew was actually the long lens camera of a photojournalist. The perspective of war suffered from below also addressed the erasure of the war dead of sky-situated knowledge by writing them into the account as 'selves' with names, histories, and lost futures. McCord's eyewitness perspective 'on the ground' in turn complicates both of these accounts.

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[52] Courage to Resist, 'Letter of reconciliation and responsibility to the Iraqi People', *Courage to Resist* (2010), available at: {http://www.couragetoresist.org/news/838-letter-of-reconciliation-and-responsibility-to-the-iraqi-people.html} accessed 7 April 2015.

[53] Tidy, 'The gender politics of ground truth'.

[54] World Socialist Website, 'US soldier in WikiLeaks massacre video: "I relive this every day"', *WSW* (2010), available at: {http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/apr2010/emcc-a28.shtml} accessed 7 April 2015.

He describes walking amongst the remains of the targeted group whose bodies had been so destroyed by 30mm rounds that 'they didn't look human', and discovering the two injured children in the shot-out van who reminded him of his own son and daughter. But in his 'eyewitness account' he also recalled seeing an RPG at the scene, a departure from the long lens camera/RPG narrative produced by juxtaposing the first two locations and modes of sight and violence. McCord's scopic truth challenges sky-situated knowledge by demonstrating that regardless of who was or was not holding a RPG or a long lens camera war can never be anything other than a murderous 'hell', but it also destabilised the account of the incident as initially produced by WikiLeaks and reinstated the military scopic authority of McCord's expert 'trained eye'[55] and with it an honourable Western military subjectivity that an audience could identify with.

The video of McCord's testimony on the WikiLeaks website includes his statement that he saw an RPG amongst the bodies, and this was acknowledged explicitly by Julian Assange in later media interviews.[56] WikiLeaks maintained the emphasis on the RPG/long lens camera confusion on the website however. In media interviews McCord was quoted being critical of WikiLeaks and emphasising that both long lens cameras *and* RPGs were present something he felt had been obscured in their initial account.[57] Writing McCord as an authentic 'first hand' expert 'eyewitness' source of scopic truth allows for an additional, more complex account of the incident to emerge (one that moves the focus on the Iraqi dead and injured in some ways beyond those easily categorised as civilian casualties) but it also reinstates the relations of power through which the Western military dictate the terms of what is seen and known. The accounts of those who were not 'on the ground' are produced as distanced, unreliable, or based on conjecture. Discussing the reception of the video in the wider media, McCord said in an interview:[58]

> You know, you have all these news, supposed war, analysts, you know, who are going over this video who know nothing of what happened that day.

The supposedly expert analysts of the established news media are delegitimised as sources of analysis. WikiLeaks are also criticised by McCord as misrepresenting the truth:[59]

> When it was first released I don't think it was done in the best manner that it could have been. They were stating that these people had no weapons whatsoever, that they were just carrying cameras. In the video, you can clearly see that they did have weapons … to the trained eye. You can make out in the video [someone] carrying an AK-47, swinging it down by his legs … .

The 'trained eye' of McCord destabilises WikiLeaks 'Collateral Murder' account that arose from the juxtaposition of 'war from above' and 'from below'. The on the ground eyewitness instead seems to be corroborating the sky-situated knowledge of the Apache crew after all; trained eyes could identify weapons in the footage. However, instead the visual regime of the soldier 'on the ground' produces a third version of the incident, as described in this extract from an interview McCord gave to Cindy Sheehan:[60]

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[55] Zetter, 'U.S. soldier on 2007 Apache attack'.

[56] Fox News, 'Military raises questions about leaked Iraq shooting video'.

[57] For example Zetter, 'U.S. soldier on 2007 Apache attack'.

[58] Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox [Blog], 'Transcript of interview with Ethan McCord' (2010), available at: {http://cindysheehanssoapbox.blogspot.co.uk/2010/08/transcript-of-interview-with-ethan.html}, accessed 7 April 2015; Zetter, 'U.S. soldier on 2007 Apache attack'.

[59] Zetter, 'U.S. soldier on 2007 Apache attack'.

[60] Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox, 'Transcript of interview with Ethan McCord'; see also D. Mark, 'Soldiers in "Collateral Murder" video apologise', *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (29 April 2010), available at: {http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2010/s2886429.htm} accessed 7 April 2015.

> Now, one thing I do need to make clear is that when I came onto the scene, I did see an RPG and an AK-47 there. However, when there's peo … My experience in Iraq is that when the locals see someone with a camera who may be a photographer or with a news agency, they always come out with their weapons, and it's kind of like showing off. Like, 'Hey, look what I have.' You know, 'make me famous' type of thing. 'Put me in the magazines.' And it's just to be noticed. My personal belief, I do not believe that these guys had anything to do with the attacks that we were facing earlier from a few blocks away.

Comfortable distinctions are removed and the experience offered up by the soldier on the ground is one infused with ambiguity. 'Locals' carry weapons, but in pursuit of media glory rather than with a military agenda, unnecessary but not unexpected victims of a mode of war in which 'the waging and representing of war are enmeshed almost to the point of being inseparable'[61] a practice resonant with those of McCord and his colleagues who routinely took cameras as well as weapons with them out on patrol. Whereas the original formulation of 'Collateral Murder' by WikiLeaks emphasised a clear distinction between those combatants who fight (who remain 'others') and those civilians who document (who are produced as 'selves'), the perspective of the 'on the ground' eyewitness complicates this narrative of war.

The 'on the ground' perspective targets sky-situated knowledge by focusing on the aerial mode of war itself, a regime of simultaneous visuality and violence that delivers the hell of the battlefield to populated streets and obscures the horror of this hell of war from home populations. In the war experience articulated through McCord's viewpoint, 'the only thing that's unusual about this [the incident] is that America got to see what happened'.[62] The real horror is not in the aberrance of what is represented, but in its ordinariness. It is worthy of note that the WikiLeaks team originally prepared 'a draft version of the video' that 'made specific reference to the AK-47s and RPGs' but did not include it in the final version because of the ambiguity of the images.[63] Ethan McCord (with his soldier's 'expert eye') could make this ambiguity itself an authoritative truth about war in a way that WikiLeaks could not. On these terms therefore, military scopic privilege worked to unevenly contest the same relations of power that underpinned its authority.

Conclusions

By revealing how a single incident of war existed across multiple experiences, WikiLeaks 'made' the 2007 killing of a dozen people in an Iraqi suburb 'Collateral Murder'. Doing so complicated and contested a dominant account of war: that located in the aerial gaze with its associated formulation of 'selves' and 'others'. The formulation challenged the notion of rational and clinical 'war from above', writing the crew of the Apache as blinkered rather than omniscient, and by making visible the Iraqi dead and injured who suffer war from below destabilising the dominant structure of 'selves' and 'others' that places the war waging 'self' above and the targeted enemy 'other' below. Analysis of WikiLeaks intervention suggests how politically-embedded the category 'war experience' is. Although they were presented as a means to access various truths about the incident, whose war experience was accounted for, when, how, and on what terms was a configuration grounded in the same relations of power that underpin war. By tracing the ways in which different visual regimes with their attendant relations of power functioned in the discursive production of 'Collateral

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[61] Anden-Papadopoulos, 'Body horror on the Internet', p. 20.
[62] Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox, 'Transcript of interview with Ethan McCord'.
[63] Fox News, 'Military raises questions about leaked Iraq shooting video'.

Murder' this article has explored how the intervention was contingent on an existing repertoire of 'selves' and 'others' with varying degrees of scopic authority.

The initial jumping off point for this article was the characterisation of war as a lived, experiential phenomenon and the need to address in scholarship that '[p]eople live in wars, with wars, and war lives with them long after it ends.'[64] The analysis in this article has explored the ways in which what is known and knowable about war is made navigable, given substance, and endowed with meaningfulness through the experiences of those who live in and with war (and indeed those who die in war). To understand war as and through experience is a project that operates within and through the broader social reproduction of war such that war experiences are never (despite how they are portrayed within the political projects that turn to them) a pure and unfettered conduit to some ultimate truth about war. Instead war experiences, and how they are made sense of both by those people who have and are constituted by them and by broader society, are sites of political contestations and intervention. As such scholarship should turn attend to the ways in which war experiences function as political currency and problematise claims to and constructions of political authority that invoke war experiences.

Acknowledgements

Biographical information

The author's work asks how war and the military logics that underpin its possibility and conduct are reproduced and contested and how this constitutes subjects. Her most recent and ongoing research shares a common starting point: the differing ways that war exists to different people; the ways in which we encounter, view, and 'live' war, what this variously makes visible, less or invisible, and what the political implications of this are.

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[64] Parashar, 'What wars and "war bodies" know', p. 618.