



**WAR ALWAYS
FINDS A WAY**
HARUN FAROCKI

In 1991 there were two kinds of shots from the war of the Coalition Forces against Iraq that were something new, that belonged to a visual category of their own.

The first shot shows a section of land, taken from a camera in a helicopter, an airplane, or in a drone—the name for unmanned light aircraft used for aerial reconnaissance. Crossing the center of the image are the lines marking the target. The projectile hits, the detonation overloads the contrast range, the automatic fade counteracts it; the image breaks off.

The second shot comes from a camera installed in the head of a projectile. This camera crashes into its target—and here as well, of course, the image breaks off.

Since 1920 in the USA, shots filmed from a position normally not taken by a person have been called *phantom shots*; shots, for instance, from a camera positioned under a train track. Images from the point of view of a person are called *subjectives*. We can therefore regard the shot from the perspective of a bomb as a phantom subjective.

The shots taken from a camera that crashes into its target, that is, from a suicide camera, cling to the memory. They were new and added something to the image that we may have heard about since the cruise missiles in the eighties, but didn't know anything specific about. They appeared together with the word "intelligent weapons," connecting a rather glib idea of intelligence together with an equally glib idea of subjectivity.

Animation as well, whether produced on a drawing board or on a computer, frequently used perspectives that were difficult or even impossible for a camera to take: for instance that of a bullet flying toward its target. Drawn animated films therefore established a predominance over the film-photographic shot. Animated films therefore became the means to make technological functions dynamically representable: thermal processes, biological functions, cross-sections of apparatuses.

In 1991, it was often stated that images of approaching targets and detonations taken from surveillance cameras made war look "like a computer game." What was meant was that war looked like a children's game. The difference between the serious and the playful, child and adult has in the intervening period become meaningless in this respect. Since then, soldiers have been practicing for war in visual worlds that the military has taken over from the game industry and adapted for their own purposes. (The US military having previously helped the games

industry generate images of certain theaters of war such as Afghanistan or Iraq.)

Since then, computer animation has become standard. If 20 or 30 years ago they looked as if they were trying to imitate film, today they abound with self-assurance. Animation comes from the computer and computer technology is so well established as the primary medium that even a badly produced image from a computer is now considered superior to a decent one from a photo or film camera. The computer has become the standard, just as the industrial machine did a hundred years ago. If a computer image leaves out a detail that film-photography reproduces, this is no longer considered a deficiency, but instead an ideal representation. Today, computer animation is like a reproach to a filmed recording for reproducing superfluous details, just as an industrial product is a critique of the irregularity of a hand-made object. The fact that in computer images framing and camera position can be reconfigured afterwards, that a figure in the image can react to something happening outside the image (that they can fall to the ground or shoot back when they're shot at), all of this more than compensates for the loss of a verifiable relation to the factual.

In these new images from Iraq in 1991, those with the crosslines in the center, there are hardly ever any humans to be seen. The battlefield is shown as deserted. And if we look at a series of such images, one could imagine that they are of a war, which rages on even after people have disappeared from the Earth. The agenda of war is executed by autonomous war machines. The operational images of approaching targets and detonation usually show military targets such as barracks, bunkers, and airfields: bridges also pass for strategic targets, even if they are in use by civilians. I remember, during the first Gulf War, a US military spokesman showing a clip at a press conference, in which a car was quickly driving away from a bridge that had just been struck, and making a joke about it. The military archives today do not show images where vehicles can be seen, which necessarily imply that people are present in the target area. It therefore becomes clear that making war and reporting war become a single project. The images that we get to see are created militarily and controlled militarily and politically. In civilian life, it is common for production companies to make a film about a production alongside the primary film, therefore keeping the entire coverage of the product for themselves. In the case of the container shows on television there is hardly any difference at all between the primary and secondary images. Celebrities sell the exclusive rights to their weddings and the

births of their children. In these cases a kind of image police is needed to prohibit monopoly-breaking reporting.

In the Iraq wars as well there has been an image police. In the first war they worked according to a good-cop/bad-cop schema. On the side of Iraq there was the evil policeman who kept the reporter away from the battlefield through conventional, repressive means. This was done so that it did not become visible that the Saddam regime was able to terrorize its own population and also that of defenseless Kuwait, although it was incapable of organizing an army that could at least provide the retreating soldiers a minimum of protection, not to mention protecting the civilian population. The *good cop* of the USA, on the other hand, structurally excluded press photographers from the events by means of the "camera bombs," as Theweleit called them. Bombs that contained cameras, but no room for an independent reporter.

Iraq permitted a few chosen reporters to remain in Baghdad, including Peter Arnett of CNN. It was these reporters who filmed the green-tinted panoramas using night-shot settings to amplify the residual light. Like Ernst Jünger had done in Paris during the Second World War, Arnett experienced the bombing of Baghdad from the roof of a hotel. Unlike Jünger, he was under a kind of house arrest and restricted to his hotel. In both cases, however, these visual constraints created an aesthetic point of view, that of a lone onlooker, observing from the commander's vantage point but without the power to command. The few correspondents in Baghdad belonged to the tactical reserves of a somewhat contradictory strategy of the Saddam regime. On the one hand the inferiority of the Iraqi side was supposed to remain concealed, on the other, the inhumanity of the allied war machine was supposed to be denounced. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to film as many dead civilians as possible, in close up and in a single shot.

The first shots taken by a camera in a projectile are from 1942 and show the test firing of a HS 293 D at a shipwreck near Peenemünde. The images were broadcast by means of a transmitter to an accompanying aircraft, which had launched the missile and then turned around. From the aircraft, the bomb was directed toward its target by means of a control stick that resembled the later joystick. Because it was not possible until the 1950s to record electronic images, this sequence is probably the only remaining documentation of such an attempt. A technician used a Bolex to film it from the control screen. Although the HS 293 D was never used in the Second World War, the miniaturization of the television camera was a significant development. Unlike the rocket

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builders, the German technicians in charge of placing a camera in the missile did not continue their work in the USA, but in the West German television industry.

"We consider it immoral to create weapons, whose construction presumes the death of the combatant and in doing so, as far as we are concerned, includes sacrificing the user in the normal usage of the weapon. In Japan on the other hand, the task of the kamikaze pilot, crashing his airplane into an enemy battleship, is regarded as honorable. The Japanese have also created torpedoes, which are directed to their targets by an accompanying pilot, proving the Russian proverb 'The bullet is a blind fool' to be false" (Ernst Jünger, *Der Gordische Knoten*, 1953).

"The bullet is a blind fool," or as it goes in the German soldiers' song: *"Nun Ade lieb Luise, wisch ab Dein Gesicht/ Eine jede Kugel die trifft ja nicht"* (*"Now farewell dear Luise, wipe away your tears/ Not every bullet hits the target"*). The images from the head of a projectile in 1991, together with the expression "intelligent weapons" were so terrifying and so fascinating because from this moment onwards, bullets could no longer be considered as blind. Even in war, it is always the others who die. The pattern recognition and object tracking of the "seeing" bombs have made the threats of infallibility a reality. Paul Virilio wrote that these images were targeted at us. That sounded then like a prophecy, one that has since been fulfilled.

During our many years of research, in only one case have we found a system that comes close to the idea of an intelligent weapon, that is to say, one that seeks out its target by processing images by computer. HIL (Hardware in the Loop) is a device for testing the flight of rockets, and which above all can automatically check the course and approach to the target. The apparatus, approximately as big as a car, has a wide degree of freedom and can pivot incredibly quickly and precisely. In the center of the simulator is the rocket's seeker head equipped with a pivoting prism. Images are played to this seeker head in simulation of the landscape to be flown over. These are real images, taken during a real overhead flight: forests, groups of houses, and transportation structures, for instance. The seeker head goes through these overhead images and processes them. This processing is made visible with green and red guiding lines. The green lines represent something like a preliminary suspicion. The seeker program has discovered a configuration in the image that could be part of a pattern that it has already memorized. The program draws a line in the image and continues looking for clusters of pixels that might make it possible to continue the line. If this is verified,

when the outlines of a street intersection, bridge, or power line become visible, which are registered as path markers, the figure is confirmed in red, like a somewhat dull mind might underline a thought that seems pertinent to him in a book. The automatic eye has memorized a handful of filters, through which it scans the images from the real world. These image-processing apparatuses work with a clumsiness reminiscent of robot arms undertaking a new task. Every movement is divided into sections, pausing after each partial movement. This may be precise, but without any of the elegance, which might be acquired through habit. Just as mechanical robots initially took workers in the factory as their model, shortly afterwards surpassing and displacing them, so the sensory devices are meant to replace the work of the human eye.

Beginning with my first work on this topic *Auge/Maschine [Eye/Machine]*, 2001, I have called such images that are not made to entertain or to inform "operative images." Images that are not simply meant to reproduce something, but instead are part of the operation. This term can be traced back to Roland Barthes. In *Mythologies*, 1957-1964, he writes in a theoretical afterword: "*Here we must go back to the distinction between language-object and meta-language. If I am a woodcutter and I am led to name the tree, which I am felling, whatever the form of my sentence, I 'speak the tree,' I do not speak about it.... But if I am not a woodcutter, I can no longer 'speak the tree,' I can only speak about it, on it.*" For Barthes, this text is an affirmation of his own practice. He wanted to belong to the revolutionary left without having to take up the Stalinist line, as the CPF was then demanding of intellectuals. Moscow persecuted the kind of semiotics represented by Barthes with particular hatred, since it did not refer back to anything foreign, but to formalism, the ostracized Russian avant-garde theory; the only thing theoretically new, according to Michel Foucault, to come out of Communism.

Nothing compels us anymore to be radical materialists and to account for materialist rules of effect in language and thought construction. If we are interested in images that are part of an operation, this more likely comes from the flood of non-operative images, from the tedium of meta-language. Tedium of the everyday practice of re-mythologizing everyday life and the multiple and many-channeled program of images that confirm the most banal thing, that the world is as it is.

Images from surveillance cameras are as a rule never viewed by human eyes. They are recorded to survey a process. They are therefore considered so insignificant that they are not stored and the recording medium is erased and reused. Only in exceptional cases are the images

observed and archived. Such images act as a provocation to artists, in that they are not authorial and intentional, but do have a certain beauty that is not calculated. Showing something in art that comes close to the unconsciously visible was outperformed in 1991 by the US military leadership when they made surveillance images the main images of war reporting.

The materialists today are authors like Heidi and Alvin Toffler. They do not belong to an intellectual circle in Paris but to a think tank in Washington, centered on the Pentagon. In their bestselling books, *The Third Wave* (New York, 1980) and *War and Anti-War* (New York, 1993), they assume that there is a necessary correlation between technologies of production and of destruction, manufacture of goods and war. In this axiomatic view of evolution, war is a field of activity like any other. They compare war and industry in the same way that one would compare, for instance, agriculture and industry.

We received a short, computer generated promotional tape sent to us by the Swiss weapons manufacturer Oelikon-Bührle: Two jet fighters in a blue sky flying over the beige colored desert. One of them shoots out an orange colored cruise missile, which, located by a dark green radar, is in turn shot at from an anti-aircraft cannon and finally destroyed. There are no people to be seen. The synthetic desert landscape is the perfect place to imagine a pure war in which every weapon is reacted to by a counter-weapon, which is then reacted to by a counter-counter-weapon. This succession of products, where the new annihilates the previous, is a cultural model. The Cold War made it possible over a forty-year period, to write off rockets, tanks, aircraft, and ships that were materially unused, but were outdated – sometimes before they were even completed.

The products of the computer and telecommunications industries actually take longer than weapons to become obsolete, so in order not to stifle the market, advertising campaigns are produced showing newer and more desirable products. It is said that the spread of products concerned with information and thus tending towards the immaterial, led to the sudden demise of the Soviet Union. The rival went under, but not only because it was weaker. It was eradicated because it was no longer needed. Even competition as the motor of obsolescence and renewal is no longer used in the IT industry.

The arms industry, on the other hand, has difficulty justifying new products these days. It lacks an enemy to produce the counter-weapons that make the counter-counter-weapons necessary. The process

of delivering surplus weapons to an ally, which then later secedes and becomes the enemy, such as was the case with Afghanistan and Iraq, can hardly be systematized. I'm speaking here from the phantom perspective of war, from an imagined war-subjective. In Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* it goes as follows: "War always finds a way." Barbara Ehrenreich understood this sentence to mean that war is unimaginably inventive when it comes to its own survival (*Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passion of War*, New York, 1997). Even if no human being wanted it anymore, it would still attempt to mutate into an automatic war on a deserted battlefield. In the rich countries, most people do not want war. War is as unnecessary as the gold standard behind currency.

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The idea of a deserted battlefield on which war battles on – a bit like the toys that come to life while the children are sleeping – reminds us of the emptiness of production facilities. In the automobile industry, for instance, we only see people working where there's no room for another robot. When we look for a link between production and destruction, the following analogy seems to apply: While in the rich countries the factories are deserted of people, in the poor countries more and more people are performing mechanical manual labor. And war increasingly takes place in the poorer countries.

The operative war images from the 1991 Gulf War, which didn't show any people, were more than just propaganda, despite rigid censorship, meant to hush up the 200,000 deaths of the war. They came from the spirit of a war utopia, which takes no account of people, which puts up with them only as approved, or perhaps even unapproved, victims. A military speaker in 1991 said, when asked about the victims on the Iraqi side: "We don't do body counts." This can be translated as: "We're not the gravediggers. This dirty work has to be done by other people." Taking it as well intentioned, it can also be interpreted to mean that the rich countries do not wish to gloat over enemy deaths and want to avoid victims on their own side. The hope rings out that from the rich countries' booty, something might trickle down to the poor ones!

The operative functional images that gave the impression of clean warfare had certainly a much stronger impact than the counter-images of the dirty war, for instance the images of the bunker in Baghdad in which hundreds of civilians were torn to pieces. The aerial shots, which were actually only meant for the eyes of military technicians, were supposed to encourage TV spectators to empathize with the technology of war. But we still remain political beings capable of communicating with each other, criticizing images and indeed differentiating between the

first war, in which Kuwait was attacked and annexed by Iraq, and the second Iraq war.

In the second Iraq war in 2003, images shot from the heads of projectiles were hardly shown at all. We also didn't hear anything more about "intelligent weapons," only about *precision guided weapons*. Because of non-disclosure, it is difficult to prove, although everything points to it, that there were no "intelligent weapons," neither in the first nor in the second Gulf War. That is, weapons that could recognize and hit a target on their own. The fact that the idea of an "intelligent weapon" was at the very least not contradicted, was simply a classic example of a strategy designed to deceive the enemy. It was all about making the idea of sighted bombs so commonplace that they only needed to be ordered, developed, and paid for. No debate was required, since the bombs already existed, even before their appearance.

If there are no "intelligent weapons", there are equally few images, which are not intended for the human eye. A computer can of course process images, but it needs no real images to determine the veracity or the falsity of the image it is fed. For the computer, the image in itself is enough. The axe of Roland Barthes's woodcutter is also no purely reified instrumental reason, but a tool does not only speak to the substance, it also speaks to the human senses. Nonetheless, we can differ in degree between the object-linguistic images and the meta-linguistic ones, just as machine aesthetics can be distinguished from the aesthetics of commodities. If a program in a sequence of images only draws in what it is looking for, whether it be colored lines as markers in an aerial landscape or the baseboard in the hall of a research institute used to orient an autonomous robot, then we're seeing a kind of disavowal of what is being marked. The lines proclaim that in this image, only what is marked is of importance. Like any disavowal, this also creates a strong counter-reaction.

My interest in aerial images from the first Gulf War can be traced back to the work for my film *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* [*Images of the World and the Inscription of War*] (1988). At its core, it is about aerial shots of the concentration camp at Auschwitz, made in 1944 from US reconnaissance planes. These images were actually meant to survey nearby targets, factories that produced synthetic fuel and rubber, but they also show the camp connected to them. Only in 1977 was it discovered that a group of detainees can be made out on its way to the gas chambers, another standing in line for registration. The commandant's house can also be identified, the execution wall, and even the slots in

the roof of the gas chambers through which the Zyklon B was introduced. At the time, these images struck me as an appropriate means of representing the camp, because they maintained a certain distance from the victims. They seemed more appropriate than the images shot close up: the sorting of new arrivals on the ramp, starving detainees in the barracks, piles of corpses being bulldozed away. Such images submit the victims to further symbolic violence even if used with the best of intentions. I wrote the following commentary concerning the aerial images of the camps, in which individuals are barely the size of a dot: "*The photograph's graininess provides them with at least some protection of their humanity.*"

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Today it is all too clear that these images from a distance did not help to spare the dead from further humiliation. There are rarely good reasons for looking at images of mutilated victims. It is part of the nature of things that the images of a terrible event taken from a distance also bring to mind more brutal images - even if they set out to have the opposite effect. It seems inevitable that some form of barbarism should show through any images of humanity.


Already in 1969, in my film on napalm and Vietnam, *Nicht Loschbares Feuer [Inextinguishable Fire]*, I didn't want to be an artist showing a horrifying image and in so doing avoid any objections. I wanted at the very least to symbolically prepare the ground, so I held a small introductory speech in which I cited the story of a Vietnamese man who had been hit by a napalm bomb. At the end I put out a cigarette on the back of my wrist: "*A cigarette burns at 400 degrees, napalm at 3,000.*" My act was about the here and now. Vietnam was far away and the pointed contact with the heat was meant to bring it closer. This small demonstration was supposed to comply with my iconoclastic intentions, it was directed against the cinematographic apparatus, but in fact it served to confirm, in the same way as an unedited sequence, the persuasive power of the filmed image.

In a remote archive in Florida we came across a promotional film from Texas Instruments. B-52 bombers in slow motion, dropping their cargo of bombs - the opposite of an operative image. An image that was meant to instill fear and entertain, preferably both. The film was accompanied by Richard Wagner's March of the Valkyries, which was undoubtedly meant to allude to Francis Ford Coppola and only unwittingly to Nazi wartime newsreels.

A commercial making the economic argument that it is cheaper to drop computer-guided bombs and cheaper still to use laser-guided

precision missiles. This might well lead to a *productive misreading*, leading to the conclusion that using fewer bombs would lead to a drop in profit, which must be compensated. If there is a relation between production and destruction, it is necessary to sell less *hardware* and more guidance systems. Selling more guidance systems implies convincing military commanders of the importance of precisely differentiating between friend and foe. The economy, at least that of the weapons manufacturer, needs war with humanitarian designs.

Translated from German by Daniel Hendrickson



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[HARUN FAROCKI | RODNEY GRAHAM]

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