INTRODUCTION

In modern warfare and the accompanying culture of war that capitalism produces as a permanent feature of modern society, the contest of images is as critical as the war on the ground. We might say that the contest of images is the continuation of war by other means, affecting not only our political understanding of the present, but also of the past, in ongoing battles for meaning that are fought out on the field of visual representation. At stake are the prevailing myths of national identity and the social and political policies of the state in relation to the lives and liberties of domestic populations as well as other peoples and nations. We begin from the understanding that the documentary image is always framed in order to control the visual and narrative dimensions of war and its ramifications. This framing is structured by the choices and conditions that are part of the image production, by what is included and what is excluded, and by the agencies, institutions, groups, and discourses that surround the circulation of the image. As Judith Butler has shown, the frame is not merely a passive device but must be understood as a structuring device that actively interprets what is real and what is not. Thus our critical attention must be focused on the conditions of the frame and how it limits or presents what may be seen and what may count as reality. Yet even as the state solicits our complicity in the normalization of war and the destruction of targeted populations, the effects of war can never be fully contained by the frame; reality can never be fully controlled. In different contexts, the meanings of the same images may even contradict one another or contradict the original intentions of their producers, demonstrating the instability of the frame. Furthermore, the excluded or repressed excess to the frame provides “the potential resources for resistance.” “In the destructiveness of war,” writes Butler, “there is no way to restrict the trajectory of destruction to a single visualized aim. Invariably, the fantasy of controlled destruction undoes itself, but the frame is still there, as the controlling fantasy of the state, albeit marking its limit as well.” Examining how the controlling fantasy of the state “undoes itself” is one of the aims of this study.

The understanding that images are mediated in terms of both the production of the image itself and how the image is framed through context has been a given in photographic theory for two or three decades and has called into question the truth value of the documentary image while placing traditional documentary in a disputed and unstable position in relation to the field of artistic production. Yet the power of the documentary image is greater than ever, emerging during a period of social and political crises.
in the twenty-first century when the image can digitally travel the globe with unprecedented speed. Does the understanding that the photographic image is always framed undermine the potential of documentary practices today to function as weapons of radical critique? How do contemporary documentary practices make explicit the frame of meaning in ways that do not rely on tropes of universalism and transparency, which may be used to serve the cause of the state? How are contemporary documentary images used to construct counterhegemonic narratives and to call into place a public sphere, based on shared ways of seeing, that are critical of and outside the control of the state? How have critical documentary practices merged with artistic genres such as video, reenactment, performance, and conceptual art in new and dynamic relationships?

These are the overarching questions that govern my analysis of war culture and its oppositional responses; more specifically, I argue that documentary practices represent a visual culture of resistance engendered by the permanent culture of war in the United States and in the Middle Eastern zones of conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Israel/Palestine (and growing globally). Recognizing that the disputed borders between documentary photography and politically engaged art have become increasingly permeable for technological, political, and cultural reasons, I believe this makes it all the more critical to examine the radical potential of documentary practices in relation to democratic ideals and social struggle and to focus on the conditions of making and discourses that surround contemporary documentary practice. Such practices have evolved to serve as weapons of critique against the perpetual militarization of society and to make visible the injustices done to those who may be recognized globally as fully deserving of democratic rights only in the public sphere that is called into place and constituted by these visual documentary practices.

**Documentary and Democracy**

Since the American Civil War, the aftermath of which was the first to be extensively photographed, war and related events are at least in part staged for the camera. This is as much a part of warfare as other strategic and tactical decisions, while every attempt is made to keep the staging, like all deceptions on which war is based, deliberately hidden from the camera. The U.S. government staged and documented a number of notorious “heroic” moments in the war on Iraq, such as the orchestrated toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad by American troops following the city’s occupation, or the simulated “Top Gun” landing of President George W. Bush on the USS Lincoln aircraft carrier in the embarrassingly and grossly pre-
mature “Mission Accomplished” publicity stunt. Other photographs, like those taken at Abu Ghraib prison and never meant to be made public, were taken by soldiers themselves, a practice that began in World War I, when war photos circulated by the thousands and were passed from hand to hand within like-minded communities of patriots and veterans, or among pacifists and antiwar activists. It is far more difficult today to keep the images made by soldiers hidden from the public. Since the introduction of popular Internet video-sharing sites and social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook, tens of thousands of viewers have been able to watch videos of military operations, such as the torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers, or U.S. troops under attack in which soldiers are hit by snipers or armored Humvees are hit by roadside bombs as a camera records the action.

On one level, the uncontrolled explosion of imagery may be seen as feeding a desire for a “universal archive.” Artist and curator Jorge Ribalta describes the universal archive as a dream or unconscious repository based on the belief that the unruly disorder of the world can be ordered and contained in “a rational-organized-industrialized system” that provides the basis for myths of both national identity and universal citizenship in the liberal public sphere. The idea of universal citizenship, by promoting a transnational global public sphere tied to the state, elides most forms of oppression and those excluded from political rights; the mythical universal citizen embodies the nation, which still depends on the paradigm of the white Western Christian heterosexual male. Militarism is justified as loyalty to and defense of the nation, and the universal archive comes to serve, in Ribalta’s terms, “the legitimation of the modern romantic-colonial nation-state system.” The Internet archive today becomes part of this machinery, which mobilizes and recruits the liberal public sphere of largely young male viewers for whom this imagery replaces the real with the representational and offers a romanticized narrative of sacrifice and heroism in service to the state.

All war experience is publicly understood only through representation. Even combatants, whose perceptions of a vast and complex war are limited to their own immediate experience and subject to the traumatic effects of that experience, produce and rely on photographs and videos so that they can remember what happened and legitimize their own experience through these images, often by posting them on the Internet as part of the “universal archive.” These file-sharing sites generally have minimal captions and no apparent framing narratives, and this seeming lack of framing devices is a large part of their appeal, allowing viewers—again, usually young men—to focus on the excitement of individual experience, the “manliness” of combat, rather than on the historical specificity and
ramifications of the events or the political significance of the larger conflict. The posting of imagery on the Internet has become such a pervasive global trend precisely because of the seemingly uncensored viewing it provides, allowing the viewer to insert the images into whatever narrative they “choose.” Yet those political and social narratives are all too readily constructed by dominant patriotic discourses, and are in turn constituted and reinforced by these images.

Theorist John Tagg historicizes documentary as a practice that emerged during the New Deal era of the 1930s and served the interests of the liberal-corporate state during a period of severe crisis. This crisis was social and political as well as economic and threatened capitalist rule. Documentary practice, he argues, was a deliberate cultural strategy that the state instrumentalized for “social consensus, national cohesion, the displacement of radical explanations, and the restoration of a sense that policy could be grounded on shared recognitions of authentic experience.” Programs were developed to employ artists in order to construct a national community based on a concept of social loyalty and responsibility, one which would “no longer be divided by the conflicts and contradictions of capitalist development” and which supported interventions by the state as a benevolent paternal body. Documentary practices were thus part of a “machinery of capture” that had little to do with “the poor and dispossessed,” the “objects of documentary,” and more to do with the “recruitment of subjects as citizens, called to witness” at a time of crisis when national cohesion was needed. Despite his brilliant analysis, Tagg takes on a despairing tone, which Ribalta regards as “melancholic defeatism” and associates with Tagg’s decision to focus on hegemonic practices and discourses to the exclusion of any resistance or disruption.

To demonstrate his thesis that even the most straightforward-seeming truth value of the documentary image can serve the state, Tagg uses the example of the 1992 Rodney King video, which was used by a jury to acquit the police who gratuitously beat a defenseless black man. Yet the broader public saw the King video differently and registered their outrage through massive rioting against the jury’s new frame of meaning. Similarly, the Bush administration attempted to reframe the Abu Ghraib photographs as the work of a few “bad apples,” but most of the world now sees these photographs as a direct consequence of American military policy, demonstrating that the state does not have a monopoly on constructing meaning.

The openings for social struggle generated by the contradictions of capitalism in the 1930s, as in our own era, also produced exemplary models of resistance. With the first large-scale expansion of the public sphere through the illustrated press in the 1920s, photography became central
to modern visual culture and an important form of visual persuasion. Groups such as the American Photo League attempted to call into place a working-class public sphere, while internationally the 1930s produced emancipatory photographic representations in the form of the workers’ photography movement promoted by the Communist International and circulated in magazines such as the *AIZ* and *Der Arbeiter Fotograf*. Through the new and expanded visual public sphere created by the illustrated press, documentary photography represented a new mass subject, which included the working class and the public. As Ribalta observes, “In the 1930s, the image of the everyday man, the rhetoric of the human and of the man in the street was the embodiment of the potential for revolutionary transformation and its spectres.”

The documentary photography of the 1930s was plural in its effects and should not be reduced to an instrumentalist frame or mere appendage of the liberal state. Documentary was not destined to serve one master only. In the Cold War era following World War II, however, artistic innovators lost their connection to mass political movements and formed new relations with proliferating art world institutions that supported and were supported by the capitalist state; these institutions, such as MoMA, articulated a new formalist aesthetic that delegitimized social considerations in documentary photography. But the pendulum has swung back the other way.

**Claiming the Frame for the Rightless**

Framing always does some sort of violence to open-ended meaning, yet meaning never can be wholly contained or structured by the frame because there are too many parties to the production of meaning. While recognizing the history of photographic mobilization and recruitment for state-sanctioned war and violence, we must also recognize the myriad forms of resistance to that framing. Today renewed social struggles and digital technologies have galvanized new producers to create alternative frames outside state control. These alternative frames of meaning are able to produce new forms of social knowledge that may be mobilized to fight for democratic rights and new freedoms. This idea of documentary as emancipatory representation is premised on the Western ocularcentric paradigm that identifies knowledge with vision. This is why we cling to the claim of photographic realism. “Even if we know after Photoshop that realism is a construction,” writes Ribalta, “I think we cannot simply abandon the claims of photographic realism. It continues to exist and to be necessary in the so-called digital era. If we want democracy to continue, we need some form or idea of documentary.” Moreover, we must recognize that the idea of documentary has revitalized the relationship between art and documentary practices.
Theorist and curator Ariella Azoulay analyzes documentary practices that do not support and are outside the control of the state. She remarks, “Photography’s critics tend to forget that despite the fact that photography speaks falsely, it also speaks the truth,” and amends Barthes’s formulation that the photograph attests to “what was there” with the understanding that what was there “is never only what is visible in the photograph,” but also reproduces a set of social relations that made the taking of the photograph possible. Given the persistent public belief that the camera is an objective observer, despite ample evidence to the contrary, we must recognize that while the state frames meaning according to its own interests, it is also possible to frame alternative realities and to make the frame apparent, that is, it is possible both to expose the racist, anti-democratic, and class interests of the state and to strengthen the critical polemical power of the forces that oppose it. There exist today documentary practices that make no claim to universality and instead make apparent their critical stance in support of transformative politics. These are documentary practices that claim the frame. Oppositional documentary practices thus reject the pretense of “objectivity” by making their stance apparent; they make visible the social and political conditions that make the photograph possible, and this, in turn, strengthens the power of the documentary image as a tool of materialist analysis. In particular, they make visible the liminal political spaces where what we think of as “human rights” are seen to be precarious, unenforceable, or nonexistent.

Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has designated these spaces or conditions of precariousness as “zones of indistinction” that produce a “state of exception,” and they demonstrate the ease with which governments can shift categories of people from those who have rights to those who do not. We may think of “human rights” as belonging to all people everywhere, but this is not the way it works. The contemporary understanding of human rights has been greatly influenced by Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and Agamben’s idea of “bare life” based on the exemplary figure of *homo sacer*, an obscure figure of Roman law who is stripped of citizenship and deprived of rights. Arendt addressed the condition of the refugee as a subject without rights and argued that an individual who is deprived of statehood or sociopolitical identity is made rightless. Human rights, then, are the rights of the citizen, but those most in need of rights—the refugee, the homeless, the political prisoner, the “unlawful” enemy combatant, the migrant laborer, the “ghost detainee,” the internally displaced, the victim of torture, the asylum seeker—are beyond the law and have no recourse to it. This is the implicit shortcoming of modern liberal democracy, which cannot be trusted to ensure human rights. As British art historian Anthony Downey
notes, “The ‘rights of man’ are a convenient fiction, in that they belong only to the citizen who is imbricated within a national, and therefore political, community.”

Agamben builds on Arendt to warn of a “coming community” of the rightless, to which we could all someday belong. Utilizing Michel Foucault’s notion of “bio-politics,” which is grounded in the meaning of life and the legal sanctity of the human, Agamben theorized the “zone of indistinction,” in which the sovereign is always both inside and outside the law, the one who makes and therefore can declare a “state of exception” from the law, producing bare (or sacred, in the rarer sense of “set apart,” and taking on the qualities of accursed, baleful, or abandoned) life, that is, biological life, in which a life may be seen as “devoid of value” and killed but not sacrificed in any religious or legal sense. The most egregious examples of bare life are the Nazi concentration camps, but also internment camps and refugee camps, which are still rampant today. Zones of indistinction may include the holding cells of national airports as well as the torture cells and prisons where people languish outside the purview of any national or international law, exemplified by Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, and the ongoing statelessness of the Palestinians, who have no citizenship and, therefore, no rights. The easy slide into a state of exception is exemplified by the Bush administration’s use of the terms “terrorist” and “unlawful enemy combatants” to characterize people who are deemed to have forfeited all human rights and who are imprisoned indefinitely, or killed. Even an American citizen, the Islamic cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, was murdered by the Obama administration without legal charges or trial, based on a secret Justice Department memo that reinforced the shredding of civil liberties as a necessary component of the “war on terror,” a “war without end against no readily definable enemy.” The “zones of indistinction” in which we find modern-day bare life are in urgent need of representation by contemporary documentary practices, which are capable of both reframing the reality of the visible and bringing into focus the invisible.

French theorist Jacques Rancière, however, argues against seeing these categories as too rigidly determined; he suggests that Agamben collapses the distinction between the political and the social, producing a “biopolitical trap” in which sovereign power and bare life appear “as a sort of ontological destiny: we are all, every single one of us, in the same situation as the refugee in a camp.” Rancière suggests that this “radical suspension of politics” is a logical outcome of Arendt’s position, which attempted to keep separate the political and the social or private, apolitical life. This leads to a “state of exception” from which there is no rescue other than an act of God, and avoids a specific political accounting, a view that is rooted in the
unquestioning acceptance of the necessity of the world capitalist economy and its state focus on security. Rancière argues that the United States did not start a war out of feelings of insecurity but rather that “the war was necessary to impose feelings of insecurity,” in order to consolidate consensus through “the fear of a society grouped around the warrior state.” The essence of the capitalist state, in its final form, is a police state, which integrates capitalist, state, military, and media powers, and must be opposed by what Rancière calls “dissensus”—whereby the distinctions between bare life and the political blur, and subjects act on the rights they do not have, thereby enacting those rights.

Thus it is possible for the documentary image, like the subject who is represented in that image, whether citizen or disenfranchised, to either further the interests of the state or to critique and oppose sovereign power by claiming the frame for the rightless. The critically deployed contemporary documentary image does not demur at partisan positioning. This is in part a response to the thoroughgoing critique of the myth of universality and transparency launched in the 1970s and 1980s by theorists such as Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, John Tagg, and others, so that documentary practices today assert a new combative political potential. Although documentary practices are still linked to the liberal-corporatist state, there are many documentary practitioners who assert the possibility of documentary practices that call into place a counterhegemonic public sphere based on a shared way of seeing that explicitly recognizes the political conditions that lead to a loss of rights and a need for dissent. These viewers are not necessarily sovereign citizens of any state, as in the case of the Palestinians, but they are, in Azoulay’s terms, “citizens of the citizenry of photography,” who utilize photography to support each other and to build an oppositional public sphere so that they may, ultimately, act on the rights they do not have and, by enacting those rights, bring them into being.

A Citizenry without Borders

My study builds upon a view of the public sphere that is both critical of the state and dependent on visual technologies. In *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Azoulay suggests that documentary photography can produce a “civil contract” that in turn produces a new kind “citizenship” based on a secular agreement among viewers that is not limited to conditions of the state but founded on “relations between the governed” and their sense of responsibility toward each other, including “the spectator’s responsibility toward what is visible.” This is related to Judith Butler’s elaboration of a Levinasian public sphere in which there is an ethical responsibility to respond to the appearance of others, especially to their
“cry of suffering.” For Azoulay, too, the political sphere is a public democratic space shared by the governed whose duty is, above all, to each other, rather than to the state, but this shared public sphere is, crucially, established through photography and its public circulation. “Photography,” she writes, “being in principle accessible to all, bestows universal citizenship on a new citizenry whose citizens produce, distribute, and look at images.” The critical function of photography is to “contest injuries to citizenship” in the form of “photograph-complaints” that “would be worthless, however, if it were not for the citizenry of photography and its citizens who produce these photograph-complaints, as photographers or as spectators.” Photography thus forms a citizenry without borders, language, place, national or ethnic identity; indeed, it has no “means of exclusion.” Citizenship, moreover, is not a passive status but an active condition produced by engaging in the civil contract of photography and the political responsibility it implies.

Azoulay also addresses the potential violence of photography in relation to the way it may exploit the vulnerability of the photographed. She asserts that this “threat of violation always hangs over the photographic act, and this is the precise moment in which the contract between photographer, photographed, and spectator is put to the test.” The threat of photography’s exploitation is mitigated when photography serves as a mediating agent in social relations, i.e., as a source of protection or “civic refuge” for those robbed of citizenship, in which they may produce grievances and claims that otherwise would not be made visible. Their invisibility would therefore further an unwitting public consensus in support of the state against the oppressed. The threat of violation that may revictimize those pictured is thus mitigated by the fact that the continuing oppression allowed by invisibility produces a far greater threat. Documentary practice therefore can become a kind of moral refuge for the oppressed. By making oppression visible, photography also demonstrates that anyone who threatens the social order simply does not have rights in a liberal order, and this ability to strip people of rights is a very useful ideological tool for imperialist expansion and the domination of other peoples. Thus bare life is always already politicized, its purpose always larger than mere existence.

**Documentary and Art**

The language of documentary has increasingly become the predominant language in contemporary art, particularly in photography, video, and film, and it even may be argued that the dynamic polemical nature of the documentary image has revitalized photography. Nonetheless, there are those who argue against loosening the boundaries between artistic and docu-
mentary photography and who question the legitimacy of picturing suffering and violence. This is the “aestheticization of violence” argument that suggests it is unseemly and in bad taste to represent social suffering, that this form of engagement, despite being associated with the politically radical Russian and German artistic avant garde of the 1920s, is not the proper province of artists. The logic of this argument is that the photograph should exist as a fine art object only. Against Michael Fried’s advocacy of postwar formalism in photography in Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before, Ribalta asserts that the relegation of photography to formal concerns and to the art market would represent a politically reactionary and antidemocratic turn. The photographic idea of documentary, though it may be used to displace dissent and to reaffirm the order of the liberal-paternal state, is nonetheless inextricably linked to the idea of democracy and can be used to mobilize and recruit a radicalized public sphere. To erase photography’s documentary power today would be to deny its potential link to emancipatory political struggles, rendering it a sterile academic enterprise.

Moreover, at this point in history the attempt to separate photography from documentary seems quite beside the point. Not only does this dichotomy maintain the arid disconnection between photography and social struggle, but it fails to recognize that such images are already globally pervasive and made by producers who reject the distinction between artistic autonomy and social engagement. Why, they may wonder, should we allow atrocities to remain off limits, shrouded in secrecy and public invisibility? Why should perpetrators remain unaccountable and victims remain unacknowledged? The issue is not one of aesthetics, of making suffering “beautiful” for the pleasure of the viewer, but ethical and political. Since no representation is without “aesthetics,” resulting from the myriad choices made by the producer whose “style” is related to a set of values and conditions, the question is not whether aesthetics have been employed, which they certainly have, but what the images effectively accomplish and what is at stake in what they represent. The anomalous attempt by photographer Luc Delahaye to draw a distinction between his own “photojournalistic” and “fine art” photographs of the same subject (Northern Alliance troops in Afghanistan) do not hold up under close examination; his allegedly more detached and impartial fine art photographs are constituted by just another set of formal conventions whose meanings still depend on the conditions of production and circulation, and they are difficult to distinguish from his photojournalistic pictures. At the same time, as Erina Duganne argues, there are indeed artistic practices that attempt to slow down the consumption of painful images in order to make the viewer more critically aware of how we see and what we cannot see, in works by artists such as Sally Mann, Andres Serrano, and Alfredo Jaar.
Political scientist Mark Reinhardt argues that the image cannot be so horrific that we cannot look at it and therefore aesthetics make it possible to look. He rejects the anxiety of critique raised by commentators such as Susan Sontag, who is ambivalent and self-critical about looking, yet, like most of us, finds it important to look. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag meditates on the tension between withholding and display and questions who has the right to look. She observes that “the photographer’s intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it,” and ultimately argues that the act of looking, and remembering, is an ethical act. She rejects the innocence that not looking may confer, concluding, “No one after a certain age has the right to this kind of innocence, of superficiality, to this degree of ignorance, or amnesia. . . . Let the atrocious images haunt us.”

In response to the argument that to aestheticize—and all photographs aestheticize—is reactionary, Reinhardt argues that this kind of thinking simplistically reduces content to form. Instead, he asserts, aesthetic strategies deepen engagement with and understanding of suffering. John Taylor, citing John Keane, similarly suggests that the “public spheres” of death and disaster images “keep alive memories of times when terrible things were done to people; they heighten awareness of current cruelty; they canvass and circulate judgments about whether violence is justified; they encourage people to find remedies for savagery.”

In a global culture where everyone is a producer as well as a consumer of public imagery, the mastery of the polemical power of the image is crucial to any emancipatory and transformative program of social struggle. The accumulation of human, economic, and environmental disasters, including the attacks of September 11, the permanent state of war in the United States that has existed throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and the massive revolts in countries across North Africa and elsewhere, have put global anticapitalism and systemic critique back on the table and opened a larger space for critical and oppositional visual practices. We must attend to the multiple forms of documentary practices so that we may hold the perpetrators of war and violence responsible for their deeds, acknowledge the grievances of their victims, expose the material conditions and political circumstances that are the underlying causes of their claims, and consider how the visual culture of war may help us to shape the future.

**Chapters**

Under the umbrella of war culture, I include in this book a wide variety of visual and documentary practices that examine the waging of war...
and the militarization of society. By placing artistic practice in dialogue with vernacular and photojournalistic images, we may better understand both the unique potential of contemporary visual art practices as well as their merging with documentary modes; indeed, a more comprehensive view of the overlapping practices of artists and photojournalists demonstrates the refusal of both to accept an artificial divide between artistic autonomy and political engagement. Not surprisingly, attempts to exhibit and theorize new rhetorical strategies about documentary imagery of war and violence have proliferated in recent years, constituting them as part of our cultural legacy. Taken together, the works examined in this book demonstrate that war is not only about the usual war aims—the killing and maiming of people, grabbing of land, seizing control of resources, and exploiting populations—but also about the permanent militarization of the homeland, the demonizing of other cultures, the attempt to make suffering invisible and to silence dissent and opposition. The study of contemporary war culture is, in its largest sense, an examination of the social and visual construction of national identities through the mythologies that are mobilized to sustain them and to suppress other ways of seeing, and the subversion of that project through documentary practices that oppose the suppression of civil liberties and the oppressive rule of capital in a contest of images.

The first two chapters engage with the “romance” of war. In chapter 1, I examine Krzysztof Wodiczko’s video projections and public works in response to 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and their relationship to contemporary media technologies. Wodiczko explores the rhetoric of war, including the promise of manliness, patriotic gratification, and the protection of democratic freedoms at home and abroad, and the effects these discourses actually produce, such as ever more sophisticated surveillance technology, the increased militarization of domestic space, and the shattered domestic lives of U.S. war veterans and Iraqi civilians. Wodiczko incorporates the documentary mode, often employing people telling their own stories, but in ways that defy linear narrative and seek to implicate the viewer in what often feels like “zones of indistinction.”

Chapter 2 focuses on the popular phenomenon of war reenactment in the United States and traces two trends: one that elides history by focusing on the romanticized mythology of individual experience and one that focuses on the political. Political reenactments that challenge the understanding of the past include the photography of Vietnamese-American artist An-My Lê, who participated in and documented reenactments of the Vietnam War, and the guerrilla theater of the American group Iraq Veterans against the War, which restaged raids by American troops against civilians in Iraq on the streets of American cities. An-My
Lê examines the way war reenactments romanticize and obfuscate the past, while the documentary-style street performances of Iraq Veterans against the War reframe a mythologized understanding of America’s role in Iraq and Afghanistan by producing visual countermemories.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on war experience in relation to gender and sexuality and the body. Chapter 3 considers the Abu Ghraib photos that went viral in 2004 and continue to provoke new artistic responses and scholarly analysis. I examine the sexualized use of American female soldiers in the tortures and humiliations of Arabs and Muslims at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay and the response to these issues in the video and performance work of Coco Fusco; the sexual abuse and discrimination against women within the U.S. military itself and how the reception of the Abu Ghraib photos was inflected by that; and the suppressed image of rape coupled with the appearance of Iraqi women raped by American soldiers on Internet pornographic sites. In addition, this chapter examines the cell phone technology and low-resolution “mediality” of the Abu Ghraib images as part of their documentary affect, and analyzes the debates over the public display of the Abu Ghraib photographs at the International Center of Photography and the Andy Warhol Museum.

Chapter 4 regards embodied experience as a metaphor for the sociopolitical corpus in the performance works of Guatemalan artist Regina Galindo, who submits herself to various forms of torture, and Mexican American performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and his group La Pocha Nostra, which metaphorically colonizes the body with a variety of techniques and produces arresting tableaux vivants that recall documentary practice without literally reproducing it. I further consider photography by artists and photojournalists, including the controversial images of burned and mutilated American contractors hanged from a bridge in Fallujah; the photos and war diary of British artist David Cotterrell, who served as an observer at a field hospital in Afghanistan; photographs by American photographers Nina Berman and Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, who represent the body of the wounded U.S. veteran in very different ways; and staged photographs of the Israeli soldier by Israeli artist Adi Nes.

The last two chapters address the landscape of war. Chapter 5 analyzes the construction of war and its navigational technology in the form of video war games in relation to real military technology, which appropriates video war games for military recruitment and employs games technology in actual gunships, as revealed in the Wikileaks video of Americans who gunned down a group of men in Baghdad that included two Reuters employees. This chapter also considers the effects on photographers of being embedded, unembedded, and disembedded, as well
as vernacular photographs by Iraqis that document a landscape of war far beyond the perspective of embedded foreign photographers. In addition, I examine the landscape of war in the United States in the work of Nina Berman and Christopher Sims, both photographers whose critical documentary practices resist being instrumentalized to serve the liberal state.

Chapter 6 explores the landscape of war in Israel/Palestine as both contested terrain and symbolic cultural identity in the work of primarily Israeli documentary photographers but also by Palestinian artists, as well as graffiti on the Barrier Wall around the West Bank by the British artist Banksy and other anonymous artists. In addition, I examine the Israeli political imaginary of the landscape as founded on a mythologized Holocaust narrative in the performance and video work of several Israeli artists and consider, overall, the ways in which Palestinian and Israeli identity are structured in terms of each other and the visual landscape.

If the images in this book haunt us, and I think they do, it is not, in most cases, because of the horror they show; rather, it is because of the vast experience of violence they gesture toward but cannot show. For the true horror of war can never be adequately represented; it is the silencing of voices and the largely unseen nature of violence and suffering that is more often represented. The politics of oppression in the contest of images is the true subject of these visual practices, and how well they succeed is the subject explored in this book.