

Harnessing Ambivalence:  
Alternative Representation in the Photography of War and Suffering

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## **Abstract**

This paper categorizes an alternative representation in the photography of war and suffering. Through interviews and visual analysis, it establishes how three photographers bear witness to suffering by facilitating a connection with the distant other that transcends the possibilities offered in the news media. The alternative representation facilitates this connection by (1) using the failure of communication as a generative force and (2) exploiting the aesthetic space as an alternative to the codes of practice that constrain representation in the news media.

## **Introduction**

Not to be overlooked in Breughel's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" is the title itself, so remarkable for what it is not.<sup>1</sup> Moral integrity, even common sense would have dictated "The Fall of Icarus" or "Icarus Drowning" for a scene of suffering, yet suffering invokes anything but common sense. Such is the lesson of the title. The fall should be the main event, but the painting is about the landscape. Icarus drowns in a dark corner amid the scenes of life of carrying on. The ploughman hears but walks on; the ship's crew sees but sails on. Even nature seems complicit in turning a blind eye to suffering as the sun bursts into the center of the canvas.

The scene provokes a question: what would make the "forsaken cry" of Icarus an "important failure" for its spectators (Auden 1995: 92)? How can the scenes of suffering be made to matter to its viewer? That is the question of this paper, and one of the answers may be in the painting itself. The ploughman is not disrupted by Icarus drowning, but the

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to Pieter Breughel's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus and W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts," both cited in Cohen 2004: 295.

observer of the ploughman is. Breughel pictures not only suffering but the process of living with it. The scene upsets because it fails to shock; it is the familiar “human position” to suffering (Auden 1995: 92). The painting invites a reflexive pause. In that pause the viewer may question the absence of connection between the ploughman and Icarus and even the absence of caring between him or herself and scenes of contemporary suffering. That is the potential of representation explored here – to reflect not only suffering but the process of coming to know it, to arouse a questioning of the habit of relating to a distant other, and maybe to inspire a connection that travels into the spaces of life carrying on.

The news media inform of the fact of suffering, but the challenges of sustaining a 24-hour news cycle prevent them from inspiring a meaningful relationship between viewer and sufferer. What action they encourage may not nurture a connection so much as alleviate a guilty conscience. This paper proposes the necessity of an alternative representation to append the news media. The nightly news serves the function of mapping suffering, but the alternative possesses the wherewithal to facilitate a connection.

Through interviews and visual analysis, the modes of alternative representation employed by three photographers will be probed for their potential to establish a space of questioning and to forge a connection grounded in complexity. Out of that complexity, the other becomes a fellow human whose suffering might matter. The ploughman may not dive into the water to save Icarus, but he will at least turn his head and wonder how he might.

## Literature Review

### The News Media: A Functional Formula

The news media often function as the first point of contact between distant sufferers and spectators; they lay down thin ties of connection through snippets of information. To satisfy the demand for information that pulses with unfaltering regularity on a 24-hour cycle, the news media have invested in a formula of presentation to streamline operations in what Hall refers to as the “professional code” of the industry (1980: 136). The structure of a front page layout, the dependable programming line up of a news hour, the expository mode of reporting with an objective “voice-of-God” narration provide the structural foundation into which information can be plugged (Nichols 1991: 34).

Critics of the news media charge that the formula coats subtle nationalistic and politically-charged messages in a veneer of objectivity. The news, for Said, is “a euphemism for ideological images of the world that determine political reality for a vast majority of the world’s population” (Said quoted in Levi-Strauss 2005: 20). Its showcase of horror vignettes, Bourdieu argues, frames the world as a dangerous place from which “that lies beyond the grasp of ordinary individuals” in which “politics is for professionals” (1998: 8). For them, the claim to represent reality-in-pure-form is pernicious in its discursive ability to steer worldviews undetected.

What should be emphasized amidst the warning calls, however, is that the news media’s formula not only offers it the structural capacity to respond to the demand for information but provide the very filters that allow the receiver to assimilate swaths of disturbing information on a daily basis. Rather than critiquing the news media from the

perspective that what they offer in the way of connectivity can stand alone, one might regard them as the first link in a chain of communication.

In the realm of suffering-on-scale, in particular, the news performs a pivotal function as digestive aid. The extremes of human suffering and cruelty in raw form can fall beyond the grasp of comprehension (Cohen 2001: 177). The scale of atrocity uncovered during the liberation of concentration camps in the aftermath of World War II seemed so unthinkable as to be unbelievable. Zelizer quotes one account admitting that ‘it was almost more rational to dismiss [the news] as untrustworthy than to accept it as true’ (1998: 40). The professional code of practice mollifies and edits scenes of suffering to facilitate assimilation. Campbell identifies the “economies of regulation” that filtered coverage of the conflict in Sudan. He also reveals that those “economies of regulation,” while making the war palatable, also prevented substantive coverage of the war crimes committed during the conflict. What images did surface so far from enlightening merely confirmed Sudan as one of the world’s ‘hollow belied’ places (2004: 70). The point of paradox is that the code that withholds and even contorts information is the same one that enables information to pass through at all. The formula of news coverage satisfies a demand for an alchemy of the unbearable into the realm of the conceivable.

Certain formulae of coverage can even facilitate positive social outcomes. The formula built around a “politics of pity,” “a politics which takes hold of suffering in order to make of it a political argument” has the potential to angle the spectator towards action on behalf of a distant sufferer (Boltanski 1999: 33-34, 44). For example, when a reporter can balance the “witnessing” and “deliberative” genres whereby a split self emerges – one part disinterested observer attesting to the facts and one part fellow human

communicating the emotions around bearing witness to suffering – then the spectator is directed towards action (Chouliaraki 2006a: 214-215; Boltanski 1999: 43-44). The reporter's incorporation of his or her own subjectivity introduces a possibility of action into the narrative. Subjective involvement in the story, Boltanski suggests, functions as a compass pointing to action (1999: 44).

Chouliaraki specifies that the tension between distance and humanity created in the balancing of the “witnessing” and “deliberative” genres (1) interrupts the free-flow of emotion associated with the realm of theatre and (2) imbues suffering with the humanity lacking in pure agoric deliberation (2006a: 43-45). The balance of fact and reflective description, then, opens a space to problematize, to ask what might be done. Rather than an account that has either “overconstructed the horror” or sacrificed humanity for steely objectivity, the nature of the coverage Chouliaraki outlines empowers the spectator with the agency of “effective speech” (Barthes 1997: 71-72; 2006a: 214, 201). “Effective speech,” manifested through denunciation or donation and enabled by a specific formula of coverage, has both symbolic and material impact. Protests push issues of suffering into the public arena, and payments have the potential to circulate resources where they are needed (2006a: 214-215). The outline of “effective speech” in the context of a formula for representing suffering defies a wholesale rejection of news coverage and hollows a space in which the news media can effect change.

What “effective speech,” in the context of news coverage, cannot and should not be asked to respond to are (1) the constraints of any formula, even one that embraces reflexivity and (2) the limitations of action in the forms of donation or denunciation.

To the first point, a formula, while useful in streamlining operation and mediating atrocity, defines roles for its participants, namely distant sufferer/victim, spectator, and mediator/journalist, that may stifle action. Each role is assigned a part to play. The victim must be a 'suitable victim,' preferably a helpless woman or child (Cohen 2001: 172). The question then becomes how the search for a 'suitable victim' itself determines the presentation of narrative and performs an unconscious editing of information. Whose story remains untold? How does the reliance on a preordained picture of victimization relegate understanding of distant others to tropes of presentation (Cohen 2001: 172).

Meanwhile, the journalist performs the part of eyewitness relaying information in pure form; the aura of objectivity, even when mitigated by flashes of humanity, confers credibility onto a story but leaves little space for an acknowledgment of the eye-witness' ingrained points of departure. One of those points of departure may be an unconscious belief that no one is interested in distant suffering, a belief that seeps into the tone of coverage and influences its selection. In his rejection of the notion of 'compassion fatigue,' Cohen argues that the media's framework for reporting presupposes a fatigue that underestimates the public's ability to assimilate knowledge of suffering (2001: 192). Moreover, a journalist or photographer's language is a function of social currents. To make the argument of critical discourse analysis, language is animated by discursive practice (Reisigl & Wodak 2001: 4). Images, text, and the way they come together conform to a grammar not the making of any one individual. The risk, then, is that "grammars of race," (Hall: 1995: 22; Barthes 1970: 137-144), or of nation (Chouliaraki 2009; Cohen 2001: 172; Tagg 1988: 13-14), infiltrate reports shrouded in the cover of objectivity. The cross-hatch of race- or nation-centered messages streaming from a single

item of news can promote worldviews that undermine a moral connection across distance.

The formula or discursive framework that defines news coverage also assigns a role for those receiving its messages. A kind of interpellation occurs whereby the news addresses a viewer or reader as its subject and in so doing dictates the kind of subject it addresses (Althusser in Cartwright & Sturken 2001: 52). In particular, news coverage whose formula of presentation depends on playing to a common humanity by “overpsychologizing suffering” engages the viewer on emotional terms alone (Chouliaraki 2006a: 210). The contact with atrocity invites the viewer to feel, to sympathize but not to question the how and the why of suffering or imagine the steps to action (Chouliaraki 2006a: 210). The viewer directs the issues inwards and chooses either not to act because suffering is the unavoidable component of depraved humanity or relegates action to the “penance” of a donation (Cohen 2001: 301). The viewer plays a narcissistic, moralized role that suffocates creativity of response.

Even the ideal cases for action – pay and protest – in response to coverage that manages a formulaic balance between the “deliberative” and “witnessing” genres must be analyzed as the optimal possibilities for action within the context of news media, but pay and protest have limitations. The acts of donating or demonstrating have beginnings and ends. If, as Cohen suggests, awareness of suffering and the spectator’s relationship to it must enter the in-between spaces, then the question to ask is what forms of representation can inspire action that transcends the limitations of pay and protest (2001: 295).

## **An Alternative**

The proposal is a categorization of an alternative representation of suffering and conflict that has the potential to enter the in-between spaces. Focusing on the photographic medium, this categorization entails a form of representation that (1) harnesses, rather than overpowers, the inherent failure of communication as a generative force and (2) achieves a productive moral relationship between sufferer and spectator by exploiting the freedoms of an aesthetic space.

## **Potential in Failure**

The failure of communication, that inability to transcend subjectivity and form a communicative union with another, has found existential expression in works from Proust and Beckett to Ionesco and Godard. The claim strung throughout seems to suggest that the inescapable solitude and even the capacity for cruelty in humans find their roots in the irksome reality that in communicating with others ‘I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides’ (Lacan quoted in Bozovic 1992: 166). The subject is confined to itself resulting in communicative gaps that will forever interrupt whole union with an other and relegate dialogue to the ignominy of “taking turns broadcasting at each other” (Peters 1999: 264).

What both Lacan and Levinas uncovered in those gaps, however, was functionality and even possibility. For Lacan, subjective confinement and the fact of a substance-less ego, an ego that will never experience its own wholeness, provide the glue of sociality: “If we were whole, we would each be in our corners whole, we wouldn’t be here, together” (Lacan 2007: 243). The intersubjective misses hold out the promise of

being understood, witnessed, and loved (Hook 2010: 13). The absence of full disclosure either of the self or of an other, then, prods us into the public realm. This is the paradox of communication – the very awareness of its impossibility, of never knowing oneself or another entirely, spurs us to uncover more, to approach a semblance of totality.

Levinas adds a moral claim to the Lacanian notion of functionality in failed communication. To cast failed communication as “the fundamental obstacle to universal brotherhood,” for Levinas, is to miss that “only what is other can elicit an act of responsibility (1989: 164, 67). Do not seek fusion in communication. Do not link moral rectitude to knowledge of the other. As Peters acknowledges, “an expansion of means” in communication does not mean “an expansion of minds,” a point Silverstone echoes when he warns against mistaking the connection and reciprocity of Internet communication with closeness, commitment and responsibility (Peters 1999: 31; Silverstone 2003: 9).

Rather, Levinas argues for a dissociation between knowing an other and relating morally that reinforces subsequent theoretical critiques of an “*if only people knew, they would act*” dictum (Bauman 1993: 166; Cohen 2001: 185; Levi-Strauss 2005: 85). Responsibility exists before the birth of a “me,” before a knowledge of another’s suffering, “as if I had to answer for the other’s death even before *being*” (1989: 83). The injection of morality into society, the prospect of “a fraternity” can only be born out of “extreme separation” (1989: 84). The perception of otherness brought out in failed communication sustains the demand for responsibility on behalf of another being. Alterity, or what Perpich identifies as “singularity,” is not about difference; it is about a presence of uniqueness that binds (Perpich 2008: 18-19). When Silverstone speaks of “proper distance,” he speaks to a preservation of this otherness which instills

responsibility (2007: 47). A Muslim portrayed as “beyond the pale of humanity” is too far, and a celebrity eating dinner is too near (2007: 48). Only at the “proper distance” can the “singularity” of an other be mediated. Hence, we must harness the communicative misses that hold otherness before us rather than attempt to overpower them or bemoan the solitude they cast around us, for, as Bauman points out, the only certainty in the realm of morality is “ambivalence” (1993: 10, 182).

### **The Paradox of Communication in Photography**

Both the Lacanian notion of failed communication as social glue and the Levinasian assessment of its ability to maintain difference as moral pull have tangible implications in the representation of distant others. First, if a communicative medium can build into representation itself an awareness that within every story and every picture is another story, that the process of encountering an other is a continuum without completion, then it has provided a crucial follow up step to news media in developing the relationship between spectator and other. An incorporation of the tension of incompleteness in communication that sustains the other as perpetual “singularity” holds before the spectator a demand of responsibility that likewise has no beginning and end points. There will always be another question, another way to relate and enmeshed in the process of always falling short is a suspension of the moral claim that one has to the other. Once moral relations reach the pretense of apotheosis, care turns into power. As Bauman writes, “Because I am responsible, and because I do not shirk my responsibility, I must force the Other to submit to what I, in my best conscience, interpret as ‘her own good’” (Bauman 1993: 91). The aim for an alternative representation of the distant other,

then, is to surrender to ambivalence and to plant a moral claim that does not hold out the promise of completion in donation or demonstration.

Photography presents itself as a fitting medium in this venture as the photographic image comes enveloped in a paradox of representation that reflects the overall failure of communication. The photograph is an art form with an uneasy proximity to science. As a form of mediation itself mediated by the physics of light and the chemistry of fixing that light, it carries the aura of reality-in-pure-form along with a simultaneous awareness of that impossibility (Cartwright & Sturken 2001: 17). The perception of truth within the frame confronts the recognition of a truth untold just beyond its borders: "...to photograph is to frame," Sontag writes, "and to frame is to exclude" (2003: 46). This is a magic trick whose secret is known and yet continues to fool. For all the claims of a 'crisis of believability,' Levi-Strauss argues, the response to the images of September 11<sup>th</sup> shows a continued reliance on pictures to convey a reality that cannot be denied (2005: 185).

Barthes attributes this paradox to the sense that a photograph, unlike a painting or sculpture, reduces but does not transform; "it is a message without a code" (1993: 196). The disjuncture in photographic representation occurs the moment a coded message is born out of the message without a code. This is the "structural paradox" that prompts an "ethical paradox," for, Barthes asks, "How then can the photograph be at once 'objective' and 'invested,' natural and cultural?" (1993: 198-199). Perhaps, Levi-Strauss suggests, it is not that "we *mistake* photographs for reality," so much as "we *prefer* them to reality" – to witness without the trauma of "being there" (Levi-Strauss 2005: 185).

The implications of the paradox on photographic representation are twofold. On the one hand, the photograph presents opportunities for ideological persuasion not possible in other forms of mediation. The photographers of the Farm Security Administration project, shot face after face of sharecropper and mother until the play of light and expression spoke to the their own conception of poverty (Sontag 1977: 6). The power of those photographs emanated from their pretense of reflecting a crisis in the southern states, the severity of which could convince urban populations of the necessity of New Deal initiatives (Tagg 1988: 13).

Rather than use the photograph's "aura of believability" as a propaganda tool, however, the photographer may also invoke its conflicted status as mediator to build meaning (Levi-Straus 2005: 185) If, as Sebastião Salgado states, "You photograph with all your ideology" and if that photograph can only ever be a trick of communion with objective reality, then a type of ambivalence is built into the photograph that aligns it with the aims of harnessing the failure of communication to inspire a curiosity in the other and to maintain a Levinasian moral demand (Levi-Strauss 2005: 45). To see a photograph is to be reminded of the stories we tell ourselves about the phantom connections made in all communication. Speaking to a grave, Peters points out, involves the performance of a response one imagines to be there despite the protests of rational thought (1999: 152). The awareness that the dead cannot reply and that a photograph can never speak truth duel with the ever-present human desire to commune with what is forever lost in the past. The photographer, as one case study will show, who can smoke out into consciousness the inherent ambivalence of the photograph as a medium might, in

the process, establish a reflexive space in which the relationship between self and distant other may be questioned and held in tension.

### **Estrangement in Aesthetics: A Way to Proximity**

Recognizing the paradox of the photograph and tapping the misses in communication that suspend the other in a state of “singularity” require seeing anew. Because the norms of the news media and of receiving its messages breed familiarity, the reflexive space necessary to see anew must be sought elsewhere. The aesthetic realm offers one possibility for fresh eyes. For Russian literary critic Victor Shklovsky, seeing anew occurs through a process of estrangement that defines the aesthetic experience; estrangement “leads us to a ‘vision,’” rather than “mere ‘recognition’” (1990: 10). Active perception shakes off the habituation that dulls encounters between self and world. Gerhard Richter’s “photo pictures,” for example, induce a disruption in recognition that inspires a vision of what he calls “beautiful meaninglessness” (Quoted in Moorhouse 2009: 44). By transposing a conventional family snapshot into a painting, from a medium whose reliability is taken for granted to a medium that demands interpretation, he gives a voice to the muteness of everyday sights that interrupts one’s sonorous relationship to fleeting experience (Moorhouse 2009: 44). Estrangement, then, lays over the smoothness of habit a “crooked road, a road in which the foot feels acutely the stones beneath it” (Shklovsky 1991: 15).

Estrangement, as Orgad demonstrates in “Have you seen Bloomberg?,” may be applied to a space of representation outside of literature and painting.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the process of estrangement will be investigated in relation to a brand of photography that falls categorically between documentary, photojournalism, and fine art. What links Shklovsky’s poems to the photographs is a shared aesthetic space that invites disruption, a disruption that Bauman identifies as a precondition of relating to and acting on behalf of an other (Bauman 1993: 148). The failure of news images, Levi-Strauss argues, is precisely that we are not “disorganized” by them; the images function within an “organized rhetoric of consumption” that inspires acceptance, not action (2005: 81).

Only in the wake of “disorganization” can questioning begin; the viewer may interrogate who the other is and how a relationship to him or her should be forged. In this way, estrangement in the aesthetic space and “proper distance” in mediation share a common goal by common means. Silverstone envisages a relationship to the other that is “produced,” “worked for” just as Shklovsky defines estrangement in poetry as the result of a language that is “difficult,” “laborious” (Silverstone 2003: 9; Shklovsky 1990: 13). A relationship to the other may never be fully apprehended; it falls in and out of focus, but in the struggle between too near and too far, between automation and awareness, that relationship, as construed in the aesthetic realm, becomes dynamic and reflexive. The call to dynamism and reflexivity echoes the proscription for ambivalence in morality and for the communicative misses that maintain the other as other, for as Bauman warns, the aesthetic space “must not...hold objects in place. Immobility is its moral sin, solidity and longevity of charts its mortal danger” (1993: 180).

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<sup>2</sup> Shklovsky is referenced in Orgad, S. (2008). “Have you seen Bloomberg?” *Global Media and Communication*. Volume 4(3): 301-327.

### **Response in the Aesthetic Space**

In addition to the reflexivity that compels seeing anew, the aesthetic space offers the possibility of a response based not on emotion or denunciation but on staring “evil in the face without immediately turning away towards imaginary benefactors or persecutors” (Boltanski 1999: 116). This space opens the way to a creative response which puts “the spectator into the director’s chair,” liberated from “the fear of danger, guilty conscience, or apprehension of shame” (Bauman 1993: 169). Bauman invokes Baudelaire’s *flâneur* as the inhabitant of the aesthetic space – he who observes and reflects from afar. In its insistence on an unfiltered, reflexive vision, the aesthetic space should not be conflated with the aesthetic experience Chouliaraki presents in the “tableau vivant” of the 2003 BBC Iraqi war footage (2006b; 2009). The visualization of war as flashes of light against a lifeless plane constructs suffering as “sublime,” as “a scene of action without enemies or victims” (2009: 527; 2006b: 267). The footage affords the “experience of a sensational performance” but negates consideration of suffering either as “unjust” or as “touching” (Chouliaraki 2006b: 267; Boltanski 1999: 115). Chouliaraki identifies an aestheticization that chills a moral response to suffering. What I propose is not an “aestheticization of suffering” so much as the creation of an aesthetic space that favors interaction over passivity through a creative response that folds awareness of the other into the “in-between moments.”

Critical to the realization of potential within the aesthetic space, however, is its alignment with a moral imperative. Drawing on the example of “successful love,” Bauman locates cooperation and assistance in the convergence of an aesthetic space with

a moral space. The moral realm draws responsibility into the foreground by wedging a distance between self and other from which respect and care may be cultivated while the aesthetic spacing prevents responsibility from hardening into “the empty shell of rule-sponsored duty” by preserving a process of seeing anew (1993: 180).

### **Conceptual Frame: Witnessing**

The examples of an alternative representation of suffering that appropriate communicative failure as a productive force and that establish responsibility from within the aesthetic space will be thematized around the concept of witnessing and in particular around “bearing witness.”

In its general function as the mediation of first-hand experience to an absent audience called upon as judge and jury, witnessing frames the nature of relations between photographer and viewer (Peters 2009: 25).

Witnessing also enacts the wider failure of communication by making manifest the distance between the “seen” and the “said” (Peters 2009: 25). The solipsism inherent to the human condition means that a “veracity gap” nests itself in the process of truth-telling (Peters 2009: 27). The exchange of sensory experience can only transpire through a representation, but that representation will always fall short. Witnessing is “a discourse with a hole in it that awaits filling” (Peters 2009: 25). The need, then, is to cultivate a form of witnessing that is conscious of itself as a construction, not a reflection, of experience. Herein lies the difference between “eye-witnessing” and “bearing witness.” An eye-witness has no leeway to create the impression of an experience. Facts, objectivity and historical accuracy dominate the eye-witness account (Oliver 2004: 81;

Chouliaraki 2009: 524). The news media could be said, and often claim, to perform an eye-witness function through what Hall calls a “reflective approach” to representation that invests in language as a mirror of reality (Hall 1997: 23). The allegiance to mimetic representation, though, extinguishes the tributary narratives attached to an experience and filters the extreme emotions associated with scenes of suffering.

“Bearing witness,” by contrast, approaches representation through a “constructionist approach” that validates symbolic expression as a means of relaying experience (Hall 1997: 25). While eye-witnessing testifies to facts, bearing witness accounts for the condition of experiencing, the “truth about humanity and suffering” (Oliver 2004: 81). Bearing witness “sanctions an interpretation of what is being witnessed” that may not conform to historical fact but that attests to a psychological reality (Zelizer 1998: 10; Oliver 2004: 83). Sontag’s example of how Goya’s paintings deploy imagery as “synthesis” rather than verisimilitude captures the essence of bearing witness. The paintings “claim things *like* this happened” (Sontag 2003: 47). When scenes of suffering puncture the limits of what seems possible or even imaginable, an account of facts may not penetrate the psyche (Cohen 2001: 174). Instead, representation must attempt an ‘intelligibility of Being-in-the-world’ that ‘expresses itself as discourse’ (Heidegger quoted in Hook 2010: 15). When Heidegger distinguishes between *gerede* and *rede* as two modes of intersubjective communication, he makes the distinction between a speech-act and discourse. Mimetic representation in the sense of an eye-witness account might be likened to *gerede* as an initial form of sense-making, as ‘passing the word along’ while *rede* resembles an act of bearing witness by focusing, not on the thing itself, but on how it might be revealed (Heidegger quoted in Hook 2010: 15).

*Rede* presents a framework for understanding that anchors information (Hook 2010: 15). In the following case studies, the photographers bear witness in the sense of creating a framework for comprehension in both the photographs themselves and their modes of presentation.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Objectives**

Probing the possibilities of bearing witness in photography aims to take on Cohen's final plea in *States of Denial*. To Berger's contention that those who 'pass over' images of suffering are unworthy of attention, Cohen retorts: "I would not like to believe this," ending the book with both a personal hope and a quiet directive ((Berger quoted in Cohen 2001: 301; Cohen 2001: 301). Cohen invites the reader to view those who walk the path, head cast down while Icarus drowns one glance away as part of a framework of missteps in the mediated representations of suffering. He suggests that those who "pass over" suffering might be engaged by remedying the framework. This paper ventures to systematize the methods certain photographers have used to redress the broken framework, offering an alternative that penetrates even as "we are busy somewhere else: eating, opening a window, just walking along" (Cohen 2001: 295). To the question of how photographers, through choices of subject and framing, can facilitate a lasting moral connection, the hypothesis is twofold: (1) by appropriating the paradox of communication reflected in photography itself as a productive force and (2) by embracing the aesthetic space as an alternative to the restrictions of the news formula.

The search for alternatives is prompted not only by Cohen's injunction but as a response to the continuous death knell sounded in photojournalism as the economic model that suited a pre-digital era fails to support photographers in the field. The August 2009 headline in *The New York Times*: "Lament for a Dying Field" reads like an obituary of the Gamma photo agency and of a field of photojournalism that fixed the gaze on suffering by the power and quality of its content. The implication extends beyond a loss of the photographs capable of forging a connection between viewer and distant other. Psychiatrist Anthony Feinstein, who specializes in the treatment of journalists with post-traumatic stress disorder, has witnessed the psychological impact of risking death for images that might never be seen. The volume of cheap images available to news agencies coupled with the censoring codes of decency in Western media undermine the photographer's sense of purpose: "What's the journalist left with?" he asks (personal communication, 10 July 2009). "Who looks at them [the photographs]?" This paper makes no claim to a solution; it merely points out the need to ask the question of what forms of photographic representation exist beyond the news format and proposes a categorization of approaches already ventured.

### **Research Design and Methodology: Interviews and Visual Analysis**

Interviews of photographers served the research question in two capacities. First, they establish the language the photographers used to make the books, films, websites and exhibitions have the effect they sought. In this sense, the interviews served a similar function as those in Lutz and Collins' examination of photographs in *National Geographic*. Lutz and Collins interviewed the magazine's editors and staff photographers

to code and engage with their content analysis of photographs. Establishing the ideological frames, styles, intentions, points of departure and resistance authenticates the semiological reading of the work beyond the pure subjective of personal interpretation. Hall's association between knowledge of codes and the reading of ideologies projected onto images applies equally to the reading of all images beyond the denotive level. "At the connotive level, we must refer, *through* codes, to the orders of social life, of economic and political power and of ideology," for codes "contract relations for the sign with the wider universe of ideologies in a society" (Hall quoted in Rose 2007: 95). Similarly, the codes of the photographers interviewed grant access to the nature of signs operating in the work and guide visual analysis.

The reliance on the artist's intentions, language, and process to interpret the photographs could be criticized for its reliance on an "auteur theory" of visual analysis (Rose 2007: 19). The critics of "auteur theory" argue that an image's effects depend, not on the artist's intentions, but on its reading in a wider social and visual context. As Barthes' interpretation of a black soldier pictured on the cover of *Paris-Match* or Hall's analysis of the "grammars of race" filtered through even the most well-intentioned television programs establish, the absorption of a representation is divorced from the intentions that inspired its creation (Barthes 1973: 127; Hall 1995: 21). However, the interviews along with the photographer's statement of purpose on their websites and in previous interviews were coded for guiding analytical frameworks, not for the photographer's particular interpretations of the work. Furthermore, the research question does not address the spectator's digestion of the images and the engrained ideologies projected onto them; rather, it aims at a more modest delineation of the artists' creative

response to the deficits in photojournalism. The mapping of audience “effects,” while crucial to understanding if the proposal for an alternative delivers its objectives, would require an account of the gallery visits, website hits, book sales, and reviews associated with the projects along with in-depth surveys of viewer experience. The validity of findings through such surveys would demand a breadth of research beyond the practical constraints of this paper. Even with adequate resources, how a photograph and its presentation enter the “in-between” spaces is a psychological question of which the surveyed subject may not be aware. Instead, the paper relies on empirical data to outline proposals and on relevant theory to suggest its possible impact.

Taken for granted, then, is the notion that photographs can “work within” us over time to catalyze certain effects as James Van der Zee’s 1926 “Family Portrait” did for Barthes. Looking at Van der Zee’s photograph, Barthes writes, “I thought I had discerned what moved me...but this photograph has *worked* within me” (2000: 53). Barthes concludes that direct vision may hinder a photograph’s influence, that only in remembrance can its true force be known. Similarly, the projects here analyzed are designed to initiate a slow, reverberating force of impact through a questioning of the habits of vision.

On a practical level, the interviewees also provided factual information about the life and impact of their projects not available in the public domain. When arguing that certain projects had an impact by creating a framework for action, I relied on the interviews to reveal the connection between a project and its ripple effects. Photographer Sara Terry, for example, explained that her *Aftermath: Bosnia’s Long Road to Peace* project provided the platform and inspiration for the establishment of a grant program for

other photographers to explore the conditions of post-war countries. The interviews were crucial in tracing a project's afterlife and its generative capacity.

The visual analysis then allowed for a teasing out of the analytical guide supplied by the interviews. In particular, the contributions of Barthes and Berger provide the structural framework to examine the tensions between referent and image, between "meaning" and "signification" that can misinform or oversimplify relations between viewer and distant other (Barthes 1973: 123).

Both the interviews and the visual analysis, however, qualify as subjective data. The researcher participates in the production of the interview data and in the "reading" of images. At no point can the data be scanned for "pure" results. In fact, the very filtering of such subjective results through the scientific language of qualitative research guides imparts an aura of validity that may be illusory. In relation to the interviews, however, this paper assumes that "interactionist research" can tap realities that exist beyond the context of the interview itself; to maintain otherwise is "to grant narrative omnipotence" (Miller & Glassner 2004: 129). Information does not exist in free form; it is constructed in the interaction between interviewer and respondent (Holstein & Gubrium 2004:141). For Studs Terkel, interviewing for *Working* meant having a conversation, and with time 'the sluice gates of dammed up hurts and dreams were open' (Holstein & Gubrium 2004:141). Similarly, my participation in the interviews was aimed at guiding and probing, not projecting and persuading.

Admittedly, in the interpretation of images, cultural and social context inform interpretation (Loizos 2000: 95). For that reason, the structural approach to signs offered

by Barthes and Berger allows for a systematic reading that does not eliminate subjectivity but refracts the analysis through a shared language of interpretation.

### **Sampling of Data**

The eight interviewees represent a cross-sampling of age, nationality, professional status, and sex, but all participants, with the exception of Dr. Feinstein, fit the criteria of photographers covering war and conflict. The analysis, however, draws on data from only three respondents. Susan Meiselas, Sara Terry, and Asim Rafiqui differ in aesthetic style, professional background, and subject matter but share an intention to challenge the norms of understanding conflict abroad and to infuse the connection between viewer and distant other with complexity; thus, they represent a diversity of views that could be collectively thematized. The images analyzed exemplify the thematic foundation reflected in the interviews. Focusing on the three sacrificed breadth of opinions for depth of analysis. In addition, the material gathered from the three accounts for the majority of overall data gathered with seven hours of interviews and a rich corpus of work from which to draw.

The elimination of Kathryn Cook resulted from the overlaps in opinion and style with Sara Terry. Both Johan Spanner and John D. McHugh were interviewed to include the views of war and conflict photojournalists serving main stream media organizations, namely *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. While they both argued for a revision in the way that photojournalists approach the coverage of suffering, they proposed alternatives that functioned from within the news media formula, opting above all for a diversification of formats to present the work. Their proposals indicate an awareness of the need for alternatives but left little to analyze. Olivier Jobard's interview served as a

pilot test of the answerability and clarity of questions (Chadwick, Bahr, & Albrecht 1984: 120). The results, however, could not be transcribed because a technical failure erased all but the first minute of the interview. Lastly, Dr. Feinstein's interpretation of the primacy of bearing witness to the photojournalist's psychological survival in covering atrocity supports the use of a witnessing framework but does not add to the proposals for alternative representation.

### **Design of Research Tools**

To conduct "semistructured" interviews that were (1) conversational, (2) guided by respondent answers and (3) relevant to the questions of how to effect change through photography, I memorized an "interview guide" with topic headings, the question suggestions, and possible follow-up questions; without referring to the guide during the interview, I used it as an outline to steer the conversation (Esterberg 2002: 87) (See Appendix 2 for sample interview guide).

The transcriptions follow a "linear writing model" to reflect simultaneous speaking between interviewer and interviewee (Kowal & O'Connell 2004: 250) (See Appendix 3 for sample transcription). The depiction of simultaneous speaking provides a means of scrutinizing the quality of data by depicting (1) the number of times the researcher interrupted the interviewee to introduce a new question or add a personal reflection, possibly interfering with the respondent's ability to expand on a thought and (2) the degree to which the researcher participated in the production of information. In the end, though, the grammar of the written word proved inadequate to mirror the pauses, tone, intonation, and speed of speech, which constrained the researcher's ability to

interpret not only the content of the words but the information locked in their construction (Holstein & Gubrium 2004: 156).

Following Schmidt's recommendations for transcription analysis, I first coded each transcript for themes and then organized the themes into analytical categories reflected in the sub-section headings of the analysis chapter (2004: 255-256). The images are grouped according to the analytical category they exemplify. Since the research question addresses the representation itself, not the conditions of its production or the nature of audience response, analysis focuses on the site of the image (Rose 2007: 13).

## **Analysis**

### **A Failure of Communication: The "How" of Bearing Witness**

#### **Generative Frameworks**

For the three photographers, the eye-witness account conveys the fact of the distant other, not an understanding that sustains meaningful connection. For Meiselas, the value of the eye-witness in photojournalism rests in "just being there...being there is a big piece of the work, but it's not all the work" (personal communication, 29 June 2009). Meiselas experienced the limitations of the eye-witness account during her coverage of the Mozote massacre in El Salvador. "That's the place where I thought that if people saw *this* they might actually pay attention. Not to so much *do* something, but at least *know* something and care" (Meiselas quoted in Lubben 2008: 120). Terry, too, identifies the simultaneous necessity and failure of mimetic representation in the news media. Introducing her *Aftermath: Bosnia's Long Road to Peace* website of photographs, she

acknowledges that “photojournalists provided remarkable images for the world of that war,” but the photographs contain only a fragment of a story that continued beyond them (Terry n.d.). The war in Bosnia did not end because the coverage ended. Terry opens the first chapter of the book that accompanies the project with the words of one Sarajevo university student: “Everyone thinks it’s great that the war is over. But we Bosnians often say we have yet to survive the peace. This Peace” (Terry 2005: 15). The eye-witness account fails to inspire a caring because its linear representation, confines the subject, whether a Bosnian widow or the victims of the Mozote massacre, to object; the pictured assume a fixed identity that cannot shift as their lives do: “I think where many photographers fall short is that they put all their focus on the object” when the object is only “a point in the process” (Meiselas, personal communication, 29 June 2009).

Connecting viewer and other, for Meiselas, mandates “building a larger framework for that object that then creates other ways for participation” (personal communication, 29 June 2009). For Terry, the creation of a space for context building and interaction is the framework. She argues that the digital age, in particular, necessitates the artist, the storyteller, and the poet “to take this onslaught of information...and give it meaning, give it context, give it a story” (personal communication, 13 July 2009). Rafiqi argues for the construction of an historically-grounded framework that supplants the existing frameworks in the news media that have trained people to see and think narrowly. He envisions a framework that pulls up the rope in the sand to reveal the totality of a situation in the way that Said exposed the undercurrents of prejudice towards the East. For Rafiqi, “the only battles in the past that have been won have been the battles in history” even if “they may be losing battles on the

ground because they're confronting an overwhelming force" (personal communication, 25 June 2009). In all three cases, the construction of a framework encourages relating as a dynamic process. Bearing witness, connecting other to viewer across space and time, involves more than the faithful reflection of an eye-witness account, for, as Rafiqui notes, the eye-witness photograph often mirrors what photographers know their editors will publish, what affirms ideologies that undermine a true understanding of the other. Rather, bearing witness requires laying a foundation that invites a curiosity in the other that prefaces responsibility. The notion of establishing a framework for the potential of connection reflects an awareness that communication does not transpire in a straight line drawn between one and the other but in the facilitated movement towards one another.

Meiselas's *aka Kurdistan*, a website that archives and invites photographs of the Kurdish people, embodies a generative framework built around the notion of connection as timeless and dynamic. The absence of a recorded Kurdish history spurs an imperative to uncover more in "a circular process" that "invigorates a kind of reflection because you're not just being told something, you're also contributing" (personal communication, 29 June 2009). As Lacan argued, the sense of not being able to know an other plants a desire to connect; Meiselas represents that desire by dissolving the finitude of the photographic frame. The site describes itself as a "borderless space" that "provides the opportunity to build a collective memory" (Meiselas n.d.). Meiselas' version of bearing witness to both the past and the present of Kurdish culture consists in an incremental plugging of knowledge gaps. During the first exhibits of the photographs from 1996, the museums across Europe and the United States sectioned off a room for the recording of stories and the scanning of photographs supplied by the Kurdish diasporas in each

country. As the show traveled, the images and accounts from the previous country were incorporated into the show and uploaded to the website (personal communication, 29 June 2009). Meiselas bears witness by layering stories, photographs and provocations, moving towards, but never reaching an unknowable “it.” At the end of *Pictures from a Revolution*, a film she made with Richard Rogers and Alfred Guzzetti to document her ten-year anniversary return to Nicaragua, she reflects that “I don’t really know what it means to just move on, to say, ‘Well, it’s over.’ Is it over? What’s the ‘it’? What was ‘it’?” (Meiselas, Rogers & Guzzetti 2007). Part of the photographer’s directive, then, is building the apparatus that will allow the work to continue, “knowing what you have to do, give, contribute, and what you don’t and others can – that whole space of acknowledgment. That’s partly what allows me to have other kinds of participants in the *aka Kurdistan*” (personal communication, 29 June 2009).

Terry, too, folded into the project itself her own awareness of reaching for a moving target “it” in representing a situation that, like the history of the Kurdish people, had fallen into the shadows of public consciousness. She refers to her book as a “final word at the moment,” and about the project as whole, she says that “There was nothing definitive in the work” even if there was “a time for the work to end” on her part, the website continues on as “a springboard” and “a conversation” (personal communication, 13 July 2009). So, too, will the message of the project be carried on in the “Aftermath” grant she created out of the project to fund other photographers covering processes of reconciliation around the world. “That’s the way that I think we can create some kind of impact in the world” (personal communication, 13 July 2009).

In fact, Rafiqui's *Idea of India*, a website he designed to challenge conceptions of an inextricable Hindu-Muslim divide, was awarded the fellowship this year. The *Idea of India*, like *aka Kurdistan* and the *Aftermath* project, approaches change by an incremental chipping away at harmful frameworks of representation and exposing an Indian past and present that hug the shadows because they have not served political imperatives. The British colonial administration and visiting anthropologists needed to make sense of the "huge polyglot space" of India in 1875; they issued a census to organize the population that mandated people identify themselves as either Hindu or Muslim, a division that effaced "a vast landscape of pantheistic beliefs, inconsistent, different,...without a common source" (personal communication, 25 June 2009). Contemporary political movements like the right-wing Hindutva, exploit the misleading division to assert power, "to create a monotheism of Hinduism" through a manufactured idea of India.

Rafiqui organizes anecdote-like entries about his discovery of a place of worship historically shared by Hindus and Muslims or of a local poet who captured India's pluralistic identity into a grid of stories. In consecutive lines across the webpage, Rafiqui places one photograph and the first line of the entry's text. With a click on the photograph, a page opens to the full text of the entry and accompanying photographs. With each return trip to India, he adds to the grid. He does not organize the content of discovery around inherited subject guides. The structure of the website itself challenges the notion of Hindus and Muslims as "two separate people" who "always were incompatible" and offers the alternative framework that in "real experience...we are actually not these characterized separate identities. We make accommodations with each other all the time" (personal communication, 25 June 2009). The *Idea of India* imparts a

sense of infinite pluralism of Indian identity through an egalitarian presentation that could continue in a ceaseless chain of additions in the grid.

All three photographers incorporate into the structure of the projects themselves an awareness of the nature of communication – the pull of the unknown and the inscrutable complexity of the other that inspires a responsibility to respect and to inquire. In so doing, they imbue the work with a surrender to the “singularity” of the other that lays the groundwork for a moral relation that, like the work itself, has no end.

### **The Return**

The photographers also manifest the failure of communication as a productive force in bearing witness through the notion of return. If relating to a distant other occurs as a process without end and if a moral relationship to the other requires the maintenance of a quest, then the representation of an other necessitates a return. The eye-witness account aims at the here-and-now; bearing witness as return aims at the here-and-ago. The three photographers incorporate return in the forms of (1) a physical return, (2) an historical return, and (3) a return to the image itself. They use the magnetic pull of never knowing to draw them back and to probe the laying of the past onto the present.

All three have structured a physical return into each of their projects. Rafiqi spent his August 2009 in India to build on the *Idea of India*; Meiselas returned to Nicaragua for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war and of her coverage of it in July 2009; Terry conducted her research of Bosnia over five years of return visits. The physical return for Terry also meant the return to a place that the international community had released from its consciousness. “I was angered by such international shortsightedness and deeply dismayed by the fact that the West was preparing to once again turn its back on Bosnia”

(Terry, n.d.). She returned to Bosnia to bear witness to a war that has never ended. While she recognizes the personal risk of covering war in action, she likens the job of representation to “shooting fish in a barrel.” “Everything’s around you; the layers are there to be seen” (personal communication 13 July 2009). She returned in the sense of returning to the coverage of a war that had captured half the story. She resists the notion that war transpires in the exchange of gun fire alone. If the impetus behind covering a war is, in part, to connect a viewer or audience to remote suffering, then Terry returned to represent a story that exceeded the frame of a battle scene. To embrace the present means representing the here-and-ago as an inseparable continuum.

Rafiqi’s return to India, too, involves more than his repeated trips. The *Idea of India* revisits the established history of India in order to represent an actual history, not one manufactured for political gain. He operates from an understanding that the past filters the present and questions how a past predicated on false history fuels rifts among the Indian population. The title of the project refers, in part, to the name of Khilnani’s own revisionist history of India in which he, too, offers an alternative to the imperial, post-imperial, and nationalist literature that “have suffused the sensibilities of popular and specialist writings about India” (1997: 1). Khilnani fashions an India united in its plurality. He describes Indian nationalism before independence as plural “even at the top, a *dhoti* with endless folds” (1997: 6). Rafiqi represents the “endless folds” in Indian history, and in so doing he seeks to alter the very material of the layers that inform the present, “to raise a generation of Pakistanis and Indians, Muslims and Hindus who see passed the false sectarian histories and say, ‘Oh wait a minute. That doesn’t make sense. It’s not true that Hindus and Muslims always lived apart because I remember this idiot

photographer whose been taking photographs in Ayodhya where he showed me that we had mosques right next to temples” (personal communication, 25 June 2009). If Indians knew of a history of compatibility and pluralism, might they be less susceptible to the Hindutva’s calls to war? The project returns to the history in order to undermine the grounds of appeal to violence.

Meiselas also initiates a symbolic return. Ten years after the Sandanista revolution ended, she installed nineteen images around the “Triumph” over Somoza on 19 July 1979 in the very places they had been photographed (Lubben 2008: 121). In prompting a return to the image and in recording the return in *Pictures from a Revolution*, Meiselas captures the re-narration of the events around the revolution, imbuing photographs in mass circulation with a living meaning. As Begrer writes, “photographs in themselves do not preserve meaning”; they “preserve instant appearances” (1980: 51). Meaning surfaces in the space of memory. The relationship to a private photograph is sustained because it “lives in an ongoing continuity.” The image of a mother will recall lived experience. The public photograph inversely is “torn from its context, and becomes a dead object which, exactly because it is dead, lends itself to any arbitrary use” (1980: 56). In the ten years leading to the return, many of Meiselas’ photographs had been stripped of their association with the people and situations they depicted; they had entered the field of pure symbol. The Sandanistas used an image Meiselas had taken of a man throwing a molotov bomb to organize the militia; the Contras used the same image to undermine the Sandanistas. They stenciled the image on walls and printed it on matchbox covers (Meiselas, Rogers & Guzzetti 2007). (See Appendix 1: Images 1-3). In what Meiselas calls this “war of images,” the photograph first documented, then illustrated, and finally

came only to symbolize (Meiselas, Rogers & Guzzetti 2007). As the primacy of the message projected onto the Molotov man came to overrule the image's original context, the photograph entered the realm of myth in the Barthian sense. "Myth," Barthes explains, "is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message"; the form supersedes meaning (1973: 109). The image as myth does not inspire remembrance, and remembering, for Berger, is an affirmation, a "recognition" (1980: 54). Meiselas used the photographs to stir a narrated remembrance critical to understanding the revolution's place in the continued economic and political desperation in Nicaragua in the 1990s.

She unified the image's symbolic field. Who was the man in the photograph? What were the circumstances of his throwing the bomb? What had become of him? For Berger, the aim of what he calls "alternative photography" is building a context that makes the public photograph function as a private photograph with resonant meaning that rescues it from a type of death (1980: 60). Barthes similarly envisions a kind of destructive capacity in the disjunction between photograph and its referent: "The Photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both" (2000: 6). In *Pictures from a Revolution*, a Monimbo woman studies the photograph Meiselas shot of her as a fourteen-year old girl carting her dead husband to a grave. The woman's face lights with recognition when she realizes she is wearing the same earrings pictured in the photograph (Meiselas, Rogers & Guzzetti 2007). (See Appendix 1: Image 4). In that moment, the photograph, as a symbol of the generalizable horror of war, is conjoined with the reality of its referent; the

photograph “lives in an ongoing continuity” represented in the earrings that are simultaneously a trace of the past and a fragment of the present (Berger 1980: 56).

Not only does Meiselas facilitate the re-contextualization of images and the awareness of a past that might possess clues to how the revolution failed to deliver its material promises, she uses the return to enforce a visceral, lived experience of the present walking through the past. For her, “the fixed nature of a photograph provokes the question of ‘Is it really over, closed, contained...What else is around it potentially?’” (personal communication, 29 June 2009). She posed the question in visual terms by printing the nineteen images on a see-through mesh material that created a composite of past onto present. (See Appendix 1: Image 5). A pictured militia man with a rifle looks onto a street of war-ravaged buildings and onto the school children who would inhabit the street ten years later. The past visually layers the present. The photograph becomes a contested space; it bears no truth, carries no inherited meaning. Its value stems from a capacity to produce a reflexive space.

For Meiselas, a “re-witnessing” of the images “becomes particularly interesting...in a country where half the population...did not live that war.” For them, the effect is “disruptive”; “it begins a set of questions...it’s a provocation, and it leads to a kind of self-interrogation or an interrogation of others” (personal communication, 29 June 2009). The “being there,” the eye-witness account, formed the basis of her coverage, then “the analysis of understanding why things are happening and trying to figure out a way to visualize that” led her to a return (person communication, 29 June 2009). The film documenting the installation of the photographs and the reactions they produced bears witness to the layered discourse, the *rede*, surrounding the war. It suggests that a certain

understanding of the distant other can be gained, not by the reporting of an event, but by a knowing suspended in a continued process of coming to know. The coming to know holds no promise of final knowledge and thus sustains the Levinasian alterity of the other central to a moral relationship.

## **A Function of the Aesthetic Space: The “Where” of Bearing Witness**

### **Representing the Unrepresentable**

Other aspects of bearing witness surface as a function of the aesthetic space in which they operate. While all three photographers have contributed to major media publications, the work here discussed exists on the margins of the mainstream. It functions within an aesthetic space that sanctions alternative forms of representation that expand on the possibilities of relating offered by the news media. One manifestation of possibility within the aesthetic space is a representation of the unrepresentable. In material terms, this could mean releasing into the public domain materials crucial to understanding a distant other but outside the conventional narrative structure of representation. While editing her 1997 *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*, Meiselas realized that “it’s a false idea to have a visual history,” that a book ends in a way that the history does not (personal communication, 29 June 2009). She came across a technology Apple had been developing to connect people to the Internet through a CD-ROM and resolved to present the complete archive of Kurdish images supplied to her through an Internet link on a CD-ROM included in each copy of the book that would allow people to follow the archive’s expansion in years to come (personal communication, 29 June 2009). The Internet found its way to personal computers before Apple completed the CD-ROM

technology, and Meiselas launched *aka Kurdistan* as an alternative. What the original concept demonstrates, however, is the way that play within the aesthetic space layers the relation between viewer and other, introducing the potential for creative response. In molding and editing material to the rules of a particular format, the photographer must snip away the dangling threads of a story, and in that judgment they risk forsaking an element that might connect to a viewer.

Representing the unrepresentable also manifests itself in symbolic form. Visual media in the news must conform to a linear representation that illustrates unambiguously through a repertoire of familiar symbols. Rafiqui notes the hypocrisy of a *New York Times* photojournalist reprimanded for staging a photograph of a Taliban member holding a gun. For Rafiqui, the photographer knew that the editors would publish the photograph for its ability to illustrate, not for its authenticity of representation (personal communication, 25 June 2009). In the aesthetic space, however, the photographer can communicate a more complex account with unrecognizable symbols.

Terry covered a war in Bosnia, but not the war of guns and smoke. She photographed the intangibles, “the underlying sensibilities” that made the aftermath a non-event in news media terms. To do so, she had to be comfortable “working with ambiguity, with blur in photograph” (personal communication, 13 July 2009). She recalls a photograph of a widow shot through a window taken the day the ground for the Srebrenica memorial was dedicated. (See Appendix 1: Image 6). The woman is a blur and seems to hold her hand out to a smudged formation on the window that resembles the outline of an angel. For her, the image is “full of emotion,” “full...of a certain melancholy.” At the same time, the aquas and greens that fill the border of the image

communicate “voice,” “other possibilities” (personal communication, 13 July 2009). Arthur Berger calls the effect of color “coercive”; it stimulates emotion, “makes us feel and see in a certain way” (2008: 83). The colors in Terry’s image shroud the somber outline of a widow in a bright hue (2008: 83). The photograph captures what Barthes calls the “*air*,” “the expression of truth” (2000: 109). When he found the “Winter Garden Photograph” of his mother, he did not “recognize” her; he “discovered her: a sudden awakening, outside of likeness” (2000: 109). This is the unrepresentable in Terry’s photographs – the “*air*” that records the currents of conflicted emotion associated with reconciliation and recovery. The expression of a time and place that has no established visual correlate requires the freedom from constraint possible in the aesthetic space.

Rafiqi, too, exploits the freedoms of the aesthetic space to convey complexity and to inspire an active connection between viewer and viewed. Terry sought to translate an “*air*” into the visual, Rafiqi attempts to communicate an idea. He represents the idea of an Indian identity grounded in plurality by resisting facile topic headings to organize his photographs (See Appendix 1: Image 7). Each image bears a non-descript reference number, i.e. “ideaofindia\_023\_005.” Rafiqi provides no textual “anchorage” to “disambiguate the image” (Penn 2000: 229; see also Rose 2007: 87). He opens the reading of the photographs as he opens the reading of Indian identity, representing the idea of India through a structure of presentation permissible in the aesthetic realm. As the colonial census labeled a diverse population either Muslim or Hindu and shadowed the complexity of identity, the “anchorage” of text stymies the polysemic potential of the photograph (Penn 2000: 229; Rose 2007: 98).

Meiselas used the aesthetic space of the art gallery to visualize the editorial gaps created during the production process. The gallery space allowed her “to play and try to make different ideas work” (Meiselas quoted in Lubben 2008: 159). The idea for the 1984 “Mediations” at London’s Camerawork was the visual representation of a question: How does communication miss? Where does it fail to make one known to an other? She displayed the photographs in three lines. The center line followed the chronological layout of her book. Along the top line, she displayed the same images only as they appeared in the international press, highlighting how the press edited and framed the images. The bottom line included the images edited from the press and from her book. (See Appendix 1: Image 8). In visualizing the interruptions of representation produced during the editorial process, she added a layer of contextualization around the telling of Nicaragua’s revolution, a layer critical to the connection between spectator and distant other. The idea stemmed both from her own experiences editing images for *Nicaragua* in which she “tended to omit the ordinary scenes of daily life” in order to engage the reader in a dominant narrative and from the knowledge that the image of a corpse on the edge of the Managua Mountains, an image emblematic of the Nicaraguan and the El Salvadoran struggles, would never be published in the international press because it violated the code of decency (Meiselas quoted in Lubben 2008: 158-159) (See Appendix 1: Image 9). She bore witness by representing the revolution and then exposing the process of representation itself; she expanded on the “witnessing” and “deliberative” genres through the aesthetic field.

### **Estrangement in the Aesthetic Space**

Tied to a notion of representing the unrepresentable is Shklovsky's association between the aesthetic space and estrangement. Visualizing what might otherwise remain in the shadows of representation and disrupting the habit of vision contribute to the same end – a dynamic relationship between self and other founded on complexity. The process of estrangement, in particular, facilitates that dynamism by cajoling the viewer out of passivity, out of the habit of seeing the distant other as an illustration of the victim or the perpetrator. Barthes interprets a type of estrangement in photography through his conception of the *punctum*, the element that pricks because it cannot be named. “The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance” (2000: 51). The task of trying to identify one's own terms recalls Shklovsky's association between the “principle of difficulty” and estrangement. The poet, in refusing to name an object outright, compels the reader to pause, and in that moment “the object is perceived not spatially but...in its temporal continuity. That is, because of this device, the object is brought into view” (1990: 12). The object in this case is the distant other, and the act of bringing into view is the facilitation of a relationship not inherited, but constructed in the present tense. Responsibility may then surface in the space of a lived relationship. Rafiqui produced an estrangement by displaying his photographs without captions. The viewer must labor for the meaning of the photographs. Terry, too, resisted anchoring the images in her book. “You're forced first to confront the image and confront what it means and then you have the information and the captions for more journalistic context” at the end of each chapter (personal communication, 13 July 2009). She also created a type of estrangement by

photographing a widow framed in the brightness of aqua blue. The picture cannot be named “helpless victim”; it invites a pause.

Meiselas constructs an experience of estrangement with the interview of a Somoza soldier in *Pictures from a Revolution*. The frame is tight on his tearful face as he recounts the loss of friends in the war. Suddenly, his disillusionment sounds like that of the Sandanistas interviewed before him, and his assessment “So many dead. All for nothing” triggers the sentiment that war makes victims of all sides, that the evil is the war, not the people fighting it. The frame opens as he speaks, and the stump of his forearm comes into view. One assumes the injury to be a product of the war. Sympathy for the humanity of the Somoza side is irrepressible. The man is silenced by his tears, and in that quiet Meiselas reveals in voiceover that she first heard the name of this man after the burning of Pantasma, a remote village in Nicaragua. She narrates, over horrific images of women surveying the damage and men shot dead in a field, that the man being interviewed was a Contra field commander connected to the town’s destruction and to the murder of Sandanista sympathizers. The film then returns to the man as he explains that he fought with the Contras to save his country: “The wounds I suffered in this war were for my country” (Meiselas, Rogers & Guzzetti 2007). The effect of the movement between scenes and the carefully placed revelation of information disrupts any simplistic assessment of the man. To assimilate the visual and auditory cues requires the labor of questioning; the viewer may never settle into the comfortable tropes of the roles played in war by helpless victim, hopeful revolutionary and heartless perpetrator. The sequence estranges by interrupting every attempt to name this other, and in so doing constructs the pretext for a relationship built on singularity, not similarity.

## Conclusion

Susan Meiselas, Sara Terry, and Asim Rafiqi visualize suffering and conflict as an image and as a process. The image performs its role as eye-witness, and the construction of process bears witness to the discourses of production, interpretation, and relating that form around that image. The incorporation of process upsets the norms of seeing; it folds into the encounter with a distant other a ceaseless questioning, a coming-to-know that prefaces the acceptance of a responsibility to the other. If the ploughman could see himself walking passed Icarus, if he could see himself reflected in the landscape of suffering, would he not question his own passivity? The representation of process in the visualization of suffering holds a mirror to the spectator's position in the scene of suffering that undermines a one-dimensional relationship to the distant other.

Like the work of the three photographers, this paper has no ending. It sought a categorization that sparks the next question: how does the potential of an alternative representation infiltrate on the scale of the news media? The reach of the work discussed will never penetrate on the scale of CNN or the BBC. The value of a pay and protest model is that it applies to a medium woven into the fabric of the everyday. Research to follow might ask how the functional elements of an alternative representation—the mirror to process—can be folded into everyday media. In the context of his day, the ploughman does not have the option to gaze at paintings, but he can only begin to question his connection to Icarus if he has the actual possibility of seeing himself in the “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus.”

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