# Images of War and the War of Images

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*Represent first the smoke of the artillery, mingled in the air with the dust tossed up by the movement of horses and combatants... Let the air be full of arrows in every direction ... you must make the mark where [the fallen] has slipped on the dust turned into blood-stained mire... Make a horse dragging the dead body of his master, and leaving behind him in the dust and mud the track where the body was dragged along. Make the conquered and beaten pale, with brows raised and knit, and the skin above their brows furrowed with pain ... and [their] teeth apart as with crying out in lamentation.(...) Make the dead partly or entirely covered with dust... and let the blood be seen its colour flowing in a sinuous stream from the corpse to the dust. Others in the death agony grinding their teeth, rolling their eyes, with their fists clenched against their bodies, and the legs distorted.(...)*

Leonardo da Vinci (182-5)

### *War Paints*

This is how Leonardo da Vinci describes in his *Treatise on Painting* the way one should go about painting a battle. His description was in fact his blueprint for composing the *Battle of Anghiari* which he was commissioned to paint on the wall of the new Council Chamber at the Palazzo della Signioria of Florence, in 1503. Besides this indirect document about the composition and a few preliminary sketches nothing else survives of the actual painting, which was, in any case, left incomplete. A century later, Rubens took on the task of interpreting the master's vision. On the wall opposite to that designated for Leonardo's painting, the Florentian Councillors decided to have a picture depicting another memorable military victory of their city, the *Battle of Cascina*. The commission was assigned to the most celebrated young sculptor of the time, Michelangelo Buonarotti. The heated artistic rivalry between the venerable old master and the ingenious young arriviste took, in this case, a new and quite unexpected turn. Leonardo's highly dramatic composition, whose overwhelming violence and

tragic expressionism distinguishes it sharply from the characteristically serene mood and restrained style of the rest of his work, aimed to render all the mindless butchery, all of what he himself called "the bestial madness of war". Michelangelo, on the other hand, chose to depict a group of naked warriors preparing for battle, celebrating their virility, their readiness to fight for country and glory. This painting was also never completed and the only surviving evidence is a copy of Michelangelo' s preliminary sketch, made in 1542 by Aristotile da Sangalo, which reproduces part of the whole composition.

In his novelistic biography of Leonardo, Dmitri Merejkowski narrates in detail the heated controversy that was ignited by these starkly different paintings among the people and the rulers of Florence (Book XIV). Leonardo, found himself under severe pressure from the Council to change his shockingly realistic depiction of the horrors of war into an idealized and elevating representation of patriotic virtue and military triumph. The city population itself was divided. The democratic faction considered Leonardo's painting as an expression of his favour for the Medicis and of his dislike for the Republic, whereas the aristocratic faction took Michelangelo's painting to be a hymn to the Republic. Each faction embraced its favorite war painting as its banner in a fight that spread across all the quarters and the institutions of the city, leading, at some point, even to the vandalization of Michelangelo's most recent masterpiece, the statue of *David*.

All these events, perhaps somewhat extravagant to the taste of the contemporary reader/spectator, took place in an era characterized by the flowering of the visual arts and the affirmation of the epistemological sovereignty of vision. Leonardo was himself instrumental in the articulation and defense of the Quattrocento's reinstatement of painting as an *ars liberalis*, expounding at length on the supremacy of painting over the rest of the arts, as well as of vision over the rest of the senses (da Vinci 107-23). A few decades later, however, another war concerning images broke out in the West and the North of Europe, as a consequence of the austere anti-visualism preached by the Reformation. Being another episode in the long drawn-out iconoclastic controversy that has surfaced repeatedly in the history of Christianity ever since its very beginning, a veritable wave of image breaking and image prohibition swept the Protestant communities of Europe during the second half of 16th century, continuing, as in the case of England, well into the 17th century. Even the Catholic parts of the world did not avoid the twinges of icono-scepticism. In France, for example, the artistic dogma formulated by the newly founded Academies of Letters (1635) and of Painting and Sculpture (1648), emphasized the morally elevating and religiously didactic purpose of art.

It was in this context that in 1635 Nicolas Poussin painted the *Dance Round the Golden Calf*, depicting the *locus classicus* of the whole Judeo-Christian iconoclastic tradition : the revival of idolatry by the Israelites, during the long absence of Moses on Mount Sinai. According to this critical episode of the Biblical narrative (Exodus 32), upon his return, Moses was ordered by God to a-

tone for violating his prohibition of "graven images" and the worship of any other God but him (Exodus 20) by putting to the sword everyone but the Levites, bringing about, in effect, the first genocide of his people. Despite, or rather, by virtue of its explicitly didactic intentions, Poussin' s painting is, however, deeply self-contradictory. Conceived and composed in order to warn and to instruct about the dangers of iconolatry, it remains, nevertheless, an image of exceptional aesthetic merit and sensual force, an exemplary instance of the visual appeal and seduction it purports to castigate.

Poussin's contradictions reflect and reproduce, in this sense, the deeply rooted ambivalence towards images that pervades the Church's dogmatic acrobatics, which from Hypatios and Gregory the Great, in the 6th century, up to the Council of Trent of 1563, is characterized by the uneasy yet tactically imperative combination of condemning the adoration of images with the approval of their tactical use for the instruction of the illiterate and the edification of the faithful (Freedberg 397-400). Ironically, it is an ambivalence which in the case of Poussin's painting was unveiled through a typical act of iconoclastic self-rightousness: image-breaking. Reviewing both past and recent cases of image breaking, David Freedberg reports the case of a man who, in 1978, attacked the afore mentioned painting of Poussin in the National Gallery in London, noting that his blows "concentrated... on the representation of the Golden Calf itself" (421) [see cover image]. The vandal, who was subsequently diagnosed and institutionalized as a schizophrenic, seems to have assumed the role of Moses himself, attacking once again the symbol of iconolatry rather than the image itself. But if he was indeed suffering from schizophrenia then the same must be said also for Poussin, as well as for the whole of the iconoclastic tradition. Strictly speaking, our vandal and Poussin were both motivated by the same iconoclastic fervour, and in both cases, they expressed it in ways that were effectively very much iconolatric. Poussin invests on the representational and rhetorical force of the image, coming up with a richly suggestive and persuasive image about the folly and the vice of believing in images. The vandal, on the other hand, confuses the pagan idol with its representation, reacting towards the latter in the same way that the spectators at the first Lumiéres film show left their seats in panic in front of the picture of an incoming train. Notwithstanding their antagonism, iconolatry and iconoclasm do not seem very much apart then. As countless instances in at least the last twelve or so centuries of Western cultural history reveal, they share the same deeply - rooted fetishism of the image, attributing to it a supernatural, either holy or un-holy, power.

The two events we have examined so far, the Leonardo-Michelangelo controversy regarding the different ways of making a war painting, and the troublesome context and career of Poussin's picture, seem to me to be highly suggestive of the predicament of the image in modern Western culture. These two, at first sight unrelated and otherwise rather unexceptional episodes in the history of Western visuality, illustrate, in a particularly telling manner, two fundamental points of the problematic on which my whole approach to the issue of war images

is based: Firstly, that the nature and the status of images in modern Western culture — and in any culture at that — is, above all, a political issue; the production and the use of images is, in other words, always related closely to the processes of the articulation, legitimation and/or de-legitimation, of political and cultural authority. Secondly, that the issue of the visual representation of war in modern Western culture is inextricably linked with the issue of the general status ascribed in this culture to the image; the question of the images of war must, in other words, be understood and analysed in the context of the war surrounding the value and the function of the image.

## *War and the Technical Image*

The controversy surrounding war images and simultaneously the ambivalence regarding the status of the image in Western culture entered a new, particularly intense phase in the era of the technical image; in the era, that is, of photography, of cinema, of television and video, and more recently, of digital and virtual reality imaging. A prefigurement of the close link that the technical image was to develop with the representation of war can be found in Fransisco de Goya's use of lithography, which, invented in 1798, was in effect the precursor of the i-mage reproduction technologies that followed. In a series of 80 lithographs, which were made between 1808 and 1812, titled 'The Disasters of War', Goya transcribed in horrific detail the insane violence and savagery of the suppression of the Spanish uprising of 1808 by the Napoleonic army. Some of the scenes he represented he witnessed himself in the streets of Madrid as the caption "Yo lo vi" (I saw it myself), makes poignantly clear. The lithographs were first circulated in 1863, in about 500 copies, to be soon recognised as some of the most powerful indictements of war.

The role of the technical image proper in the representation of war begun with the Crimean War (1853-7), when Roger Fenton became the first photographer to be present in the field of armed conflict. Fenton, hampered by the slowness and the laboriousness of the photographic apparatus he was using, limited himself to pictures of the encampments and of posing soldiers rather than of the combat itself. The war that signaled the turning point for photography was the American Civil War (1861-5), the "first conflict in which the photographer superseded the engraver, or the sketcher for the popular press" (Fox 8). Despite the fact that photojournalism proper had not yet properly been born, since photographs, until at least the 1880s, could only be published via the making of wood engravings based on them, it was the first time that photography gave a stunning testimony of the massive destruction of human life on the field of modern warfare. The huge public impact of these pictures made clear that modern warfare was to be marked not only by mass armies and machines of mass destruction, but also by mass witnesses; all those civilians, who were traditionally cut off from the direct perception of the war, were now able to be there, right in the front line, witnessing the bloody aftermath and carnage of the battlefield through the

intrepid eye of the war photographer's camera. Such, at least, was the role-model of the war photographer established by Mathew Brady and his crew, who daringly managed to capture some of the most famous images of the American Civil War. Some of these images, however, were later revealed to have been carefully staged with an eye for dramatic impact, indicating that perhaps his reputed daring was nothing but the risk-taking spirit of a shrewd entrepreneur set to satisfy the market' s thirst for sensational war pictures.

At the turn of the century, a new vision machine, cinema, made its appearance in the battlefields. The first encounters of cinema and war were marked by profit driven deceit and propagandist fabrication, setting a pattern that was to dominate the rest of the 20th century. The first war newsreels, those of the Spanish-American war of 1898, were anything but genuine. Upon his return to New York from Cuba, Albert E. Smith realized that his footage from the heroic charge up the San Juan Hill looked extremely lame as compared to the graphic descriptions trumpeted by the newspapers. Outclassing Brady's sense for the dramaturgical, he went on to shoot a table-top version of the battle, full with cigar smoke and cardboard ships sinking in inch-deep water. Combined artfully with the shots he had taken from Cuba, this version of the battle proved a huge popular success at the Vitagraph cinemas. Following up on his success, the following year Smith was sent to Africa to cover the Boer War. Mindful, by then, of the difficulty of capturing the drama of combat, he developed his histrionics even further: he dressed up British soldiers in Boer uniforms and stage-managed their battle (Barrow 23-4). The same recipe was adopted, for propaganda reasons, by certain British film makers, who shot, in the outskirts of London, a melodramatic scene of Boers attacking callously a British front-line hospital, and presented it as genuine war footage.

In the First World War (1914-18), the British military censors allowed photographers in the front line only in 1916, when the Allied army took the offensive. Photography, however, made its presence felt in the war in another capacity as well, which was prefigured as early as 1858, when Nadar took the first aerial pictures of Paris from a balloon. Aerial photography from aircraft and balloons was systematically used by both the German and the Allied armies to provide a constant stream of vital information for artillery fire plans and for military planning in general. At the same time, cinema was drafted in the war effort as a propaganda weapon, with D.W. Griffith himself contributing his officially commissioned *Hearts of the World* (1918). In the making of the latter he also used footage taken from the front, whose grim reality, however, left him "very disappointed".

Starting from 1928, the year when the 'movies' became 'talkies', talking images made universally available through mass circulation picture magazines became a staple in living-rooms on both sides of the Atlantic, causing Siegfried Kracauer to exclaim with dismay that "in the illustrated magazines, people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from seeing" (432)! *Vu* in France, *Life* in U.S.A., *Picture Post* in Britain, the *Berliner Illustrierte*

*Zeitung* and the *Münchner Illustrierte Presse* in Germany, all achieved astonishing popularity in the 1930s by virtue of their promise to allow their readers, as the *Life* editorial ran, "To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events...to see strange things—machines, armies, multitudes...". What had initially been only just glimpsed through the war photographs of Fenton and Brady in the mid-19th century was now at last delivered. War, the most photogenic and action-packed subject of all, became readily available for all to watch due to the invention of small portable cameras such as the Leica or the Ermanox, and of faster, more light-sensitive films; both inventions allowing photographers to capture the very heat of the battle. And there was plenty of it around, particularly in the case of the Spanish Civil War (1936-9). The battlefields of the latter, as well as the concurrent militarization of Europe, provided all the "machines, armies and multitudes" necessary to fill the pages of the image hungry magazines. From the same battlefields, however, Robert Capa's photographs, just as Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), both showing the senseless brutality of war, came to acquire an iconic status, being universally recognised as enduring expressions of the horror and the destructiveness of war.

What was rehearsed during the Great War was systematically used in the even greater war that followed it. In a sense, World War II (1939-45) had begun long before the first shot was ever fired, through the growth of propaganda cinema, both of the fictional and the non-fictional kind. When the war actually started, the participating governments made sure that there was a constant supply of newsreels and documentaries specially made to inspire on the one hand, faith and confidence in the march towards victory, and on the other hand, the cultivation of hatred for the enemy. As a result, none of the civilian populations ever had a clear picture of the true extent or damage of the war; scenes of disaster, personal grief and human loss were systematically censored and emphasis was placed, by contrast, on showing marching armies, heroic soldiers, awe-inspiring new machines of war, recuperating wounded and the tenacious perseverence of civilians at the homefront. War images became, more than never before, part and parcel of the war itself. It is no accident that the following war, the Cold War, a war fought mostly on the level of images, had begun even before the previous one had ended. The period that started with the picture of the nuclear bomb exploding over Hiroshima and closed with live TV coverage of the demolition of the Berlin Wall was a period during which all kinds of images—journalistic, documentary, cinematic and even artistic—were systematically used for the symbolic annihilation of the enemy. Even the actual war images from wars taking place in various, usually far away, exotic, places—like Greece, Korea, Vietnam, Africa, the Middle East etc.—were commonly presented and perceived as showing one single, global, on-going war between Good and Evil, Light and Darkness. Moreover, all these different images were regularly presented and interpreted as nothing but shadows of a much larger and more ominous, final picture, looming over the horizon, showing the imminent end of the world.

The wars that marked the post-Cold War decade of the 1990s—the Gulf

War and the War in Kosovo — are widely thought to have brought about a new, virtually symbiotic relationship between the war and the image. Electronic imaging, whether in our homes in the form of the TV, or in an airplane's cockpit, as part of its targeting system, or mounted on a laser directed bomb, is considered by many to be the cornerstone of the same singular kind of hypermodern warfare. Now, more than ever, it is said, images can kill, while killing itself has become easier, automated, sterilized, for our enemies exist only as images. In the contemporary critique of the relation of visuality and war we find two dominant and often interlocking themes: first, that there is an eclectic affinity between vision machines and killing machines, that the historical evolution of the technologies of visual communication is closely linked to the development of the means and the mores of war. Second, that there is a complicity between the images of war and the war itself, particularly with regards to its moral neutralization, its legitimation.

## Imaging as War

An early formulation of the first theme can be traced back in McLuhan's observation that there is a close relation between literacy, a purely visual skill, and marksmanship. Thinking of weapons as he did of media, as technological extensions of man, McLuhan suggests that just as "the arrow is an extension of the hand and the arm, the rifle is an extension of the eye and the teeth" (341). Writing at the peak of the Cold War era, as well as at the beginning of the electronic age, McLuhan describes the former as a "war of icons", an "electric battle of information and of images that goes far deeper and is more obsessional than the old hot wars of industrial hardware". Avoiding, however, any facile identification of visual technology and war, he asserts that if the cold war "is being fought by informational technology, that is because all wars have been fought by the latest technology available in any culture" (339). He concludes by suggesting that modern weaponry, just as electric technology in general, overcomes, by virtue of its very inclusiveness, the psychic and social fragmentation of mechanical technology, disclosing the inter-connectedness of humanity, acting as a daily reminder of the fact that "politics and history must be recast in the form of the concretization of human fraternity" (345).

In the 1980s and 1990s the problematic first set out by McLuhan, in his notoriously anti-conventional and sweeping prose, regarding the relation between war, technology and representation, was further elaborated, in a manner at least as provocative and aphoristic, by Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard. While they took many of their cues from McLuhan's insights they also effectively reversed both his assertions and his optimistic tone.

In a series of books written just before the end of the Cold War, Paul Virilio (1986, 1989, 1994) developed the argument that the logic and the logistics of war functions as the central moving force in history, being responsible for all the characteristic innovations of the modern world, such as the city, the ever

faster means of modern transport and communication and, above all, the diffe-
rent forms of visual technology. The evolution of the latter, from the telescope
to the video and the digital image, is for Virilio effectively tantamount to the hi-
story of modern warfare. This evolutionary process he divides into three distinct
ages: the age characterized by the *reality* of the *formal logic* of traditional pictorial
representation, ending with the 18th century; the age characterized by the *actual-
ity* of the *dialectical logic* that governs the photographic and cinematic image.
And finally, the age dominated by the *virtualities* of the *paradoxical logic* of the
video, holography and digital imagery, as a result of which "the real-time image
dominates the thing represented, real time subsequently prevailing over real
space, virtuality dominating actuality and turning the very concept of reality on
its head" (1994: 63). Having earlier identified photography and cinematography
with the rise and conduct of modern warfare up to World War II (Virilio 1989),
in *The Vision Machine*, Virilio focuses on the Cold War, considering it as an
exemplary instance of the image's most recent age of paradoxical logic. He de-
scribes it as a war of disinformation and deception, of total dissimulation, fought
with the new vision machines, whose images and representations completely
eclipse the real, transferring conflict "from the actual to the virtual", into the
artificial battlefield of images and information (1994: 67-72). In the same vein, in
his post-Cold War works, Virilio focuses on the recent transportation and
information technology arguing that it takes us out of the familiar world of real
space and time, ushering us into an inhuman and degrading vertigo of demate-
rialized and disembodied existence, where vision itself and experience in general
is been taken over by machines (Virilio 1995, 1997, 1998).

A strikingly similar line of thinking we find in Jean Baudrillard. Beginning
with his *Simulacra and Simulations*, Baudrillard went on to develop the idea that
the modern means of communication have led to the creation of such an ubiqui-
tous and profusive production of images that reality has been effectively re-
placed by 'hyperreality', a world of simulacra that do not refer to anything but
themselves. The traditional distinctions between object and representation, truth
and fiction, real and imaginary have been invalidated as a result of the total ab-
sorption of the real by this overwhelming flood of artificial, self-referential signs
and images. Understanding, just like Virilio, the evolution of the image as the
process of its gradual distancing from reality, he diagnoses its current phase as
that in which it has come to "bear no relation to any reality whatever", since it
has become "its own pure simulacrum" (1983:10). It is from this perspective
that Baudrillard approached the Gulf War of 1991, as a war that, as he charac-
teristically dubbed it, never actually did take place! In his book that bears pre-
cisely this provocative title, *The Gulf War did not take place*, Baudrillard analyses
the media representations just before, during and immediately after the war,
treating the latter as a non-event, as an exemplary instance of a simulacral
event, created and fought by means of and for the sake of the TV screen. In this
paradoxical, ambiguous war, in which "war and non-war have happened at the
same time", both Saddam and NATO are shown to have been virtuosos of the

virtual, holding us, the audience, hostages strategically *in situ* in front of our TV sets (1991: 49, 11).

The common denominator, then, in Virilio's and Baudrillard's thought is the derealization of modern warfare as a result both of its coverage by television and of the particular way it is organised and carried out, i.e. through its reliance on visual technology. Intertwining, thus, inextricably the critique of modern visual culture from the pessimistic perpective of a society dominated by mass illusions and delusions, with the condemnation of modern warfare as a telescopic and tele-controlled war, supported by a visual logistics and fought out in the virtual arena of disinformation and dissimulation, this mode of thinking proved highly influential. It has become a widely cherished cliché that the Gulf War was a video war, or that "in the culture of the simulacrum, every war is a war game. Both the event and pseudo-event are staged on the video screen" (Taylor & Saarinen 184). For many critics of contemporary visual culture this problematic offered an ideal complement to Michel Foucault's problematic of vision as an integral part of the modern forms of power, as exemplified in the disciplinary and surveillance technologies governing institutions such as the clinic (1976) and the prison (1979), and more generally the normalization of the modern subject (1980). In Susan Sontag's characteristic formulation photographic cameras "define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers)" (178). Combining thus the themes of panopticism and surveillance with those of spectacularism and illusionism, the modern anti-visualist discourse achieved a particularly pervasive articulation which claimed to provide a comprehensive critique of the role of visual communication and technology in contemporary society and culture (see eg. Robins 1996, McQuire 1998).

Historically, this articulation is by no means novel. In its essentials, it represents, in fact, a revival of the problematic originally outlined by Martin Heidegger in his essay on "The Age of the World Picture" (1938). For Heidegger the essence of the modern age is the fact that through the representations of modern science and technology the world "becomes picture", that it is "conceived and grasped as picture" (130, 129). As a result of this we have the simultaneous objectification of both the world, as the object of man's conquest and mastery, and of man himself, as something which can be represented just as any other object of the world. The grounding event of modern history, is then, for Heidegger "the interweaving of these two events... that the world is transformed into picture and man into *subiectum*" (1977: 133). These two events, which for Heidegger signalled the reduction of both man and the world into representations, were treated subsequently more or less separately. The theme of the reification and domination effect suffered at being the object of the gaze was developed by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and later on extensively elaborated by Foucault, who summarized it succinctly in his aphorism that "the gaze that sees is the gaze that dominates" (1979: 39). The theme of the alienation and inauthenticity suffered by the subject of the gaze in a world that has been reduced

to its representations was developed initially by Guy Debord, who drawing also from Marx's early writings on ideology and fetishism came up with his notion of the "society of the spectacle" as that which is characterized not simply by the mass dissemination of images but by the objectification of a whole world vision. It went on to receive its most recent elaboration by Baudrillard, with his apocalyptic vision of a world substituted by simulacra and hyperreality. Virilio himself seems to have moved between these two themes, having begun with the idea of a war-driven image technology only to finish with the idea of an image technology at war with reality and humanity.

Notwithstanding the fact that the debt of these critics to Heidegger's thought is not direct or even definite, what is noteworthy is their common anti-technologism and anti-scientism, as well as their common suspicion, if not downright condemnation, of visuality and the image. In the context of the recently achieved re-articulation of the above two themes we find the macro-optics of tele-war and tele-culture linked to the micro-physics of power and domination, the disembodied hyperreality of the society of the spectacle connected to the grim authoritarianism of the panoptical society.

### Complicitous Images

The second aspect of the contemporary critique of the relation of visuality and war concerns, as we noted earlier, the essential complicity of images of war with the war itself. Writing towards the end of the Vietnam war, Sontag accuses photography of being a way of simultaneously certifying and refusing experience, of being essentially "an act of non-intervention". In its incessant hunt for the striking and the dramatic, photography, according to Sontag, establishes "a chronic voyeuristic relation to the world" which not only "levels the meaning of all events" (9, 11), but also acts, just like sexual voyeurism, so as to "at least tacitly, often explicitly, encourage whatever is going on to keep on happening". In this way, photography ends up being "in complicity with whatever makes a subject interesting, worth photographing—including, when that is the interest, another person's pain or misfortune". She goes on to condemn the callousness of contemporary photojournalism citing the most memorable coups from the Vietnam war as horrible precisely because of the awareness "of how plausible it has become, in situations where the photographer has the choice between a photograph and a life, to choose the photograph" (11-12).

And yet, Sontag acknowledges the public revulsion against the war that some Vietnam War pictures managed to stir, or even, the epiphanic effect that photographs from the Nazi concentration camps had on her personally, when they first appeared in print, back in 1945. Led, thus, to admit that when photographs are in tune with the general public feeling, although by themselves unable to "create a moral position", they can certainly "reinforce one—and can help build a nascent one" (17), Sontag points to the crucial dialectic that goes on between images and the context of their reception. She quickly abandons, however,

this much more fertile approach in order to condemn the contemporary prolife-ration of war images, arguing that our overexposure to them has a corrupting effect, familiriazing us, to the point of complete insensibility, with the atrocities of modern warfare. "The quality of feeling, including moral outrage, that people can muster in response to photographs of the oppressed, the exploited, the starving, and the massacred ...depends on the degree of their familiarity with these images", since photographs can only shock "insofar as they show something novel" (19). If, then, for Walter Benjamin (1973), the reproducibility and conse-quent generalised availability of the photographic image was thought responsible for taking away from the visual artwork the aura of its uniqueness, for Sontag, the same is held responsible for taking away from the images of war the aura of their poignancy.

Sontag' s radical ambivalence towards war photography, and more gener-ally the socially concerned forms of photography, is highly typical, then, of the ambivalence surrounding the status of the technical image in what she calls our "image-choked world". Appreciating, on the one hand, at least conditionally, the powerful moral impact of photography, she retreats, on the other hand, to rehashing Kracauer's iconoclastic arguments of the 1920s, i.e his diagnosis of photography as a medium integral to bourgeois aesthetics and ideology, his con-demnation of the "blizzard of photographs" as sweeping away "the dams of me-mory" and betraying an indifference toward the meaning of things (Kracauer 432)[1]. In the most recent burst of moral indignation at war images, that ac-companied the Gulf war, most of these arguments were revived and repeated. However, if for Sontag, the Holocaust and Vietnam acted as an opportunity to acknowledge the crucial public impact of certain images, no such admission was to come by the younger generation of anti-visualist critics.

Harking back at Juvenal' s scornful invectives against the Roman public's taste for *panem et circensis* (*Satires* X), Jean Baudrillard, in his eloquently titled essay on "The Evil Demon of Images", argues that audiences are seduced and held captive by images of violence which fill them with "a kind of primal pleasure, of anthropological joy in images, a kind of brute fascination unencumbered by aesthetic, moral, social or political judgements" (1988: 11). In his response to the television images from the Gulf war he goes on to revive most of the stock motifs of traditional mass society theories. Specifically, he extends his oppro-brium of the audience to the mass media by suggesting that they "live off the presumption of catastrophe and of the succulent imminence of death" (1994: 55). Television, in particular, "inculcates indifference, distance, scepticism and uncon-ditional apathy. Through the world's becoming–image, it anaesthetizes the im-agination, provokes a sickened abreaction, together with a surge of adrenalin which induces total disillusionment" (1994: 61). For Baudrillard, the profusion of the televised images of the Gulf war promote our forgetting of the war. Tele-vision shields us, in effect, from the overwhelming force and urgency of its images: "its immunizing, prophylactic use protects us from an unbearable responsibility. Its effect and its images self-destruct in the mind" (1994: 63). Televisually in-

duced amnesia and anaesthesia complements, thus, ideally the televisually produced non-event of the war.

In Kevin Robins's account of the moral aspect of the Gulf war images we find a synthesis of all the above themes. A characteristic representative of the contemporary anti-visualist discourse, Robins begins by repeating Sontag's polemic against photographic voyeurism, this time, though, applying it in the far more dangerous version of the screen voyeurism associated with video and electronic images. In the case of the Gulf War the television screen functioned, according to him, as a medium allowing us to witness the violence and the catastrophe of war, while, at the same time, protecting and insulating us from it. The screen did not act, however, only as a defense mechanism, but also as a fantasy agent. Even though it "was the only contact point, the only channel for moral engagement with the enemy Other", in reality, it did not function as such, but, on the contrary, "it amplified and legitimated the sense of omnipotence and power over the enemy" (1996: 79). In the context of this screen-gazing war, which was not only watched but also conducted through the screen, the spectators come, moreover, to be virtually indistiguishable from the soldiers fighting out this tele-war through their image-guided weapons. Just as we, the screen-gazers, are "morally disengaged, floating about in an ocean of violent images" (1996: 81) so do the soldiers, who are similarly close and at the same time detached from the painful reality of death and destruction. In the simulated, disembodied combat-screens of postmodern warfare, although the cyber-warriors have a visual perception of their enemy much more direct than the one characterizing earlier forms of military technology, they experience a far more intense degree of existential dislocation and moral dissociation (1996: 64), since "through the long lens human bodies lose their immediacy, their materiality; even if they are seen in bodily form, the enemy remains a faceless alien" (Robins & Levidow 1991: 90).

The television screen has been thought the culprit in one additional sense, this time regarding its size. For Regis Debray "miniturisation through the image can make acceptable if not picturesque massacres and wars in far away places that would not be tolerable in its true scale". Suggesting, thus, some kind of a necessary congruity of magnitude between the image and the event it represents, Debray concludes that "to reduce a column of civilian vehicles or a bombed city to the size of a video screen is not the best way to 'realise' the human costs of a bombing expedition" (380). The fact is, however, that video-size, and even smaller, print-size images of war atrocities were used extensively in the last decade by many NGOs involved in campaigns for humanitarian aid, in order precisely to remind us of the human costs of war, and to stir us morally and emotionally so as to contribute, through our donations, to their amelioration.

It is with this specific use of war images that Hans Magnus Enzensberger takes particular issue, making it the pivotal point of a generalized attack on the contemporary media culture of violence and the Western discourse on human rights. Specifically, Enzensberger accuses the mass media for turning "slaughter into mass entertainment", wars into soap-operas and murderers, gangsters and

kidnappers into celebrities. In this way, they cultivate subconsciously the idea that violence and terror are the stuff everyday life is made of, transforming us, at the same time, into voyeurs who attend fascinated and at a safe distance, a public "cult of violence" (78-81, 87-8). Enzensberger's most bitter attack, however, is aimed at the hypocrisy of the universalist rhetoric of the Western proclamations on human rights, which places upon us demands that far exceed our objective possibilities for action. The images with the victims of war, of famine, of persecution, of dislocation and of torture, are presented to us, he argues, accompanied by the reproachful question "What are you going to do about all these?". In this way, television, "the most corrupt of mass media, turns into moral police", exerting upon us a moral blackmail, to which we can never possibly fully respond. The spectators, overwhelmed by a mass of information, end up "feeling desperately impotent watching this flood of incomprehensible killings". Some are overcome by anxiety and guilt, and try to help through donations, only to be charged for trying to appease their conscience by way of a facile moral alibi. Most of them simply get numbed by the sheer magnitude of the demands they are faced with and retreat into a defensive position of doubt or supression. In an age when the morality of human rights "has become the last refuge of eurocentrism", Enzensberger concludes, "moral demands which are disproportionate to our possibilities for action" are bound to produce a result opposite to the one desired, i.e. "the cancelling of the demands and the abrogation of responsibility. In this we find the seed of a vulgarization that can reach the limits of a rampant aggressivity" (89-91).

By way of summarizing the arguments we presented above, the central point of the contemporary anti-visualist discourse can be taken to be the following: war has become telescopic, utilizing a visual technology that makes it more and more mediated and faceless, and hence, more inhuman and morally neutralized for combatants and non-combatants alike. The link between the cameras, the television screens, the spy satellites and the sighting devices of modern "smart" weapons, makes us all equally distant and belligerent. The latterday televisual warrior as tele-spectator, and the tele-spectator as latterday televisual warrior, both watch from a safe distance and with the same cold, detached gaze witness the destruction of the target. The first squeezes the trigger as if it was the control panel of a video-game. The second plays with the buttons on his tele-control zapping boringly (or evasively) between the violent images shown on his TV screen. Someone, somewhere far away gets killed. To the question 'who killed him?', our critics answer unequivocally: both!

### Towards an analytics of the visual field

In the 20th century, the image, and more specifically, the technical image, has been the object of a fiercely polemical critique that seems to traverse most of the philosophical, sociological and critical thought of the time (Jay 1994). This modern anti-visualist tradition continues, in effect, the iconoclastic tradition of

past centuries, drawing from and simultaneously arousing a series of deeply-rooted and archetypically anti-idololatric attitudes and reflexes. As we noted, however, earlier, in the case of the vandalisation of Poussin's painting, this thought is at the same time pervaded by some equally archetypical iconolatric attitudes and reflexes, since it demonizes images to such an extent as to ascribe to them an almost magical, supernatural power. From Kracauer's fear, back in the 1920s, that photography replaces reality with its images, to Boorstin's anxiety that "We are haunted, not by reality, but by those images we have put in place of reality" (6) and Debord's sinister view of a spectacle-dominated society, up to Baudrillard's more recent diagnosis that today the real has disappeared behind its simulations, we find the same primitive belief that the image seizes and dominates reality, that the idol captures the soul of the living. In the polemic against mass media images, cultivated by mass society critics from Adorno and Horkheimer to Sontag and Enzensberger, we find the same emphasis on the all pervasive, seductive and manipulative power of the image. In this respect, the moral critique of contemporary war imagery seems highly disingenuous. Its exponents start by assuming the all-powerfulness of the image, its ability to guide us, to control us, to persuade us. Asking themselves, subsequently, why don't the war images produce the reactions they consider desirable or necessary, they answer that it is the images' own fault, since they 'are only images'! Thus, the images are presumed able to make us do or think or believe virtually anything, except to influence our views, ideas or values regarding the war! The discomfort and gloom expressed by all these critics in view of the multiplication of technical images, usually accompanied by elegiac memories of a time when these were either non present or simply just a few and thus necessarily auratic, clearly reveals a nostalgia for an imaginary, pre-image time, a time of a mythological coincidence of the real with its signs. The contemporary critique of visuality assumes the existence of a dominant ideology of the visual and proceeds to attack its manifold manifestations and realizations. It is characteristic that in its totalizing discourse images are dealt with generically, as images, with no further qualification or respect for category, mode or style. Blind to the image-text itself, to the discourses that determine its original production, this critique is no more interested in those that inform the context of its use and its reception[2].

Our latterday iconoclasts seem, therefore, to have developed a veritable metaphysics of the technical image. If the *acheiropoietoi* (non-painted by human hand) icons had been the object of iconolatric adulation, the non-man made images of visual technology have become the object of iconoclastic demonization. By means of this negative fetishism of the technical image, the centuries'-old iconoclastic tradition achieved its survival and continuation through the technophobic tradition of the 20th century. Most significantly, however, the contemporary iconoclastic polemic has laid on the technical image and its technologies the full burden of the guilt of modern civilization, reducing, in effect, all the complexity and contradictions of its evolution to the impact of one particular mode of representation and communication. Even the visual testimonies of the

inhuman and the destructive instances of this civilization are themselves brushed off as nothing but cover-ups of its crimes and as accomplices of the guilty. Kellner's astute critique of Virilio for giving no place to agency and politics, to the struggles between social groups for the control of new technologies, as well as for substituting moralistic critique and lament for social analysis and political action (1999: 120) can be justly generalized to the totality of the contemporary anti-visualist discourse. It is evident that its totalizing and reductive approach to the modern visual culture and technology cannot possibly offer us an accurate understanding and appreciation of its role, its functions and its effects in contemporary society. Such an understanding and appreciation can only be assured if we start by accepting, by contrast, that the field of visual representation and communication is—just like any other field of social representation and communication—radically heterogeneous and ridden with contradictions and conflict. What is proposed, in other words, is that instead of seeing everywhere a monolithic, sinister and all pervading 'Visual Ideology', we should be discriminating enough to be able to distinguish all the different and often conflicting visual ideologies, which traverse the multiform repertory of image genres, producing an endlessly proliferating and diversifying number of visual symbols, styles and techniques, being closely connected in each case to the whole wide variety of social, political and institutional practices and contexts of image production, use and reception. This alternative conceptualization of the visual field should, in addition, be seen as a complement to the more general problematic outlined initially. A problematic which stresses the need to conceive of and approach the visual field within the framework of a comprehensive analysis of its links to the processes of the articulation, legitimation and/or de-legitimation of political and cultural authority, and through this, to the general status enjoyed by the image in any specific culture.

Turning now specifically to the images of war, we should begin by noting the special place they seem to hold in the iconography of every society since pre-historic times. What we find in every society is a distinctive symbolic economy of images—a whole system, that is, of visual symbols, motifs and conventions—through which this society represents the facts which are the most critical for its very existence and survival: war, violence, death and disaster. This symbolic economy is under the direct control and scrutiny on the one hand, of the political authorities, of the institutions exercising the monopoly of war and violence within a domain and, on the other hand, of the religious authorities, of the institutions that articulate and uphold the dominant cultural definitions of death and disaster. Regarding specifically the Western world, this symbolic economy met its first serious challenge during the Renaissance, due to the exceptional growth of the visual arts and to the significant degree of autonomy enjoyed, for the first time, by many visual artists. The Leonardo-Michelangelo controversy is symptomatic, in this respect, of the loosening of the institutional control over the production of images. This control was, however, soon to be reaffirmed and it was only in the second half of the 19th century that the growing social autonomy

of the visual field and the simultaneous growth and diffusion of modern visual technologies succeeded in bringing about the radical deregulation of this symbolic economy. In the age of the technical image, the visual representation of death, war, violence and disaster came to be largely emancipated from the restrictions, rules and definitions set by political and religious authority. A wide variety of social, political and cultural agents, including the mass media, museums, educational institutions, scientists, propagandists etc., started to participate actively in the production, collection and circulation of such images, seeking to articulate and promote their own definitions and interpretations of war, death, violence and destruction, on the basis of a variety of diverging and often conflicting ideological perspectives and cultural assumptions.

The implications of this deregulation are particularly discernible in the decades-long controversy regarding our presumed overexposure to images of violence and destruction in cinema and television, but also in the gradual deglorification of war and demystification of death in contemporary culture. It was a deregulation, on the other hand, that was symptomatic of a more wide-ranging deregulation of the whole visual economy of modern culture, that resulted from the social autonomy of the visual field and the growth of modern visual technologies. As a consequence of this wider deregulation, the visual field in its totality turned into a veritable arena, within which a variety of visual ideologies as well as ideological visions, connected with all kinds of economic, political, artistic and cultural institutions, interests and practices, articulate their different and often antagonistic perspectives and projects. This was, in effect, realized even by such an eminently anti-sociological thinker as Heidegger. In his final, and evidently little noticed by his iconoclastic readership, section of his aforementioned essay on "The Age of the World Picture", Heidegger concludes that as a consequence of the transformation of the world into a picture, man contends for his position in it through the articulation of appropriate representations, leading, thus, to a struggle between competing world-views (134-5).

The age of the technical image is, indeed, the age of a generalised war of images. The feminist, anti-racist and anti-colonial movements that marked the social and political upheavals of the 20th century all involved a revolt against demeaning images, against humiliating stereotypes. The central issue in the contemporary struggles for recognition, fought by a variety of nationalist, religious, indigenist, minority or sub-cultural movements, is nothing but the status of certain collective images, and more specifically of collective images that were traditionally either obscure or stigmatised. The fact that the visual field has become the combat zone par excellence of the modern world is eloquently testified by the war-related array of metaphors that have been established to describe the different operations and activities that are carried out in its midst. Advertising, marketing and propaganda are said to have 'strategies' and take the form of 'campaigns'. Their object is to conquer a territory which is but the retina of the viewer. The typical way their messages encounter us is to take us by surprise, as well as through an insistent *blitzkrieg*. The mass media, we say, 'bombard' us with

images. Often, with images of real bombardments.

Let us return, then, to the war images themselves. Their totalizing demonization by the iconoclastic tradition of the 20th century has almost totally obscured two critical issues. The first concerns the fact that around and through the war images another war is taking place, a war regarding the control over their production and their circulation. From the time when the regulation of war images has ceased being in the hands of the political and religious authorities, the question of which images are to be taken or be publicly shown, has become a major point of contention between these authorities and the newly sprung agents of image production and circulation. Without exception, all the totalitarian and militarist regimes of the 20th century have carefully shielded their concentration camps, their mass executions, persecutions and torture, from the photographic, cinematic or television cameras, taking special care, at the same time, to keep them from showing the disasters of war, the true extent of the human pain and loss suffered as a result of their purported glorious and patriotic wars.

This practice was by no means limited, however, to the totalitarian regimes. The same practice was followed by liberal regimes as well, although with distinctly less success. Official censorship of war images, having made its presence already in the days of World War I, when war photojournalism was still in its infancy, became much more methodical during World War II, and even more so during the Cold War, which coincided with the era of television. The real watershed, however, was the Vietnam War. The relative relaxation of official control in the early years of the war, allowed many, particularly freelance photojournalists, to move around and explore freely, enabling them to develop their own personal interpretations of what was going on, interpretations that often diverged radically from those offered by government and military spokespersons[3]. As a result, there were cases when the photojournalists' pictures, like for example those of Nick Ut, "begun effectively to challenge the legitimacy of the war that their society...and many publications were sponsoring" (Ritchin 604-5). The powerful and often discussed public impact of these pictures, led subsequently to an unprecedented tightening of the control exercised by the political and military authorities over the visual coverage of war. From the Falklands War up to the more recent war in Kosovo, the characteristic of hypermodern warfare is not, as is regularly emphasized by our iconoclasts, its over-exposure in the media, but, on the contrary, its systematic under-exposure, by way of the systematic distortion, censorship and manipulation of its visual coverage. In this respect, the term 'cyberwar' proves especially felicitous: it is not simply the war conducted by means of the modern electronic guidance and imaging technology, but, much more significantly, it is the war fought by a political authority which tries to reclaim and reassert its traditional prerogative to control the production and circulation of war images in a way that best serves the legitimation of itself and of the destruction it authorizes. If the often uncensored pictures showing the atrocities of the Vietnam War acted as a catalyst in turning American public opinion against its escalation and finally, against its continuation, the carefully controlled, selected

and sometimes even staged pictures of the more recent cyberwars, by promoting a sanitized view of the war, proved instrumental in securing and consolidating their public acceptance.

During the Gulf War, Britain's television networks went as far as to exclude from their programmes all war-related films and documentaries in order "to avoid any visual reminder of the human consequences, even those from other wars" (Robins & Levidow 90). At the same time, in the United States, "casualties were reported, but there were few pictures of dead or wounded" (Hachten & Hachten 340). The images sent back by 'smart' bombs homing on their targets, during the war in the Gulf or in Kosovo, were only shown on television if the latter were some deserted installations, factories or bridges. All such images showing the horrified faces of the soldiers or civilians being hit were prohibited from public view. At the same time, however, and that is where the actual functioning of the contemporary visual field comes in, there were leakages. Images exposing the callous realities of 'collateral damage'—i.e. the scores of fleeing refugees killed on the roads of Kosovo, or of the civilians bombed in Belgrade and at the Al Amiriya air-raid shelter in Iraq—although officially supressed, managed to find their way to our screens and radically undermine the myth of a 'just war' fought through 'surgical strikes'.

The case of these last images, and more generally, the fact of censorship, lead us to the second issue that has been completely obfuscated by the indiscriminate rhetoric of our latterday iconoclasts: that every war image, produced as it is, in the context of a certain, however implicit or spontaneous visual ideology, always contains, in the form of certain coded elements, a specific perspective on the war and its meaning. A perspective that determines the choice both of the particular theme of the image and of the specific mode or style of its representation. It is evident that a completely different perception of the American-Japanese war in the Pacific is given through Joe Rosenthal's famous—as well as carefully staged—picture of the raising of the Americal flag on the mountains of Iwo Jima, and through a picture showing the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Similarly, a completely different idea about the Vietnam or the Gulf war emerges from pictures focusing on the bomb-carrying capacity and the technological superiority of the B-52s or the Stealth airplanes, and from those showing the dreadful effect of their bombs.

No war image, moreover, is ever encountered in a void, in a state of pure, contextless perception. Just like images in general, war images are as a rule accompanied by a verbal message—a caption, a news story or a narrative—which serves to define the nature and the circumstances of the event depicted, as well as to suggest a specific interpretation of its meaning. With regards to this 'discursive framing', images are no exception to what pertains to any other form of communication. It has long been established that the meaning of all the different forms of both verbal and non-verbal representation and communication—the latter including besides images also gestures, postures, signals, dress codes etc.—is overdetermined by a multiplicity of contextual factors such as social rituals,

practices and relations, cultural norms and conventions, institutional uses, discursive rules and formations. The fear voiced by many contemporary iconophobic critics of being overwhelmed by a flood of moorless, irremediably mute and ambiguous images, inherently susceptible to manipulation and misappropriation, entails a radical misrecognition of the fundamental character not simply of visual communication, but of all communication in general. An image is never completely silent, a passive instrument in the hands of its arbitrary user, just as it is never so overbearingly eloquent as suggested by its stereotypical equation to a 'thousand words'. The effective comprehension of its role and its impact demands that we take into account both the image-text and its context, and concentrate on the specific, in each particular case, mode of their connection and interaction.

### The War of War Images

Seen in this perspective, which dispenses both with the determinism of textual essentialism and the arbitrariness of a purely contextual approach, war images are never just 'war images' and they are never alike, even when they are the same. They are, on the contrary, heterogeneous and conflicting, reflecting a variety of ideological and interpretive perspectives. Often, in fact, war images are but a continuation of (or a preparation for) the war, or of the war against war. A particularly enlightening case-study, in this respect, is provided by Dora Apel's (1999) intriguing analysis of ideologically conflicting photographic narratives of the World War I, that appeared in Germany during the short-lived and fateful years of the Weimar Republic.

In 1924, in Berlin, the anarcho-pacifist Ernst Friedrich founded the International Antiwar Museum and published a photographic narrative of the Great War, titled *Krieg dem Krieg!* [*War against War*]. According to Apel's detailed description of the book's structure and rhetorical strategy, in its first part, Friedrich juxtaposes the optimistic images, the enthusiastic rhetoric, as well as the evasive war reports of the patriotic and militarist propaganda, with shocking photographs showing the shattered, mutilated and burned bodies of both German and Allied soldiers on the front. Using images that were officialy censored during the war and simultaneously, pressing forward his point with his ironic commentary, Friedrich challenges the discourse of militarist ideology, by showing the senseless killing and destruction it led to. The second part of Friedrich's narrative consists of a series of photographic close-ups of horribly mutilated and disfigured soldiers, taken from the archives of veteran hospitals. These clinically set up images, taken by a dispassionate, institutional authority, were originally used to advertise the triumphs of German surgery and of prosthesis technology. In an exemplary act of recontextualization, Friedrich redefines them as showing the real face of the war, articulating through them "an emotional appeal for the renunciation of war based on visceral repulsion to universal human physical suffering" (Apel 62).

Friedrich's book had a mixed reception. Enthusiastically welcomed by the pacifist camp — the liberals, the socialists and the anarchists — it did not fail to enrage the authorities, the nationalists and the Veterans Associations, who, in many cities, managed to have it banned and confiscated, demanding, at the same time, the expulsion of Friedrich from the country as an "internal traitor" (Apel 68-9). Most significantly, however, the reaction against Friedrich's photo-narrative took also the form of a series of counter photo-narratives, produced with the express intent to contest and repudiate its antimilitarist and anti-nationalist representation of the war. The most representative of them, according to Apel, is Hermann Rex' s *Der Weltkrieg in seiner rauhen Wirklichkeit 1914-1918* [*The World War in its Harsh Reality 1914-1918*], published in 1926. Quite predictably, the visual content and strategy is here totally different: troops marching off to war cheered by enthusiastic crowds, pictures of the tanks, guns and aircrafts used by the German army, focusing on their steely beauty and deadly capacity, aestheticized aerial shots of the combat zones. The 'harsh reality' in the title probably refers to the few pictures showing German dead, which are shown as examples of the noble act of sacrifice for the Fatherland. Notwithstanding their supreme self-sacrifice, however, these dead are always seen "from a distance, nearly indistinguishable from the landscape and debris... and with no discernible facial features" (Apel 74).

Rex goes as far as to include two of Friedrich's most horrible images, in order to directly contest his interpretation of them by recontextualizing them in a nationalist discourse. They are both pictures of burned soldiers shown trapped in a destroyed tank and next to a downed aircraft, respectively. By contrast to Friedrich' s captions which universalize here the identity of the dead striving for an emotional humanistic appeal, Rex identifies the dead as enemies and notes with satisfaction the lethal effectiveness of German artillery. In Rex's book, as in all the other similarly minded photo-narratives of the period which effectively paved the way for the consequent re-militarization of Germany, pictures showing the immense human destruction, suffering and deprivation brought by the war are prominently absent, the emphasis being, by contrast, on the representation of war in terms of "a test of manliness, the honour of self-sacrifice, and the romantic, redemptive death" (Apel 74). Their choice and use of war images serves, in all cases, to neutralize and aestheticize the ravages and the horrors of the battlefield, to sublimate the agony and the tragedy of the individual soldier into the impersonal epic of the glorious struggle of the national will and destiny against its primordial enemies.

The confrontation between the anti-war images of Ernst Friedrich and the pro-war images of his militarist opponents continued unabated all through the rest of the 20th century, fought with the same visual terms and strategies. Visual terms and strategies that, in reality, date as far back as the Leonardo-Michelangelo controversy regarding the different ways of making a war painting. Thus, in a recent extensive content analysis of the images published in various news magazines concerning the Gulf War, Michael Griffin and Jongsoo Lee

(1995) found that the bulk of them showed military technology and hardware, noncombat scenes of troops and political-military leaders. Despite the over-advertised claim of the media's on-the-spot coverage of the war, there were very few pictures showing actual scenes of battle, and even less showing Iraqi troops or the human costs of war. In this study, as well as in others dealing with the visual coverage of the Gulf war (Kellner 1992), a central common finding is the way images were used to demonize the enemy, Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi army in general. This visual strategy which, as we have seen earlier, dates from the early days of cinematography, was openly challenged by the French photographer Marc Riboud who chose to cover the Vietnam war by focusing on the enemy, sending back from the 'evil' North pictures of rare dignity of a people so totally demonized by the official propaganda[4]. At the same time, one of the most caustic attacks on U.S. policy was a photo-narrative by the Welsh photographer Philip Jones Griffiths, titled *Vietnam Inc.*[5] Distancing himself from the usual photojournalistic practice of representing the war as photogenic drama, Griffiths repeats Friedrich's accomplishment, by juxtaposing pictures of combat, death and destruction and accompanying them with terse and ironic captions, succeeding in producing a work that undermines the warlords' rhetoric surrounding the Vietnam conflict.

What we have, then, is on the one hand, the pictures of Robert Capa, Dan McCullin, Nick Ut, Griffiths and many others, which showed all the horror, the suffering and the derpivation caused by war in our century, encouraging their viewers to empathize with its victims, irrespective of their ideology, nationality, creed or race, and to demystify the officially propagated views of the war and the enemy. On the other hand, we have images which glorify the battlefield skills of military leaders and heroes, advertise the sinister virtues of military hardware, reverberate the jingoistic rhetoric of the politicians and the patriotic media, and conceal the true extent of the death and pain inflicted on soldiers and civilians alike. In the first case, the images show unflinchingly a suffering humanity, a humanity weary, agonizing, crushed and torn to pieces by the senseless brutality of war. In the second case, we have images that either reduce war into an exciting action-packed story, or sublimate it into the glorious and sanitized epic of man and machine against a systematically defaced and eclipsed foe.

This war of war images not only persists but, moreover, becomes more and more intensified, internationalized and innovative. As Fred Ritchin points out, the increasing diversity of the mass media and the global spread of photographic technology has enabled the development of new strategies of reportage and the growth of photojournalism beyond the control of the American and European agencies (607-9). As a result, non-occidental perspectives on local wars and conflicts have started to claim our attention, at the same time that photoreporters in the West are able to present their work bypassing the restrictions set either by official censorship or by corporate interests. A characteristic example here is the collection of photographs on the San Salvador conflict of the early 1980s[6], published by thirty photographers who pooled together their work "feel-

ing that their point of view was not adequately reflected in the mass media which simplified and sensationalized the violence there" (Ritchin 607).

And yet, could Enzensberger be right when he argues that all this is simply too much for the average Western viewer, that we better close our eyes to all these disturbing images coming from afar and abandoning our universalist ambitions focus instead on the conflicts at hand, in the home front (99-105). Or is Sontag right when she dismisses the humanist claims made by photography suggesting that "humanism has become the reigning ideology of ambitious professional photographers—displacing formalist justifications of their quest for beauty" because "it masks the confusions about truth and beauty underlying the photographic enterprise" (112). Confusions that one may perfectly well suppose they characterise not only the works of modern visual technology but also the anti-war paintings of Leonardo, Goya and Picasso.

### Epilogue: The Will to See

In the last four decades, the period during which war photography saw an unprecedented growth and public diffusion, due mainly to the international spread of illustrated publications and of television, its moral status and impact became a controversial issue. As we have seen, the anti-visualist critics analysed the visual representation of warfare in terms of distanciation, neutralization, disembodiment, voyeurism and specularity. In direct conflict to the sentiment and the intentions of the epigones of Leonardo and Friedrich, they believe that imaging the 'disasters of war' induces moral disengagement, anaesthesia and finally, amnesia. The assumption is, in other words, that the audience consist of "hapless and gullible idiots who are incapable of interpreting or reinterpreting images of violence, even those which are presented with explanations of their origins, causes and ethical implications, and that the [it] is therefore at most capable of catharsis, or gross satisfaction in the misfortune of others" (Keane 79). As Keane goes on to stress, however, this assumption that the audience are "stupid misanthropes flies in the face of considerable counterevidence". Particularly since the Biafran and the Vietnam wars, these 'human disaster' images have greatly eroded the glorified representations of war, and in many cases they have managed to sway public opinion against the prospect or the continuation of fighting; in other cases they have succeeded in revealing atrocities that would otherwise have remained unnoticed and unpunished, and they proved instrumental in sensitizing and mobilizing the international audience so as to secure comfort and relief to millions of wounded, malnourished, persecuted and dislocated people across the globe. As Edgar Roskis, an otherwise acute critic of the current widespread lapse of photojournalism into the sensational and the stereotypical (1994a, 1994b), characteristically stresses: "Confronted with oppression and savagery there is nothing worse than the lack of witnesses. Confronted with horror, we rather have a photograph, even a controversial one and regardless of the photographer's motives, than having none". In the final analysis, he concludes, "who

would be interested in the half million of dying Sudanese, in the starvation in E-rithrea or in the besieged population of Sarajevo if it wasn't for the visual shock caused by the journalists' photo-reports?" (1994a).

To a large extent, then, what is currently called 'international public opinion' to denote a kind of a global moral subject or awareness, is but the product of the global diffusion of the image, and significantly, of the war image. And this is only natural, since, as it was astutely pointed out from very early on, by that pioneer of globalization, Marshall McLuhan, the great two globalizers of the 20th century have been the war and the image. In the course of the 20th century, the former has repeatedly brought different societies or groups together in a deadly embrace and even to the brink of global extinction, while, at the same time, the latter has brought them closer, by allowing them better to understand their inter-connectedness, their interdepedence as members of the same species, as partakers of the same common fate who have the same fundamental moral responsibility towards each other.

The formative influence of mediated experience and of the time-space compression it implies on the modern subject's self-identity and moral outlook has been welcomed by social theorists of mass communication like Anthony Giddens (1991) and John Thompson (1995). They point out that the exposure to distant events — and therefore the suffering of distant others — has made the self more reflexive, making both identity and life-planning itself more and more enmeshed with experiences, processes and risks that far surpass local or national frameworks of reference. In this situation where "the narrative of the self becomes interwoven with a narrative of the other in such a way that one can no longer prise them apart" (Thompson 225), humankind itself has, at least to an extent, become "a 'we', facing problems and opportunities where there are no 'others'" (Giddens 27). Although both explicitly distance themselves from the apocalyptic tone of the anti-visualist critics, neither, however, resorts to a mere reversal of the latter's nightmares into the wishful thinking of an over-optimistic evangelism. They are both quite aware that the process of globally mediated intimacy and community is fraught with contradictions, that its form and implications are widely contested and its outcome highly uncertain.

The anti-visualist discourse of the 1980s and 1990s represents a characteristic instance of this contestation. Baudrillard, for example, accuses the aid campaigns to the suffering populations of the southern hemisphere as the modern transmutation of imperialism, in the context of which we consume no longer minerals or crops but the raw materials of the television viewers' good conscience, "the ever delightful spectacle of poverty and catastrophe, and of the moving spectacle of our own efforts to alleviate it" (1994: 67). His attitude is typically shared also by marxist critics who similarly condemn televisually induced pity and charity as a form of evading the West's responsibility for the causes of war and famine. This 'ideologically correct' dismissal of the concern about other people's wars as a way to sublimate our guilt for our role in their plight strikes, however, more and more as cynical and hollow. As Alain Finkielkraut pointedly

notes: "Until yesterday, we denied being taken in by suffering in the name of ideology. From now on, holding on to suffering and having in front of our eyes all the misery of the world, we deny to be taken in by ideology" (148). The insistence, on the other hand, on a guilt due to an unredeemable 'original sin', turns ideology into an exhortation for a collective *mauvais consience* and paralyses any possibility for action. Instead of this debilitating focus on guilt, a much more constructive approach is, according to John Keane, the appeal to shame, since "the ashamed feel that they have failed to live up fully to a standard towards which they nevertheless still strive", leading them, consequently, to will to recover and redress. This shame may, moreover, prove to be the first, necessary step in delegitimizing war. The images of Auschwitz, of Hiroshima and of Vietnam made the whole of the Western world feel shame. What is more appropriate than Keane's concluding exclaimer: "Shoudn't we feel shame about what we have done to each other during this endless century of violence?" (185).

The questioning of the Baudrillardian and the marxist critique of the popular response to images of distant wars as being simply a continuation of imperialism by other means forms also the starting point for Michael Ignatieff's analysis of the moral consequentiality of war images. Rejecting this view as a gross oversimplification of the issue, he believes, instead, that television images actually redress the moral division of the world between 'them' and 'us' cultivated by European imperialism, by breaking down "the barriers of citizenship, religion, race and geography that once divided our moral space into those we feel responsible for and those who were beyond our ken" (13, 11). The reason, he argues, of the viewers' empathy towards images of human suffering lies in the fact that the European conscience has been historically moulded on the basis of the myth of human universality: "the simple idea that race, religion, sex, citizenship, or legal status do not justify unequal treatment; or, more positively, that human needs and pain are universally the same, and that we may be obliged to help those to whom we are unrelated by birth or citizenship, race or geographic proximity" (12). Despite, however, his conviction that television has become the privileged medium through which modern moral universalism is articulated and moral relations between strangers are mediated, he fears that, at the same time, television "makes us voyeurs of the suffering of others, tourists amid their landscapes of anguish", since, while it confronts us with their fate, it obscures "the distances—social, economic, moral—that lie between us" (10-11). Television news' penchant for a heteroclite flow of fleeting and dramatic images, for showing consequences rather than exploring causes and intentions, tends to banalize horror and severly limits its ability to act as moral mediator, while, at the same time, it encourages many to resign to the misanthropic idea that the world has become just a 'ship of fools' that does not deserve their serious attention or concern. As a way out of this contradiction, Ignatieff emphasizes the value of television documentaries, which by forcing "the spectator to see, to shed the carapace of cliché and to encounter alien worlds in all their mystery and complexity", challenge the established criteria of newsworthiness and achieve

the prerequisite of moral vision (32).

Perhaps the most critical point raised by Ignatieff in his discussion of the moral significance of images of war and violence is that "moral life is a struggle to see—a struggle against the desire to deny the testimony of one's own eyes and ears" (29). Vision, and more specifically the sight of the other's suffering body is found to be at the heart of the modern humanistic tradition. Both Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of pity and Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime, are but different ways of acknowledging that at the origin of the social bond lies the feeling of compassion that overwhelms us when we are confronted with the image of the other's plight. What indeed is one of Thomas Lacquer's central findings in his wide ranging study of the humanitarian narratives of the 18th and early 19th century, is the fact that they all rely "on the personal body, not only as the locus of pain but also as the common bond between those who suffer and those who would help..." (177). Far from citing or defending the principles of some abstract moral universalism, the different texts examined—novels, autopsies, medical reports and case histories, parliamentary inquiries—all focus, in horrific detail, on the corpse, on the shattered, tortured or otherwise vilified flesh of particular individuals, as a way to enable the reader's imagination to comprehend the predicament of the other and sympathize with his suffering. It is texts like these that Lacquer finds to have been instrumental in articulating and mobilizing the most important reform movements of the era, such as the prison reform, factory legislation, abolitionism etc.

The choice, then, of the whole of the anti-war tradition of visual artists, photoreporters and activists of representing the suffering body as a way to expose the evils of war and establish a common ground of sensibility and understanding should seem now more clear and legitimate. If the beginnings of the modern humanistic tradition, in the Renaissance, were marked by the reinstatement of the dignity and the celebration of the beauty of the human body, it seems inevitable that the image of the degraded and defiled human body has since become the most potent symbol of everything that takes away from it and destroys its dignity and beauty, and thus, the most compelling incitation for ameliorative action. Ever since Leonardo and Goya, humanism is a quintessentially visual and at the same time embodied discourse, that constructs humanity as the most inclusive imagined community possible, through images that project a foundational, species identity centred on the human body.

In the era of the generalized war of images brought about by the worldwide dissemination of the technical image, we are regularly confronted with images that instigate war and images that castigate war; images that legitimize war and images that reject and deny it; images that sublimate and glorify warfare and images that demystify and deglorify it; images that obscure its costs and obfuscate its grim reality, and images that expose the death, the destruction and the despair it causes; images that extoll the catastrophic potential of modern war technology, and images that focus on the insanity of it all; images that praise military virtue and patriotic duty, and images that testify to the courage of all

those who oppose war, who resist violence and militarism. This war between war images is impossible to be won by restricting or avoiding them, or rejecting them all wholesale. This war can only be won by producing, by multiplying and by disseminating as much as possible, those images that castigate war, that expose its horror, that undermine the rhetoric and the ideologies that lead to it and legitimize it. The war against war involves, of course, much more than engaging in this war of images. We cannot possibly win the former, however, without having first prevailed in the latter.

## Notes

1. Sontag seems to disregard here Kracauer's later, significantly revised formulations in his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York, 1960).
2. For a comprehensive account of the different discursive contexts involved in the making and the interpretation of specifically the photographic image see G. Paschalidis, "Introduction to the Analysis of Photographic Meaning", *S-European Journal for Semiotic Studies*, vol. 8(4) 1996: 689-706.
3. This should not be taken to mean that the public was daily exposed to a constant flow of uncencored images revealing the true extent of the bloodshed of the war. This widely accepted misperception was effectively repudiated by D. Hallin in his *The 'Uncensored War': The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford, 1986).
4. See M. Riboud, *Face of North Vietnam*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.
5. P.J. Griffiths, *Vietnam Inc.*, New York: Macmillan, 1971.
6. H. Mattison, S. Meiselas and F. Rubenstein (eds.), *El Salvador: Work of Thirty Photographers*, New York: Writers and Readers, 1983.

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*Rubens, drawing of the central part of Leonardo da Vinci's
original composition of the* Battle of Anghiari, *1602.*

*Aristotile de Sangalo, copy of the central part of Michelangelo's* Battle of Cascina, *1542.*



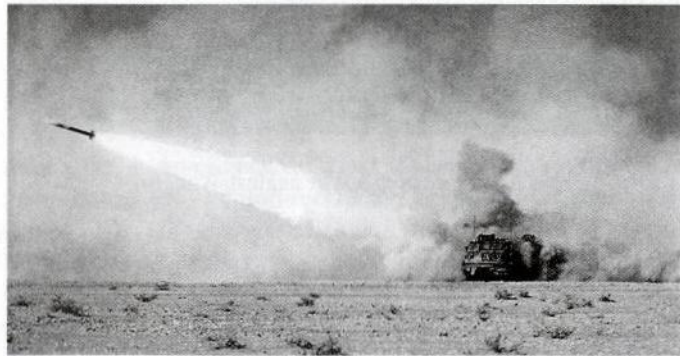*Fransisco de Goya, from the* Disasters of War, *1808-1812.*

*Robert Capa,* Spanish Soldier, *Spain, 1937.*



*Hung Cong ('Nick') Ut,* Accidental Napalm Attack, *Vietnam, 1972.*

*Joe Rosenthal,* Old Glory goes up on to Mt. Suribachi, *Iwo Jima, 1945.*



*A missile being fired by the allied forces during the Operation 'Desert Storm' against Iraq (1991). Hundreds of similar pictures were shown by Western mass media during the Gulf War, without ever showing the devastation these missiles caused on Iraqi soldiers and civilians.*
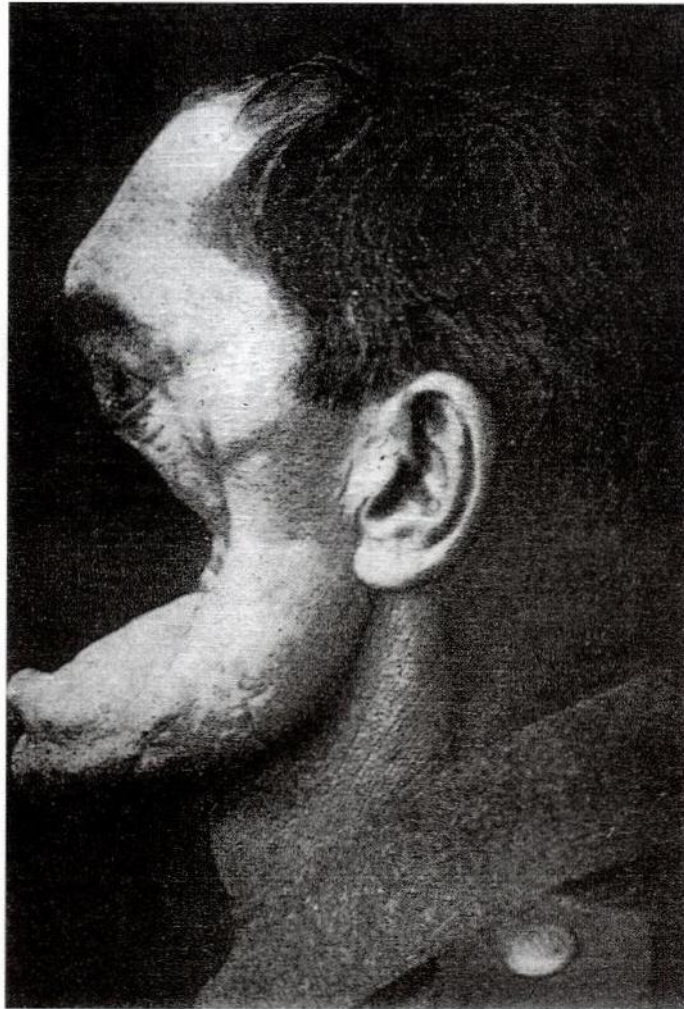
*From Ernst Friedrich's* War against War, *1924.*