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Where Truth Lies:
Political Documentary Film and Digital Media, 2000-2010

By

Kristopher Damien Fallon

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Film and Media

and the Designated Emphasis

in

New Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Linda Williams, Chair

Professor Kristen Whissel

Professor Jeffrey Skoller

Professor Martin Jay

Spring 2013

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by

Kristopher Damien Fallon

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Media

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Linda Williams, Chair

Recent scholarship treats the transition to the digital format in documentary film as a straightforward change in production practices or distribution channels, ignoring the deeper implications of digital technology for non-fiction moving image media. Far from a simple transition in the technology used to shoot and produce these films, however, digital technology has altered, and been altered by, documentary film to a far greater extent than any previous period in its history. The first decade of the twenty first century gave rise to dramatic technological, aesthetic and political revolutions around the globe, dramatic events mirrored in the rapid evolution of documentary form across the same time period.

This project focuses on the emergence of digital documentary in the context of the ideological shifts and social conflicts of the early 21st century. As blogs, social networks and mobile technologies became the connective tissue of political dissent and social mobilization over this period, these technologies utilized documentary's unique synthesis of visible evidence and rhetorical argument, while pushing its traditional form in unexpected new directions. In the polarized climate surrounding contentious events such as the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq, new modes of visual representation became both viable and desirable. Data visualization and virtual environments began picturing the world alongside, and even within feature-length films. Beyond simply providing visual content on newly digital platforms, documentary film now provides a conceptual framework for understanding much of the social impulse of political activism today. Conversely, computational forms of representation and social organization radically undermine the privileged if problematic role optical media once claimed in representing reality. By identifying the moments of rupture where prior forms of representation and persuasion were discarded or discredited, I demonstrate that 'truth' now lies in a new set of discursive practices emerging and coalescing over the last 10 years, standards which implicitly shape the documentation of everything from widespread social movements like Occupy to isolated, viral phenomena like the "Kony 2012" video.

To Alisa

**Where Truth Lies:
Political Documentary Film and Digital Media, 2000-2010**

By Kristopher Damien Fallon

Table of Contents

Introduction.	“Seeing in the Dark”	1
Chapter 1.	“We see what we want to believe”: Archival Logic and Database Aesthetics in the War Films of Errol Morris	16
Chapter 2.	Networked Audiences: MoveOn.org and Brave New Films	46
Chapter 3.	“‘States of Exception’: The Paradox of Virtual Documentary Representation”	74
Chapter 4.	Technology, Transparency and the Digital Presidency	89
Conclusion		126
End Notes		129
Works Cited		

List of Figures

0.1	“Bush/Truth” Banner on the Plaza Hotel.	1
1.1	A soldier scans the horizon in <i>Fog of War</i> .	19
1.2	Taking Aim.	19
1.3	‘Over-eager’ sonar men.	23
1.4	The domino theory in action.	23
1.5 and 1.6	The Observer and the Observed.	25
1.7	Falling Statistics.	27
1.8	Graphic superimposition on Tokyo.	28
1.9	The cloud of images in <i>Standard Operating Procedure</i> .	39
1.10	The database of images.	40
1.11	The accompanying metadata.	40
1.12	Images compared by timecode.	40
1.13	Fox News take on the ‘hooded man’ image.	43
1.14	<i>The Economist Cover</i> featuring the ‘hooded man’.	44
2.1	MoveOn.org logo.	46
2.2	‘Fox Attacks!’ cover for <i>Outfoxed</i> .	46
2.3	Cover for <i>Unprecedented</i> .	51
2.4	Cover for <i>Uncovered</i> .	51
2.5	Cover for <i>Unconstitutional</i> .	51
2.6-2.8	Screen shots from Elinor and MoveOn’s ‘Host a Party’ on YouTube.	62

3.1	Photograph of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay Prison Camp.	76
3.2	Screen shot from <i>Gone Gitmo</i> .	76
3.3	Teenagers playing <i>America's Army</i> at the Army Experience Center.	84
3.4	Arcade version of <i>America's Army</i> .	84
4.1	NYTimes.com infographic.	89
4.2	Wordle graphic.	91
4.3	PowerPoint version of cancer rates.	96
4.4	Tabular version of cancer rates.	96
4.5	The initial Recovery.gov homepage.	105
4.6	The more data-driven version.	106
4.7	Screenshot from <i>The River</i> .	108
4.8	Mapping recovery funds.	108
4.9	Data 'uplift' on recovery.gov.	110
4.10	IED attacks visualized by <i>The Guardian</i>	123

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Introduction: Seeing in the Dark

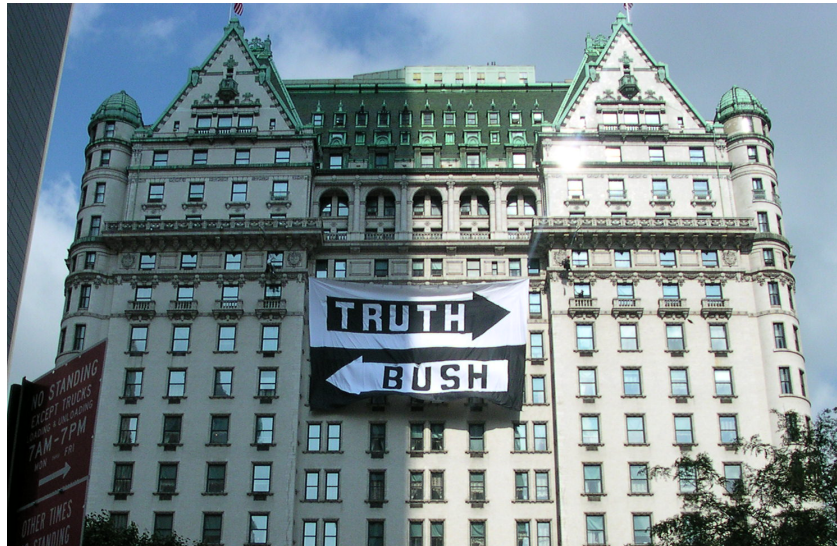


Figure 0.1 A banner hung on the Plaza Hotel in New York City in August of 2004 by the activist group Operation Sybil.

“We also have to work, though, sort of the dark side, if you will. We’ve got to spend time in the shadows in the intelligence world. A lot of what needs to be done here will have to be done quietly, without any discussion, using sources and methods that are available to our intelligence agencies, if we’re going to be successful. That’s the world these folks operate in, and so it’s going to be vital for us to use any means at our disposal, basically, to achieve our objective. It is a mean, nasty, dangerous dirty business out there, and we have to operate in that arena.”

-Dick Cheney

Meet the Press, September 16th, 2001¹

“My fellow Americans, we have traveled through more than a decade under the dark cloud of war. Yet here, in the pre-dawn darkness of Afghanistan, we can see the light of a new day on the horizon...As we emerge from a decade of conflict abroad and economic crisis at home, it is time to renew America. An America where our children live free from fear and have the skills to claim their dreams. A united America of grit and resilience, where sunlight glistens off soaring new towers in downtown Manhattan, and we build our future as one people, as one nation...But through dark days we have drawn strength from their example, and the ideals that have guided our nation and lit the world: a belief that all people are created equal, and deserve the freedom to determine their destiny. That is the light that guides us still.”

-Barack Obama

Press Conference, May 1st 2012

Introduction

These two statements bookend a dramatic period in the history of the United States. In the early days of a post millennium presidency, just two weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11th, Vice President Dick Cheney presaged that the country would be forced to “work the dark side” and “spend time in the shadows” to wage a battle for which there would be “no end date.” Signaling an end to the (relative) peace and prosperity of the prior decade, this new world was “mean, nasty, dirty dangerous” and survival in this landscape would require “any means at our disposal.” Though he was referring to the government’s planned approach to dealing with terrorist threats, in hindsight his remarks foretell the long period of political turmoil and deep conflict over events yet to come, events that included revelations of secret prisons, torture, human rights abuses, over a hundred thousand civilian casualties, two wars abroad and an unprecedented erosion of civil liberties for average citizens at home. In the midst of this political conflict, the country was shaken by the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Just over a decade later on the anniversary of the death of Osama bin Laden, however, President Barack Obama reassured the public that this period of darkness was over. The country had emerged from the “dark cloud of war” and basked in “the light of a new day.” Finally, we could rekindle the ideals that “have guided our way and lit the world.” While these remarks illuminate two widely varying worldviews, both Cheney and Obama rely on metaphors of vision and light– optics and occlusion– to signify this period of political instability. They seem to agree with one another that the intervening decade was a ‘dark’ chapter in American history. But what was this darkness, and how did we emerge from it?

The question elicits a range of possibilities, from the horrific nature of various historical events to the disastrous, at times unethical, reactions of the leaders tasked with responding to them. I want to suggest that this so-called ‘dark’ period emerges in part from the struggle to find sufficient images to represent and therefore contain events that were for many unbelievable. I do not mean that there were no images of these events, quite the opposite. The 9/11 attacks were widely viewed live on television, and the ensuing invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan were extensively covered on television through the military’s ‘embedded’ reporting program. For events and policies not covered through official media channels (the execution of Saddam Hussein, or the torture program at Abu Ghraib), a gusher of ‘leaks’ sprang forth to fill the void. Nor am I referring specifically to places like the ‘Salt Pit’ near Baghram Air Base or policies like ‘extraordinary rendition’ that remained largely hidden from public view.² By sufficient images I mean the mode of image making which equates the ability to ‘capture’ something with the psychological and emotional state of having understood and to some extent mastered it. In the same way that optical ‘seeing’ often exchanges metaphorically for cognitive understanding (‘I see what you mean’), representing something in an image implies the ability to encapsulate and transmit this understanding to another. Thus, the period of darkness that confronted us during the first decade of the 21st century partially emerged from our inability to understand, explain and master the gravity of the events that unfolded. In literal and metaphorical terms, we were unable to ‘picture’ what was happening, incapable of ‘visualizing’ a proper response. Instead of the ‘just’ image we needed to shed light on our

situation, we just had images, to paraphrase Jean Luc Goddard's well-known turn of phrase.³

The optics of this dark period were, paradoxically, pushed forward into new territory by the same force which had driven their technological development for much of the last two centuries: warfare. As scholars like Paul Virilio and Paul Edwards demonstrate, the connections between warfare and optical technology run deep, extending down into the classified realm of military research where weapons development spins off into consumer technology and out into the popular culture where war and entertainment easily pass for the same spectacle.⁴ As the old model of two nation states squaring off on the battlefield gave way to newer forms of urban guerilla combat and invisible insurgencies, modern military technology turned to the use of information and digital technology— cellular and satellite networks— to track and attack a disparate and disconnected enemy on a global battlefield. As the lines between previously distinct entities and activities like civilians and insurgents or military engagement and nation-building began to blur, the state of generalized confusion contributed to the larger impression that the United States was in the dark about who and where its enemies were, an impression mirrored in the increasingly 'optic-less' form of warfare it was waging.

Even as military strategy evolved to face these invisible enemies, activists and protest groups took up similar technologies to expose and oppose these actions. Virilio describes the complicity between the state and the entertainment industry in producing and profiting from the spectacle of war in society. And yet, for as long as there have been optical recording technologies, there have been representations which seek to counter or contest their official, state sanctioned use. This most recent period was no exception. As historical events forced the United States to take unprecedented steps (in Cheney's eyes at least), these actions provoked reactions on the part of activists, artists and everyday citizens. Like Cheney, these dissenting voices were forced to 'work the dark side' using 'any means necessary' to articulate and disseminate their opposing viewpoints. The result was an explosion of experimentation in non-fiction visual representation, one that combined older technologies like photography, film and video with newer technologies like digital networks, social media, videogames and data visualization. These new, hybridized forms combined documentary aesthetics, political rhetoric and digital technology. The recent dark period was in this sense a renaissance. It brought each of the above fields into concert with one another, a development that produced a radical evolution in the technology we use to record and represent the world and ushered in the emergence of a new 'worldview' hammered out over the course of the decade.⁵ What brought us out of the darkness was thus not a new technology, but rather a new way of seeing the world itself.

The birth of this new worldview is the focus of the text that follows. Its title, *Where Truth Lies*, describes the space of transition from one worldview to another, a space where the disruption of what once seemed solid and trustworthy (or 'true') forced the search for a new 'truth' to replace what was lost. Rather than offer an absolute definition of 'truth' I outline the dynamic in which the failure of existing representational paradigms to account for and describe the world compelled the creation of new ones on different ground. The space between destruction and rebuilding, its own 'ground zero' of sorts, is the space that

the project explores. This space exists in the overlapping border of the three territories described above: politics, aesthetics and technology. The competing worldviews I outline are as much a product of a particular geopolitical regime (referred to in various contexts as 'neoliberalism' 'multi-national capitalism' 'vectoral capitalism' or 'empire') as they are a given form of technological media or the aesthetic representations that it produces. In this sense, the disruptions that occurred in the last decade reshuffled what Jacques Ranciere refers to as the 'distribution of the sensible.' As Ranciere defines it, "the distribution of the sensible is the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it."⁶ The redefinition of where truth lies can be understood as a reorganizing of the 'self-evident facts' and social relations that comprise Ranciere's distribution of the sensible. It is, in other words, a re-distribution of the sensible.

Positioned at the cusp of film and digital media, this redistribution sits between what was clearly the dominant medium of the 20th century (the moving image) and what is arguably becoming the dominant medium of the 21st century (digital technology and the internet).⁷ But the emergence of any new media does not of course dictate the disappearance of its predecessors. Just as film did not eliminate its forerunners (still photography and print) and went on to survive the emergence of broadcast technologies like radio and television, moving images in general will survive and migrate over into new digital formats and distribution technologies. And yet, this migration will inevitably change the nature of moving images, even as moving images equally impact the nature of these new media. Film for example may have survived and influenced the emergence of its moving image counterpart television, but it was nonetheless significantly different as a result. Similarly, film, television and any number of other existing media will both shape and be shaped by emerging digital technologies. The broad intersection of moving images and digital media thus represents the major media transition point occurring today.

What follows focuses specifically on the interactions between one particular type of moving image, the political documentary, and the different ways in which it is shaping and being shaped by digital media. Working at a transitional point in an ongoing historical process that is neither uniform nor monolithic, I explore a range of documentary and digital materials that bear the marks of their mutual influences to varying extents. Some of the works I consider are clearly recognizable as traditional, feature-length documentary films and yet they nonetheless bear the imprint of digital technology in both their form and content. Other works are 'born' digital and lack any photographic, cinematic, or indexical trace, and yet they nonetheless fit within a broad documentary framework by virtue of their rhetorical contexts and political agendas. These hybrid media can be understood to a limited extent as *either* documentaries or new media but that they are best explained as some mixture of *both*.⁸

Beyond providing content, political documentary film provides the ideal context for understanding much of the political activity taking place throughout this period. At its root, documentary film collects information about the world, organizes this data into a socially meaningful form and then presents this information to the public. As an aesthetic practice,

documentary instantiates or manifests this meaning through a variety of expressive codes, including framing, editing, exposure, sound, etc. When social conceptions of truth and meaning change over time, documentary aesthetics shape and are shaped by these wider ideological shifts.

This mode of aesthetic expression, organizing information into a socially meaningful form, describes much of the activity taking place in online environments. Indeed, a corporation like Google expresses this boldly in their mission statement, which proclaims that they want to “organize the world’s information.” While a website is not simply another form of documentary film, the same impulse to inform, educate and persuade that gave rise to documentary film in previous periods shapes a great deal of the work being done in online environments. Moreover, documentary’s long traditions of participant/independent media production, archival exploration, and social discourse/action all find correlates in interactive environments which seek to enable user generated content, tagging, and social networking. Both expressions draw on the same social and political impulses, seek the same outcomes and inform one another’s execution even as they differ in the forms of meaning making which they undertake.

If part of the ideological disruption and redistribution that I describe lies in the interactions between these two forms of media, the rest of it lies in the specific political climate that emerged during the presidency of George W. Bush.⁹ The extreme controversy generated first by his election in 2000 (the first of many close elections which reminded the electorate that “participation matters”), and then by his handling of the 9/11 terrorist attacks ignited heated political debates throughout his term in office, debates which increasingly found expression *through* documentary means *in* online environments. Moreover, his administration’s general antipathy for the media and any type of transparency regarding its decisions and their consequences unsurprisingly fed a drive toward independent investigation and expression by both ends of the political spectrum. Indeed, Dick Cheney’s assertion about the need “work the dark side [and] spend time in the shadows” also inadvertently came to characterize the administration’s generally secretive approach. Consequently, the Bush administration became a natural target for a genre like documentary steeped in the Enlightenment ideal of transparency. This genre itself was in the midst of migrating to an environment that found its own mantra in Stewart Brand’s well-known claim “information wants to be free.”

As the discrepancy between Cheney’s secrecy and Brand’s transparency indicates, there is a discursive conflict between politics and digital media during this period. Both political debates and discussions about the internet find themselves enmeshed in questions of information, democracy, human rights, truth, and the competing interests of the individual and society. From the beginning, the war on terror had been conceptualized both advertently and inadvertently as a war of information. Intelligence failures like the in-ability to predict the 9/11 attacks and the mistaken belief in weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were characterized as either a lack of information or the fabrication of information to lead the country into war. The use of torture, on the other hand, is approached as a punishment of the body to access information in the mind. Similarly, the spread of the internet and networked culture are repeatedly evangelized as an information

revolution ushering in an era of collective intelligence and universal access to information. As the torture debates were weighing out the relative importance of individual human rights against the group's need for safety, internet communities were embracing web 2.0 technologies to empower a cacophony of individual voices to be heard even as these individuals were orchestrated into mass consensus (as a site like Wikipedia illustrates). As political debates waged on about the need to bring democracy to the Middle East, the internet was hailed as a democratizing source of information and positioned as the new public sphere which would return the demos to its rightful center at the heart of public life.

The meeting point between both of the above discourses during this period is the political documentary film. With its long tradition of alternative/activist media, political rhetoric, information dissemination and collective spectatorship, documentary was ideally positioned to address both the prominent political questions which came to fore during this period as well as the competing utopian and dystopian claims about the role of digital media in public life.

The Digital Documentary

While the connections between each of these three areas of focus represent mature fields of research (film and digital media, documentary film and politics, politics and new media) the specific area this project addresses remains surprisingly under-explored. To date, virtually no extended discussion exists of the intersection between documentary film as a branch of film studies and the effect of the rise of digital technology on its production, distribution and exhibition. This is an odd omission for several reasons. First, significant moments in the development of documentary form and subject matter have repeatedly accompanied and coincided with developments in the technology used to produce and distribute these films. Discussions of the Direct Cinema and Cinema Verite movements of the 1960s for example begin, as a rule, with accounts of the development of production technologies such as improved 16mm film stock, wireless sync sound, and lighter, more mobile cameras.¹⁰ And no less important to the Direct Cinema movement early on was the distribution outlet these films received from television networks, another relatively new technology at the time. Both developments shaped not only how the films were made and seen, but also their subject matter, form and social impact.¹¹

Given the significance of technological development in prior moments, it seems obvious that the emergence of digital video cameras and non-linear editing in production and DVDs and the internet in distribution and exhibition will continue to change the genre no less significantly. While the specific impact of these technologies on documentary form will provide the basis of the following chapters, they can be summed up here as 1) increased access to higher image quality, 2) greater flexibility and decreased cost in post-production, 3) increased distribution and exhibition options, 4) expanded audience potential. My point is not that digital technology has ushered in a utopian better/faster/cheaper era for documentary film. Indeed, the move from the big screen of the theater at film festivals and organizational meetings to the small screen of the computer and flat panel display in the home clearly makes a number of trade-offs for filmmakers, particularly in a genre where collective viewing is often fantasized as a form of collective action. Furthermore, a simple increase in image quality through camera

technology has little effect on the quality of the final film as a film. As Jean-Luc Godard said, "There's no point in having sharp images when you have fuzzy ideas."¹² Rather than simply evangelizing the many benefits of digital technology for documentary, I demonstrate that changes in technology over the last decade have altered both the films they are used to make and the potential political impact they have on audiences.

The Political Documentary

This connection between film-making technology and documentary aesthetics seems to indicate a determinist connection between the two that haunts any study of the emergence of a new technology.¹³ The influence of technology undoubtedly forms a key component of this evolution, but it is only one part of the equation both in this period as well as in previous moments of rapid evolution. The formal innovation that I attribute above to underlying technological developments also occurs during very specific historical moments. Documentary as the branch of film-making focused on the historical world has always been influenced by shifts in the society that it seeks to reflect and influence. Rather than a smooth development between history, aesthetics and technology, changes take place at moments of historical rupture and social crisis: wars, depressions and cultural revolutions. These underlying events also spark the types of changes that I describe here. As historical events create specific challenges for society, film-makers seek to respond to these challenges by utilizing new and existing technologies to develop new rhetorical, formal and aesthetic gestures.

Documentary as a genre is a notoriously capacious term that covers a heterogeneous variety of modes from state propaganda to ethnography. However, certain historical periods reveal a great deal of homogeneity. Relevant here are three periods that have all been elaborated elsewhere: 1) the 1930s/40s, 2) the late 1960s and early 1970s and 3) the late 1980s and early 1990s. At each of these points documentary film-makers utilized new forms of technology to respond to specific social crises. In the 1930s and 40s film-makers such as John Grierson, Pare Lorentz, Frank Capra and Leni Riefenstahl utilized new sound technologies to create state sponsored films that addressed social issues related to the Great Depression and World War II. Their films utilized what would eventually be termed 'voice of God' narration to articulate the aims and nationalist endeavors of the state. As previously mentioned, in the 1960s and 70s American Direct Cinema groups and others (the Newsreel collective, Emile De Antonio and Haskell Wexler to name a few) utilized newly available 16mm sync sound equipment, faster film stock, and lighter cameras to document the rise of the American counter-culture and stimulate resistance to the war in Vietnam. This counter-cultural ethos was once again mirrored in the form of their films, all of which shunned voice of god narration in favor of observation and participant interviews. And finally, the work of film-makers such as Jill Godmillow, Rea Tajiri, Jenny Livingston, Marlon Fuentes and Marlon Riggs responded in the 1980s and 90s to the culture war issues of the AIDS crisis, Reagan era cutbacks of social welfare programs, the defunding of the arts and other issues by turning to video to create deeply personal films meant to reflect the issues of specific subgroups. These performative films sought to bring what many had deemed the ob-scene on-scene by exploring the experiences and identities of these groups in a visible, mainstream form of media expression.¹⁴

These previous periods also demonstrate significant developments in documentary's rhetorical approach to what Jerry Kuehl calls its 'truth claims' about the historical world. As different groups turn to documentary to further their social and political aims, they bring with them very different theoretical and philosophical influences, which in turn produce different rhetorical strategies for speaking about the world. As Jonathan Kahana points out, voice of god documentary in the 1930s and 40s which sought to provide governmental transparency to the populace originated in the pragmatist philosophy of thinkers like John Dewey, Walter Lippmann and A.D. Lindsay. For these theorists and the film-makers they influenced, the general public needed to understand the true nature of the complicated workings of large government bureaucracies, hence the need for films that performed this edifying function.¹⁵ As historians of groups such as Newsreel have pointed out, theorists such as Herbert Marcuse influenced young activists to pursue independent representations of truth in opposition to the ideological truths of the state and mainstream media. In other words, counter-cultural film-makers were offering the people's truth to counter the dominant state truth.¹⁶ Finally, films in the 1980s and 90s clearly reflect the 'post' systems of thought (post-colonialism, post-modernism, post-Fordism) that deconstructed master narratives of truth, giving way to smaller scale truth claims regarding the legitimacy of alternative identity formulations and a conscious utilization of aesthetic form as an expressive tool.

The Aesthetics of Politics

This most recent period of the evolution of documentary form deserves extended discussion, both because it directly preceded our current period but also because it was the moment in documentary history when aesthetics came to the forefront as a fundamental tool (one is tempted to say weapon) for politically motivated work. While both the 30s and 40s and late 60s films utilize a particular aesthetic form to express and instantiate the given political positions they espouse, for both aesthetic form was regarded as a necessary, if regrettable component of documentary expression. Indeed, one can characterize the break from the more institutionally driven, voice of god films that characterize the early period to the Direct Cinema and Verite period that followed as a conscious move to limit artifice in favor of directly exposing or observing what took place before the camera.

For groundbreaking political filmmakers in the 1980s and 90s, however, aesthetic form was consciously embraced as the fundamental ground on which one waged a particular political stake. As before, changes in production and distribution technologies (the emergence of consumer grade video and public access on expanding cable networks) emerged alongside a broader epistemological shift across the academy about the problematic nature of different forms of representation in fields. Scholars and practitioners across fields such as History and Anthropology as well as the arts and humanities began to question the ethics and accuracy involved their work. As Hayden White demonstrated, the separations between form and content blur to the extent that meaning can only come to exist through the particular aesthetic or narrative form that it adopts.¹⁷ Ethnographic filmmakers like David McDougall, building on the work of anthropologists like Clifford Geertz, began self consciously inserting themselves into their

stories, implicitly undermining the objective authority once taken for granted by the camera/observer. In the work of practitioners and theorists such as Trinh Minh-ha, aesthetic form became central to documentary's legitimacy as a mode of expression rather than a regrettable drawback to be avoided at all cost.¹⁸

These insights shifted documentary expression past its 'talking head' experts and fly-on-the-wall observations to a more experimental, expressive mode of representation that consciously utilized and maximized aesthetic form rather than minimizing its intrusions. During this period documentary film, fine art, experimental film, video art and grass roots activist practices all began to cross-pollinate.¹⁹ This created a level of fluid hybridity between forms and modes that would later manifest again in the broad explosion of documentary forms in the last decade.

The 4th period, or Political Documentary in the Digital Age

This last period of political conflict provided a paradoxical legacy for documentary film-makers in the wake of the controversial 2000 presidential election, the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the "war on terror." On one hand they were faced for the first time since Vietnam with an extended crisis of national magnitude and hence the impulse to speak to the widest possible audience on a relatively tense political issue, while on the other they utilized a medium which has long since lost its rhetorical power to mobilize a population less willing than ever to take to the streets and march on anything.²⁰ Indeed, the breakthrough of the aesthetic turn in documentary filmmaking during the 1980s and 90s brought a conscious rejection of a single, guaranteed truth and a recognition of aesthetic form as a central component of documentary expression. And yet, the period since the 2000 presidential election kindled not just a widespread revival of political engagement, but also a corresponding surge of politically directed documentary film production.²¹ I argue that the current political crises to which documentary film responded utilized technology in ways that have radically altered the form itself, changes that extended its influence into new interactive environments and reshaped the medium far beyond traditional definitions.

As Charles Musser has pointed out, political documentary films since the 2000 election levy their truth claims over and against those offered by the mainstream media.²² That is, instead of purporting to present a state truth or an anti-state truth as films in the 30s/40s and 60s/70s did (or, in the case of 1980s documentary, anti-normative), documentary films since 2000 counter-pose their truth claims to an increasingly polarized and politically distrusted 'media' truth (for the right the object of this distrust is typically *The New York Times* while for the left the role is filled by *Fox News*). Moreover, in the last thirty years documentary films that address political issues seem to have realized the futility of speaking to those beyond a constituency of sympathetic viewers. While this audience has typically been a specific identity group, the polarized political environment in the wake of the controversial 2000 presidential election has simplified, solidified and enlarged these constituencies into two major wings (to paraphrase Bush's own terms "You're either with us or against us.") Such divisiveness enlarged the potential audience for any given film to roughly half of the population. Thus, for the first time since Vietnam,

documentary films had the freedom to speak *to* specific groups that were already inclined to believe the truth claims they presented *about* issues that affected everyone. This expanded audience, combined with the previously discussed technological shifts (the emergence of digital production capabilities and the advent of DVDs and the internet as distribution channels), provided the perfect environment for the renaissance of political documentary seen in the ten years.²³

While my assessment of the current climate of documentary film and media draws from the longer history of the medium and its interactions with politics, I focus in what follows almost exclusively on work that emerged in the last ten years. I elaborate these previous moments here both for the model they provide for our current situation but also because of the extent to which this moment inherits the legacy of these prior moments. Indeed, the historical legacy of documentary film as a viable form of political action and mobilization both explains the extent to which political documentaries have re-appeared on the national scene and provides an alternative media model for a great deal of the political activism taking place in various digital environments. That is, the general distrust of the mainstream media that characterizes our current situation explains not only the resurgence of documentary's popularity but also the legitimization of other alternative forms of participant media from weblogs and podcasts to Twitter feeds and wikis. The same impulse that gave rise to political documentary films in prior moments is now a driving force in the manner in which documentary film and these other forms of digital media are deployed in current social and political battles.

Each of the following chapters offers a comparative analysis of two different media objects or texts situated at some point along the spectrum between documentary film and digital media. I focus exclusively on the historical period which begins with the dot-com crash of 1999, the 2000 election and the 9/11 terrorist attacks and ends with the re-election of Barack Obama. However, my study draws on prior moments as they inform the central texts I'm considering. Given that many of the political issues that arose during the administration of George W. Bush have scarcely subsided with the return to power of the Democratic party, my concluding chapter extends the analysis into the 'digital presidency' of his successor.

Chapter 1 explores the impact of non-linear digital editing and compositing programs on traditional documentary film by presenting a close reading of the recent work of Errol Morris, particularly his two films about war, politics, and technology (*Standard Operating Procedure* and *The Fog of War*). In the arc of Morris' career the two films present something of a paradox. On one hand both deploy all of the standard tropes of his by-now signature style: intertron enforced eye contact, richly staged reenactment, plentiful archival material, and visually dense montage sequences set to hypnotic music. Moreover, both films deal directly with questions of war, the military and the mediated, moving image representations we have of both. And yet these films respectively represent the high and low points of his career. Though somewhat controversial with critics for its treatment of Robert McNamara, *The Fog of War* generated nearly \$21 million dollars at the box office and garnered Morris the Academy Award for Best Documentary. Going into *Standard Operating Procedure* it seemed as though his films had finally received the mainstream

attention and studio backing many felt he had always deserved. The success, however, was short-lived as the film debuted to even greater controversy and went on to fail commercially as well (earning just over \$300,000 total).

While not resolving the question of why one film succeeded where the other failed, my reading instead claims that it is the controversial nature of the subject matter that allows Morris to address his larger point. That is, while engaged in the debate surrounding Vietnam or Abu Grahیب, Morris is also exploring the technologically mediated nature of these events. In the dense collage of different materials that both films present lies an implicit critique of the media saturated environment in which important historical events lose their clarity even as they are increasingly 'covered' by different forms of representation. In his previous work, this impulse was often interpreted as baring the marks of the postmodern era of which they were a part. I argue that this collage style is now the product of a certain form of database aesthetic in which the elements of the historical record (the archive) act as discrete elements that can be mixed and remixed depending upon the particular discursive context one wishes to construct.²⁴ As different sequences flip chaotically through disparate media material (newspapers, military records, still photos, newsreels, stock footage, etc.), the overall impression is that Morris has culled through a database of material and selected specific elements that are then threaded together to present a particular narrative interpretation. Although he gives us one particular linear interpretation, one always feels that other interpretations lurk within the same materials, an impression I argue Morris encourages both formally and thematically. In the case of Robert McNamara, evidence that once yielded a specific reading of the world (a particular narrative) is now re-thought to yield different conclusions. In *Standard Operating Procedure*, the same treatment is given to the Abu Grahیب photographs. Nothing, however, guarantees one reading over another, an ambiguity that I believe lies at the heart of these films and is the source of the controversy they generated. As Morris once famously remarked, "Truth isn't guaranteed by the camera, it isn't guaranteed by anything."²⁵

This theoretical construct also plays out at the formal level: both films clearly bear the marks of the non-linear editing technology that produced them. In *The Fog of War*, for example, archival documentation made by the military of bombs dropping in the second World War is over-laid with a graphic depicting falling statistics. Thus, two forms of 'documentation' are torn from the original context in which they demonstrated military efficacy and graphically super-imposed in a historical remix to investigate military inhumanity. The free-floating images that 'snap' into various timelines in *Standard Operating Procedure* do much the same thing.

The irony inherent in his critique of media representation is that at this stage in his career Morris himself can almost be considered a multimedia artist. Each of his last two films was extensively documented in an accompanying book, and Morris contributes material regularly to a blog for the New York Times as well as to his webpage, ErrolMorris.com. That is, as Morris' films critique the omnipresence of recording technology and the extent to which it can lead us to disastrous conclusions, his activity outside of the theater expands upon and utilizes other forms of media to participate in the

very saturation he's critiquing. These extra-cinematic materials demonstrate the beginnings of a symbiosis between the films and other forms of media.

If the recent films of Errol Morris demonstrate the influence of digital technology and documentary's encroachment into other forms of media, Robert Greenwald's 2003/4 film *Uncovered: The War in Iraq* and its relationship to the political advocacy group MoveOn.org reveals a full-fledged inter-dependence between the two. As forms of grass roots political organization and action continue to move online, an increasingly common element in such websites is the inclusion of moving images. Indeed, a quick glance at political action websites ranging from those on the left (Reprieve.org, Witness.org) to those on the right (RightMarch.com, TeaPartyPatriots.org) reveals a universal reliance on streaming video footage to articulate a group's message and document its past action. Given the rise of video sharing sites like YouTube and documentary film's long established roots in advocacy and political action, their symbiosis with online, interactive technologies capable of networking like-minded individuals is unsurprising. Documentary's ability to marshal evidence with argument to present a call to action found a natural home on websites capable of providing an immediate outlet for the impulse.

Chapter 2 analyzes one of the key historical moments in the remediation of these two forms: the 2004 collaboration of director Robert Greenwald (*Outfoxed* and *Walmart: the High Cost of Low Prices*) and the political action powerhouse MoveOn.org. After a career producing what the New York Times called "commercially respectable b-list movies" like the Olivia Newton John vehicle *Xanadu* and the critically acclaimed television drama *The Burning Bed*, in the 2000s Robert Greenwald made the improbable metamorphosis into the political documentary film-maker working at the forefront of online distribution. The turning point seems to have been the 2000 presidential election, which formed the focus of the first of three films known as the "Un-trilogy": *Unprecedented: The 2000 Election* (2002), *Uncovered: The War in Iraq* (2003, 2004), and *Unconstitutional: The War on Our Civil Liberties* (2004). With *Uncovered*, Greenwald formed an alliance with MoveOn to use the film in informational meetings of political activists organizing for the 2004 election cycle. Using the feedback gathered from these meetings, Greenwald was eventually able to secure a theatrical release for a longer, re-edited version of the film. The move proved pivotal for both, and Greenwald now releases regularly to the web while MoveOn mobilizes its members to support films like Michael Moore's *Sicko* and produces documentary media of its own for distribution on its website.

This relationship demonstrates two key points. The first is the effect of digital technology on film distribution and political engagement. Needless to say, it is only in the environment of decreased production costs, simplified formatting and duplication, and alternative political organization made possible by digital technology that such a release strategy (foregoing the theater and the television networks, not to mention the major studio backing of a direct-to-DVD release) is possible. Furthermore, *Uncovered's* relationship with MoveOn exemplifies a clear symbiosis between documentary film as a source of information and the internet as a form of political action. One of the larger characteristics of post-2000 documentaries is that they lack an overt, aesthetic call to action. To borrow Jane Gaines's term, these films do not possess the aesthetic of 'political

mimesis' wherein the marching bodies on the screen were intended to motivate and mobilize the bodies in the theater (indeed, in this case, there was no theater at all).²⁶ Virtually all post-2000 films will forgo the masses of marching bodies that so clearly characterize both previous periods of political documentary. Rather than moving "from the seats to the streets" this type of pairing hopes to move viewers from the television screen to the computer screen as a prosthetic, interim step to change in the real world. Thus, the efficacy of these forms of digital activism and their comparison with other forms of activism also forms part of the argument I put forth here.

This chapter provides both an historical account of the release of *Outfoxed* as well as an analysis of the extent to which MoveOn and Greenwald relied on one another to achieve their specific goals. Utilizing this cross-pollination as a case study, I analyze the mutual synergies between these two forms of media in order to demonstrate the necessity of each for the other as well as to interrogate the extent to which both forms still rely on real-world action to achieve their ends. Even as political action and its attendant images continue to move online, the goal remains to move people direct action in the real world.

Whereas Chapter 1 presents a traditional documentary film that bore some of the imprint of digital logic, Chapter 3 presents wholly digital media influenced by a documentary logic. It offers a comparative analysis of two online, interactive video games with clear political overtones. The first is the *Gone Gitmo* project in Second Life, which attempted to recreate the real but inaccessible Guantanamo Bay prison complex in the virtual but accessible gaming environment. The project uses various 'documentary' sources for its recreation, and seeks to raise awareness about the political issues involved in the prison. The second is the *America's Army* video game that has served for several years as a recruiting tool for the US Army. The game offers players the chance to participate with other players in missions that simulate battles in Iraq and elsewhere. Although both games completely forsake the photographic indexicality that is documentary's tie to the historical world, both games utilize what I call the 'documentary impulse' to intervene in and motivate the individual to act in the real world.

While the ties between video games and cinema represent an active area of research on many fronts, my goal is not so much to outline definitively the connections between the two media in general, but rather the way in which specific game texts bear the marks of documentary film-making and social action. In the examples under consideration, both texts engage in a give and take exchange with reality in ways that clearly mirror earlier documentary film efforts, and yet, the mechanisms that drive this exchange are clearly different. Like a documentary film, these games draw on the real world to create a representation that is transmitted to participants in order to cycle back to the real world and initiate specific forms of action by those participants. In documentary film terms, this translates back to Gaines' previously mentioned theory of 'political mimesis' in which bodies marching onscreen were intended to motivate viewers to act in the real world. Such tactics were utilized by the State in propaganda training and recruitment films like the *Why We Fight* series in World War II, and by individuals in both observational and performative documentaries in the 1970s and 80s. As the cultural theorist Johan Huizinga points out, the move from spectator to player involves the participant in a methectic rather than mimetic

relationship to the representation.²⁷ Rather than going from world to representation to world as documentary films do, realist political games go from world to virtual action to a hybridized world-action. In both *Gone Gitmo* and *America's Army* this feedback loop is intended to encourage users to protest the injustice of the Guantanamo Bay Prison or enlist in the United States military via interaction with virtual simulations.

Both texts further engage in a realist rhetoric and draw on documentary material to achieve their reality effects. In *America's Army*, this takes the form of extensive maps, mission commands and weapons descriptions intended to give the player the sense that what they are experiencing in the game environment is what a soldier experiences in real life. The game's website also features 'Hero' profiles of actual soldiers and videos of soldiers discussing their lives in the army. *Gone Gitmo* likewise utilizes blueprints, photos and actual film footage to simulate the detainee experience, and includes audio files of interviews with these detainees. In this sense, both games seek to trade on something of the documentary effect to achieve their tie to reality.

Where the games differ, both from each other but also from documentary, is in their engagement with the complex mix of embodiment and agency that a game environment provides. Where documentary seeks to effect action and change by presenting a situation for the spectator's consideration, games seek to give players a sense of individual agency through their interaction with the game simulation. The terms of this simulation and its connection to reality are where the games offer an interesting comparison of the relationship between real and virtual embodiment. *America's Army* enables players to kill and be killed with realistic graphic visualizations of both, but a player's ability to simply 'start over' marks an obvious disconnect to the experience of real life battle. *Gone Gitmo* on the other hand seeks to offer an experience of Guantanamo without seeking to simulate any of its more notorious features (torture, indefinite imprisonment, etc.). Where the experience of battle without consequence is intended to ignite a desire to experience real life battle in *America's Army*, the inability to simulate imprisonment in *Gone Gitmo* is intended to end that experience for others. Both games trade on virtuality to simulate reality, but one seeks to uphold this reality whereas the other seeks to challenge it.²⁸ This chapter demonstrates that the documentary impulse survives into non-optical, virtual environments, but only insofar as representation and reality connect on essential points of correspondence.

Chapter 4 looks at the use of data visualization in government transparency initiatives during the first years of the Barack Obama administration. While Obama attempted to use 21st century tools to create what he called 'the most open administration ever,' his efforts were ironically sidestepped by the unprecedented information releases of the group Wikileaks. At the same time that Obama was seeking to digitize and visualize government records, anarchist/activist groups like Wikileaks were actively challenging the barriers between public and private entirely. Even as they reached for a series of optically driven Enlightenment metaphors to characterize their objectives (light, truth, sunshine, transparency) both utilized non-optical media to achieve this. Moving from the documentary image to digital data in its raw form, the chapter provides a historical look

back into the history of transparency that also looks forward to the shape these debates will play in the coming decade.

Taken together, each of these chapters explores the emergence of the 'digital documentary' by placing equal weight on both sides of the term, arguing that documentary informs the digital as surely as the digital informs documentary. As "data" becomes the central lens through which we view ourselves and the world around us, existing non-fiction practices such as documentary film will be the primary media that shape how digital media impact and express our individual worldviews.²⁹ In seeking legitimacy as a mode of expression, digital media drew on the precedent set by documentary, and in grappling with the impact of digital media on our lives, documentary began to express the different fears and fascinations surrounding the transformation. If the first decade of the twenty-first century did indeed cast us "into the dark" as our various political leaders would have us believe, it was a combination of both digital culture and documentary film that brought us back into the light, an evolution of forms and practices which worked show us "where truth lies" for the century to come.

Chapter 1 “We see what we want to believe” Archival Logic and Database Aesthetics in the War Films of Errol Morris

“There is nothing more frightening than a labyrinth that has no center.”

-GK Chesterton [as quoted by Borges in a review of Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* {as quoted on www.ErrolMorris.com}]

Introduction

In May of 2000 in connection with the premier of his television series *First Person* on the Bravo Network, documentary filmmaker Errol Morris launched his first homepage on the World Wide Web at www.errolmorris.com. Initially the site contained little more than the standard webpage info (biography, filmography, interviews, etc., what the site would later link to as the “BORING stuff”), but after a few months Morris eventually published a black and white image of a horse’s skull with crosses over the eyes next to the following list:

“Why it Makes Sense to Beat a Dead Horse

1. Sets an example for other horses
2. Aerobic workout
3. Horse might not be dead yet
4. Tenderizes the meat
5. Horse is unable to fight back
6. Makes you feel good”³⁰

One of several lists the site would feature over the coming months and years (others include “Why it Makes Sense to Bite the Hand that Feeds You” and “Why it Makes Sense to Wear an Albatross Around your Neck”), it represents Morris’ first attempt at creating original content for his newly adopted medium and foreshadows something of the random, ironic tone that he would develop further on the site over the next decade. As it stands today, the site is a teeming labyrinth all its own with content drawn randomly and in connection with his many film projects, commercials, books, blogs, tweets and other media that the director now uses to explore his selected topics of interest. Far from a simple website promoting his moving image work, the site is a full fledged production, and perhaps one of the more interesting utilizations of the internet by a filmmaker to connect and expand upon a multi-media body of work.

As the website and its collection of multimedia content demonstrates, Morris occupies a unique position in the field of documentary film. On one hand, he ranks among the more prominent American documentary filmmakers, standing alongside other mainstream directors like Michael Moore and Ken Burns. On the other hand, Morris has embraced digital technology head on, utilizing it both in his cinematic work and as a medium in its own right. Beyond simply incorporating CGI and other digital effects into their production, however, his two major film projects from this period (2003’s *The Fog of War* and 2008’s

Standard Operation Procedure) also demonstrate a willingness to interrogate the widespread influence of such technologies on individuals and their perception of the world around them. These films are *about* digital media as much as they are products of digital media. The dense collage of archival material that confronts us in *The Fog of War*, for example, inherently encapsulates and interrogates the archival logic that surrounds much of the drive behind the Internet today.³¹ In *Standard Operating Procedure* this collision between images and digital media goes even further. Indeed, in this film the images are themselves digital media. This combination of factors makes Morris' recent output (both online and onscreen) the ideal object for charting the convergence of these forms over the last decade.

Given his reputation as a director willing to take on such abstract topics as truth and human perception, Morris' work also became increasingly relevant (and controversial) in a period marked by extreme political polarization and overt ideological confrontation. Throughout his career, Morris' films have always been structured around a basic tension between subjective fallibility and objective truth, or put differently, individual delusion and social history.³² As the political controversies of the 21st century succeeded one another with astonishing rapidity (the 2000 US Presidential election, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the open ended 'war on terror,' the Patriot Act and Guantanamo Bay prison camps, etc.), such issues were increasingly presented and debated in a newly fragmented media landscape divided between old and new media. Thus, the principles that had long structured Morris' films increasingly seemed to structure American political discourse as well. Dealing with former secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and the controversial Abu Ghraib photographs, *The Fog of War* and *Standard Operating Procedure* are Morris' most political works to date. Unlike the more obscure corners of the world that his previous works uncovered, both films address people and events that had widespread social impact, and both focus on war and the technological media used to wage and represent it. In doing so, these films and their multimedia offshoots enter the labyrinth of images that shape our collective view into past and present, thereby offering an entry point into the evolution of technology, politics and aesthetics over the last decade.

***The Fog of War's* Twin Logics**

The Fog of War is structured loosely around 11 lessons drawn from the life of Robert McNamara. As James Blight and Janet Lang make clear in the book that accompanied the film, these lessons are themselves the product of a series of conversations and conferences that McNamara participated in along with other leaders via the Wilson Institute's "Critical Oral Histories." Initiated by Blight, the project brought together former policy makers and academics experts to debate the events and records that make-up our collective understanding of the past. Many of these reflections were previously collected in a volume called *Wilson's Ghost*, co-authored by McNamara and Blight.³³ In the books they form a series of aphorisms drawn from McNamara's direct participation in key historical events like the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War and to a lesser extent World War II. In essence, they are positioned as history lessons, not in the sense that they hope to teach us

facts about the past, but rather that the past itself is offering us insight into how to do things differently in the future.

Thus, much of the film's formal structure and the conclusions it draws regarding its subject existed well before McNamara ever stepped in front of Morris' Interrotron.³⁴ But, of course, the film itself is much more than a moving image interpretation of thoughts put together elsewhere. That is, in the process of translating this material to the screen, Morris adds his own interpretation of the lesson these events can teach us, and his own view on the perspective of his subject. Among these lessons are two that form the core of the film's critique and are therefore the focus of my discussion here. They are "Lesson 2: Rationality Will not Save Us," which the film uses to critique the use of computer driven logic and statistical control in warfare, and "Lesson 7: Belief and Seeing," through which the film interrogates the relationship between images and the events they document and communicate.³⁵ Both lessons perform the double function of depicting McNamara's recollections on screen while at the same time setting up the film's larger conclusions about our own computational and photographic approaches to the past and indeed to reality itself.

To get a sense of these larger conclusions, we need look no further than the opening of the film itself. The first footage we see is a grainy, black and white television recording of a young McNamara standing behind a podium adjusting the height of a chart and asking his audience if this is "a reasonable height for people to see." The camera then cuts to McNamara at the podium where he states: "Earlier tonight...let me first ask the TV 'Are you ready?...all set?'" Just as he is about to begin again the film then cuts to the opening credits. Intercut with the credits and set to Phillip Glass' score are more grainy, archival shots of soldiers on a ship looking out at the horizon using various optical devices (binoculars, sonar equipment, maps and charts) and apparently preparing for battle of some sort.

Taken together, these two brief moments hint at the primary themes in the film. We are introduced, via the news footage, to McNamara not just as the film's main subject and sole interview, but further as someone who is media savvy and thoroughly controls the message he is about to send. This is a message, moreover, that will be delivered with the aid of charts and graphs, delivered in a manner that's 'reasonable' to the audience. Reducing the impact of what he wants to say for those present matters less than making sure that the 'TV' is ready. The film's opening, an ironic 'behind-the-scenes' beginning from the past, also serves as an indicator and a reminder of the manipulated nature of the media through which such messages are transmitted. Lest we miss it, the closing of the opening credits gives way to the following exchange between McNamara and Morris:

McNamara: "Let me hear your voice level so I can know if it's the same"

Morris (off-screen): "How's my voice level?"

McNamara: "Fine. Now I remember exactly the sentence that I left off on. I remember how it started, and I was cut-off in the middle, but you can go back

and fix it up somehow. I don't want to go back and introduce the sentence because I know exactly what I want to say."

Morris: "Go ahead."

McNamara: "Okay. Any military commander..." (*The Fog of War*, 2:55-3:10)

As in his archival appearance before the cameras, McNamara is once again fully in control of his message, to the extent that he suggests how Morris should eventually edit the film by 'fixing it up somehow.' Rather than take this advice, Morris instead chooses to include it, reminding us once again that such messages are shaped and framed not just by those that send them, but also by the media that transmit them.

The footage in between these two clips is no less significant. As described, it consists of various soldiers on a battleship studying their environment and preparing to act on their observations. Although only presented in brief segments lasting no more than a few seconds each, they all depict what must be a very routine set of events in a hostile environment. A situation is observed via optical, infrared, and topographic means (binoculars, sonar and maps respectively) in order to determine the proper response. Once a decision has been made, the information is communicated and a course of action is set. This, of course, is no different than what most of us do at every waking moment as we observe and respond to our environment, but in this case the stakes are far higher; given the presence of massive cannons and the assembly of bombs and other munitions, they become a matter of life and death.

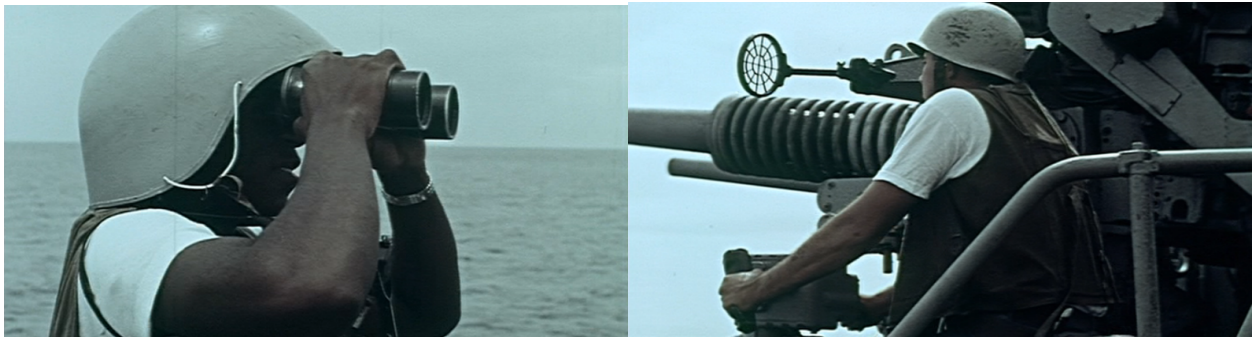


Figure 1.3 A soldier scans the horizon in *Fog of War*.

Figure 1.2 Taking aim.

Taken together, these reminders of the mediated nature of media and the archival footage of preparing for battle offer the viewer a stern warning about the information we use to reach our own conclusions and actions as we take in the flow of information from the media that surrounds us. We should be on guard, it seems, not just against the potentially flawed and mediated messages we receive, but also the conclusions we make and the actions we take based on those messages. This point is further reiterated and explored in the two 'core' lessons from the film.

“Lesson #2: Rationality Will Not Save Us”

Throughout the book version of *The Fog of War* as well as in the other written material by McNamara and Blight, the aphorism that ‘rationality will not save us’ forms the backbone of their reflections on the Cuban missile crisis.³⁶ This indeed is the point that McNamara puts forth in the film as well. Throughout the documents collected in the text, some of which are excerpted in the film, the authors paint a picture of a world standing at the brink of a nuclear war that is narrowly averted at the last minute by one factor: luck. As McNamara puts it in the film:

“I want to say, and this is very important: at the end we lucked out! It was luck that prevented nuclear war. We came that close to nuclear war at the end. [Gestures by bringing thumb and forefinger together until they almost touch.] Rational individuals: Kennedy was rational; Khrushchev was rational; Castro was rational. Rational individuals came that close to the total destruction of their societies. And that danger exists today. The major lesson of the Cuban missile crisis is this: the indefinite combination of human fallibility and nuclear weapons will destroy nations.” (*The Fog of War*, 59)

Thus, for McNamara and Blight the danger posed by nuclear weapons lies in the irreversibility of a single bad decision in the face of a conflict like the one in which Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro found themselves in October, 1962. Even rational leaders such as these can make a reasonable choice based on faulty information and incorrect assumptions that will lead to disastrous consequences. Surely this seems accurate, and nothing in the film works to contradict it.

In their dismissal of the ability of rationality to solve such problems, both Blight and McNamara leave oddly unexplored the role that rationality plays in creating them. That is, by pointing to rationality’s failure at a key historical moment they miss the extent to which it is responsible for producing this moment in the first place. This lesson is not lost on the film. *The Fog of War* spends a good deal of time visually exploring the role that instrumental rationality plays in creating McNamara’s own perspective. This critique arises subtly from the structure of the film’s visual materials. Shortly after the opening sequences examined above, the film introduces this theme through archival footage from a *CBS Reports* segment entitled “McNamara and the Pentagon.”³⁷ As observational footage rolls of McNamara scribbling down graphs and percentages for a group, a “voice of god” narrator introduces him with the following description:

“This is the Secretary of Defense of the United States, Robert McNamara. His department absorbs 10% of the national income of this country, and over half of every tax dollar. His job has been called the toughest in Washington, and McNamara is the most controversial figure to ever hold that job. Walter Lippman calls him not only the best Secretary of Defense, but the first one who ever asserted civilian control over the military. His critics call him a con man. An IBM machine with legs. An arrogant dictator.” (*The Fog of War*, 4:57-5:41)

The nomination of McNamara as an ‘IBM machine with legs’ is one the film underscores throughout via other archival materials and reenactments. For example, when he discusses his biography and the events that led to his involvement in World War II, McNamara describes his role in creating the “US Army Air Corps Statistical Control School” in 1942, a post that lead directly to his commission in 1943 as Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Corps overseeing logistics and success rates in the air campaigns over Europe and Japan. McNamara hints here that one of his great achievements was the insistence that the school take the punch cards the military had collected on every soldier and run them through the IBM sorting machine for criteria like “age, education, accomplishments, etc.” “We were looking for the best and the brightest. The best brains, the best capacity to lead, the best judgment.” (*The Fog of War*, 28:17) McNamara thus positions his ability to act in a rational manner using logic and statistics as among the key factors in his success at both Harvard and in the military afterward.

But the film’s image track throughout this segment is telling. In addition to the interview footage of McNamara, the film oscillates between archival footage of animated charts detailing information like “Analysis of Striking Power in Heavy Bombers in ETO” and reenacted footage of punch cards sliding through an IBM Hollerith sorting machine—the very same IBM machine to which McNamara’s critics compared him. The footage of the Hollerith foregrounds this earlier criticism and initiates a chain of associations that that film directly connects back to its subject. Developed for the 1890 census, such machines have long been synonymous with statistical information and population control.³⁸ Moreover, during the period of the film’s production a minor controversy erupted regarding the role of IBM’s complicity with the Nazis and the role of the Hollerith in the German war machine.³⁹ By invoking the comparison between McNamara’s own thought process and the mechanized efficiency of this early computer, the film establishes a visual metaphor that unites computational logic and human rationality with inhuman aggression and destruction, a theme reiterated each time this same footage reappears. Even as McNamara points to the importance of rational decision-making, the film pairs this form of rationality with acts of violence and aggression. Most damningly, as McNamara states that he wanted people with “the best judgment” the image track cuts to footage of bombs falling from a plane.

McNamara, of course, was not alone in introducing rationality, computers and statistics into the perfection of warfare. The historical role of other academics such as Alan Turing and Norbert Wiener in the creation of encryption and targeting systems for the military has been well established.⁴⁰ Nor is he the only one to paint these activities in a positive, patriotic light as having had a beneficial impact on both the war effort and on society in general. After heading the military’s Office of Scientific Research and Development, Vannevar Bush famously lamented the loss of a common research goal that the end of the war would bring, and called on scientists to collaborate in creating tools that would enable them to share and communicate more effectively during peace time. One such solution was a tool called the Memex, a technology that many see as an early model for hypertext and the Internet.⁴¹ Others, however, rethought the ethics of applying science

to warfare. Weiner, for example, even went so far as to forgo any type of military funding for his post-war research.⁴²

Unlike his academic counterparts who took part in the war effort, McNamara declined to return to academia and opted instead to put his newly perfected optimization and rationalization procedures to bear on production and design in private industry for the Ford Motor Company. Here McNamara describes once again the importance of personality testing (accompanied again by shots of the Hollerith), and explains how he set up a marketing office to 'get the data' about who was purchasing cars. He also describes commissioning research on accident statistics to understand how to manufacture safer vehicles. Here the image track cuts between various charts and graphs, again visualizing McNamara's approach to solving problems. The problem, he states, was 'packaging,' or the materials that surround and secure the driver in the car. This determination led him, with the help of scientists at Cornell, to research how the human body could be better protected by dropping human skulls wrapped in various materials down the stairwells of the dormitories of the school.

Here the film cuts to what Morris describes in an interview as his favorite shot of the film.⁴³ As he tells Terry Gross on NPR's *Fresh Air*, "Whenever I hear a story, particularly if it's a good story, an image comes immediately to mind and it becomes very hard to resist the temptation to shoot those images...part of *The Fog of War* is a story of dropping things from the sky, bombing if you like... But this is an instance where dropping things actually produces good rather than evil."⁴⁴ The slow motion shot Morris produced to illustrate McNamara's anecdote is thus in part one of the redemptory moments in the film for him and the rational approach that he expounds throughout.

As with all of Morris' reenactments, there is something here that exceeds the image's purported meaning. The image of a human skull falling in slow motion through space and eventually smashing into pieces at the bottom of the stairwell opens itself to any number of readings beyond simply illustrating McNamara's story of dropping for "good rather than evil." On one hand, the skull has long been the symbol of death and mortality, a reading compounded by the frailty it demonstrates in coming apart as it hits the stone surface below. Thus we are reminded of the true cost of calamities like auto accidents and high-tech warfare. On the other hand, the skull is itself the 'packaging' for the human brain, the seat of the thought and rationality that the film reminds us again and again will not save us. Its destruction in this sense speaks to its fragility in the face of 'dropping things.' Regardless of which reading we choose, the image nonetheless presents a damning indictment against the application of rationality to human aggression that McNamara celebrates throughout the film. Again, this broad critique of rationality, indeed that it "will not save us," comes not just from McNamara or the supplemental textual materials but also grows discursively from the image track of the film itself.

“Lesson #7: Belief and Seeing”



Figure 1.3 'Over-eager' sonar men.



Figure 1.4 The domino theory in action.

Shortly after recounting his invitation to Washington by John Kennedy to serve as Secretary of Defense, McNamara (or the film, we're never sure which is structuring the chronological narration of the events) turns to his account of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the discussion of which makes up the core of the second key lesson in the film, "Lesson# 7: Belief and Seeing Are Both often Wrong." Here the film thematically and formally points back to the two segments analyzed previously by including the same archival shots of soldiers on a ship preparing for battle that accompanied the opening credits.

As McNamara recounts the miscommunication that led to the misperception that Vietnam had attacked the USS Maddox in the Gulf, the film cuts to an audio recording of a conversation between the Admiral USG Sharp and General David Burchinal who determine that the error was the result of a "mistaken sonar reading." Here an archival image appears of three sonar men staring into a screen. As the error is revealed, the film cuts back to McNamara briefly as he recounts the chain of events that led from this event to the escalation of the war, which Morris pairs with original footage of a chain of dominoes falling across a map of Southeast Asia. McNamara reflects on the experience:

Robert McNamara: It was just confusion, and events afterwards showed that our judgment that we'd been attacked that day was wrong. It didn't happen. And the judgment that we'd been attacked on August 2nd was right. We had been, although that was disputed at the time.

Ultimately President Johnson authorized bombing in response to what he thought had been the second attack- it hadn't occurred but that's irrelevant to the point I'm making here. He authorized the attack on the assumption it had occurred and his belief that it was a conscious decision on the part of the North Vietnamese political and military leaders to escalate the conflict and an indication that they would not stop short of winning.

We were wrong, but we had in our minds a mindset that led to that action. And it carried such heavy costs. We see incorrectly or we see only half the story at times.

Errol Morris (off-screen): We see what we want to believe.

Robert McNamara: You're absolutely right. And belief and seeing, they're both often wrong. (*The Fog of War*, 1:06:10-1:10:53)

Here we have a chorus of voices. The voices of the two men on the phone, the voice of McNamara, the voice of Morris, and of course the visual "voice" of the images we see. The film rhetorically pairs the image of the sonar men staring into the screen with the image of McNamara staring into the camera, implicitly connecting their faulty observations with his own subjective point of view. The slow motion shot of dominoes falling both alludes to the "domino theory" behind the escalation of the war and provides a visual metaphor of historical causality.⁴⁵ This connection between an ideological framework and series of errors suggests a causal chain between faulty observations and the unintended consequences that result from acting on such observations. Thus, while giving McNamara the final 'word' (at least in the spoken sense) on one of the most debated events in the Vietnam War, the film simultaneously demonstrates that any individual interpretation is open to flaw and failure, a point that undercuts not just McNamara's perspective but also our own.

If the prior lesson demonstrated that "rationality will not save us" then its combination with these thoughts on "belief and seeing" become all the more alarming. The film's skepticism towards a rational individual's ability to make a proper decision based on a given set of information is expanded here to include skepticism of the ability of human perception to gather the proper information in the first place. This indeed is the point that both McNamara and Blight and Lang in the accompanying text want to make about the event. As the text states: "How ironical and tragic-how absolutely surreal-that the August 4th, 1964 watershed leading to a war in which three million people were killed was the result of a double misunderstanding." (*The Fog of War*, 90) The double misunderstanding in this case refers to both the error of the "over eager sonar men" and the misperception by the leaders of the two countries that this event and its response indicated a shared commitment to go to full-scale war.⁴⁶

But as with "Lesson #2," the film once again expands the scope of the critique that McNamara offers to makes its own larger claims. Rather than provoke a broad suspicion of observation, the film scrutinizes the specific forms of mediated 'seeing' that we engage in via media technology. The segment therefore includes archival material of not just the sonar men but also the subsequent footage of Johnson announcing the attack on television and committing the nation to a justified response. Misperception thus occurs not only at the level of the individual and their given ideological mindset, but also in the tools and technologies that we use to extend, record, and transmit these perceptions to others

This same theme reappears as McNamara narrates the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis in another of the crucial reenactments that structure the film. As McNamara discusses the inability of the US to determine definitively the presence or absence of Soviet missiles inside of Cuba, the film cuts to footage of large photographic transparencies of the aerial surveillance photos from the Cuban missile crisis illuminated by a series of light boxes. As the camera inspects the photographs alongside an unseen human observer, various lenses and magnifying devices pass over and in front them, distorting and manipulating their contents. At one point we see an image of a human eye peering through a photographic loupe, the magnification from which gives the eye a bulbous, distorted appearance. Considered alongside the discussion of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, this sequence reveals that the view from above can be just as faulty as the view from the ground. Placed in the context of McNamara's revelation that the Kennedy administration had wrongly assessed the presence of missiles in the photos, the images illustrate that looking closer does not always mean seeing more clearly.

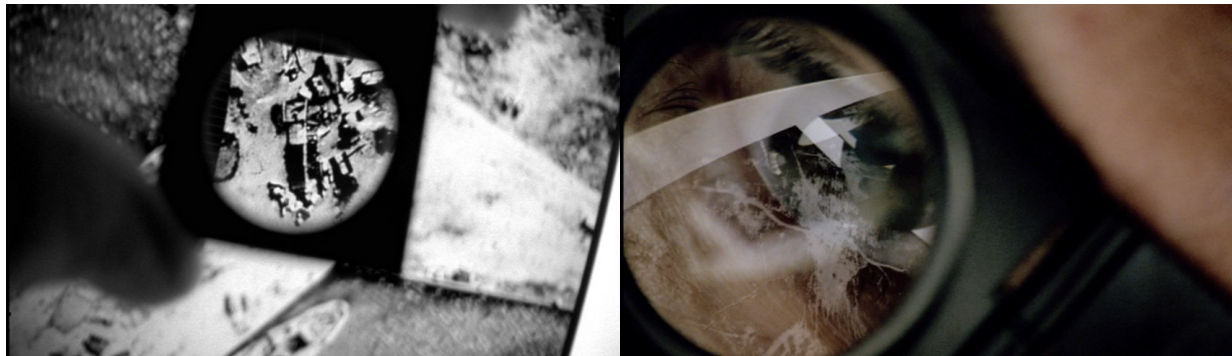


Figure 1.5 and Figure 1.6 The observed and the observer in *The Fog of War*.

The reflexive nature of their content gives these moments in the film a special charge. As the film invites us to explore the perspective of a man who played a key role in history via the cinematic apparatus, it foregrounds the subjective nature of human vision and questions the reliability of the technology we rely on to help us extend and improve this vision. While these sequences demonstrate that intelligence gathering in a hostile environment rests precariously on the limits of technology and the distortion of framing ideology, I would argue that the film extends this critique even further. That is, McNamara's reflections on the failure of "belief and seeing" in hostile environments give way to a larger critique of the relationship between reality and its media representations, a point I'll turn to now in considering the film's digital manipulation of its archival materials.

Animating the Archive

As I have been claiming, one of *The Fog of War's* primary concerns is the tendency of contemporary society to extend its vision via the forms of media that transmit current events to it on a daily basis, in essence the forms of media that he relies upon for much of the core visual material in the film. But, as I have also demonstrated, these materials are not included simply to 'illustrate' the content of McNamara's narration. Instead, these archival images form a visual voice that challenges, amplifies and expands upon the claims

of its subject. But their formal presentation also undermines their own claims as well. Even as Morris relies heavily on the archive to create the film, these historical records often communicate meanings that are decidedly different from those that they were originally expressed.

Consider, by way of contrast, the work of another documentary filmmaker credited with 'bringing history to life' in his films, Ken Burns. Similarly laden with archival material, Burns' films earnestly attempt to collect and coordinate a wealth of historical material by pairing elements that will expand upon and reinforce one another. Archival photographs, panned and scanned in what has famously become the 'Ken Burns effect,' are accompanied by period music and the narration of letters, diaries, speeches and newspaper articles from the time. This archival unity implies that a variety of media perspectives provide a sufficient representation of the past to comprehend its enormity.

In *The Fog of War*, however, the archival representations from the past are revealed to be not only fallible, but fallible in a way that reveals our faulty perceptions at the time. Thus, Morris' inclusion of this archival material seeks critically to unpack its pretensions and misperceptions for the sort of hidden truths that may lie beneath. This skepticism regarding access to the past is, of course, the thrust of the film. As McNamara states at the outset, "In my life I've made mistakes, but my rule has always been to try and learn, and pass these lessons on to the future." The film's contribution to this project is not just to question past events themselves, but also the material residue they leave in their wake.

In part this aim is achieved through the sort of selection and re-contextualization that Jayne Loader and Kevin and Pierce Rafferty mastered so artfully in films like *The Atomic Café* (1982). *The Fog of War* similarly takes footage from any number of sources and re-contextualizes it to illustrate the film's larger points. Whatever its original purpose, it seems unlikely that the footage of battle preparation from the opening credits was ever intended to question the ability of the military to gather proper intelligence, as I've been suggesting here. The film's inclusion of the outtakes from the press conference that open the film suggest a similar, subversive rereading of the footage's original intended meaning. In this sense, the industrial and propaganda materials that form the backdrop for the film all play unwitting roles in testifying to their own limitations and reveal their latent potentiality for remediation and reinterpretation. Such a move marks the film's unique utilization of the archive and sets its approach off from the earnest, good faith quotation of a Ken Burns' film.

At other points, however, the film goes beyond simply re-contextualizing its source material to overtly manipulating it. Again, Bruce Conner, Craig Baldwin and others have long utilized and manipulated archival material to critique and undercut its original rhetorical use. But unlike other found footage films, Morris combines this material with the testimony of an eyewitness observer. Consider, for example, Bruce Conner's use of found footage and media coverage in *Report* (1963-67). Conner's juxtaposition of the footage from John F. Kennedy's funeral procession with battle footage and a bullfight offers a startling, subtle critique of a society that thrives on the media driven spectacle of violence.⁴⁷ While Morris' work clearly shares political sympathies and formal methodologies with Conner's biting, ironic media satire, he differs from Conner in his

utilization and juxtaposition of this archival material with the first person interviews of his subjects. *The Fog of War* thus seeks a middle ground between the earnest archival unity of Ken Burns' work the ironic self-reflexivity of Conner's assemblages. Neither entirely redemptive nor dismissive of the archive, Morris takes a unique approach to these materials by digitally altering them at key moments to punctuate and critique McNamara's thoughts. Digital alteration—usually associated with undermining the truth or faking it—here suggest that such transformations can reveal the truth.



Figure 1.6 The 'number cruncher' becomes the bomber.

In what has become one of the film's more notorious segments, McNamara relates how he and General Curtis LeMay arrived at the means and methods for firebombing Japan. As Morris has claimed, this is the first place that McNamara has discussed his participation in these events, events which many consider to be tantamount to the eventual choice to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After stating that an operation had burned to death "100,000 civilians, men, women and children in a single night" Morris asks McNamara if he knew this was going to happen. He replies, "In a sense, I was part of a mechanism that recommended it." At this moment, after having chaotically flipped through documents, photographs, and images from the period that document the missions, the film cuts to an image or footage (we aren't sure what's causing the movement) of animated blue numbers and statistics falling out the bomb-bay doors of an aircraft down onto a city below. The original source material, a black and white, sepia toned photo, is identical to countless others that feature bombs falling out of an airplane, but this one overtly implies that the use of statistical rationality was equally damaging. Again, whatever its original purpose, through the use of CG animation the photograph becomes the film's most direct indictment of its subject.

Shortly after the 'falling statistics,' McNamara describes a report he wrote for LeMay that argued for flying the B-29s at a lower altitude during their bombing missions. While this decision increased the risk of a plane being shot down, it dramatically increased its effectiveness in 'target destruction.' Utilizing a technique that Morris has described as "3-D photography,"⁴⁸ the film cuts to a black and white image of bombs dropping from a plane. The camera appears to zoom into the image, but rather than simply enlarge the elements equally as a typical zoom would, elements in the foreground appear to expand and move more rapidly out of the frame relative to those in the background. The visual effect yields

not only the impression of three dimensionality that Morris describes but also gives us the feeling of dropping out of the plane alongside the bombs themselves. In a sense, this is exactly what the men who piloted the planes were doing given that, under McNamara's direction, they lowered their flight altitude to the extent that they became targets themselves for Japanese anti-aircraft fire. While the shot lasts only approximately eight seconds on screen, the 3-D effect is startling enough to call it out amongst the dozens of similar images that the film contains and marks the significance of this portion of McNamara's testimony. As the image digitally 'comes to life' relative to the others, we gain the sense that McNamara has gone from being a witness of history to one of its actors, directing its outcome rather than passively observing its course.

One final instance of digital manipulation further illustrates Morris' approach to his archival material. Although less innovative than the previous two, its effect is no less powerful. This moment comes as McNamara discusses the result of the firebombing that LeMay carried out on Tokyo and the devastating impact the bombs had on what he calls "a wooden city." Morris' voice is heard off-screen asking McNamara: "The choice of incendiary bombs, where did that come from?" McNamara replies to the effect that the problem lay not in the method of destruction so much as it did in its extent. He goes on to list the other cities that were similarly destroyed, comparing each target to a similarly sized American city. He states: "He went on from Tokyo to firebomb other cities. 58% of Yokohama, Yokohama's roughly the size of Cleveland. 58% of Cleveland destroyed...99% of Chattanooga destroyed, which was Toyama. 41% of the equivalent of Los Angeles, which was Nagoya." As he lists the cities destroyed, a black and white photograph of ruins appears superimposed with the name of the Japanese city and the percentage destroyed in red text. This black text fades, giving way to the name of the US city in black text over the same photo. At first the technique simply illustrates McNamara's examples, but once he stops with the list above, the image track goes on, listing dozens of other cities at an accelerating pace in time with the music. McNamara's point is certainly powerful enough on its own. But combined with the effect of the extended list and its chaotic, accelerated pace it becomes ample evidence of McNamara's admission at the end of the sequence "that [Lemay], and I believe I, were behaving as war criminals."



Figure 1.7 The details of the devastation.

Graphic superimpositions of this sort are nothing new, but their use here nonetheless stands out for the ambivalent position they occupy between McNamara's

message about the past and the film's message about him. They pose a contrast between two forms of evidence and representation: the statistical and the photographic. The images of devastation are sufficiently generic that they simply become signifiers of the concept itself rather than descriptors of a given event. Their historical specificity and their emotional connection to the audience derive entirely from the names and numbers affixed to them. And yet, the film simultaneously calls this type of statistical information into question, or at least aligns it with the rational worldview that brought about this devastation in the first place. Thus the statistical information also lacks a level of historical sufficiency without a view toward the physical devastation that it corresponds to, a dimension provided by the images that form the backdrop.

This series of images and their superimposed identifiers occupy a curious middle space. On one hand the statistics represent the startlingly calculated rational efficiency with which the destruction of Japan was carried out (as McNamara states, LeMay was the only general who focused exclusively on the percentage of target destroyed per unit lost). And yet, the film pairs them with photographic representations to redeem and represent that loss by powerfully conveying its true extent. What was once used for the rationalized optimization of destruction (statistical quantification) is now used to generate commemoration and empathy. That which had faded into generic, historical obscurity (photographic evidence of the devastation) is once again rooted into historical time and space. At the time of their creation, such representations were utilized to document and perfect the destruction that they quantify and capture. In retrospect, these same representations stand as evidence of the guilt of both McNamara and LeMay by documenting their crimes and reinforcing the extent of their impact. While neither form of representation is sufficient on its own to reach this conclusion, figured together in this series of superimpositions they reinterpret one another and provoke a self-consciously synthetic visualization of this untold moment in the history of the war.

Theories of History and the Archive

Along with the falling statistics and the 3-D animations, these graphic superimpositions demonstrate the film's ambiguous approach to its archival material and interview subject. I say ambiguous because there is at once a reliance on the archive to represent the past, and yet its constant manipulation throughout the film betrays a clear suspicion about its ability to self-sufficiently convey its own level of historical truth. Of course, even terms like 'historical truth' and 'representation' are notoriously slippery and ambiguous, opening themselves to extensive debate by credentialed historians and theorists about the existence of objective truth and its ability to be captured or represented in any given form of history.⁴⁹ Despite this ambivalence, however, the film nonetheless approaches its subject with a definite theory of truth and history. Academics may not have agreed on the existence of an objective reality or the possibility for unmediated, individual access to it, but Morris as a filmmaker nonetheless argues he has. For example, in the June 2000 interview with *Cineaste* cited earlier in which he discusses the tendency of people to "live in a cocoon of one's own devising" (*Cineaste*, 6), he contrasts this tendency toward individual, subjective delusion with a resolute belief in objective

reality. Responding to a question about his background in philosophy and the influence of thinkers like Foucault on his work, his response is worth quoting at length:

Morris: I'm certainly aware of it. But my background is in American analytic philosophy rather than in Continental philosophy, and that's where my sympathies lie. I once said that one of the good things about Cambridge, Massachusetts, is that Baudrillard isn't in the phone book. Because first and foremost there is a kind of realism behind all of the movies that I've made. Realism in the philosophical sense. That there is a real world out there in which things happen. Truth is not subjective. When you make claims such as poison gas was used in Auschwitz, there is a true and false answer. Just as there is a true and false answer to the question of whether Randall Adams shot police officer Robert Wood on that roadway in West Dallas. This is not up for grabs. You don't take an audience survey.

Cineaste: So we have an unmediated relationship with the fact.

Morris: I wouldn't say that our relationship with the fact is unmediated, but there is a fact out there.

Cineaste: But we have direct access to it.

Morris: Well, the world leaves a trail, and it is our job as investigators-or, specifically my job as an investigator-to try to lead myself back to the world. It's not something that you just grab hold of.

Cineaste: You had said there are two stories, two emphases in working on this movie.

Morris: Yes, the need to go back to that place now removed from us in time. Two stories, and they almost become confused, conflated, as if they're the same thing, and, of course, they're two radically different things. I would call one the subjectivity of history, namely that we can never know historical truth-a view that I do not believe in. Then there's another theme, which I would call the perishability of history. The idea that we know about the world, we know about our history, through the things that history has cast off, whether it's pieces of evidence, documents, the testimony of people who have lived through those times. If you think about it for a moment, there is that really sad realization that it could all be lost. It's not like science, where the world replicates itself again and again. History comes by only once, and the residue of history can be lost. (Cineaste, 7)

On one hand, Morris claims, individual social actors have the potential to delude themselves about 'reality' and construct for themselves "a cocoon of their own devising," a possibility held by both McNamara and Morris in the film's contention that "belief and seeing are both often wrong." And yet, Morris argues the potential for critical reflection by an eyewitness to provide one of the "pieces of evidence" that make up the "residue of history." But of course, this testimony is only one piece of the puzzle that the "investigator" has to put together, and thus the need for the other forms of evidence that history has "cast

off,” from documents and photographs to archival footage and statistics. At the same time, however, none of these individual records, “the trail” that history has left behind, sufficiently leads us “back to world,” and hence the need for their critical evaluation and re-assembly in the film which, taken as a whole, Morris believes leads back to some level of historical truth. Individual testimony, historical documents and archival materials on their own, in isolation, are insufficient. But re-worked, digitally manipulated, critically interrogated and contradicted, these materials together contain the potential for representing the past.

While utilizing such statements runs the risk of relying too heavily on authorial intentionality to interpret meaning, this is an instance where such statements merit a little scrutiny. As a ‘conversation’ between McNamara’s words and Morris’ images, the film explicitly addresses competing theories of history, and its release alongside a book and countless other interviews testifies to a desire to make this theory explicitly part of the film’s reception. While Morris’ theory of history may not be identical to the film’s, it at least forms part of its backdrop, and this exchange clearly demonstrates the interplay between the archive and McNamara’s testimony that I have been describing in the film.

The film’s dense collage of archival material not only seeks to represent this past, but to animate it in a manner that interrogates not just its own historical truth, but also the archival impulse itself. That is, operating in the background of the film and its treatment of archival materials is a certain level of skepticism regarding the transparency of these past media to represent the events that they outline in a self-sufficient and self-evident manner. One gathers, both from the film’s willingness to tinker with these materials and from Morris’ statements above, that the “residue” of the past collected in the archive is perhaps a necessary condition for achieving historical truth, but not a sufficient condition in its own right. Necessary also is the investigator, the one who will seek out and critically interrogate these materials. If we are to achieve historical truth via the archive, if we are to lead ourselves “back to the world,” we must tease out this truth from a mass of material in which truth is anything but self evident.⁵⁰ “It’s not something you just grab hold of,” as Morris puts it.

Interestingly, however, the film arrives at a moment when our culture is witnessing an extreme bout of “archive fever,” to borrow Jacques Derrida’s phrase. One of the fastest growing portions of the Internet during this period is not the digitization of existing analog archives, an effort motivated by the hope that by putting these materials online, we might finally arrest the process of physical decay and transform such materials into durable, universally accessible resources.⁵¹ But as Wendy Chun points out, the digital technologies that make up the computer and the internet were, from their very conception, viewed as tools that might one day organize the world’s information long before Google took this as its mission.⁵² Through close readings of Bush’s “As We Might Think” and John Von Neumann’s *First Draft of a Report on EVDAC*, Chun demonstrates that the technologies we look to as a means of permanent storage are universally reliant on regenerative repetition, a quality that makes them more similar to human memory than archival storage. Rather than a permanent, accessible archive of all the world’s information, the experience of the online archive is one of broken links and missing files on a micro-level, and the medium

specific churn of old and new material on a macro-level ('new' material seems instantaneously outdated, and old material is constantly rediscovered and re-circulated as new). Thus for Chun, the archival Internet is at once a place of both memory and forgetting, creation and deletion, a state she calls the "enduring ephemeral." (Chun, 20)

Morris' concerns about the "perishability" of history in his *Cineaste* interview as well as *The Fog of War's* general thrust to draw lessons from the past both align with the positivist, archival thrust that Chun locates in the drive to digitize. And yet the film's critique of McNamara as an "IBM machine with legs" and its willingness digitally to tinker with rather than faithfully transcode its archival sources point to a certain skepticism regarding the transparency and self-sufficient utility of the archive, digital or otherwise. Of course, the film is not 'about' the digital archive, but its critique of computer driven logic and rationality, its contention that "rationality will not save us," points to an awareness that there is more to unearthing the past and unlocking the truth in the archive than simply transcoding it into a digital form.

Perhaps the best way to characterize the historical theories of Morris and the treatment of history in the film is by way of reference to an existing if not mainstream approach to visual historiography advocated by the art historian Stephen Bann. Bann's work charts the rise of what he calls "historical consciousness" in the visual culture of 19th century Europe. Drawing from Hayden White's tropological theory of historiography, Bann contends that this growing historical consciousness over the last two centuries has delivered us into an era of post-modern irony regarding the visual presentation of history in venues as diverse as colonial Williamsburg (which effaces the difference between present and past in a move not unlike a Ken Burns film) to more overt, self-conscious juxtapositions of multiple temporalities like the work of landscape architect Bernard Lassus. Lassus's work restoring historical spaces seeks to preserve both the present of the space with "yesterday, and the day before yesterday" (*New Philosophy of History*, 210) in such a way that all are simultaneously present and yet faithful to the individual periods. While such juxtapositions might seem confusing, Bann argues that contemporary spectators have developed the faculty of "seeing double," that is holding in their vision multiple sites of historical engagement at once.⁵³

Indeed, the notion of an "ironic museum" in which past and present are preserved in their temporal and formal separation, but sit self-consciously and playfully side-by-side perfectly captures the approach to the archive that we see in *The Fog of War*. It is perhaps only in the ironic mode that we might square the film's critical treatment of computer rationality with its reliance on digital effects to re-interpret and highlight these materials, or its overt critique of historical media in the service of creating yet another media representation of these events. And yet, the film's insistence that the past is worth preserving and that it contains lessons for the present saves its ironic methodology from devolving into parody or pastiche. Even as the film's opening footage reminds us that all media are manipulated, there is gravity to its tone and subject matter that compels our attention. Indeed, the film's manipulation of its source material continually reminds us that the 'truth' of images is never entirely immanent to the media themselves; rather, truth derives from the rhetorical and critical contexts in which media appear. At once distrustful

of the archive but reliant upon it, dismissive of logical rationality but earnest in pursuing some level of historical truth, the film sits evenly between an abstract meditation on media and an exploration of the past that it has captured—a divided attention which will carry over to Morris' next cinematic project, *Standard Operating Procedure*.

***Standard Operating Procedure's* Image Aesthetics**

If *The Fog of War* works as a meditation on the archive writ large that draws in many forms of media from many different sources, then the focus of the archive in *Standard Operating Procedure* is far more closely circumscribed. Rather than explore charts, graphs, reconnaissance photos, news footage, audio tapes, newspapers and any number of other media as does *The Fog of War*, *Standard Operating Procedure* turns its attention to one specific form of media- the digital photograph- as it is instantiated in one specific collection: the images that emerged from the Abu Ghraib prison complex in Iraq in April of 2004. In spite of this shift in scale, however, *Standard Operating Procedure* continues *The Fog of War's* exploration of the relationship between historical events, the social actors involved in them, and the media representations they produce. Like *The Fog of War*, the film is as much about the media representations of the event as it is about the event itself.

Indeed, the two films share a sort of inverse, mirror relationship with one another in several other ways as well. Morris himself calls *Standard Operating Procedure* the “flip side” of *The Fog of War*, “because instead of a policy-maker- perhaps the most important person in the government save the president himself- here you have grunts, people with little or no power” (Joseph, 29), a point Linda Williams echoes in her discussion of the film.⁵⁴ Beyond the difference in rank of their subjects, both films are obviously about war and its effect on both the perpetrators and victims of such wars, and both films explore the media that these conflicts produce. Furthermore, while *The Fog of War* was a critical and commercial success, receiving generally positive reviews in the mainstream media and garnering Morris an Academy Award for “Best Documentary Feature,” *Standard Operating Procedure* received mostly negative reviews from critics, and went on to fail miserably at the box office.⁵⁵ But if *The Fog of War* received more attention than *Standard Operating Procedure* in the mainstream popular press, in academic circles the situation was reversed. Since its release, *The Fog of War* has been largely ignored in journals and other publications, whereas *Standard Operating Procedure* has generated a great deal of controversy and attention from film and media scholars at conferences and in publications.⁵⁶

Beyond their reception, the two films also mirror one another in that both were released with an eponymous companion text. But whereas Blight and Lang's text expanded the historical facts and philosophical issues explored in *The Fog of War*, Phillip Gourevitch's text instead offers a narrative account of events leading up to the Abu Ghraib scandal and its aftermath. For their source material Blight and Lang drew from their own, pre-existing research (generated over a decade of working with McNamara before he sat down with Morris). Gourevitch, on the other hand, derived his text largely from the material Morris himself collected for the film (the interviews alone ran to almost 2.5 million words⁵⁷).

The relationship between both films and Morris' website also offer parallels and differences. Whereas *errolmorris.com* largely followed *The Fog of War's* release as it was covered by other media (collecting reviews, release events, and interviews with Morris), for *Standard Operating Procedure* the site began to feature original content that explored several points in the film further and defended Morris' actions in several of the controversies that erupted during its theatrical release. While much of this was also part of the blog Morris began writing for the New York Times in September of 2007, other material on the site related to the film is unique to the site itself (the sections "The Grump" and Morris' thoughts on several of his "Aborted Projects," for example). The point here is that as Morris' presence on the web expands in the four years between his two films, his work there begins to take on a more active role in extending and expanding the issues addressed in his films. Furthermore, as *Standard Operating Procedure* comes to focus on an exclusively digital medium, photography, his own 'digital' activities online begin to expand as well.⁵⁸

The shift from *The Fog of War* to *Standard Operating Procedure* is thus not a clear thematic break but rather a shift in focus and scope. Rather than focus on the life of a single individual who had a hand in several of the bloodiest and most technologically mediated wars of the 20th century, *Standard Operating Procedure* meditates on the role of a specific media technology in relation to a specific event. But if Morris tightens the focus of *Standard Operating Procedure* to a single technology and event, the problem he explores, namely the role of photography in our understanding of an event, is approached on a number of fronts at once. In addition to the film, Morris begins simultaneously exploring the themes from the film on his blog; considering his work there alongside the film expands our understanding of both.

NYTimes Opinionator: Many Thousands of Words

Tellingly, Morris' first post to his blog appeared nearly a year before the film premiered, but it's content clearly reflected what must have been a major preoccupation at the time given the film that he was in the midst of making. Entitled "Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire," it offers a discussion of the possibility for photographs to be faked and the role that context plays in their reception and interpretation—an issue that would return front and center once the film came out. It begins: "Pictures are supposed to be worth a thousand words. But a picture unaccompanied by words may not mean anything at all. Do pictures provide evidence? And if so, evidence of what? And, of course, the underlying question: do they tell the truth?"⁵⁹ This post offers a fitting preamble to the blog itself, and subsequent posts deal further with photography and re-enactment, perception, memory and any number of other issues central to the investigation in *Standard Operating Procedure*. Many of the posts are extremely long by blog or even newspaper article standards, often running into thousands of words spread out over several installments. In one post Morris even acknowledges, in response to reader comments, that he's not blogging so much as posting essays, a point he admits before comparing his own method to Descartes' in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*.⁶⁰ If, as his first post reiterates, a picture is worth a thousand words, then it seems he is using the blog to give the photos he discusses their textual due. Given its thematic preoccupations and its simultaneity with the production and release of

Standard Operating Procedure, the blog thus forms an additional background text to the film.

Unlike the film, the focus of Morris' thoughts on photography in his blog is only occasionally on the Abu Ghraib photographs. Morris's subject is more generally the issue of truth and photographic representations, an issue that leads him to explore the work of Roger Fenton, Matthew Brady, Walker Evans, and others. In typical Morris style, his posts generally begin with a series of images, often older archival images, and then pose a series of questions they raise upon closer inspection in the tone of an investigation or a detective mystery. These questions often relate to the circumstances surrounding their creation and the extent to which they can be said to reflect the 'truth' of the scenes they capture. The discussion is often both a good old fashion mystery of the sort that Morris seems drawn to but also an occasion for reflection on the nature of reality/representation and history/memory of the sort that also frequently circulates in his films. Given the nature of his moving image work, it is not surprising that he often gravitates toward the more bizarre instances of his chosen topics. A recent post on anosognosia, for example, begins with an anecdote about a bank robber who covered his face in lemon juice mistakenly thinking this would allow him to remain invisible to the security cameras that were eventually used to apprehend him.⁶¹ But beyond simply mirroring the style of his films in general, the material on his blog often relates directly to the issues addressed by *Standard Operating Procedure*.

In one of Morris' first posts, for example, he takes the two Roger Fenton images from the Crimean war entitled "Valley of the Shadow of Death" that have been discussed by Susan Sontag and others and proposes that one of the nearly identical images must have been staged.⁶² Calling them "ON" and "OFF" in reference to the placement of a series of cannonballs in the middle road, Morris investigates a number of different techniques to determine whether Fenton or another party moved the cannonballs into the road or into the ditch for the second image. As a choice of topic, the Crimean war is a natural one in that, as Ulrich Keller has noted, it represents a sort of transitional stage in the visual history of warfare.⁶³ On one hand it was the last war to be fought as a grand spectacle for the eyewitness observer since modern weapons like the machine gun made bold charges toward the enemy dangerously obsolete. But on the other hand, it was the first war to be thoroughly visually documented by modern forms of media representation like lithography and photography. Fenton's photographs, then, are the first to be taken of any war ever, and Fenton, as Sontag notes, is repeatedly cited as the first war photographer. None of this is lost on Morris, as he cites Sontag's book repeatedly, and interviews Keller himself. The blog thus reveals the degree to which Morris researched the relationship between war and photography as he prepared to make a film about the Abu Ghraib scandal.

Beyond their status as historical forerunners to the Abu Ghraib photos, the Fenton photographs are also relevant to the making of *Standard Operating Procedure* given the nature of the questions they pose. That is, once we allow that the scene on the hillside was altered for one of the images, we must immediately ask which image, and why. Leaving aside most of the intricacies involved in Morris' attempt to order the images temporally (suffice it to say it takes him nearly 9,000 words and the use of spectral analysis to do so), it

is worth noting that he traveled back to the location where the images were taken to record his own images and reenact the conditions of their capture—an effort not uncommon in his film projects and one that lead to a great deal of the criticism of *Standard Operating Procedure*.⁶⁴ Moreover, the images provide Morris with occasion to reflect on Fenton’s motivations for altering the landscape of his subject. Was he trying to put the cannonballs back in the position where they would have originally landed (in other words, was Fenton himself reenacting the scene)? Or was he simply trying to capture a more dramatic shot (and would that have consequently been more or less faithful to the subject he was attempting to capture)? In essence, Morris is concerned with the interplay of aesthetics and reportage in the two images, and which method was more faithful to the veracity of the subject Fenton felt it was his charge to document.

Like the Abu Ghraib photos, Morris once again delves into images of war that were staged or acted out for the benefit of the camera. As many commentators have noted, there is a complicated co-incidence in the Abu Ghraib images between the presence of the camera and the incidents of torture that it records.⁶⁵ On one hand, the absence of a camera would deprive the world of evidence of these acts, so the camera and its images are necessary to understand what took place. On the other hand, there is a great deal of evidence that often the particular form of torture documented by the camera was specifically staged to create a visual spectacle for the benefit of the camera itself. Thus, what happened *before* the camera might not have happened *without* the camera (or at least not in the same fashion). Paraphrasing Morris’ title from the Fenton post, we might wonder, “Which came first, the spectacle or the camera?” But like Fenton, the perpetrators of the Abu Ghraib images arranged the scene in a certain fashion for maximum dramatic impact. Summing up his search, Morris takes a moment to wax philosophic about his desire to arrange the images. He states:

“I sometimes wonder: is the entire meaning of photography contained in these twin Fenton photographs – one the *doppelganger* of the other and often indirectly described as such? The good Fenton photograph, honest and unadorned by a desire for contrivance or misdirection, and the bad Fenton photograph – the photograph decried by Sontag – corrupted by the sleight of hand, the trick, the calculated deception.

But which is which?”⁶⁶

In a sense, the Abu Ghraib images present a quandary because they occupy the space between the two Fenton images, and that perhaps is why they came to occupy Morris in the first place.

I raise the issues presented in the blog because how we read Morris’ blog in relation to *Standard Operating Procedure* affects how we interpret the aim of the film, and its subsequent success or failure. That is, if we see *Standard Operating Procedure* as an investigation into the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and the question of US policy on torture then we are inclined to place it alongside other films dealing with similar issues like Alex Gibney’s *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007), Michael Winterbottom’s *The Road to Guantanamo* (2006) or Rory Kennedy’s *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007).⁶⁷ This of course is perfectly

appropriate given the subject matter and thrust of the companion text and the simple fact that *it is a film* by a well-known filmmaker. But if we place the film in the context of Morris' previous film on war, *The Fog of War*, and his other activities on his blog and elsewhere, then the subject matter takes on a different valence entirely. Seen as part of an ongoing meditation on the relationship between representation and reality, photography and the external world, the film is less about specific policies and events or individual culpability and more about the nature of perception, representation, and human behavior. As the content on the blog indicates, the role of photography in warfare and the nature of that particular technology in documenting and interpreting such momentous events is a topic that occupies Morris far beyond any one particular instance or set of photos. We might conclude, then, that *Standard Operating Procedure* is not so much about Abu Ghraib the event as it is about the Abu Ghraib images, and their role in the event.

How one determines film's true focus seems to dictate the extent to which one finds any merit in the film's overall project or approach. Returning to the controversy the film generate , we can draw a fairly clear line between those who did or did not 'like' the film based on what they think it's overall subject and intentions were.⁶⁸ Scholars who fall into the latter category, like Bill Nichols and Irina Leimbacher, for example, read the film as being about torture and the circumstances behind the events captured in these images.⁶⁹ Given this, they find Morris' treatment of the images and his method of reenacting the torture sequences they depict to be fraught with a fetishized aestheticization of the events that lacks a moral center. Such critics further assert that his signature Interrotron interviews simply provide an opportunity for the perpetrators to deny ultimate culpability. Nichols three primary objections, which nicely sum up the general reaction against the film, are 1) the limited perspective of the guards, and their inability to assume any of the guilt, 2) the aestheticized nature of the reenactments, and 3) the absence of any voice for the victims.⁷⁰ His is a trenchant critique of the film, and if the film is about acts of torture, then all of Nichol's claims are indeed accurate and the film's flaws are, to some extent, inexcusable.

But if we shift the focus of the film from being about the event of Abu Ghraib to being about the images it generated, our reading of its method, and perhaps its faults and omissions, also shifts. Consider, for example, the description Julia Lesage (who was largely positive on the film) offers of its subject:

“I use a textual analysis of *Standard Operating Procedure*, which takes as its topic just the Abu Ghraib photographs, to explore issues of affect in the torture documentary. However, I also explore how the film works as an analytic documentary, one that explores what the photograph, or indeed witnesses, can and cannot convey. *Standard Operating Procedure* particularly raises the question of "authenticity" in relation to its interviewees. We are asked to evaluate not only the history of Abu Ghraib torture that these participants tell us about but also how much we trust what they have to say.”⁷¹

Lesage clearly notes that the film is about “just the Abu Ghraib photographs” and what they or their creators “can and cannot say.” Linda Williams similarly reads the film as an interplay between the images and their creators, insisting that the images have as much to

do with the larger ideological context that exists beyond the frame they impose.⁷² In a reading that lies closest to the one I am proposing here, Caetlin Benson-Allott writes:

*“Standard Operating Procedure focuses on how atrocities become media files. Morris’s film asserts that although the abuse at Abu Ghraib is undeniably terrible and true, the photographs neither speak directly to us nor offer transparent access to the events. The photographs are insufficient and require interpretation from viewers, who may bring external impressions and motivations to the task. Standard Operating Procedure tries to communicate this problem by focusing on how mediation, and digital mediation in particular, disorients rather than facilitates our processes of interpretation.”*⁷³

Like Williams and Lesage, Benson-Allott determines that the film focuses on the subject of digital photography and the photographs themselves and that in this particular arena, the film offers an important, worthwhile intervention and addition to the collection of films on the Iraq war.

Interestingly, none of the scholars who praise the film deal very extensively with the reenactments it contains, and their discussion of the interview segments (which for Nichols allowed the subjects to deny guilt) emphasize the way in which the film forgoes the question of guilt for the audience to determine. My aim here is not to determine which side of the debate is correct or incorrect (though the thrust of the reading I’m offering obviously aligns more closely with those who think the film is about photography and mediation). While I agree with Benson-Allott et al. that the film is ultimately about this collection of digital images, I believe that the emphasis here is not on the images per se, but the collection itself. That is, the extensive commentary thus far offered on the film largely misses their status as a *database* of images.

Database Aesthetics

Almost without fail, nearly every critic of the film points out that the images that it deals with are ‘digital’ rather than analog photographs, and that this fact has something to do with the mutability and transportability of their contents. Had they not been, so the logic goes, they would have been far easier to contain and perhaps less likely to have been created in the first place. Lacking the need for a third party to develop the images, digital photos have the ability to reveal their contents while remaining the exclusive property of their creators to a greater extent than analog photos. And yet, their default state as digital files readily opens them to copying and sharing, lending them an instantaneous ubiquity that analog photos lack. Digital photos, moreover, are far more open to manipulation via programs like Adobe’s Photoshop. All of this is surely accurate, and as I will show the film does indeed highlight the digital nature of the images. And yet the film doesn’t emphasize either of these points. While both ideas seem to lend themselves to the types of issues I have been claiming most interest Morris, the film leaves both aside. Rather, *Standard Operating Procedure* emphasizes and questions another aspect of digital media: its status as a collection of files, or, more accurately, as a database. Interrogating the database, Morris most clearly advances the larger themes of representation, mediation and truth that became so evident in his blog posts.



Figure 1.8 The opening cloud of images in *Standard Operating Procedure*.

As it was with *The Fog of War*, the opening sequence of the film is once again telling. As the opening credit sequence rolls, or rather floats, the viewer is immersed in a cloud of spatially diffuse images floating back and away, a double movement which yields the impression that as we drift steadily forward, our attention is directed stubbornly backward at images fading slowly into the distance. While many are immediately legible as the more iconic images from the Abu Ghraib scandal, they appear here robbed of any framing context but the frame itself. But what interests me here is not the images themselves nor the frame around them, but rather the blank, nonrepresentational space in which they appear, a space that is rather overtly rendered as ‘no place.’ While this will at first seem counter-intuitive and perhaps the epitome of disinterested spectatorship (how could one *not* look at these images?), their distinct aesthetic treatment here lays bare the film’s relationship to the controversial material it explores. The film’s aesthetic is best understood through the nascent field of New Media Art known as database aesthetics.⁷⁴

In his influential *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich describes the database as the dominant symbolic form of the computer age, our new interface to the cultural field and one that replaces the centuries-long dominance of the narrative form as sustained by older media such as the novel and film.⁷⁵ While he points out that both forms, the database and narrative, have always existed alongside each other, he argues that at different points either form rises to prominence, an exchange currently taking place thanks in part to the widespread adoption of the computer as the Universal Media Machine.⁷⁶ For Manovich, the database as a cultural form is characterized as a collection of discrete entities with an infinite number of possible connections to each other but lacking in any necessary connections that order or prioritize these items. Unlike the narrative, which imposes specific cause/effect, beginning/middle/end relationships on its constituent elements, the database leaves these connections undefined.⁷⁷

Returning to the opening credit sequence, the cloud of images that float there before the viewer present themselves, in this reading, as a collection of discrete digital records, which, as products of various digital imaging technologies, they undoubtedly were/are. Presenting them as a random cluster with no immediate logic to their arrangement or spatial distribution renders aesthetically the material status these records had at various



Figure 1.9 The database of images.



Figure 1.11 The accompanying metadata.



Figure 1.12 Images compared through timecode.

points in their existence, from the non-linear editing software that rendered this shot, to the hard drives of the computers to which they were downloaded, to the memory cards of the cameras with which they were originally recorded. As digital files, they can be ordered according to any number of different principles, fore-grounded or elided depending upon any number of preferences.

We can see this same aesthetic principle at work at several other points in the film. The discrete nature of the image as individual record, for instance, is foregrounded most explicitly in the description given by Army Investigator Brent Pack about “metadata” in which he defines the “fancy two dollar word for information about information” that allows him to order the images according to various factors including the date they were taken and with which camera they were taken. The collection of images is, at other points, foregrounded as a database of such records. When Pack describes the beginnings of his investigation he reveals that the army gave him 12 CDs worth of images, which he then began to go through and organize. Here the image track explicitly illustrates a screen with the “thousands of images from Abu Ghraib” as tiled icons on an apparently enormous screen. His goal, as he states it, was to find the images that depict prisoner abuse, and identify who might have been in the area at the time. As the screen rapidly flips through these records, sound effects reminiscent of a hard drive spinning click frantically away. As Pack hones focuses his attention, the screen isolates specific images, aesthetically calling them forth from the cloud; they appear as records called up from the database with individual labels enumerating the aforementioned metadata applied over them. (Still 13) As he describes organizing the photographs according to various interpretations, the screen image responds by arranging and rearranging images into various timelines.

Again, the material form of this collection of images outside the film *is* a database. This is not, therefore, a status the film imposes on them. Significantly, it takes extensive measures to retain and foreground this materiality in their aesthetic treatment each time they reappear. The various visual and sound effects that connote the database here in this narrative medium are somewhat the reverse of the artificial shutter-sound that plays when one snaps a picture on a digital camera: aesthetic, sensory appendages held over from another medium to remind one of their origins. Indeed, Pack’s investigation as it is presented in the film is this migration from one form, the database, into another, the linear narrative. As he puts it, “The pictures spoke a thousand words, but unless you know what day and time they were talking, you wouldn’t know what the story was.”

What the Story Was

Again and again the various social actors in the film highlight this same tension between the extreme legibility of what the images depict and their inability to, as Pack says, narrate the story adequately. In essence, this is the tension inherent in the database/narrative distinction that Manovich makes. As critics of New Media art point out, much of what constitutes database art in the strictest sense often presents itself as a ‘choose your own adventure’ style set of materials for individuals to create their own narratives. And this is largely what happened with the database of images from Abu Ghraib. Once they surfaced from the prison, any number of individuals and media outlets began selecting specific images and placing them into various discursive contexts, from the Army investigation that Pack started in early 2004 to the “60 Minutes” broadcast that eventually introduced the scandal to the public. Indeed, the film itself is an attempt to understand ‘what the story was’ that produced these images.

I would like to linger on this question of the insufficiency of the images themselves to stand for and represent the events they depict in a complete and self-evident fashion.

This is, after all, the ineffable paradox of still photography: on one hand so automatically, irrevocably indexically bound to the historical world, on the other hand so mediated, insufficient and misleading about that world. Taken together, these fragments of time fail to offer a sufficient account of the circumstances of their creation. As a collection they are, in the strictest sense of the term, nonrepresentational. While each individual image may offer a mediated, representational glimpse of what existed before the camera at a given moment in time, their collective meaning has to be supplied externally. The database allows us to order its contents according to any number of criteria, to declare certain images relevant and others irrelevant, and to classify them into categories like ‘criminal act’ or ‘standard operating procedure’, but these organizational schemas are necessarily external to the database itself. In database terms, the individual record itself may be representational, but the dataset as a form is manifestly nonrepresentational. It can contain information, but meaning has to be found elsewhere. This is precisely what the film reveals in the extended CGI sequences that I’m describing as a form of database aesthetic.

Though the film foregrounds the plasticity of its source material, it does not, however, evacuate it of meaning entirely. Quite the opposite. By translating the database into a linear narrative, the film utilizes any number of techniques to account for the structure the database lacks, including the interviews, Sabrina Harmon’s letters, and, notoriously, the reenactments. Interestingly, the film lacks entirely those elements so omnipresent in *The Fog of War*. Rather than focus on a collage of external media sources and archival documents, the film focuses exclusively on the Abu Ghraib images themselves and supplements them with the interviews, letters, log books, and reenactments. Instead of animating the archive by digitally manipulating its contents as he did in *The Fog of War*, Morris aestheticizes in order to foreground the immaterial, mutable nature of the digital archive itself.

The lack of an external, secondary media context of the sort that we saw in *The Fog of War* is, of course, supplied in our contemporary context by the flurry of media coverage that surrounded the Abu Ghraib images when they first emerged on the scene and were widely taken up and debated from any number of perspectives. For some, the Abu Ghraib images represented the work of ‘a few bad apples.’ For others, they offered a glimpse of the moral vacuity at the heart of the Bush administration’s prosecution of the war on terror. For others, they were the unsurprising proof of Western aggression against the Middle East, a manifestation of the larger “crusade,” as Bush himself once called it. As WJT Mitchell asserts, these images proliferated for a brief time with the rapidity and uncanny duplication of the act of cloning, and in each new manifestation they accreted meanings and interpretations along the way. In reference to the infamous ‘hooded man’ photo he writes: “If ever an image has been ‘cloned’ in the circuits of mass media, this one was, both in the sense of indefinite duplication, and in the further sense of taking on a ‘life of its own’ that eludes and even reverses the intentions of its producers.” (Mitchell, 204) For Mitchell the image’s resemblance to Christian passion iconography and its transposition onto an Arab body indicate its inherent openness to interpretation in multiple pro- and anti-war discourses.

I would instead argue that the fluid nature of the images as a *collection* allowed them to be inserted into multiple competing discourses. That is, lacking a fixed story of their own, the database of images from Abu Ghraib provided ready source material for people on every side of the issues involved: when the images emerged, they had no captions to anchor or interpret their meanings. As Morris, echoing Susan Sontag, claimed in his first blog post, “a picture unaccompanied by words may not mean anything at all.” But as they circulated through the mediascape, any number of commentators stepped in to fill the void. Thus, the same ‘hooded man’ image appeared on Fox News with the caption “Detainee ‘Abuse’” and on the cover of *The Economist* with the headline “Resign, Rumsfeld.” This is exactly the flexibility of meaning enabled by the database, and it is this aspect of the Abu Ghraib images that the film repeatedly highlights in its CGI sequences depicting them moving about the screen.



Figure 1.13 The Fox News take on the ‘Hooded Man’ photo.



Figure 1.14 May 2004 cover of *The Economist*.

And this, indeed, is perhaps why the film generated so much controversy among critics and academics and so little interest among viewers. That is, by opening these images up to multiple interpretations and by insisting, as Morris's films always do, that the images themselves mean nothing outside of a specific discursive context, the film confronted a socio-political landscape already heavily populated with very definitive interpretations. And unlike McNamara's reflection on events and debates over thirty years old, these discourses were still in wide circulation. Coming rather late to the party, the film's claim that these images are still open to reconfiguration proved to be an unwelcome contribution to the discussion. Documentaries, after all, are interpretations of the historical world that invite us to agree or disagree, a move Bill Nichols describes with the enjoiner "This is so, isn't it?" Unfortunately for Morris and his studio, a majority of the viewing public the answered the question "This is so, isn't it?" with a resounding "no."

Outside of the film's success or failure, however, considered amongst his other projects of the last decade it clearly stands as his most technologically driven project to date in both form and content. As digital media came to dominate the field of filmmaking, its implications for truth and representation obviously came to dominate Morris' projects as well. But an event as recent and divisive as the Abu Ghraib scandal lacks the historical distance and 20/20 hindsight that the Crimean or even Vietnam wars provide, and as a consequence the film became swept up in the controversy it explored. While the film has already faded into the background of recent documentaries addressing torture, it

nonetheless exemplifies the ever-growing integration between moving images and digital media, making its thoughts on the dangers therein all the more timely.

Conclusion

If we return to the rather cryptic epigraph (heading this chapter) that first adorned errolmorris.com in 2000, it now seems a prophetic inauguration for the shifts to come in both Morris' own work and the political landscape as whole that we have been considering here. As his interests expanded from film to many forms of media both old and new, Chesterton's fear of the "labyrinth with no center" seems to have served less as a warning than as an inspiration for Morris. Amidst a decade that witnessed the extreme polarization of American politics, however, an arena in which the center all but disappeared, Morris' work seems to have heeded the call. Moving from the more arcane fringes of obscure Americana into the stormy waters of political filmmaking, Morris' two major projects from this period offer unique attempts to carve out an ethical and political center in the issues they explore. Taking on such notorious figures as Robert McNamara and Lyndie Englund guarantees that viewers will come to these films with strong, preconceived notions about their subjects, notions that the films attempt to confuse rather than clarify. Thrusting us into the center of complicated ethical issues, both films further force us to empathize to some extent with those we consider our enemies, a move that McNamara himself reminds us is essential if reconciliation is to be achieved and humanity preserved. If his next project is any indication, Morris' work from this decade may prove to be an aberration. Released in 2010, *Tabloid* centers on former Miss Wyoming Joyce McKinney and her odyssey of kidnapping, cults and non-consensual sex. While it certainly continues his pre-occupation with mass media and social mediation, Morris has returned once again to his previous emphasis on idiosyncratic subjects.

While it may have been detour for Morris, however, the intersection of film, politics and technology that these two films explore was rapidly becoming the center of online activism and documentary filmmaking during the presidency of George W. Bush. Some, like MoveOn.org, began the decade as little more than e-mail lists to organize and inform voters and activists, but ended it as political powerhouses with organizing groups in every district and a fundraising network big enough to swing elections. Central to this growth was its innovative use of documentary moving images. Others, like Robert Greenwald's Brave New Films began as traditional documentary production companies but evolved into political action committees that utilize documentary film as one among many tools for mobilizing constituents. As we will see in the next chapter, these two groups began on opposite ends of the spectrum but gradually grew together over the course of the decade.

Chapter 2

Networked Audiences: MoveOn.org and Brave New Films

“Revolution doesn’t happen when society adopts new technology, it happens when society adopts new behaviors.”

-Clay Shirky, “Here Comes Everybody”⁷⁸



Figure 2.1 The MoveOn.org logocirca 2010.



Figure 2.2 “Fox Attacks” special edition of Brave New Film’s *Outfoxed*.

Introduction

In the title of the introduction to his influential study of radical political documentary on the left, *Show Us Life*, Tom Waugh cleverly poses the question “Why Documentary Filmmakers Keep Trying to Change the World, or Why People Changing the World Keep Making Documentaries.”⁷⁹ Like the book it is drawn from, the title hits directly on a theme that has run throughout the last eighty years of documentary filmmaking, namely its connection with the people and organizations that hope to produce social change. What Waugh’s title also cleverly, perhaps inadvertently, uncovers is that there are at least two routes to the production of a social issue documentary: the first stems from the desire to ‘change the world’ and hits upon documentary as a means, the second originates in the ability to make a film and alights on a particular issue as an application of the medium. Waugh’s playful re-articulation is clearly meant to bind political activism and social change with documentary film. But it also inadvertently describes the paths of two progressive activists, the husband/wife team of Wes Boyd and Joan Blades, and the filmmaker Robert Greenwald, whose organizations, MoveOn.org and Brave New Films,

would take dramatically different routes toward the level of hybridity that Waugh implies. What Waugh couldn't have foreseen in the pre-Internet era in which he was writing, however, was the importance of newly available digital technology for both.

The political polarization of the decade after 9/11 radicalized a new generation of political activists who already possessed lives and livelihoods outside of organized party politics but who nonetheless felt called upon by the events they saw unfolding to *do something* about newly perceived injustices. This meant that somebody like Jon Stewart could blend a career in comedy and entertainment with an impulse to speak out politically into a new form of political entertainment, *the Daily Show*, which in turn found an audience amongst a generation of like-minded and similarly politicized viewers.⁸⁰ For Blades/Boyd and Greenwald, this metamorphosis took the form of blending careers in technology and filmmaking respectively with large scale political organizing to create two of the most influential political organizations working today. As of 2010, MoveOn.org boasted over five million members and participated daily in organizing campaigns across the country on targeted issues from civil rights, to health care to budget reform.⁸¹ For its part, Brave New Films was responsible for some of the decade's most successful and influential political documentaries from *Walmart: The High Cost of Low Prices* (2005) and *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism* (2004) to several of the most overt attacks on the Bush administration and its war policies, including the so-called "Un" trilogy— *Unprecedented* (2002), *Unconstitutional* (2004), *Uncovered* (2004)— and *Iraq for Sale* (2006) among others.

Currently, the two organizations seem surprisingly alike. In spite of the social media that enabled it to become the archetype of netroots organizing, MoveOn.org regularly turned to the decades old technology of documentary media as a means to mobilize members. Likewise, Brave New Films has repeatedly turned to social media in order to fund, publicize and even produce its film projects. Both ended the decade as hybrids of documentary film and political activism of the sort that Waugh alluded to twenty years earlier. For both, however, the glue that enabled this synthesis was technology that emerged in the two decades since. Their parallel evolution, moreover, is not simply a coincidence. At several points around key political events during the Bush years, notably the 2004 elections, the two organizations collaborated on projects that convinced each of the efficacy of the other's tactics. Both organizations started the decade with the conviction that their respective form of media (filmmaking and the Internet) could, as Waugh put it, 'change the world,' but both left the decade with the conviction that it would take some combination of both to do so.

This chapter looks at these organizations and considers the way in which both utilize differing measures of documentary film and digital media to change the world. Despite their disconnected roots in technology and filmmaking, over the period of 2000-2010 the two organizations evolved to resemble one another in ways that challenge easy distinctions between documentary film or social media. The heated, gloves-off environment of political debate surrounding the series of close political contests from 2002-2008 emboldened both groups to engage in radical media experimentation to advance their political agendas. Their individual and shared history during this period provides an ideal illustration of the natural synergy between these forms. In MoveOn and

Greenwald, we find a praxis driven example early in the decade of the broader theoretical debates that would eventually emerge. While scholars and historians look to the role of YouTube videos in Iran's Green revolution in 2009-10 or the part played by social media technology like Facebook and Twitter in the Arab Spring which began in 2010, Greenwald and MoveOn were pioneering similar practices years before these eventual mainstays of web 2.0 even existed.⁸² As Waugh might put it, and as Greenwald and MoveOn both demonstrate, people trying to change the world were still making documentary films, but they were also doing other things as documentary images became one part of a widespread strategy aimed at social change.

Moving in the Same Direction

The story of the MoveOn/Brave New Films collaboration begins with the mysterious connection between two seemingly unrelated pop-culture relics of the past: singer, songwriter and sometime actress Olivia Newton John, and the iconic 'flying toaster' screen saver of the pre-internet computer. The simple answer to the enigma of their interconnection is that both were the forerunners, and in a sense the angel investors, of what would later become Brave New Films and MoveOn.org. Before his engagement with political documentary, Robert Greenwald worked for several decades producing and directing what the New York Times described as "commercially respectable b-list movies,"⁸³ including 1984's *The Burning Bed* starring Farrah Fawcett, and of course 1980's *Xanadu* starring Olivia Newton John. While several of these early films evince a clear interest in social issues, nothing foreshadows the dramatic transition he makes in the wake of the 2000 presidential election to producing and directing some of the most critically and commercially successful political documentaries of the last eight years.

Joan Blades and Wes Boyd got their start founding Berkeley Systems, a Bay Area software company that created a number of different applications for the Mac including an early text-to-speech program "Outspoken" and a virtual desktop program "Stepping Out." Mainstream success arrived for the company with its popular screensaver program *After Dark*, which featured the signature flying toasters and the later trivia game "You Don't Know Jack." After selling the company in 1997, Blades and Boyd began circulating an online petition via e-mail in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal that directed Congress to "censure President Clinton and move on." The petition, which eventually generated over a half a million signatures, established an issue-oriented, technology-driven campaign model that the resulting political action group it inspired has followed ever since. Over the last decade the organization has adopted various social media technologies like Meetup, Facebook and Twitter to extend its network of political activists into a number of domains ranging from election campaigns for individual candidates to more general issues like health care reform and the war in Afghanistan.

As innovators in the fields of film production/distribution and political organization, Brave New Films and MoveOn have both been the object of extensive study by film scholars, political scientists and sociologists seeking to analyze the impact they have had producing social change. Charles Musser and Christian Christensen, for example, both point out the innovative distribution techniques Greenwald and Brave New Films pioneered in the period from 2004-2008.⁸⁴ Christensen demonstrates that Brave New

Films, via its partner organization, Brave New Theaters, has begun building non-traditional screening outlets for its films (in homes, churches and other public venues) into a hub for sympathetic groups and individuals to initiate further social action.⁸⁵ Similarly, MoveOn has been the object of extensive research for social and political scientists seeking to unpack the group's use of newly evolving technology for political organization and mobilization. Studies have focused on the role of MoveOn in relation to other grassroots movements, the group's use of technology (particularly e-mail and other social media) to create a new model for a Social Movement Organizations and on the rhetoric of its campaign materials in manufacturing a virtual imaginary community.⁸⁶ In addition to this, both organizations have received an impressive degree of attention from the mainstream press.⁸⁷

Less discussed, however, has been the influence of the two organizations on one another. Furthermore, despite an acknowledgment of the obvious role of films and other media in their efforts, most of the coverage has left aside any formal or aesthetic discussion of the media itself and what role these qualities might play in shaping the tone or direction of the action to be taken.

Robert Greenwald: From *Xanadu* to Afghanistan

Prior to working with MoveOn.org, Greenwald got his start in the documentary form when Richard Perez and Joan Sekkler, both longtime activist filmmakers, approached him with "paper bags filled with tapes they had shot in Florida."⁸⁸ Outraged by the outcome of the 2000 election, Greenwald found it surprising that no one else was working on a film about the myriad of controversies and inconsistencies surrounding the Bush victory. He agreed to take on producing the project, which eventually became *Unprecedented: The 2000 Election* (Richard Ray Perez, Joan Sekler, 2002.) Timed to coincide with the 2002 mid-term elections, the film premiered on September 17th, 2002 and went on to several film festivals and high profile screenings but did little to change the results of the election, which was widely perceived as another victory for the right. Its impact on Greenwald, however, was significant. As Musser put it, although "the documentary changed the trajectory of Greenwald's filmmaking career...its limited distribution and impact provided the filmmaker with issues to ponder as he looked toward the 2004 election."⁸⁹

In June of 2003, with the war in Iraq already well underway, Greenwald began work on his next film. As with *Unprecedented*, his goal was to shed light on an issue being ignored by the mainstream media. For Greenwald, the film seems to have resulted from something of an epiphany:

"It was an early morning in late June, I was reading the paper, and in the middle of a long article about Iraq, one of the Bush Administration folks was quoted, speaking about 'programs for weapons of mass destruction' and how sure he was that they would find 'programs.' I got a knot in my stomach and a feeling of deep concern. We did not go to war for a program...We went to war because we were told there were 'weapons' and that the threat was imminent and dangerous. But the article did not in any way challenge this revisionist explanation of the 'why. I imagined a headline - 'Programs for WMD Found!' - and I feared that we would all just accept that."⁹⁰

This narrative reveals that the decision to make the film stemmed from two inter-related forces: his perception of the administration's change in tactics, and significantly, his conviction that the mainstream media was failing in its duty to hold it accountable. His oppositional stance toward both institutions (the government and the media) not only informs the overall direction of his career since, but also places him in step with a number of other newcomers to the progressive media landscape including Jon Stewart, newly emerging left-wing bloggers on sites like the DailyKos and, of course, MoveOn.org, a group of activists that Theodore Hamm refers to as "the new blue media."⁹¹ Although still a novice to documentary film, Greenwald was immediately drawn to its potential as an alternative media form, an impulse that had been attracting activists and artists from the Worker's Film and Photo league in the early 1930's through groups like Newsreel in the 1960's to the ground-breaking (and ongoing) efforts of groups like Paper Tiger and Deep Dish television to sidestep the mainstream media.⁹²

Like his forerunners, Greenwald realized that an effective alternative media required not just a different message, but also a different channel of distribution. He states: "I have made over 50 films including theatrical, cable, and television, all utilizing the existing distribution system. In the case of UNCOVERED, I wanted it seen quickly. So I never considered the traditional gatekeepers."⁹³ For Greenwald, this end run around the existing distribution system entailed approaching John Podesta of the Center for American Progress (a newly formed progressive think tank largely funded by George Soros) and Wes Boyd of MoveOn. Both organizations provided funding for the completion of the film but also, and perhaps more importantly, tapped into their existing member networks for what Greenwald called an "upstairs-downstairs" distribution model. This involved CAP organizing screenings for key-decision makers (including every member of the House of Representatives and the Senate...the presumed 'upstairs' center of power) and MoveOn organizing screenings in 2,600 house parties across the country (the 'downstairs' segment of disaffected voters.)⁹⁴ Further up-ending the traditional distribution model, Greenwald also sold DVDs of the film directly from his website via alternative outlets beyond CAP and MoveOn including *AlterNet*, *Buzzflash* and *The Nation*, eventually enlisting a commercial distributor and selling over 120,000 copies of the film. As its reputation grew, the film attracted the attention of a commercial distributor who took it to the Cannes film festival and released a longer version in theaters around the world.

In addition to breaking new ground in distribution, *Uncovered* also forged another principle Greenwald's films have adhered to since: timeliness. Initially, Greenwald had planned on a year to complete the film, but at the request of Wes Boyd (who asked if it was possible to do in a month) Greenwald cut the schedule down to just under five months. While certainly longer than the immediacy of mainstream television news coverage, by film standards this timeframe is relatively quick. As events continued to unfold and new information came to light, Greenwald further demonstrated a willingness to rework the film, eventually expanding it by nearly 30 minutes and shortening the title to *Uncovered: The War on Iraq*. Later, even five months would seem too long. Greenwald's 2008-9 project, *Rethink Afghanistan*, was shot in a series of installments which were released to the web before eventually being reworked into a longer DVD release for event based screening

and direct sales.⁹⁵ Greenwald's desire for speed and the consequent need for a more flexible text both demonstrate his desire to compensate for perceived lacks in coverage by the mainstream news media and a wholesale reliance on emergent technology in order to do so.⁹⁶

With *Uncovered* Greenwald thus established the two features that have been the hallmarks of his activity since: 1) cooperation with other activist groups for production, funding and exhibition (what Christian Christensen identifies as the "coalition model" of documentary advocacy)⁹⁷ and 2) distribution via whatever technology will allow the work to be seen by the greatest number of people in the shortest amount of time be it DVD, theatrical release or, eventually, online streaming. The film's commercial and critical success firmly established Greenwald in the circuit of progressive liberal activists and media makers, connections he would increasingly rely upon in future projects. Indeed, as we'll see, Greenwald's next project not only perfected this model, but also resulted in a newly formed production company cum activist organization, Brave New Films, that has since become the umbrella organization for all of his political activities. But before Greenwald could take that next step, he needed some additional help from MoveOn.org, which itself was quickly evolving from an e-mail petition to a political media powerhouse.



Figure 2.3 – 2.5 Greenwald's Un-trilogy.

MoveOn.org

The story of MoveOn.org's evolution toward political power and media advocacy offers a paradigmatic example of the 'power of the internet' variety that has now become commonplace, one in which an organization's speed of success comes as a surprise for everyone involved, including its founders. Although the unexpected is by definition difficult to anticipate, MoveOn has managed to capture that spirit repeatedly in its first decade of existence. The viral success of Boyd and Blades original e-mail petition to "censure President Clinton and move on..." (garnering hundreds of thousands of signatures

in a few weeks) exemplifies an often repeated theme in media accounts of its organizing ability: an ability to raise money quickly or turn out supporters for last minute events. Although MoveOn made an early push for tougher gun legislation in the wake of the Columbine High School shootings in 1999, for the most part its early years were focused on issues related to the impeachment and reshaping Congress away from its Gingrich based social conservatism.⁹⁸ In the run-up to the 2000 election, MoveOn repeatedly broke online fundraising records for candidates it supported in races against some of the most outspoken proponents of impeachment, including James Rogan of California (the House Impeachment manager), and Florida congressman Mark Foley.⁹⁹ Although it scored a few early victories in these races and established itself as a player in political fundraising and viral campaigning, MoveOn sat out the post election protests over Bush's election (a move Boyd later regretted) and seemed resigned to periods of inactivity between election cycles.

However, the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11th and their political consequences pushed MoveOn's membership and its founders to a more issue oriented protest model. Rather than focus solely on elections, MoveOn began mobilizing between elections to oppose specific policies. In 2001, the group merged efforts with 911-peace.org and recruited its founder, Eli Pariser, to be its Executive Director. In a story reminiscent of MoveOn's own, on September 12th Pariser sent out an e-mail to 30 friends asking them to sign a virtual petition he set up urging "moderation and restraint" in response to the attacks. In two weeks the petition generated over 500,000 signatures and elevated the 20-year-old Pariser to national prominence as a leader in the growing protest movement to the invasion of Afghanistan. It also brought him to the attention of Boyd and Blades, who clearly recognized Pariser's potential and saw him as a natural fit for their efforts.

Over the next few years, Pariser would be instrumental in MoveOn's foray into media campaigning as a key component of its political strategy. In early 2002, during the build-up to the war in Iraq, the group launched another online petition calling on Congress to "let the [weapons] inspections work" and sought member donations to raise \$40,000 for a full-page ad in the *New York Times*. When the effort generated nearly \$400,000, MoveOn took this as a sign that its members were "very interested in being heard through advertising," as Blades put it.¹⁰⁰ MoveOn used the additional funds to create what became known as the "Daisy" ad after the controversial Lyndon Johnson television advertisement that aired during his 1964 race against Barry Goldwater. While reaction to the MoveOn version was mixed, it succeeded in generating attention and airplay far beyond the original thirteen cities in which it was shown as a paid spot.¹⁰¹ David Fenton, MoveOn's communications consultant, claimed that thanks to its coverage on the internet and cable news outlets, it is the most viewed advertisement in the history of the medium.¹⁰² Seeking to build on this success, MoveOn next created a contest to replicate the success of the Daisy ad in a more distributed fashion. Called "Bush in 30 Seconds," it challenged MoveOn members to create a political ad that summed up the Bush administration in 30 seconds. The winner's entry would be aired during the Super Bowl halftime show paid for by MoveOn contributors. The contest was judged by a panel of celebrities, from the musician Moby (who is credited as one of the contest's creators) to other high profile personalities

like Jack Black, Russell Simmons and Michael Moore.¹⁰³ Citing a policy against advocacy advertising during the game, CBS declined to sell MoveOn the spot. But the winning ad and the controversy the contest generated nonetheless earned an enormous amount of free publicity for MoveOn.¹⁰⁴ MoveOn continued to make political advertising a primary tool in its efforts throughout the next few years, airing over \$10 million dollars of its own material in the 2004 election alone.¹⁰⁵

Since 2006, MoveOn's other channel for distributing these short political advertisements has been through embedded video clips on its website. While MoveOn had used streaming video in campaigns before (notably for the "Bush in 30 Seconds" contest) the advent of YouTube in 2005 brought simplified video streaming to mainstream users, obviating the need for custom browser plugins or software downloads to deliver video over the web to a mass audience.¹⁰⁶ Less than a year after YouTube launched, MoveOn had established a profile on the site and began uploading campaign related videos to embed in their webpages. A typical MoveOn campaign page now regularly features a short video of explaining the issue at hand, a brief text explanation of the issues involved, and a form of some kind to respond (donating, signing a petition, e-mailing a specific politician, etc.) Unlike the messages it pays to broadcast on mainstream television channels, these embedded campaign videos are more akin to in-house advertising and offer short bursts of information and rhetorical appeals to incite the viewer/member to some kind of action. To date, MoveOn has posted hundreds of these short videos on its YouTube channel and, collectively, have been viewed over fifteen million times. YouTube's allowance of embedded video on other sites means that a significant portion of these videos were watched by users visiting the MoveOn campaign pages, thus most users would have encountered them within the context of an overt political message rather than in the context of other user submitted video that forms the bulk of YouTube's content. While the inclusion of streaming video on a webpage has by now become commonplace across the Internet, MoveOn's specific use offers clues about its approach to moving image media in general

Beyond direct advertisement and short embedded video clips, MoveOn's most consistent use of media in its campaigns has been its support of outside projects it feels are relevant to its larger goals. After the dispute between Michael Moore and the Disney Corporation over the distribution of Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, MoveOn started a pledge drive of members willing to see the movie on its opening weekend hoping to make the film a success in spite of the efforts to block it. In exchange, Moore participated in an online virtual 'town hall' meeting that connected 30,000 members at a number of house parties across the country with the director to discuss issues raised in the film. In calling on members to see the film, Pariser praised it for taking up a mission similar to Greenwald's: holding the administration accountable on issues where the mainstream media isn't. He writes: "Despite years of television coverage on Iraq and the war on terror, most of the movie consists of footage you'd never see on TV...The film is filled with this stuff, and it's hard to imagine seeing it and not being moved, shocked, and outraged." Since then, MoveOn has sponsored screening and attendance drives for many films including *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim, 2006), Moore's later films *Sicko* (2007) and

Capitalism: A Love Story (2009), Leonardo DiCaprio's *The 11th Hour* (2007), the Iraq war film *The Ground Truth* (Patricia Foulkrod, 2006) , and of course several of Robert Greenwald's films, including *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*, which would prove to be the most extensive ongoing collaboration between the two organizations.

Fox News: A Common Enemy

In mid-2003, reports began surfacing in the mainstream press that a Republican led effort to filibuster the Senate in an all-night session pushing for an up or down vote on George W. Bush's judicial appointees had in fact been the idea of an editorial in *Weekly Standard*, a publication owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, *The Washington Post* and *The Hill* both reported that Fox News had asked Republicans to schedule the filibuster to coincide with the opening of *Special Report With Brit Hume* at exactly 6:02 to capture their dramatic entrance live on television.¹⁰⁸ While the story itself simply became a footnote, for progressive activists and media watch groups, it seemed to provide clear evidence for their long-held suspicion that Murdoch's company, and Fox News in particular, were heavily biased in favor of Republicans. For MoveOn.org and Robert Greenwald, it was a call to arms, one that would direct their next collaboration and shift the future direction of both organizations.

Given their mutual opposition to the Bush administration and their mistrust of the mainstream media's ability to hold it accountable, Fox News presented Greenwald and MoveOn with the opportunity to critique both groups at once. Claiming, as Greenwald did, that "Fox is a Republican, not merely a conservative, network," meant that confronting the network would simultaneously allow them to confront the entire Republican agenda.¹⁰⁹ This move, in turn, further solidified the position of MoveOn as an alternative to conservative and Republican policies and Greenwald and other filmmaker's as alternative media outlets to the mainstream press.

Fox itself had long been an object of scorn for the left based on what many saw as its destructive effect on television news in general. Long dominated by CNN, the market for 24-hour news began expanding in 1996 with the addition of Fox and MSNBC. To launch the new network, Murdoch hired Roger Ailes, a former NBC executive and Republican political consultant. Ailes was responsible for designing the network's emphasis on live news coverage during the day followed by opinion programming in the evening. To anchor these evening programs he hired large personalities like Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity in order to differentiate Fox from the staid programming of CNN. The network's emphasis on visually dense graphic presentation and sensational stories earned it comparisons to *USA Today*. But despite these dismissals, between the terrorist attacks in 2001 and the run-up to the Iraq war, Fox moved into first place in the cable news ratings, a prominence that drew attention to its effect both on cable news specifically, but also on American political opinions in general. The heightened tension surrounding the attacks and an impending war played directly into the dramatic, sensational presentation that Fox brought to the business of television news. Its style was so extreme that even Laura Bush once criticized the network for "scaring people" with its continual coverage of the terror threat level.¹¹⁰ As Ken Auletta pointed out in a widely read profile of Fox and Roger Ailes from 2003, CNN and MSNBC both found themselves in the position of playing catch-up, often by ineffectively

imitating the leader.¹¹¹ Moreover, many widely suspected that conservative media such as talk radio and Fox News were responsible for the ascendancy of the Republican party on a national scale, an influence Sociologists would later dub “The Fox News Factor” or “The Fox News Effect.”¹¹² Thus, for progressive political action groups like MoveOn, Fox News was not just a convenient target but rather an essential one for the advancement of the progressive agenda.

In 2003, MoveOn and Greenwald teamed up again to work on a political action campaign that would expose what they believed to be Fox’s abuse of mainstream journalism, the centerpiece of which would be the Greenwald documentary *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism*. As with *Uncovered*, MoveOn provided production funding alongside The Center for American Progress, but this time it also lent its numbers and organizing strength to the production of the film itself. After recording and looking over six months of 24-hour-per day recordings of the Fox News channel, Greenwald outlined what he believed to be the most egregious of the Fox News tactics, which he categorized into a series of themes that would form the backbone of the film. MoveOn then put out a call to members asking for “Fox Monitors,” individuals who would sign up to watch Fox News programs during specific times throughout the week.¹¹³ When monitors found examples of Greenwald’s themes, they would fill out a spreadsheet detailing the date, time and context and forward it on to him. Greenwald then compiled these reports for his team of editors, who would pull the footage and work it into the appropriate sequences. To complement the Fox footage, Greenwald also conducted interviews with a series of former Fox employees, several of whom disguised their voice and appearance, as well as outspoken critics of the network like Al Franken and Eric Alterman.¹¹⁴

Once *Outfoxed* was complete, Greenwald, together with CAP and MoveOn pursued the same upstairs/downstairs distribution method that they had used on *Uncovered*. To leverage the film, MoveOn conducted a series of specific actions based around the film that it dubbed the “Unfair and Unbalanced” campaign. These included a petition to the FTC to block Fox’s use of the phrase “Fair and Balanced” on the basis that it was inaccurate and misleading, a night of 2,750 house parties to screen the film, and a series of press releases and e-mail campaigns calling on Congress to force the network to “come clean about its rank partisanship,” as Wes Boyd put it.¹¹⁵ In his letter to MoveOn members urging them to participate in the campaign, Boyd also announced that members who made a \$30 donation to the alternative news organization AlterNet would get a copy of the film for free, stating that, “As part of this campaign, we’ve got to support good media, and AlterNet is a great independent outlet.” In addition to AlterNet, MoveOn, Greenwald and CAP also teamed up with several other independent news organizations and watch dog groups including FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting), Common Cause, Media Matters and the Center for Digital Democracy, among others.

Predictably, Fox responded to the claims presented in the film. Instead of suing for copyright infringement (as it had against Al Franken for his book *Lies (and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them): A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*), Fox instead leveled its own accusations on air against MoveOn, the *New York Times* and George Soros for colluding to “corrupt the journalistic process.”¹¹⁶ Fox’s insinuation that *The New York Times* was itself a

liberal mouthpiece overtly echoes claims that the network, and the right in general, have repeatedly made about the general liberal bias of much of the mainstream media news, from NPR and CNN to the New York Times.¹¹⁷ Regardless of the validity of either side's accusations, a topic too vast and vexing to take up here, these claims only further bolstered progressive calls for an independent media apart from the larger corporate conglomerates who had come to dominate virtually every channel of the news media. Indeed, the website for the *Outfoxed* film directs visitors to "Sign the petition to break up the big media conglomerates and get higher quality news" and to "Volunteer with Independent Media Centers all across the globe."¹¹⁸ What Fox failed to realize in its counter-attack was that the progressive activist groups aligned against it weren't advocating for one corporate media organization over another, but rather against corporate media organizations in general. For Greenwald, the entire shift of his career over into documentary filmmaking and his partnership with organizations like MoveOn was based on the belief that people not only wanted but also needed an alternative form of media and a different channel through which to access it.

***Outfoxed* the Event**

Like much of Greenwald's documentary output, *Outfoxed* works within a barebones style that offers little in the way of aesthetic flourish or textual innovation. The talking head interviews juxtaposed with footage from Fox itself simply seek to prove the case, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the network engages in blatant political favoritism and consistently presents editorial opinion as unbiased news. As one reviewer described it, "the result is an unwavering argument against Fox News that combines the leftist partisan vigor of a Michael Moore film with the sober tone and delivery of a PBS special."¹¹⁹ The film's strongest evidence is its use of the Fox material itself to decontextualize and lay bare what it describes as the Fox style of journalism. Its smoking gun lies in a series of memos leaked to the filmmakers by Fox employees (and later published on the film's website) that detail the way in which Fox sets its agenda for covering specific events. The memos, sent out by Fox's Vice President for News, John Moody, suggest specific angles from which the news should be approached, and are the film's irrefutable evidence that Fox directs its employees to cover the news from an overtly political standpoint.

The film's conclusion, that Fox News is politically biased, is as *The New York Times* put it, "not exactly earth shattering."¹²⁰ By the time it was released, studies had already been published by the Columbia School of Journalism and Maryland's Program on International Policy demonstrating these exact conclusions, and Fox's particular style of reporting was sufficiently well known that it had already become fodder for parody on popular political satire outlets like *The Onion* and *The Daily Show*.¹²¹ But simply because the point had been made elsewhere doesn't make the film itself irrelevant, and moreover it denies the utility it afforded the progressive groups who created it as a documentary. Although academic studies had been carried out and jokes had been delivered all pointing to the same conclusion, the case had yet to be made in the particular form that *Outfoxed* delivered. Put differently, the "sober tone of a PBS special" that the film manifests is not simply the result of a lack of creativity, but rather an intentional part of its larger rhetorical strategy.

Form in this case refers not only to the particular organization of *Outfoxed* itself but also to the documentary form in general, both of which played decisive factors in the context of the film's argument and its circulation within progressive political discourse in this period. As a type of moving image media, documentary naturally lends itself to the method of media quotation essential to the film's strategy of using Fox's own material against itself. As Julia Lesage points out, documentary film is adept at taking vast quantities of information and synthesizing it down into salient points and a digestible format, a skill that would be brought entirely to bear by Greenwald and MoveOn as they sought to distill six months worth of 24 hour per day Fox News coverage down into the hour and a half running time of the film.¹²² This level of decontextualization and synthesis allows the film to achieve the small degree of stone faced humor it allows itself as, for example, Bill O'Reilly repeatedly commands his guests to 'shut-up' in a variety of ways across a multiplicity of contexts, all presented in rapid montage succession. Pairing this sort of comedic evidence with the more traditional expert interviews segments positions the film directly between the academic studies and the parodic attacks that came before it.

Moreover, set in the context of mainstream media criticism, the film utilizes the documentary mode to reflexively position itself as the type of product that it is advocating. When paired with its unique production methods, *Outfoxed* becomes a powerful organizing tool for MoveOn and its members. In collaborating with MoveOn members to identify the material that would later appear in the film, Greenwald was effectively engaging in an early form of what Jeff Howe would later call "crowdsourcing," or using technology to assign a large task to a group of disconnected individuals to complete in parts.¹²³ While the term would eventually come to refer to everything from the creation of Wikipedia to attempts by businesses to utilize slave-labor in the developing world, for MoveOn it represented a unique opportunity to engage its members in the form of direct, participatory democracy that the group stands for. Incumbent in its attacks on Fox and the mainstream media and overt in the rhetoric used by its independent media partners is the belief that a strong democracy requires an equally strong press to hold the government accountable and provide the electorate with the information they require to make informed choices. For Greenwald and MoveOn, the first step in achieving this goal was exposing what it felt was the most egregious example of corrupt journalism, a goal it could only achieve through the help of its many members. In this sense the film itself is a product of group action in much the same way that MoveOn tries to be.

The documentary form also lent itself to the particular method of organizing that MoveOn had pioneered, the house party. If MoveOn members were an important part of the film's production process, they comprised an even larger part of its intended audience. Through its use of the house party to screen films for its members, MoveOn has essentially become an ad-hoc exhibitor for political documentary films, able to produce thousands of viewers for a given film. Indeed, MoveOn's house party event for Greenwald's *Walmart: The High Cost of Low Prices* put together 7000 simultaneous screenings. Arguably it enjoyed a wider release than James Cameron's *Avatar* which, at its height, played in 3,461 theaters simultaneously.¹²⁴ There is, of course, no comparison, between a nationwide theatrical release sustained over many weeks and a stand-alone event arranged in a myriad

of private venues, but in the realm of documentary film this level of exposure is nearly unprecedented. For a filmmaker simultaneously engaged in political activism, access to a group of politically committed audience members presents an enormous opportunity for Greenwald to translate his film into action, not to mention DVD sales (party hosts are often required to purchase the films at their own expense, typically at a discount).

For MoveOn, the events also double as membership recruitment and volunteer drives. Since house parties are typically paired with a conference call afterward that includes MoveOn organizers and the filmmakers, attendees feel part of something larger than their particular gathering. As an eighty six minute text delivered in a “sober tone,” documentaries like *Outfoxed* function as a crash course for MoveOn members in the issues the organization seeks to advance. Of course, such events have long been a staple of political documentary films, which are often screened in public venues to sympathetic audiences to generate awareness and motivation for specific issues or causes.¹²⁵ Where MoveOn differs from its forerunners is in the sheer scale it achieves through technology. When a house party is planned, members are notified via e-mail and other channels of the upcoming event and asked to host a party. Once a sufficient number sign-up on the website to hold an event, a second wave of e-mails invites others to RSVP to one in their area using their zip code. If no party is being held nearby, members are asked to hold one of their own, soliciting participation from friends and family who might be interested. From here, hosts are asked to purchase copies of the film and provide an internet connected computer or telephone to participate in the discussion afterward. After the screening, hosts will typically call or login to a conference call where MoveOn staff and/or the filmmakers will address the audience and occasionally answer a selection of questions.

Paired with this technological interconnection is the face-to-face interaction at the party itself. Situated in people’s homes but open to the general public, these events hinge upon turning the shared experience of the film into an interpersonal connection amongst people whose primary interface with the organization that brought them together is through their computer. Reportage on the house parties in the mainstream press paints a heterogeneous picture that thwarts easy characterization, with accounts ranging from catered gatherings in the homes of wealthy celebrities attended by hundreds to small get-togethers in apartments offering home made appetizers to a dozen people.¹²⁶ Regardless of the nature of individual events, however, in their mass simultaneity they offer a unique hybrid of public and private spectatorship that troubles the traditional distinction between the theater and the home. Despite talk of the Internet and the high definition living room atomizing the traditional theater audience, the MoveOn house party works toward creating the same sense of collective spectatorship offered in a theatrical screening.¹²⁷ While hosts and other attendees are encouraged to publicize the screenings to friends and family as a distributed publicity tool, there is little expectation that a given event will be composed solely of people familiar to the host. The inclusion of the conference call also requires the nationwide screenings to take place at the same time. This simultaneity strengthens the collective sense of a shared experience which in turn fosters greater identification with the organization and the collection of individuals who comprise it.

The structure of the house party also assumes people will want to discuss the film and the issues it raises after they have watched it, and the gathering provides a natural outlet for the impulse. Centering the party on the film screening gives the people in attendance a built in conversation topic on an issue that they are already predisposed to support. Furthermore, it also gives them a chance to act upon the problem structure that organizes most of Greenwald's films. In spite of his reluctance to utilize the pathos driven approach that comes more naturally to someone like Michael Moore, his films nonetheless deal with controversial issues that he and MoveOn feel people will act on. Attendees are often asked to conclude the event by writing postcards, signing petitions, making phone calls or volunteering to participate in future events, all of which provide an outlet to respond to the call to action that problem documentary films end with. This move implicitly pairs collective spectatorship with collective action, and in the context of the house party the two sit side by side. In this sense, the documentary form offers MoveOn the ability to bring its members together around an event (the screening), provide them with a shared body of knowledge and then ask them to act immediately on the information they have been given.

In the context of the house party, the "sober tone" of a film like *Outfoxed* thus sits ideally between the seriousness of the academic studies and the accessibility of its popular culture parodies that had already been presented on Fox's bias. The zero degree style that Greenwald's films employ fits within a logic that dictates that once people have the information they will be compelled to act, and the house parties are so structured to capitalize upon this. The social ritual of coming together to watch a film and the impulse to participate in a nationwide 'event' are both centered on the experience of the film text, and the film text derives its agency from the context in which it is presented. No other media form offers this same level of symbiosis.

***Outfoxed's* Offshoots**

Greenwald himself went on to adapt the material from the film into additional forms of media, in this case a book (co-written with Alexandra Kitty) and a website, and both offer interesting gestures toward the two ends of the spectrum that I am arguing his film sits astride. If *Outfoxed* the film is less weighty than more serious, academic studies on the topic, then the book is clearly an attempt to make up the deficit. As was the case with the companion texts to both Errol Morris' films from the same period, the book essentially works as a set of footnotes to the film: citing sources, reprinting transcripts from the interviews and Fox broadcasts and presenting a more detailed argument than a film would allow.

And where the book grounds the film's assertions in a solid body of evidence, the website extends its argument and call to action forward in time and updates its documentation of Fox's tactics. In addition to the standard film website housed at www.outfoxed.com (which contains a trailer, synopsis, reviews, links to purchase the DVD and other additional information,) Greenwald also launched an offshoot site at <http://foxattacks.com> that contains a series of viral videos created after the film's release. Utilizing the tagline "They distort, We Reply" in response to Fox's well-known "We Report, You Decide," the videos are intended to expose Fox's coverage of ongoing issues for

inaccuracy and political bias. Thus when Fox goes “on attack” against an individual or issue like Michelle Obama or Health Care, the staff at Brave New Films will post a video documenting their claims and notify subscribers who can then forward the video on to others. For content, the site relies on partnerships with other independent watchdog groups like Newshounds and FAIR to alert it to inaccuracies in Fox reporting (a group it calls a the “Fox Attacks Coalition”).¹²⁸

In another context, a website like FoxAttacks.com could be interpreted as an advertising mechanism to spur on DVD sales of the film, much as the popular “Freakonomics” blog implicitly advertises for the book even as it provides ongoing analysis that the book doesn’t contain. In this context, however, there are several indications that the site’s purpose is more than purely commercial. The first is that Greenwald, under the Brave New Films production company that came out of *Outfoxed*, has offered all of his films, including *Outfoxed*, for free on Google video (a companion site to YouTube without the length restrictions.) The aim, apparently, is to get the film’s larger message out regardless of the particular channel of distribution. The second is that Greenwald made all of the source material in the film, including the interviews he conducted, available for use by other filmmakers under the Creative Commons license. Like the Fox Attacks website, publishing the raw material treats the film as part of an ongoing project for further development as opposed to a finished text. More broadly, Greenwald has claimed that, like many documentary filmmakers before him, his aim is not to make money from the film but rather to advance his political agenda.¹²⁹ Funded by non-profit foundations and promoted for free across a variety of channels, the pay off for its patrons lies elsewhere. As Jonathan Kahana notes, “Such entities usually expect to generate cultural, political, or ideological, rather than financial, returns on their investments.”¹³⁰ In this sense Fox Attacks is a political extension of, rather than commercial support for, the film that inspired it.

Fox Attacks also demonstrates a keen awareness on the part of Greenwald to tailor the broader message to the individual media channel in which it appears. If the house parties acknowledge that a feature length documentary lends itself to discussion and follow-up action, the website asserts that a video clip on a webpage lends itself to brevity and sharing. In making the videos highly portable (they are capable of being e-mailed, linked to and embedded in other webpages,) Greenwald is taking advantage of the interconnected, entirely transferable nature of digital media on the internet. In making them brief, he is admitting that the attention span of the internet audience is relatively short. It is telling, for instance, that even after the film was made available on the web for free, DVD sales have continued coming in, owing perhaps to the preference of one medium over another depending on the length and tone of the message, although habits in this regard are hardly fixed.¹³¹ As Musser points out, this awareness of the power of the short form on the web would become key to Greenwald’s work during the 2006 and 2008 elections.¹³² But regardless, the lessons learned from the *Outfoxed* project by both MoveOn and Greenwald would have immediate and ongoing influence on the activities of both.

Outfoxed: The Aftermath

Although Greenwald and MoveOn continue to collaborate on projects and campaigns and mutually support each other’s projects, their integration has never been as

extensive as it was on the *Outfoxed* project. Nonetheless, the collaboration charts a course that both groups have continued to follow since.

For its part, MoveOn has continued to support films and filmmakers who share its causes through house parties and screening drives. As video streaming became simpler and more ubiquitous, MoveOn's campaign messages and other webpages increasingly featured short video clips of materials relevant to a particular issue. Its use of these materials runs the gamut from the 30 second attack ads aimed at television to short testimonials by MoveOn members about an issue or their experience with the organization. Like Fox Attacks, MoveOn's video strategy demonstrates a canny awareness of the internet as a medium. Two particular styles seem to dominate their output and both offer examples of the larger role of MoveOn's in-house media production.

The first type of video that MoveOn regularly produces is closely related in form and purpose to the television advertising the organization has sponsored. As the "Bush in 30 Seconds" contest, the infamous "Daisy" spot and its equally infamous 2008 follow up "Not Alex" demonstrate, MoveOn has clearly become adept at turning a controversial advertisement aired in a few states into a national conversation topic that replays in news segments on television and becomes virally distributed across the web on blogs and other social media sites. MoveOn's in house advertising for its specific campaigns may be intended for a different audience and distributed in a more limited fashion, but it nonetheless functions in much the same way. Slightly longer than a thirty second spot, these videos are still quite short, in keeping with the brevity principle for web-based video. They reach their conclusions quickly and seek to make one brief call to action, usually via the webpage in which they appear. In 2008, for example, MoveOn created a compilation clip of seemingly irrelevant questions asked by ABC News correspondents of the Democratic presidential candidates and paired it with a call to sign a petition asking ABC to "focus on the issues."¹³³ Its style and message clearly draws on the *Outfoxed* campaign. In another recent video entitled "Lieberman Socks," sock puppets portray a group of Senators huddled around Joe Lieberman trying to convince him to support the public option. The video accompanied a petition to Congress and President Obama to "Stand up for Real Health Care Reform."¹³⁴

Though shown to existing MoveOn members, the videos use humor and comic juxtaposition to appeal to the broadest possible audience. Outside of their political point, they offer mild entertainment targeting both politically active and nonpolitical members of the public. Like the original e-mail petitions that Blades and Boyd created in 1998 and Eli Pariser sent around in 2001, the hope for these videos is that they will 'go viral' and spread around the internet via e-mails, links and posts to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. But failing this, these embedded clips and the enjoinder to "share them with your family and friends" clearly serve another purpose since most of the people viewing them on MoveOn pages are already members. Sharing the video by posting it to a Facebook page, e-mailing it to a friend, etc. not only works to publicize the issue, but it also provides the member doing so with the sense that they have done their part for the cause. MoveOn's conception of itself as a member driven organization clearly depends not just on getting its members to participate, but also on giving them the perception that this participation is



Figure 2.6-2.8 Screen shots from Elinor and MoveOn’s ‘Host a Party’ on YouTube. As Elinor gestures around the screen she implicitly acknowledges her presence embedded in a web page next to a form for viewers to volunteer.

what makes a difference. Providing them with a palatable, humorous, easily distributable message introducing an issue enables these clips to serve both functions.

The second type of video that seems to dominate MoveOn’s YouTube channel is the member testimonial. These clips feature members, often self recorded via webcams, testifying to their experience with MoveOn and entreating other members to become similarly involved. In another context such limited production value might be a detriment, but in this context the format actually works as a strength. In a video called “Host an Event!” a woman named Elinor shares her experience hosting a party for MoveOn and asks others to do the same.¹³⁵ Sitting before the camera in what appears to be a dimly lit living room, Elinor states “If you’ve only interacted with MoveOn on the internet, let me tell you, it’s better in real life!” She goes on to ask viewers to “Sign up now to deliver a petition to your congressman, it’s an easy thing to do. All you have to do is fill out the form that’s located there, or there, or maybe there.” As she gestures around the screen, acknowledging her virtual location on a webpage, her call to participate ‘in real life’ urges the viewer to move beyond the medium that currently connects them. Her onscreen appearance and its webcam-aesthetic reflexively mirror the members who are watching her from their computers; as she sits and looks into her computer screen, the viewers sit and gaze into

theirs. Even as emphasizes the technological interface, the video also puts a human face on an organization that otherwise largely exists as a webpage on the internet. Like the house party, these member testimonials seek to personify MoveOn the organization. Their DIY aesthetic and their status as indexical moving images speak to a desire on MoveOn's part to reveal the people behind its organizing prowess, people who, like the spectator, can do it themselves. As Paul Arthur might claim, it is through these aesthetic limitations that the videos gain the "jargon of authenticity" they seek to impart.¹³⁶ Significantly, even an organization as rooted in digital technology as MoveOn still has consistent recourse to the power of documentary testimonial to further its aims.

For Greenwald, *Outfoxed* represented the formalization of his move into documentary activism as a new production company, Brave New Films. Functioning until this point as Robert Greenwald Pictures, Brave New Films signaled that political documentary would now take center stage. In time, the production company would grow into a collection of organizations that include the Brave New Foundation and Brave New Theaters. Each of the three organizations serves a somewhat specialized purpose, but their overall goal is remarkably similar to the collaborative model that Greenwald pioneered with MoveOn. Brave New Films focuses on media creation, from viral video series like "The Real McCain" targeted at politicians, to longer running projects like "Rethink Afghanistan" which started as a series of video installments but was later built into a film. Brave New Theaters functions as the distribution arm, offering a platform for activists and media makers to connect and then providing them with tools to host a screening and associated political action. Brave New Foundation works as a partner with other activist organizations on political action campaigns around issues like immigration, the war in Afghanistan, clean energy, etc. and it also offers consulting and training to other non-profit organizations on how to effectively utilize social media in their efforts. While the focus of all three organizations is on media production and distribution, there is also a clear effort to integrate the organizational components into the process in a fashion similar to MoveOn.

Though similar, the two organizations do not compete with one another. Rather, they view themselves as partners in an ongoing struggle to create a more effective democracy. MoveOn sees its route as organizing members to make their voices heard, utilizing old and new media in the effort to do so. Brave New Films seeks to empower independent media organizations to hold politicians accountable and make the voices of the electorate heard by bypassing the "traditional gatekeepers," as Greenwald himself put it. The irony in their evolution and interaction is that MoveOn's roots in new media technology have increasingly led it to forms of old media moving images, and Greenwald's skills in old media production have increasingly found an outlet on new media platforms. The question remains, does either form of media, old or new, actually achieve what both groups seek: political change?

Documentary Agency and Read/Write Culture

In what has become a classic essay in the field of documentary film scholarship, Jane Gaines posed a question that had hung over the heads of filmmakers and scholars for much of the existence of the genre. Namely, have documentary films changed the world, and if so, how? Referencing a 1995 study by Kirwin Cox for the National Film Board of Canada,

Gaines notes that the “forty-eight scholars and filmmakers polled had difficulty thinking of any films that had actually ‘changed’” anything, opting instead to point to films that had achieved some level of local influence. Undeterred, Gaines decided to conduct her own poll of scholars and filmmakers, but her results were largely the same. In lieu of films that had created change, they opted to discuss films that *should* have changed the world. She writes: “although they could list films which had moved them personally, they could not be certain that these films had actually changed anything for anyone.”¹³⁷ Given documentary’s long history of social activism from the work of John Grierson down, this result is surprising. As Gaines notes, it flies in the face of the desire of legions of filmmakers and activists who look to film as a tool for social transformation and social justice. While it seems absurd to believe that every film documenting a pressing social issue will produce a desired change, it seems impossible that eighty plus years of documentary output had failed to produce a single, exemplary case study of a film that had.

Rather than a failure of the documentary form to produce change, Gaines’ essay demonstrates both the difficulty of the precise, quantitative cause/effect measurements of “media effects” more broadly, but also the emergence of a widespread skepticism regarding documentary film’s relationship to notions of objectivity, truth, and reality. Indeed, as many of the essays in the “Collecting Visible Evidence” anthology demonstrate, the entire modern period of documentary film scholarship, initiated, among other things, by the 1992 publication of Bill Nichols’ landmark *Representing Reality*, is characterized by the assumption that the necessary relationship between documentary and reality is at best tenuous and at worst, a fiction. The scholars polled by Gaines had trouble finding a film that changed the world because the solid, indexical links between film and the world at that particular post-structural, post-modern moment were under broader scrutiny. For those questioning the solidity of documentary’s ‘truth claims’, the ability of this truth to convince an audience was equally suspect. And, as the work of Errol Morris exemplified in the last chapter, this skepticism about the relationship between truth and documentary was held not just by scholars, but by some filmmakers as well.

Beyond academia, however, a belief in and desire for documentary agency persists. In October of 2011, for example, an article in the Guardian provocatively echoed Gaines question, asking “Can Documentary Films Change the World?”¹³⁸ The occasion for the article was the announcement of the creation of the Creative Impact awards, which aimed to “honor the documentary film creating the most significant impact in the world.” In an indication of the somewhat straightforward way in which the issue would be judged, the organization elected a jury that included mainstream directors such as Morgan Spurlock, whose 2004 film *Super Size Me* claimed responsibility for forcing the restaurant McDonald’s to remove the ‘super size’ option from its menu. As a marker of public perception regarding the agency of documentary film, the article set a fairly stringent standard for what it defined as cause and effect. Along with the example of Spurlock’s film, Errol Morris’s film *The Thin Blue Line* is also held out and it of as an example of a film that was able to achieve direct results, in this case the release of Randall Adams from prison for murder. Needless to say this sort of one-to-one relationship between cause and effect in a given documentary film and its call to action is fairly limited. Many of the problems which

documentary films seek to solve or address cannot be simply fixed with a single decision or outcome on the part of the government or a company. Films such as Eugene Jarecki's *Why We Fight* or Charles Ferguson's *Inside Job* present vastly complex problems for which no easy solution emerges. Even the two films the article cites as clear evidence of documentary agency present much broader agendas than the simple release of a single individual or even an admittedly large business plan alteration by a major corporation. These sorts of intangible, amorphous results are open to interpretation and refutation, and they certainly don't make for a clear and compelling newspaper article but they are nonetheless the stakes the most feature-length, social issue documentary films seek to achieve. The article gestures in this direction, speculating that perhaps filmmakers aren't so much interested in changing the world as they are in changing the minds of the people in it.

Thus the question "can documentary films change the world?" is at once too simple and too complex to answer. The mere act of bringing a film into the world changes it, even if only imperceptibly. *How* documentary films change the world is where things get complicated. As the Guardian article speculates, successful change might mean simply changing someone's mind on a given issue. Even as they were dismantling documentary's ontological truth status, scholars over the past two decades have been looking at the issue from more nuanced positions in order to articulate and study the relationship between the call to action in a given film and specific forms of social movement that might arise as a result. Gaines herself revisited the issue in an article provocatively titled "the production of outrage" in 2007 where she argues that the production of the film itself is a form of social action.¹³⁹ Here she outlines the need for films to "image out" in the same way that people might speak out against a given social atrocity by creating films that address the need and the problems inherent in a set of historical events. Rather than simply being a middle step that might advocate for social action, film itself is a form of social action. Revisiting the forms of cinematic realism articulated by Andre Bazin and Soviet Cinema, Gaines argues that images of suffering and other atrocities re-contextualized through the documentary film have the power to initiate and inspire social change that they might not in other contexts. As she puts it, in this way film is able to "use the world to change the world."¹⁴⁰ Gaines was specifically responding to what she saw as a level of social fatigue with images of the war in Iraq, what she referred to, quoting Martin Jay, as a form of iconophobia or a war on images of war. This new iconophobia is a result of the massive quantity of digital imagery now available, a quantity which inures spectators to the problem instead inspiring political action.¹⁴¹ But rather than destroying or limiting exposure to such images, Gaines instead calls for documentary activists to reformulate them into more effective documentary expression. Documentary is uniquely capable of breaking through the noise and laying bare the social contradictions they conceal.

Although she doesn't state it overtly, Gaines' formulation eschews a straightforward representational conception of documentary (film as a 'mirror' or 'window' of the world), in favor of something much closer to Lawrence Lessig's description of remix. Just as remix depends upon pre-existing material and disparate fragments which are pulled together in novel formulations, documentary film must utilize and re-contextualize pre-existing

representational tropes and narratives to articulate novel arguments about the world. A documentary about the Iraq war, for example, wouldn't necessarily reveal something previously unseen, but would rather try to break through the existing representations of the war by posing an alternative formulation and inviting a response from the audience. Indeed, Lessig's description of remix, or what he calls 'Read/Write' culture, could be mistaken for Gaines' descriptions of documentary culture: "RW culture extends itself differently. It touches social life differently. It gives the audience something more. Or better, it asks something more of the audience. It is offered as a draft. It invites a response. In a culture in which it is common, its citizens develop a kind of knowledge that empowers as much as it informs or entertains."¹⁴² While the concept of remix has been heavily associated with a certain aesthetic common to the sort of 'mash-up' videos one finds commonly going viral on sites like YouTube and Facebook, at a more fundamental level it is rooted in a desire to challenge the existing cultural and political narrative through recontextualization. Thus, Gaines' desire for documentary to 'image out' is a call for documentary to act as remix, in function if not in form.

Other theories of documentary agency point to its power as an organizing force for disconnected groups of individuals, almost as a form of social remix. As David Whiteman points out, within a social movement organization the documentary form often forces stakeholders to synthesize and articulate their issues and concerns and work to establish a common blueprint for their competing desires and outcomes.¹⁴³ According to Whiteman, each stage of documentary production, distribution and exhibition have the effect of bringing together different parties related to a particular issue and inviting them to engage in dialogue. Making a film, it turns out, can educate filmmakers and participants in the same way that seeing one can educate audiences. Whiteman calls this the 'coalition model' of documentary film, a model that describes the social fabric the film can weave amongst disparate groups. Like the broader coalition of nations that would eventually invade Iraq twice in 1991 and again in 2004, Whiteman's coalitions are often made up of disparate, heterogeneous groups connected to a broader social issue like labor relations in the southeastern United States or strip-mining in rural Appalachia. Once in conversation, Whiteman demonstrates that such groups often remain united in their common cause. Rather than changing people's minds, such documentaries may have their greatest impact on those who already agree with film. While such films might be "preaching to the choir" of sympathetic audiences, their overall aim in Whiteman's model is to unite the choir and to get it to sing louder.

Together, Gaines' and Whiteman's theories demonstrate that documentary agency (or at least the abiding theory of documentary agency) relies on bringing disparate, pre-existing elements together into novel configurations and relations in much the way that remix or read/write culture does. Whether 'elements' here refers to the social actors involved in the production/distribution/exhibition of the film or the disparate images and media fragments that comprise the text itself, documentary as remix circumvents the traditional identification of photographic indexicality as an essential component of documentary truth. This more experiential, process based form of documentary agency (Whiteman) acknowledges and even depends upon the presence of alternative

representations of the world for its own intervention (Gaines). Rather than rely on a privileged connection to the world for its form of truth, these films seek to levy their version of truth in and alongside competing narratives of the world.

Documentary as remix nonetheless maintains documentary's traditional identity as an alternative form of media expression that circumvents and subverts the traditional, commercial monopolies that dominate the media landscape. This model of documentary as 'user generated content' has existed at least as long as the Workers Film and Photo League first emerged in the 1930's. As Lessig claims, Read/Write culture is neither new nor isolated to any particular form of technological media. The impulse to 'speak back' to a dominant cultural text is already common to language and writing. For Lessig all that has changed is the ability for the average person to access and alter forms of modern media traditionally protected by significant technological barriers. Less emphasized by Lessig is the extent to which remix culture might be capable of producing novel forms of social organization and consequently social action. This was the focus of documentary from the start.

In drawing the connection between documentary and remix my point is less to argue that what seems new is actually old, or that the old is being replaced by the new. Instead I am highlighting the extent to which the traditional aims of documentary found new means to pursue their old ends with the emergence of digital media. Yet, as documentary scholars and activists were working to articulate the exact means by which their older form of media achieved the social agency they believed it retained all along, another debate was breaking out amongst scholars of new media as to whether these forms were capable of changing the world at all.

Social Media for Social Change

In the October 4th, 2010 issue of the magazine *The New Yorker*, a debate which had been quietly rumbling inside of academia for much of the previous decade spilled out into the conversation of the general public. Malcolm Gladwell, *The New Yorker's* prominent and popular debunker of conventional wisdom and social statistics, argued that social media like Twitter and Facebook were incapable of producing meaningful social change or challenging the status quo. Using a history of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's, particularly the lunch counter sit-ins that began in Greensboro, North Carolina, Gladwell claims that true social change requires the presence of strong-tie relationships between social actors. Social media, built on weak tie connections between disparate people, are consequently incapable of producing the level of commitment necessary to foster something like the Civil Rights movement. Gladwell acknowledges that weak tie connections are capable of initiating lower levels of commitment from a greater number of people, but maintains that such groups will never change the world. As Gladwell puts it, "The Internet lets us exploit the power of these kinds of distant connections with marvelous efficiency. It's terrific at the diffusion of innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, seamlessly matching up buyers and sellers, and the logistical functions of the dating world. But weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism."¹⁴⁴

Gladwell's argument arrived against the backdrop of the initial stages of what eventually became the Arab Spring, which, among other changes, provided a less than clear test case for competing theories about the efficacy of social media to produce social change. On one side, the popular uprisings across the Middle East, reported in many major news outlets to have been organized and executed using popular, widely available social media networks, seemed to bear out the predictions of scholars like Clay Shirky and Yochai Benkler, or journalists like Tim O'Reilly and Andrew Sullivan. Long predicted to change the world, events like the "Twitter Revolutions" in Moldova and Iran seemed to fulfill technology's promise. On the other, less optimistic side scholars like Evgeny Morozov and Golnaz Esfandiari pointed out that the role of technology in these events was misunderstood, and more a product of Western Journalists' imaginations than activists on the ground. Gladwell clearly sides with the more dystopian outlook, even going so far as to maintain that substantive social change can only be the product of closely integrated hierarchical organizations that are run in a rigid, top down fashion. While the sort of decentralized, crowd-sourced network might produce a project like Wikipedia, Gladwell concludes, "The things that [Martin Luther] King needed in Birmingham—discipline and strategy—were things that online social media cannot provide."

The exact role of social media in the Arab Spring continues to be a topic of debate amongst scholars and activists.¹⁴⁵ Of importance here, however, is the uncertain role technology in general, and social media in particular, might play in producing social change, or its mere façade. The debate strongly echoes the fears that seemed to plague Gaines in relation to documentary film. While no one would dispute that Facebook has changed the world, the question comes down to the extent to which it upholds, or disrupts, the status quo. For Shirky, the major impact of technology on society lies in allowing people to organize differently, and these new types of organization can inevitably lead to social change. Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody* collects countless examples of groups coming together in adhoc fashion to establish new resources and institutions (like Wikipedia) and disrupt the status quo for others (like newspapers). In facilitating connections between individuals, new communications technologies enable novel collaboration and social organization. He claims, "More people can communicate more things to more people than ever before, and the size and speed of this increase makes the change unprecedented."¹⁴⁶ Given the breathless enthusiasm with which much of the book is written, it's easy to see why Shirky is often accused of utopian technological determinism. And yet, Shirky's pronouncements are often more circumscribed than his critics acknowledge. Gladwell, for example, faults him for celebrating the positive potential of technology in recovering a lost cellphone as though this somehow portended a revolution, but skips over his discussion of the Catholic Sex Abuse scandal or the Howard Dean campaign, both cases of legitimate social change, if not on the scale of the Civil Rights movement.

Shirky, moreover, is neither for or against social media, he simply accepts the fact that it is a force in the world and attempts to understand the nature of the change. He writes: "To ask the question 'Should we allow the spread of these social tools?' presumes there is something we could do about it were the answer 'No.'"¹⁴⁷ Shirky's motivation for tracking the changes he describes is in prescribing policies and approaches to dealing with

these technologies so that they work largely toward positive social ends. Hence his criticism of the US State Department for its attempts at facilitating democratic uprisings in China and the Middle East.¹⁴⁸ In his formulation the emergence of Social Media tools have already changed the world, and the only thing left for us to do is to react to these changes in a positive manner. Implicit in his descriptions of social tools and the changes they bring, however, is the supposition that the emergence of this technology has put greater freedom in the hands of the individuals (and by extension) taken it away from existing organizations and institutions. The ability of people to spontaneously self-organize, and the disruptive impact this can have, is for him one of the signal changes inherent in the emergence of these forms.

For Evgeny Morozov, on the other hand, the emergence of social media technologies has placed more power in the hands of the state than it has in the hands of the people. For Morozov, the development of the Internet over the last two decades has been toward greater and greater levels of state administration over the policies and potential that online communication has to offer. The illusion of the democratizing, connective power of technology (what he calls “cyber-utopianism”) leads to misguided policy and regulation of the Internet (in his terms “Internet centrism”).¹⁴⁹ The abstract belief that the Internet and the cohesive, spontaneous networks and forms of expression that it fosters are unequivocally conducive to democratizing principles is what fools individuals into complacency about the policies and principles which should be used to regulate it. This opens citizens in repressive states to greater and greater levels of government scrutiny and blinds those in the West to the surveillance and censorship taking place in their own backyards. The typical dichotomy drawn between the relatively democratic West and more authoritarian countries like Iran, Burma and China hides for Morozov the fact that competing forces are at work, forces which in both environments are working toward greater control, censorship and surveillance of the individual by the State. So long as a country like Moldova allows for a certain level of free expression, it will not only identify problematic individuals for closer monitoring but it will also give the majority of the population the illusion that it enjoys complete freedom online. Moreover, fears of the commercially disruptive nature open networks result in greater censorship and scrutiny by the government (consider the debate in the US over the SOPA and PIPA laws). Hence, the West is looking more and more like China even as China is looking more and more like the West. He writes: “Anyone designing [online regulations] should be aware of some major inconsistencies between the strong anti-regulation impetus of Western foreign policy and the equally strong pro-regulation impetus of Western domestic policy.”¹⁵⁰

Morozov’s argument brings to light one of the common inconsistencies in discussions about the ability of the Internet to empower individuals and disrupt existing organizations. As the subtitle of Shirky’s book *Here Comes Everybody* asserts, the struggles that we see taking place in networked environments are the result of “the power of organizing without organizations.” This new found power puts the existing organization, be it a business, industry or government institution, at odds with a newly united group of previously disparate individuals. The work of scholars like Shirky and Lessig are filled with examples of this newfound power at work. But as Morozov repeatedly stresses, context

matters. What works in one political and cultural context may not translate across borders. And what's true in the commercial sector may not apply to government institutions. Too often in cyber-utopian discourse these contextual details are ignored in favor of a string of success stories that point to a seemingly limitless potential for the Internet to change the world. This leads commercially disruptive trends to be conflated with a politically disruptive form of individual agency that may or may not exist in any given political context. The effect that blogs and online file sharing have had on the News and Entertainment industries is undeniable. The impact that Twitter and Facebook have on emerging and established democratic societies is still very much under debate.

This same tendency to generalize also leads to the problematic conflation of other relevant issues in the debate over the role of technology in political and social activism. One such issue is online anonymity. Dystopian critics like Andrew Keen blame the ability to anonymously comment and contribute to blogs and message boards for the generally abysmal state of information and political discourse one finds on the web. "The Internet," he writes, "has become the medium of choice for distorting the truth about politics and politicians." The result is not a technologically enabled public sphere but instead a place where this "democratized media" is used to "obfuscate truth and manipulate public opinion."¹⁵¹ "In traditional news media," he writes, "there is no such thing as anonymity...But in the anonymous world of the blogosphere, there are no such assurances, creating a crisis of trust and confidence."¹⁵² Anyone who has read through a discussion on a message board or comment section that has been hijacked by a so-called 'troll' has witnessed how little it takes to derail a conversation thread. Even when online discussions stay on topic, they tend to quickly move toward the most extreme views. In such cases the shield of anonymity seems to obfuscate the potential for productive political dialogue and social engagement, tools vital for the form of networked activism which its celebrants claim will change the world.

And yet, there are plenty of instances where anonymity seems not just appropriate, but vital. Critics of anonymity like Keen don't take into account that for many people, trolls aside, anonymity online can be a vital shield against political repression or even just social condemnation.¹⁵³ Although it was judged to be misguided by people on every side of the issue, the US State Department even sponsored the development of tools that would help dissidents in countries like Iran remain anonymous.¹⁵⁴ Presumably, the logic went, this would enable them to speak out about issues in their country and to empower others to find out the truth about events and policies affecting their lives. Anonymity online can thus make users in one context more honest, but make users in other contexts less honest. The question of surveillance and privacy is also one that pits the individual against the established organization, and one that often results in less than useful blanket statements. It's common to hear the refrain "Privacy is dead" whenever the issue comes up.¹⁵⁵ And yet, such views rarely take into account the difficult time law enforcement agencies have in locating and identifying cybercriminals and vigilante activist groups like Anonymous.¹⁵⁶ Presumably the idea here is that privacy is dead for the average user, but there are ways around this for those in the know. Moreover, as Helen Nissebaum points out, we often have very conflicting beliefs about individual and personal privacy depending upon the

situation. Most people feel comfortable allowing medical professionals to determine their vital statistics on a visit to the doctor's office, but feel less certain when an issue like electronic medical records comes up.¹⁵⁷ For Nissenbaum, it is more productive to discuss 'information flows' in order to dissect the issue rather than to simply adopt pronouncements like "technology killed privacy" or "privacy at all costs."

The nuance that Nissenbaum argues for in the privacy debate brings to light the lurking determinism that populates discussions of social media and social change. Too often proponents or critics of the 'democratizing' power and potential of new technology frame the discussion as though the entire future of democracy itself would be determined by (or not determined) by the emergence of a particular technology. The idealist, revolutionary ethos behind the open software movement and early networking technology seems to have infused the debate around technology's impact with an all-or-nothing tone.¹⁵⁸ Both stances ignore the obvious middle ground, where existing social forces shape new technologies, and vice versa. Gladwell demonstrates both extreme stances on the issue when he states "Activists used to be defined by their causes. Now they're defined by their tools."¹⁵⁹ As he points out, the Church gathered people and disseminated information as Twitter or Facebook would today, and yet, we don't call it the "Church Revolution." But this doesn't mean the Church was incidental to the event of Civil Rights. Calling an event the "Twitter Revolution" is surely absurd, denying that Twitter played any role equally so.

Theory Meets Praxis

What remains when we leave behind the hyperbolic pronouncements about the power of social media and other technologies to cause social change is a consideration of case by case scenarios that put newer technologies alongside older ones, and consider the historical and cultural environment in which these two forms collide. And here is where the partnership between MoveOn and Greenwald becomes essential in understanding the way that two particular forms of media technology mutually influence one another. Three lessons emerge from their collaboration. These lessons capitalize on what Whiteman and Gaines outline as the particular strength of documentary film, and avoid many of the pitfalls that Morozov and others identify in relation to utilizing social media to achieve social change.

MoveOn in particular demonstrated clear early innovation in several key areas long before other commercial websites developed and perfected them. The organization was operating as a type of social network long before MySpace and Friendster developed or Facebook perfected that model of community. In their early roots as an email petition, MoveOn seems to have understood the strength of leveraging people's existing relationships. This leverage allowed the group to grow at viral speeds, and the general shift of politics in the United States after the Monica Lewinsky scandal gave members something to focus their energies on. Second, the adoption of the 'house party' model also worked as a form of location based organizing similar to what other services like MeetUp would eventually develop. And finally, in its model of funding and, in the case of the *Outfoxed* production, creating, media items and political campaigns, MoveOn developed early models of crowdsourcing and crowdfunding before other services like KickStarter and Mechanical Turk emerged.

All of these technologies (social networking, location based media, and crowdsourcing) became essential features of what we associate with Web 2.0 and the emergence of the smartphone, but all three are what, under different names, are clearly features of grassroots political organizing. MoveOn's achievement was to take the means and methods of grassroots organizing and adapt them to emerging technologies more fully and successfully than anyone else had up to this point. For his part, Greenwald's filmmaking demonstrates a clear willingness to adapt his production and distribution methods to work within this new model of political organizing. While still producing feature length films that formally fit within the boundaries of documentary practice for at least the last twenty years, Greenwald's work rapidly evolved over a few short years to 'dis-intermediate' what he called the 'traditional gatekeepers' at film festivals and studios. His means were largely the organization that MoveOn was simultaneously building, and the new uses of technology that they were adapting. At the center of these innovations, particularly the houseparty and crowdsourced production, were Greenwald's films. Thus, politics was the ground that enabled the co-evolution of documentary film and technology for these two organizations.

In addition to this early innovation, the second exceptional feature about the Greenwald/MoveOn collaboration is its utilization of what Gaines and Whiteman identify as the most productive outlet for utilizing documentary film to achieve social change. Earlier I called this a 'remix' model of documentary film, one which reframed existing image tropes in the culture to produce new arguments (Gaines theory of 'imaging out') and then used these arguments to draw together novel constellations of interest groups (Whiteman's coalition model). What's interesting here however is that this remix takes place as a result of the two organizations coming together and collaborating with one another. Put differently, it takes both the presence of Greenwald's documentaries and MoveOn's digital organizing to achieve this. None of Greenwald's films during this time contained radically novel material or arguments that no one had seen, nor did they contain any investigative 'smoking guns'. They were effective because they put into a single text what many people, MoveOn members in particular, already suspected: that Bush stole the election, that the Iraq War was unjust, that Fox News was biased. They served as a rallying point for MoveOn members to come together and mobilize in opposition. The 'remix' of ideas and groups depended on both the films and the virtual organization in which they were seen and produced.

Finally, the MoveOn/Greenwald collaboration also demonstrates a solid middle ground case between the all-or-nothing extremes of the debate over technology and social change. Much of MoveOn's activity seems to fit solidly within the model of 'clicktivism' that critics of technologically fueled social activism decry. That is, signing petitions, forwarding links, donating small amounts of money, all have the appearance of political participation, but don't necessarily produce the types of momentous social change that Keen or Gladwell describe. And yet, within and alongside these activities, and very much dependent upon them, is another set of activities that fit very much within the model of traditional, strong-tie activism. This is where the houseparty model once again becomes essential. The 'nationwide' screenings of Greenwald's films provided members MoveOn

members with an event to take their virtual connections and map them onto a series of local, geographic areas. Since these houseparties formed the basis for other offline activities (protest marches, phone calling campaigns, etc) the event of the film screenings acted as a conduit between the online and offline world's in a way that enabled MoveOn to translate the size and scale of a network of weak-tie connections into the commitment and motivation that comes with strong-tie, face to face interaction.

Chapter 3 “States of Exception’: The Paradox of Virtual Documentary Representation”

Introduction

Immediately after his inauguration in January of 2009, President Barack Obama made headlines by signing an executive order that pledged to close the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and revise US policies for questioning and detaining terror suspects. These moves sought to signal his administration’s shift in waging the ‘War on Terror’ declared by his predecessor. He stated at the time: “The message that we are sending around the world is that the United States intends to prosecute the ongoing struggle against violence and terrorism” but will do so “in a manner consistent with our values and our ideals.” In language intended to signify his rejection of the Bush era binaries that drew stark contrasts between opposing sides, Obama added, “We continue to reject the false choice between our safety and our ideals.”¹⁶⁰ After several attempts at closing the base failed within that timeframe due to concern over where to move prisoners, the administration admitted that finding a solution would take longer than expected and would contain provisions for extra-judicial trial and “indefinite detention.” In spite of what may have been a sincere and honest attempt to undo the ethical and political damage created by Guantanamo, once established, such a place proves rather unyielding to the shifting political tides surrounding it.¹⁶¹

In the early months of his second term in office, long after the issue of Guantanamo had moved to the political and national back burner, Obama once again faced questions relating to his administration’s policies on trying and prosecuting perceived enemies in the war on terror. This time, however, the issue at stake was the use of unmanned aerial vehicles to track and kill enemies of the United States without trial or official oversight. Rather than detain and imprison terror suspects, it seemed that the so-called ‘kill policy’ simply eliminated them outright. In a move intended to draw attention to the issue, Senator Rand Paul took the extraordinary step of filibustering the Senate for thirteen hours questioning the legality of using drones to kill United States citizens on American soil without any Congressional oversight.¹⁶² Citing the need for national security and the authority to act quickly, the Obama Administration’s defense of its policy sounded reminiscent to many of the rationalizations of his predecessor, leading many to wonder whether the “regime change” of 2008 brought much change at all.

Both the ongoing complexity of the Guantanamo prison camp and the legality of the drone policy demonstrate the bizarre political and legal limbo entailed in waging the ongoing war on terror. Outside of the legal and ethical questions they present, drones and other forms of robotic technology sit at the heart of an increasingly technological arsenal that utilizes video game and virtual technologies to recruit, train and equip the soldiers fighting this war. And for those opposing the war and the way in which it is fought, these same tools and technologies offer the only means for exposing and countering these policies. This chapter contrasts two radically opposed projects that use virtual technology to simulate and document the bizarre battlefields of the war on terror. Though these landscapes have, in many ways, become inaccessible to the type of optical recording

technology traditionally used both to wage and oppose war, both projects attempt to relay players back to reality in a way consistent with traditional documentary film. And yet, the military's massive recruiting and training efforts in *America's Army* end up distorting the reality of warfare, whereas the activist expose *Gone Gitmo* skillfully plays on the realities of virtual representation to critique the military's policy of torture and indefinite detention. This difference enables one to open up a critique of the other, and together both demonstrate the possibility of maintaining a documentary impulse in the absence of the documentary film proper.

Traveling from Guantanamo to Gone Gitmo

The question that Obama faced when he took office, "How to handle Guantanamo?" was also one that faced the myriad of political activists who opposed its existence, a group that included civil rights attorneys and human rights groups as well as journalists and documentary filmmakers. The military had on many occasions blocked requests for media access to the base and legal representation for the men imprisoned there. This left such groups struggling to find a way legally and visually to represent Guantanamo in order to draw public attention to the issue and the individuals involved. Some of the unique tactics these groups utilized to 'represent' Guantanamo offer insight into the complicated political issues surrounding it.¹⁶⁵ One such solution, the *Gone Gitmo* project on the gaming platform Second Life, demonstrates that the nature of these virtual environments uniquely mirror the paradoxical political nature of the physical place that it recreates.

Created in 2007 during a residency at the Bay Area Video Coalition, *Gone Gitmo* is the product of a collaboration between USC graduate student Nonny de la Pena and USC visiting professor Peggy Weil.¹⁶⁶ The guiding idea behind the project was to allow users of the Second Life platform to experience the Guantanamo Bay prison camp 'first hand' by virtually recreating the prison in exacting detail. As the pair described at an ACLU event featuring their work:

Our purpose is to raise awareness, initiate discussion and educate on habeas corpus issues by making a virtual but accessible Guantánamo Bay Prison in contrast to the real, but inaccessible, U.S. prison camp. We are using Second Life to expose a substantially new audience to these issues by extending the methods and images from documentary filmmaking into new online, participatory environments... Our overriding philosophical challenge is to communicate a gravely serious matter in a medium known for games and entertainment... As artists, we confront how to portray the practices in Guantánamo effectively and design an experience that does not trivialize torture (we will not torture your avatar) but will provoke thought and insight into the complicated issues surrounding detainees' rights.¹⁶⁷

When users of Second Life typed in the project's address, their onscreen character (or avatar) was immediately hooded, and transported with the screen darkened to a holding cell in the prison simulation on the project's space. Once there, they were free to explore the virtual space, which included links to numerous articles about the prison as well as a video feed running testimony by the few detainees who had been allowed to speak on camera about their experiences in the real prison. In order to leave the prison,

visitors could simply enter the address of another Second Life location, whereupon their avatar would 'fly away' from the prison, something its real life inhabitants have yet to experience. This description and the statement given by the project's creators demonstrate that *Gone Gitmo* is something of a paradox, a hybrid space that blends different media together to access each term through its opposite: the real by way of the virtual, the inaccessible via the open, the gravely serious in the space of play. In short it answers a paradox with a paradox.



Figure 3.1 This screenshot depicts the *Gone Gitmo* space in Second Life. The image on the left shows the actual space. Weil and de la Pena relied on satellite imagery of the prison to recreate scale and layout, and rare press photographs like this one to fill in the detail and construction materials.

The documentary tendency at work in *Gone Gitmo* is immediately apparent in its attempt to point us toward the real, historical world in opposition to the imagined, fictional world typically on offer in Hollywood cinema. Traditionally we think of this as being tied to cinematic indexicality and its visual representation of historical events, but reenactment, interview, testimony and even animation—not to mention the necessary use of cinematic conventions like montage, subtitling, and frame composition—have all been utilized to achieve this same end. Similarly, *Gone Gitmo* itself seeks to represent as faithfully as possible the actual physical spaces it recreates, from the size and layout of the prison cells to the orange jumpsuits worn by detainees. While one might convincingly argue that certain historical epics seek this same faithful representation in order to open onto the most fictional of fantasies (*Titanic* comes stubbornly to mind), comparing *Gone Gitmo* with the rest of Second Life throws the distinction into greater relief.¹⁶⁸ If we take the proponents of Second Life's ability to fulfill one's physical, material and sexual desires from the ease and safety of one's own seat, then its similarity to mainstream fiction becomes clearer. Contrast this with a space like *Gone Gitmo*, which seeks to alert and inform visitors of the all-too-grim events taking place in real life.¹⁶⁹ If Second Life is a Hollywood-esque space of fantasy and play, *Gone Gitmo* is its 'discourse of sobriety.'

Gone Gitmo further manifests a documentary impulse or tendency shares through its attempt to intervene in issues of social justice. To be sure, plenty of documentary films speak to issues other than those in the political arena, but documentary's attempt to inform, persuade and advocate on this front certainly represents one of its major categories.¹⁷⁰ Like a traditional political documentary, *Gone Gitmo* offers us both a specific

political position (that Guantanamo should be closed), and a defined call to action (with links to write one's Senator and specific interest groups to support.)¹⁷¹ Beyond its connection to the real and its political sympathies, *Gone Gitmo* further shares several formal similarities with documentary form. The first is its ability to pull in multiple forms of media in order to marshal its argument and achieve its aims. Similar to a documentary which utilizes archival footage, interviews, newspapers, still photographs, sound recordings and reenactment, etc., *Gone Gitmo* contains elements of all of these things, including poetry written by detainees, newspaper headlines (with links to the stories), fragments of footage from traditional documentary film (taken from Nonny De La Pena's *Unconstitutional*), and reenactment (the hooding of the avatar and its placement in C-17 transport plane when teleporting to the *Gone Gitmo* site.) While the question of perspective, point-of-view, and omniscience in relation to virtual environments is complex, suffice it to say that Second Life contains its own version of camera angle, depth-of-field, etc. all taken directly from film language itself.¹⁷²

But if *Gone Gitmo* shares these similarities to documentary film, there are also a number of points where it expands its limits. The first is its ability to stay current. As mentioned, the project includes a number of places where newsfeeds and other media sources are pulled in, similar to a Ken Burns' style pan and scan of these materials in a documentary. Unlike a film, however, which remains tied to a given historical point upon its completion, *Gone Gitmo* is both updatable and auto-updating. Newsfeeds in fact enable visitors to be up to the minute on the information they receive. Moreover, the space itself has been constructed and reconstructed several times to reflect changes in the physical layout of the Guantanamo camp itself, lending its representation a temporal mutability that would be impossible in film.¹⁷³

The second advantage that *Gone Gitmo* offers over traditional film lies in its predominantly non-indexical form of representation. In spite of the best efforts of Linden labs to make Second Life as photorealistic as possible, one would never confuse it with a photographic representation, much less reality itself. On one hand, this extreme mediation removes us from the real that documentary always seeks, and yet it also reminds us of the limits of the experience we are given. We never confuse the representation with reality, a clarity that both keeps us from overindulging in a potentially delusional empathy for the victims and focuses debate on the issue itself.¹⁷⁴ In discussion boards populated by people who have been to the site, it is amazing to find very little of the cynicism regarding source material and omission that seems to haunt a filmmaker like Michael Moore.¹⁷⁵ Users seem to have no problem making the jump from the project itself to the issue involved, despite the mediated form the representation takes. While this doesn't necessarily promote a more civilized debate (something message boards never seem to achieve), it does shift the discussion past form to substance.

The third advantage of *Gone Gitmo* over a traditional documentary film is the simple access that it offers its users to the space of the camp. Under the veil of security, Guantanamo has been notoriously off limits to outside observers from the UN, human rights groups and the media.¹⁷⁶ In the absence of the ability to record the location itself, virtual environments offer an excellent opportunity to open-up such non-existent spaces.

Furthermore, the user-control and three-dimensional rendering offered in such an environment enables one to explore the space at will. This allows one to linger or skip past elements. Moreover, once one becomes used to moving around in Second Life, the experience of exploring something like a cell offers one a spatial understanding that film simply cannot. While this doesn't replicate the experience of actually being in the cell (with little to no hope of release), neither does a film.

As a form of representation, *Gone Gitmo* is thus a hybrid medium that extends documentary's activist impulse into a form that transcends its traditional limits. This sense of control, experience and empathy brings me back to the question of embodiment addressed earlier. Notable in the statement from the project's creators quoted earlier is the point that they will not torture your avatar, and in light of the mobility just discussed it is clear that they do not imprison it either. Given the vexed nature of virtual embodiment in general, it makes sense then to ask what we can actually gain from something like *Gone Gitmo*, if our virtual selves are neither tortured nor imprisoned. These two actions, after all, were the primary purpose of the real Guantanamo and the key point of its political controversy. Indeed, it is unclear how one might even begin to do something like 'torture' a virtual body, given that its sense and sensations are disconnected from our own. And yet for many Second Life is manifestly about exploring different identities and social positions than their own, and to whatever extent this is possible for the avid enthusiasts who populate it, certainly seeking to experience something of the position of a Guantanamo detainee is a possibility. So why ruin what for many might remain a fantasy driven playground with a dark reminder of the grim political issues playing out in real life?

We can begin to see appreciate the appropriateness of building a virtual Guantanamo by delving into the more confusing aspects of the real Guantanamo, a place I earlier described as a legal and political paradox. Prior to 9/11, many people considered state sanctioned torture and uncharged imprisonment legal, if not logical, impossibilities. And yet, as Giorgio Agamben has argued, such 'States of Exception' lie at the very foundation of political sovereignty in every state, including Western Democracy.¹⁷⁷ For Agamben, the 'State of Exception' is the political and legal framework, present in all democracies, wherein the leaders of the State can nullify the existing constitution by declaring a form of martial law, thereby selectively and capriciously applying existing law and consigning any specific group of individuals to whatever legal designation it deems politically expedient (his designation for this is the 'force of law.'). Far from being a simple clause in the constitution that may be amended, it is this exception that enables the rule of law itself to exist. Hence the paradox. Indeed, much of what followed 9/11 from the Patriot Act to Guantanamo and its detainees has provided a textbook example for Agamben of the manner in which sovereignty simultaneously exists both inside and outside the law. And much of Guantanamo's paradoxical state draws on the same sort of political, legal and geographic simultaneity. Even its various labels ('prison camp', 'detention facility', etc.) point to the indeterminacy of its exact nature.

It is tempting to dismiss such labels as further examples of the extreme limits to which political rhetoric was driven under the Bush administration. But as Judith Butler points out in *Precarious Life*, each of these terms is carefully crafted to perform significant

political and legal legwork, striping these individuals of not their rights and even their status as human beings.¹⁷⁸ For Butler, the refusal to mourn the 9/11 attacks in such a way that included a consideration of what caused them forced us to deny any consideration of the position of the Other, a refusal that opened the door for such future actions as denying detainees any claim to fundamental legal and human rights. Interestingly, Butler ties self/Other together in a way that locates responsibility and morality with both sides simultaneously, a move that places it in the same sort of liminal position that I'm claiming both Guantanamo and the *Gone Gitmo* project occupy. Part of shaping the discourse after 9/11 in a legal and media framework was deciding whose voice would be excluded from the conversation, an exclusion that *Gone Gitmo* and other activist representations seek to redress. The irony of the Bush administration's ability to place things rhetorically into simple either/or terms ("You're either with us or against") is that its policies proliferated places and populations that are neither/nor any of the established positions. As the case of the Uighurs demonstrated, every case in relation to Guantanamo offers an exception to the rule, exceptions which in turn make the rules themselves entirely untenable and meaningless.¹⁷⁹ In short, as Agamben says, where the exception becomes the rule.

But beyond simply exemplifying the paradoxical nature of political sovereignty, Guantanamo's very existence embodies legal and logical contradictions of its own. Consider, for example, that the United States military even occupies a base on one of the few remaining communist countries in the world, one that it has virtually locked out of any diplomatic connections for much of the last half century. While the arrangement pre-dates the Cuban revolution in the 1950s and the political enmity the Castro regime brought with it, the original lease on the land was a product of what Larry Birns calls the "19th century gunboat diplomacy practiced by Washington" in the wake of the Spanish-American War. Even then debates swirled as to whether the base would be covered under US or Cuban constitutional law.¹⁸⁰ With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the transfer of the Panama Canal in 1999, the base seemed to have lost any strategic benefit to the US and was looked at for closure several times during Defense Department budget cuts in the 1990s. And then came September 11th, 2001.

The very same aspects of the base that made Guantanamo such a perplexing place before the war on terror both in legal and political terms made it an ideal place afterward. This irony was already obvious as early 2003 when a *New York Times* Op-Ed piece stated "A territory outside U.S. sovereignty, held in perpetuity, where the U.S. military rules, Guantánamo is a chillingly appropriate place for the indefinite detention of unnamed enemies in a perpetual war against terror." The only political entity with any claim to sovereignty over the base, the Cuban government, was the only one completely lacking the political or military resources to exercise it. The precedent for detention facilities there had been in place since the early 1990s when the base was used to house both Haitian immigrants fleeing the fall of Jean Bertrand Aristide's government in 1991 and the influx of Cuban refugees captured on the open sea between the US and Cuba seeking asylum. The notorious Camp X-Ray, in fact, had been used during this time to house HIV-infected Haitian immigrants who were denied asylum in the US. When the first detainees from the invasion of Afghanistan began arriving there in 2002, their designation as 'illegal enemy

combatants' rather than as 'prisoners of war' consequently denied their rights under the Geneva convention. These detainees fell into the same legal limbo that the base itself existed under for the last century. In Guantanamo the US military had essentially secured the perfect place to settle the equally legally dubious individuals who would be brought there.¹⁸²

The dark genius of Guantanamo's creation lies in its nature as a hybrid space of sorts, one that fits none of the existing categories and hence one that can't be dealt with according to any of the established laws or guidelines. Such hybrid spaces, those that elude classification and are therefore impervious to shifting political climates and to overt political action, are only increasingly common in the 'State of Exception.' It is this relative political uncertainty and physical inaccessibility that makes Guantanamo the perfect subject to represent with immersive virtual technology. If the strength of *Gone Gitmo* is that it responds to a paradox with a paradox, then to a large extent the uncanny uncertainty of the virtual world that exists in Second Life provides the appropriate analogue. Depending on the source, Second Life is either an explosively growing utopia or it is yesterday's next big thing. Either way, after exponential growth through mid-2007, the online world continues to grow steadily if modestly and still attracts a dedicated user base. In late 2011, the last period in which traffic was reported for the site, it had approximately 1,000,000 repeat visitors who spent a total of 124 million hours a month collectively exploring it.¹⁸³

Descriptions of Second Life tend to characterize the environment in two seemingly contradictory fashions. On one hand its similarities with the real world are stressed: people do all of the things 'there' that they do 'here' from working and shopping to socializing and traveling. On the other, it is characterized as being nothing like real life: physical constraints such as gravity, hunger, fatigue, aging and illness are all optional indulgences. In short, virtual environments like Second Life are paradoxically hybrid places. Similarly, discussions of the 'experience' of Second Life are equally vexed. The philosopher Hubert Dreyfus points out that the fundamental deficit in platforms like Second Life is their lack of embodied finitude.¹⁸⁴ For Dreyfus, virtual environments predicated on a user consciously controlling the gestures, emotions and reactions of an avatar treat users as mind-centered subjects capable of exchanging one container for another. Thus, they succumb to the fallacy of Cartesian mind-body dualism. The technological promise of a body without limits is precisely what prevents virtual environments like Second Life from delivering much of the physical, emotional and social sensation that we draw from embodied experience in real life.¹⁸⁵

Taking the opposite tack, the anthropologist Tom Boellstorff readily admits that virtual embodiment is concomitantly different from real embodiment, but he maintains that it nonetheless offers certain users experiences absent from real life.¹⁸⁶ Focusing on the sociality involved in group interaction, Boellstorff's study outlines several instances in which the users' ability to change their bodily appearance in Second Life allowed them to experience an identity different from their own based on the reactions of others. For Boellstorff, the ability to explore different facets of oneself in persona-play offered users forms of fantasy, empathy and self/other exploration denied to them in real life,

occasionally with lasting results for the physically embodied person at the keyboard.¹⁸⁷ Even users who didn't engage in these activities felt that their virtual bodies were truer to some aspect of their self-perceived selves than their physical bodies.

Neither fully embodied nor dis-embodied, virtual worlds thus place users in a zone of indeterminacy that forecloses some experiences while enabling others. But this is not a drawback; instead, it is precisely this neither/nor status that makes *Second Life* an intriguing territory in which to explore the politics of a place like Guantanamo, one which can also extend the limits of a medium like documentary film. While virtual environments sever ties with film in multiple ways, the process of remediation ensures that some cinematic aspects remain, including point-of-view, camera angle, depth of field, etc..¹⁸⁸ Moreover, projects like *Gone Gitmo* demonstrate that a documentary impulse not only survives in such new media, but is essential to the impact they achieve. Several qualities of *Gone Gitmo* manifest what I am calling the documentary impulse, and in many ways the project even transcends the limits of documentary.

But beyond offering just some form of empathy and experience in relation to Guantanamo, I claim that *Gone Gitmo* is perfect for the task, and this is because its complexities and contradictions replicate the peculiar political complexities and contradictions of the camp itself. Neither fully embodied nor disembodied, neither empowered agent nor passive spectator, neither real nor fantasy, *Gone Gitmo* offers its visitors something of the paradoxical limbo that Guantanamo inflicts upon its detainees. Returning to the current issue still facing Obama "what to do with Guantanamo" we unfortunately find that *Gone Gitmo* offers nothing in the way of a solution, nor perhaps will it be any better at convincing those on the opposing side of the merits of its case than the dozens of films that have been made on the issue. It offers no technological utopia. But even if Guantanamo were closed and bulldozed as Abu Ghraib was before it, the issues and victims it contains will simply have migrated to new places like Bagram, the 'Salt-Pit' or any other of the 'black sites' that exist away from the scrutiny of the public. When *Gitmo* itself is gone, the relevance of a project like *Gone Gitmo* will remain, even if we have to teleport to a new platform in order to see it.¹⁸⁹

War Games

While activists like Weil and de la Pena were utilizing virtual platforms to expose the inherent inconsistencies of US government policies around torture and detainment, the government itself began adopting these same technologies to make the detention of enemies in the war on terror an irrelevant issue. Almost from the moment of the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001, the military began developing and utilizing video game and other virtual simulation technologies to train and recruit soldiers, and even more advanced robotic technologies to track and kill its enemies on the battlefield. If the complexity of battling a stateless terrorist enemy necessitated the creation of surreal legal and territorial spaces like Guantanamo, these were nothing compared to the virtual spaces it created in the process. But in the course of modernizing its arsenal, the military inadvertently created a set of paradoxical policies and experiences for the soldiers tasked with utilizing these new weapons.

The opening sequence of 2012's *Bourne Legacy* provides an apt example of how this paradox played out for ordinary soldiers. The latest installment of the series and its most clear attempt to turn the original trilogy into a full fledged franchise, the film introduces Alex Cross, the successor to Matt Damon's Jason Bourne character via a series of super or even supra-human achievements as he traverses the Alaskan wilderness. As he fords glacial streams naked, scales craggy peaks and fights off hungry wolves, the sequence sets up a classic man vs. nature conflict only to demonstrate repeatedly the inherent superiority of man, or at least this particular man. We eventually discover that this series of trials is a training mission designed to test the capabilities of the US Government's newest weapons system, a line of chemically and genetically engineered soldiers. When a series of leaks threatens to reveal the program's existence, the CIA is forced to eliminate it by killing off the various members of the program. Given Cross's remote location, a drone strike is ordered to take out the final two members of the arsenal. Demonstrating once again his cognitive and physical superiority, however, Cross manages to hack the tracking chip technology embedded in his thigh by cutting it out and feeding it to the aforementioned wolves, one of whom becomes the unwitting decoy eventually executed by the drone. The scene offers a series of engaging role reversals in the hunter/hunted binary as Cross manages to turn both "predators" against one another by playing on their desires and limitations. With the introduction of the drone, a third term is inserted into the man/nature binary already established. As Cross fends off the instinctive, energetic desire of the animal with superior rational planning, he finds himself hunted on the opposite end of the spectrum by the calculated, quantitatively precise designs of the machine. Through a uniquely human combination of both tendencies, Cross is able to play animal and machine against one another.

This scene from an otherwise forgettable movie sets out an apparent conflict at the heart of the US military's application of virtual training and robotic weapon's systems, one replicated in popular and scholarly discussions on the use of games and game technology in the military. On one hand, the military uses gaming and simulation technology extensively to train and recruit soldiers, hoping to channel the instinctive drives around popular first person shooters into better-prepared soldiers. On the other, it deploys robotic weapons systems like drones that utilize telepresence to project force from the cool, rational space of the screen to the battlefield. But how are these two forms of screen warfare connected? Consider the material and psychological disconnect they present: the experience of war simulated by game technology in titles like *America's Army*, vs. the experience of the pilots of unmanned aerial vehicles.

The military's use of games and other virtual technology is a well documented and discussed topic in games studies scholarship, from landmark texts by lay authors like Ed Halter's *From Sun Tzu to Xbox* to more focused articles and chapters by leading scholars in the field such as Ian Bogost and Alex Galloway, not to mention anthologies of essays such as *Joystick Soldiers*.¹⁹⁰ As Halter convincingly argues, there have been game versions of war like chess for as long as there have been both games and war. The interconnections between the two take a significant turn in the 1980s when the military begins to express an interest in the nascent market of consumer videogame technology and its possible use for

training and recruiting. The starting point for what James Der Derian and Roger Stahl call the Military Industrial Media Entertainment complex or the “militainment complex” extends back over thirty years to the Army’s commission of Atari to modify its popular 1980 3D vector game *Battlezone* into a training tool for future tank commanders.¹⁹¹ The project produced the *Bradley Trainer*, a stand-alone console game similar to the commercial but modified to match the equipment profile of Soviet tanks. Though there is no evidence the project was ever used, it set an important precedent for the possibility of future collaboration between the commercial game industry and the military.¹⁹² The military went on to sponsor adaptations of other popular games, including a customized modification of the game *Doom*, a popular online multiplayer game which allowed users to create custom environments. The military version, *Marine Doom*, was un-lockable by users with a special cheat code. In the late 1990s, the Army entered into a partnership with the University of Southern California to form the Institute for Creative Technology. Intended to bring University level research together with Hollywood creativity and military funding, the group produced *Full Spectrum Warrior*, a training tool that was also eventually released as a standalone console game.

The logic behind the military’s use of commercial games technology appears synergistic on multiple levels. Collaboration offered a level of market driven efficiency where none previously existed. The military could share the research and development cost of games with private companies seeking to outdo their competitors and directly monetize their investments. Second, collaboration enabled the military to benefit from the widespread popularity of games. On one hand this had the effect of normalizing warfare on a larger cultural level, but it also lent the military a level of cultural cache that it sorely needed in an era of all volunteer soldiers. On a final level, the collaboration seems to have worked because industry and military interests are often aligned. Both were interested in pursuing the most ‘realistic’ simulations possible from both a visual and mechanical perspective: the military in order to prepare its soldiers for combat, and industry in order to outdo its competitors in the technological arms race that defines the medium.

The military’s use of game technology accords with Ian Bogost’s influential argument about the procedural rhetoric of the game medium.¹⁹³ By invoking proscribed choices and actions on the part of players, games can procedurally persuade players that a certain idea, ideology, argument or course of action is the preferred method for achieving a specific end. As Bogost demonstrates, the apotheosis of the military’s use of game technology is perhaps the US Army’s enormously successful and widely discussed title *America’s Army*, which debuted as a free download in 2002 and has generated millions of downloads world-wide. Widely praised at the time for its high-resolution graphics and realistic simulation of battle, the Army continued the project through several other iterations, including the 12 million dollar Army Experience Center and a standalone arcade game. Unlike the PC version, both of these versions allowed users to utilize gun-shaped controllers and other props to engage in combat.¹⁹⁴ The Army Experience Center in particular offered the general public a look at the more advanced technology the military had developed to prepare soldiers, including resources like the *Infantry Immersion Trainer* at Camp Pendleton, a 32,000 square foot facility that replicates “the sights, sounds and

smells” of urban combat using a combination of physical settings and virtual avatars.¹⁹⁵ In this sense, *America’s Army* is the tip of spear, so to speak, in the military’s strategy to enlist and equip soldiers for the realities of war. It’s the first point of contact that many will have with what will eventually be a series of experiences using virtual immersive technology.



Figure 3.3-3.4 *America’s Army* everywhere. After debuting as a downloadable PC game for play in people’s homes, the success of *America’s Army* persuaded the military to offer the game in public versions. This enabled recruiters to approach players of the games directly, rather than waiting for them to enter their personal information on the website. It is worth noting that the arcade game (right) displayed signage that claimed the game was “Suitable for all ages.”

Unlike previous efforts to meld games and military training, *America’s Army* was engaging enough to attract a wide audience, while at the same time faithful enough to the procedures of military conduct to constitute a valid training tool. The game requires players to complete various training exercises before being allowed to play the more advanced combat levels, and all players have to adhere to the military code of conduct or risk being locked out of future play. Moreover, success depends upon cooperating with other players on group missions against enemy forces using the stock military equipment the game offers, all efforts to make the game as true to the army experience as possible. The game also includes a number of other nods toward the real Army, including profiles of soldiers and stories of their time in combat. For Bogost, the game faithfully reflects the larger ideological aims of American unilateralism and militarism, in that player/soldiers are constantly being deployed around the globe in an endless series of missions, a further level of verisimilitude between the real Army and its virtual representation in the game.¹⁹⁶

That the game simulates, enacts and reflects this level of procedural and graphical realism for players does not, of course, obscure its more obvious distortions of reality. Some critics point out that the game’s hyper-realistic images and soundtrack don’t extend to the less palatable aspects of war, while others like Alex Galloway point out the extent to which the game exists in a sort of apolitical realm completely divorced from the social realities in which modern warfare is executed.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, at a most basic level the game

engages in the same “save-die-restart” logic that Nick Dyer-Withford and Greig de Peuter call the “big lie of the video game as war” model.¹⁹⁸

But there is an even bigger lie at work in the game, or at least a comparable one. To what extent does the game actually prepare its players for what is arguably the defining psychological reality of warfare: a kill-or-be-killed confrontation with another person? Of course, nothing entirely prepares one for that particular reality, which is the prime reason for training and simulation in the first place. Practicing ‘procedure’ repeatedly prepares one to act on instinct when the time comes (Bogost’s argument still applies). This same logic also justifies the drive toward increasingly immersive environments and ever more realistic graphics that seems to characterize the game industry in general and its ‘militainment’ branch in particular. It is certainly at work in the outsized investment the military makes in creating simulators for high-risk duties like flying a plane. The more time one can spend proximally adjacent to war without actually facing its mortal realities the better. This is why the Army apparently claimed at the outset of its participation in ICT “We want a Hollodeck.”¹⁹⁹

And yet, as the military continues to modernize its arsenal with the type of digitized, networked technologies that brought *America’s Army* to computers everywhere and further decreased the distance between simulation and reality, its simultaneous deployment of robotic technologies erases that distance entirely. The connection between games that simulate war and the robots actually used to fight it are both real and imaginary. On a cultural level, popular fictional texts that experimented with the possibility of playing a game while actually fighting a war began appearing shortly after the Army and Atari teamed on *Battlezone*. These included books like Orson Scott Card’s *Ender’s Game* and films like *The Last Starfighter*, *War Games* and *Cloak & Dagger*. In all of these texts, character pursuing mastery of some game eventually learn that they actually fighting a battle, thereby playing out the possibility that simulators like the *Bradley Trainer* might eventually be linked to remote robotic tanks. Ronald Reagan himself prophesied that videogames would eventually train a generation of soldiers to fight in war in “ways that many of us who are older [couldn’t] fully comprehend.”²⁰⁰ As these technologies have become a reality, drones in particular and games like *America’s Army* are routinely linked in press coverage about the emergence of ‘virtual war.’ And beyond these cultural expressions, Peter Singer notes that many of the controls for future robotic weapons are prototyped and eventually designed using hacked versions of the physical controllers and graphical user interfaces from console systems like the Xbox and Playstation. This consistency is intended to limit the learning curve for the generation of soldiers who grew up playing games.²⁰¹

Outside of these connections, there is of course one important difference between the drone and the simulation: one is real and the other is not. One prepares the player for a reality they may one day face, the other allows the operator to “play” reality from a distance. If games and training simulations are the cinematic equivalent of the blockbuster fiction film, then remote robotic warfare like the drone is its documentary equivalent. The parallels between the two are more than metaphoric. Like a big budget action film, part of the pleasure involved in playing a typical action game is precisely the fact that it’s not real, allowing one to engage in experiences and behaviors they would avoid in their everyday

lives. This is what the ‘media effects’ argument about the priming possibility of violent video games seems to miss.²⁰² Most people who avidly play first person shooters do so because they *aren’t* actually killing people. Fictional games, like fiction films, allow us to experience realities that are thankfully not our own.

But like a documentary, drone warfare bears a necessary, mediated connection to reality. I am even tempted to say an indexical connection to reality, if we bear in mind that one of Pierce’s original examples of the indexical sign was the scar, evidence that signifies a prior wound due to some trauma imparted by the real. Or perhaps more temporally and spatially accurate, his example of smoke to signify a distant fire.²⁰³ To paraphrase Bill Nichols, no matter how realistic, games and fiction films will only offer us ‘a world’ as opposed to the world.²⁰⁴ In the same way that viewers of a documentary are constantly aware that what took place before the camera bears a connection with the real, historical world, so the pilot of the aerial drone knows that when he pulls the trigger, an action and effect are carried out in the world.

Beyond the presence or absence of a direct connection to reality, there are other parallels between these forms of media. Like state of the art special effects in fiction films, games and simulations utilize cutting edge technology to achieve photorealistic visual imagery. By comparison, the typical camera feed available to the drone pilot has the feel of a low-res, low-budget documentary shot on consumer grade home video. As opposed to the constant action of a game or simulation that allows one to skip to the ‘good parts’ of the text, one of the prime problems confronting drone pilots is the boredom induced by extended hours of inactive screen time, a fear not uncommon to film majors taking their mandatory documentary course.²⁰⁵

Placing drone warfare in the context of documentary further alerts us to the heavily mediated nature of the reality experienced by the drone pilot, as well as the clear benefits and drawbacks of experiencing reality from a safe distance. As has been well publicized, drone pilots often act on less than sufficient information, resulting in tragic civilian deaths.²⁰⁶ Doing so from an airbase thousands of miles away in northern Nevada or Virginia and then driving home to suburbs when a shift is over has been blamed for causing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in drone pilots at a rate comparable to front line soldiers. While higher resolution optics and more precise strike capabilities are being planned to alleviate the problem of mistakes, such measures would only seem to exacerbate the circumstances which give rise to the psychological conflict associated with PTSD. Pilots and sensor operators report that watching the same person for an extended period time only increases the guilt and anxiety that arise when they eventually kill him.²⁰⁷ As in documentary film, no particular optic or recording technology can reconcile one to the larger moral and ethical “truth” of what one is seeing or doing.

Most importantly, however, comparing the military use of virtual and robotic technologies to fiction and non-fiction films throws into relief the connected but different nature of these mediated forms of fighting. Like fiction and documentary, games and robotic warfare exist on the same spectrum of representation, but cannot be conflated. Moreover, comparing the experience of drone pilots with the promise offered by something like *America’s Army* clarifies the bait and switch effect at work in the military’s deployment

of virtual technology to recruit, train and fight its wars. Whereas the game offers players an enhanced sense of agency, excitement and immortality, virtual war as experienced by drone pilots seems to entail guilt and boredom, experiences that are absolutely anathema to the feelings that commercial gaming, and by extension *America's Army*, are supposed to evoke. It is war fought from the safety of one's home, but it turns that home into a battlefield where the 'combatants' have to balance soccer practice and family dinner with killing people. To return to the example of Alex Cross in the *Bourne Legacy*, the military wants to place the modern soldier somewhere between the instinctive, hedonistic experience it uses to entice and train them and then deliver them to the sanitized, strategic space of surgical, robotic combat. But as Cross's superiors do in the film, it has forgotten to take account of the human in the middle.

Conclusion

Side by side, little separates the form and methodology of *America's Army* from *Gone Gitmo*. Aesthetically they are nearly identical: a virtual landscape or object on one platform looks as 'real' as a similar object or landscape on the other. While both trail behind the most cutting-edge virtual representations available, they both nonetheless achieve sufficient verisimilitude that we recognize objects and places for that they are supposed to represent. A fence is quite obviously a fence. Both also utilize these virtual environments to offer users a sense of what it would be like to inhabit a real space quite different from their own. Where *Gone Gitmo* seeks to offer visitors to the virtual Guantanamo a sense of the physical environment and the political and legal issues facing the detainees, *America's Army* wants to prepare future recruits for possible events they might face as soldiers engaged in combat. They also draw upon traditional photographs and video footage as ancillary materials to point users back to this reality in a similar fashion; *Gone Gitmo* through the video testimony that it includes from detainees and *America's Army* through its "Real Heroes in Action" profiles, segments on the game site which feature profiles of decorated soldiers.²⁰⁸ Following from these formal similarities, both have recourse to one of the defining features of persuasive rhetorical media, documentary film included: the presence of a clearly defined 'call to action' that structures the text. *Gone Gitmo* aims to stimulate debate and protest around the ongoing imprisonment of the prisoners. *America's Army*, on the other hand, primarily hopes to persuade young people to enlist in the US armed services, and more indirectly to shift general opinions of the military more broadly.

And yet, in spite of these similarities, the above reading demonstrates that one sits closer to activist documentary while the other lies closer to fiction film. The spatial metaphor is important here, as distinctions between fiction and non-fiction, real and virtual, are better understood by degrees of separation and resemblance than by categorical distinctions. The comparison between these forms of media illuminates the importance of holding onto the (admittedly slippery) categories of fiction and non-fiction even as the technological ground shifts away from optical recording technology. Just as optical indexicality never guaranteed documentary film's relationship to truth, nothing in the graphical resolution or three-dimensional rendering technology itself guarantees any closer or more complete relationship with the events that each seeks to represent.

Nor does the distinction between the two texts rest on their differing political orientations (one apparently opposing the official status quo of military policy, the other supporting it). While *America's Army* has been dismissed by its detractors as propaganda for the military, the designation mischaracterizes the relationship between a politically persuasive text and the propagandistic one. This is of course a vexed issue, and any working hierarchy between the two reveals more about a given value system than it does about either form's relationship to reality. We tend to believe in truth claims that support our individual ideological frame, and dismiss those that contradict it. "They" make propaganda, "we" speak the truth. Reality always suffers any number of distortions when forced into particular narrative frame. Gaps and omissions are the rule for both what we dismiss as propaganda as well as what we deem 'true' to reality.

The tipping point between fiction and non-fiction in traditional and virtual documentary lies in what these gaps and omissions exclude or include, and the extent to which we deem these choices to be critical to the project's larger truth claims. *Gone Gitmo* excludes abstract or embodied experiences like indefinite detention and torture, both of which might be considered 'un-representable' in a broad sense. Indeed, both are practical impossibilities given the nature of the chosen medium, thus the project invites participants to reflect on such realities by way of their obvious omission. In *America's Army*, the gap in the text is instead the defining feature of the chosen medium. That is, the first person shooter is arguably defined as a forum in which the player is able to engage in consequence-less killing first hand with no corporal, legal or ethical jeopardy at stake. Warfare, on the other hand, is the exact opposite. *Gone Gitmo* chooses *not* to represent these things, but to instead play on their absence. *America's Army* utilizes this representational distance to make killing ubiquitous, and individual death a mere inconvenience (one has to start the game over). This distinction makes one a documentary, and the other a fiction.

The fictional status of *America's Army* is further underscored by the mediated experiences of drone pilots, soldiers who actually fight in combat situations but do so through a game-like interface. Unlike virtual representations, the video and data feeds that confront pilots don't point toward reality, they emanate directly from it. This is still reality represented, but done so without an author, seeking not a broader 'call to action' but instead a stimuli/response from the soldier. The attendant feelings of stress and guilt that such experience seems to evoke for some of these individuals further highlights the lack of stakes in the game version of virtual war, which allows and even rewards higher body counts. While the experience of remote, telepresent combat like the drone interface offers important parallels to documentary representation, there are clear distinctions that make a direct connection between them problematic.

In effort to curb the incidence of PTSD for drone pilots, the military began investigating technology to give the computer systems that provides pilots and sensor operators interact with more personality.²⁰⁹ The thought is that sharing the guilt with a 'third party' would lessen the burden shouldered by the individuals pulling the trigger. Depending upon the level of automation they eventually achieve, a fully automated drone fleet might alleviate the need for human operators entirely.

Chapter 4 Technology, Transparency and the Digital Presidency

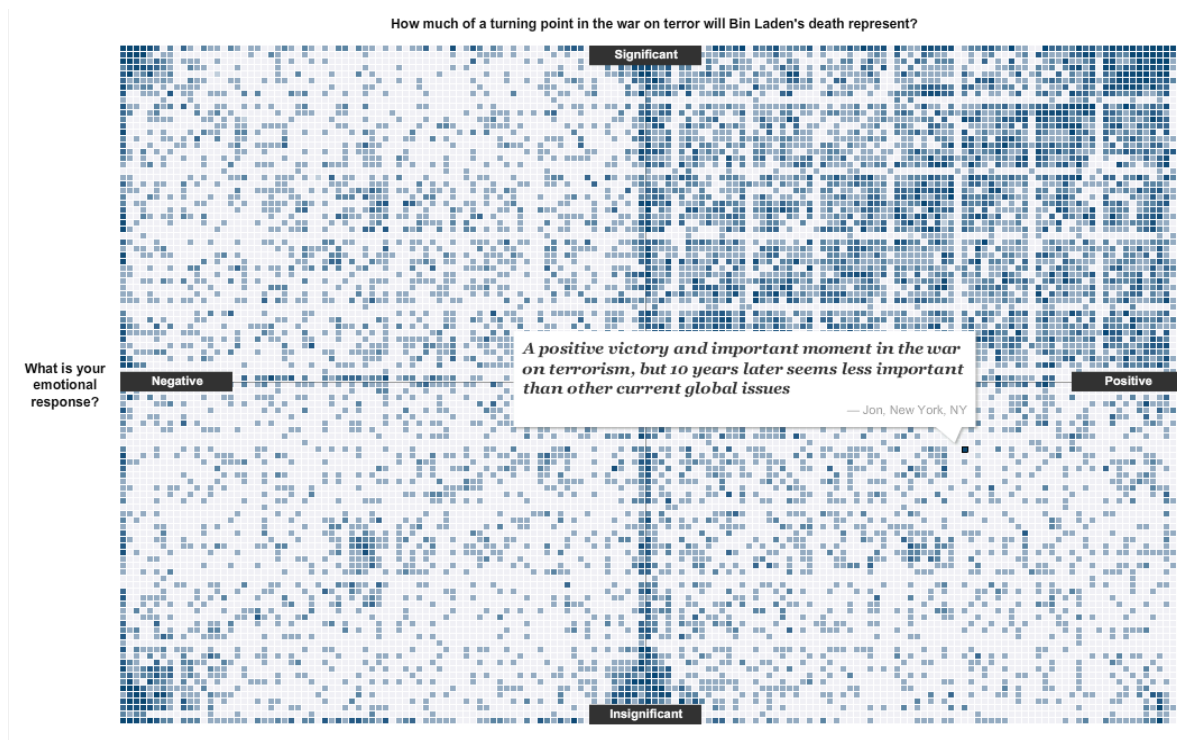


Figure 4.1 An *NYTimes.com* infographic depicting the range of opinions on the death of Osama Bin Laden. The horizontal axis depicts emotional responses from negative to positive and the vertical axis depicts reader's assessment of its importance in the war on terror from significant to insignificant. Darker shades of blue point to multiple ratings, and hovering over any sector reveals the comments made by that respondent.

“Sunlight is said to be the best disinfectant.”

-Louis J. Brandeis, *Other People's Money*²¹⁰

“Science and art have in common *intense seeing*, the wide-eyed observing that generates empirical information. [It] is about how seeing turns into showing, how empirical observations turn into explanations and evidence.”

-Edward Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence*²¹¹

Introduction

On March 28th 2011 a group of representatives from five different government watchdog groups met at the White House to present President Barack Obama with an award in recognition of his efforts toward creating greater government transparency.²¹² The presentation was intended to coincide with an annual event known as Sunshine Week that has, since 2002, sought to raise awareness about greater access and oversight of the

government by the press and individual citizens.²¹³ In an odd public relations gaffe, however, the White House choose not to make the presentation an official press event and consequently held the meeting in private. As perhaps should have been expected, the press immediately jumped on the irony of the situation, and for the next 24 hours headlines like “Obama Accepts Transparency Award...In Private!” appeared across the media. While the award’s presenters were critical of the discrepancy between the event and its public profile, they nonetheless reiterated their praise of the President’s efforts to make the federal government more open and pushed him to continue in his pledge to make his presidency the most transparent in history.

In spite of the absurdity of recognizing openness in private, however, a deeper irony underscoring the award seems to have gone unnoticed by all involved. That is, in the spring of 2011 the United States government may indeed have been more transparent than at any point in its history, but it wasn’t just Obama who deserved the credit. Although his administration had worked to overhaul policies and procedures in order to push reams of data into the public domain, its efforts had been leap-frogged over the previous year by a series of high-profile unofficial leaks by the organization Wikileaks. Combined, these had placed more than a million previously secret documents online, and in the process opened up a heated debate about the need for secrecy as well as transparency in public life. While Obama’s policies were meant to signal a shift from the secrecy that had characterized his predecessor’s administration, the Wikileaks scandal forced him to consider the extent to which openness should be carried.

This chapter explores the threads of openness and transparency as they are woven into the debates around the high profile “data dumps” (both official and unofficial) that emerged from US Government archives during the first years of the Obama Administration. Although government transparency has long been considered an ideal within democratic politics, at various points different forms of media, from newspapers and photographs to film and television, have been celebrated as the best means of achieving this. It was clear from the start that for the Obama administration, transparency and digital technology went hand in hand, and out of this marriage a new form of visual media emerged as the ideal: data visualization. A janus faced counter-example, Wikileaks shared Obama’s belief in transparency and his faith in technology as the means to achieve it, but from an anarchic, oppositional position. Given the size and scope of its releases, journalists and amateurs alike also turned to digital tools like data visualization in order to sift through and represent the Wikileaks data.

Long used to represent scientific and financial data, data visualization’s ability to represent vast quantities of information at a glance made it the ideal medium for those seeking to make the government’s inner workings legible to the general public. And while it may seem that a medium like data visualization moves entirely beyond the representational and indexical media that previous chapters have considered, image based media continue to reassert their importance and influence. Not only do still and moving images continue to appear alongside data visualization’s interactive charts and graphs on government websites, but as its evolution will demonstrate, data visualization’s claim to

representing reality rests on the same ‘seeing-is-believing’ foundation that photographic media had established. Indeed, in many ways data visualization is itself the outgrowth and the inheritor of the same documentary impulse that has for many decades fueled the production of non-fiction film and television in general.

While the government and Wikileaks appear to be largely at odds over the nature and purpose of releasing information to the public, both are nonetheless part of a larger historical stream that is informing and shifting what counts as open and transparent, and which further demarcates our current notions of publicity and public space at this particular moment in history. Like Progressive Era reformers from a century earlier, these new champions of transparency and government accountability believed, like Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, that “Sunlight was the best disinfectant” to clear away the miasma of government corruption and public distrust. Unlike their forerunners, however, the new generation of transparency advocates believed the best technology of visibility was not the camera or the muckraking expose, but instead the networked computer, a tool capable of visualizing and distributing the vast amounts of data being made public through official and unofficial channels. Combined with a Depression Era belief in the power of raw documentary evidence to inform the public, groups on both sides of the law worked to usher in a new era of transparency and accountability akin to early and mid-20th century efforts, but this time with a distinctly 21st century twist.²¹⁴

Data Visualization: The Roots of a Revolution

It should perhaps come as no surprise that the Obama Administration and Wikileaks both turned to the medium of data visualization in order to make their efforts legible to the public. Data visualization as a medium is currently in the midst of an immense level of popularity and prominence across contemporary visual culture. Examples of data visualization can be found everywhere from advertising (IBM’s “Smarter Planet” campaign)²¹⁵ to journalism (CNN’s “Magic Wall” and NYTimes.com’s interactive



Figure 4.2 A ‘wordle’ word cloud created out of 1,300 articles on the financial crisis. The size and color of the fonts used reflect various statistics relating to word frequency and categorization.

infographics)²¹⁶ to academia (the journal *Nature* and others as well as the burgeoning field of Analytics.) Its work is celebrated on blogs like *infosthetics.com* and *visualisingdata.com* and made available to the masses via tools like Wordle, Tableau and Many Eyes. Even as they struggle for added revenue amidst falling circulation rates, newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* have invested heavily in the medium, creating online features not possible in their print editions and spawning the new field of 'data journalism' in the process.²¹⁷ Visualizations are so ubiquitous that even as early as 1982, in a pre-internet era of publishing, Edward Tufte was able to claim "Each year, the world over, somewhere between 900 billion (9×10^{11}) and 2 trillion (2×10^{12}) images of statistical graphics are printed." (Tufte, *VDQI*, 2)

As a contemporary phenomena, the recent explosion of data visualization relies on a range of newly emergent technologies from the ubiquitous deployment of inexpensive sensors to collect data, to advancements in cloud computing and commodity level clusters for processing and analyzing this data, to high resolution displays and increased graphics processing for rendering it visible.²¹⁸ But in spite of its ubiquity in contemporary media and its reliance on cutting edge technology, data visualization broadly conceived (the impulse to collect information about the world and display it visually) is among the oldest of pursuits.

Early History and "Golden Age"

Most contemporary accounts of data visualization characterize its tools and techniques as the latest developments in a line of inquiry that stretches as far back as the first scientific tools and earliest forms of human writing.²¹⁹ According to Jeffrey Heer, a data visualization researcher at Stanford, early maps dating from 6200 BC found in Konya, Turkey already demonstrate the desire to graphically represent relationships present in the physical world.²²⁰ For Heer, this same impulse continues through Ptolomey's *Geographica* in 150 AD into various scientific and technical representations throughout the Renaissance and extends into William Playfair's experimentation with line charts and bar graphs in the early 1800's.

Playfair's work stands at the beginning of what Michael Friendly refers to as the "golden age" of data visualization, a period during the second half of the nineteenth century when simultaneous developments in a range of fields allowed an explosive output of data visualizations only rivaled in the last 15 years.²²¹ As with our contemporary moment, Friendly points out that these developments were also in the three areas of collection (improvements in scientific measurement, instrumentation and cartography,) data analysis (developments in the fields of statistics and demographics) and display (the invention of processes like lithography to print and distribute on a mass scale in full color newly created graphics.) This golden age of data visualization was one in which new ways of observing the world were developed alongside new forms of processing and understanding those observations to create new aesthetic forms for representing and communicating the results.

This remarkable period in visualization, moreover, coincided with a larger revolution in science as a whole. As Ian Hacking has demonstrated, the 19th century was a period bookended by the determinist models of Newtonian mechanics on one end and the open-ended indeterminacy of quantum mechanics on the other. It was a period in which, he writes, “it might be possible to see that the world is regular and yet not subject to the universal laws of nature. A space was cleared for chance.”²²² For Friendly, it was a period that “deserves to be recognized – even revered—for the contributions that it made to statistical thought and practice in that time and for the legacy that it provides today.”²²³

In addition to owing a debt of innovative gratitude to the 19th century for its influence on the current re-birth of visualization’s popularity, however, the period also bears significance for our contemporary moment in that it is the first period in which data, not only how its collected and displayed but also the relationship it bears with the subjects it seeks to describe, begins to touch on the inner workings of social and political life in a way that its forerunners simply didn’t. Through the work of figures like Adolphe Quetlet and Charles Babbage, Joseph Fourier and Frederic Villot, Charles Dupin and others, detailed records for virtually every aspect of the modern nation state were recorded, tabulated and often graphically depicted for the first time.²²⁴ For Hacking, the rise of probability in statistics as a scientific model went hand in hand with the sorts of vast data collection and visualization that Friendly describes, and the two in turn go hand in hand with the administration of the modern bureaucratic state, itself emerging around this time. He writes:

The printing of numbers was a surface effect. Behind it lay new technologies for classifying and enumeration, and new bureaucracies with the authority and the continuity to deploy the technology. Categories had to be invented into which people could conventionally fall in order to be counted. The systematic collection of data about people has affected not only the ways in which we conceive of a society, but the ways in which we describe our neighbor. It has profoundly transformed what we choose to do, who we try to be, and what we think of ourselves.²²⁵

While he shares Friendly’s sense of indebtedness to the past, Hacking clearly feels the heritage is of a more dubious nature.

For Michel Foucault, the relationship between modern statecraft and statistics is even more direct. He writes:

Etymologically, statistics is knowledge of the state, of the forces and resources that characterize a state at a given moment. For example, knowledge of the population, the measure of its quantity, mortality, natality;; reckoning of the different categories of individuals in a state and of their wealth; assessment of the potential wealth available to the state, mines and forests, etc.; assessment of the wealth in circulation, of the balance of trade, and measure of the effects of taxes and duties, all of this data, and more besides, now constitute the essential content of the knowledge of the

sovereign. So it is no longer the corpus of laws or skill in applying them when necessary, but a set of technical knowledges that describes the reality of the state itself.²²⁶

Indeed, the rise of what Foucault has called “the sciences of man” (and the statistical methods and visualization techniques which are its quantitative and aesthetic instantiations) are part and parcel of how the state administers its power, how it comes to control and regulate the flow of resources in and through its borders. As we will see when we turn to more contemporary examples of data visualization and their role in the transparency debates surrounding the Obama administration, it is once again the flow of the very “knowledge of the state”– who is allowed to have it and who is not– that is very much at stake.

Regardless of how we interpret the legacy of the 19th century expansion of statistical data collection and graphical representation, it is nonetheless essential to recognize the extent to which these methods and techniques moved from describing natural phenomena in the physical world (Galileo’s records of the movements of heavenly bodies, for example) to describing, and eventually influencing, the nature of the social and political worlds (Minard’s celebrated map of Napoleon’s ill-fated march into Russia.) This shift not only signaled an aesthetic change in how data was processed and displayed, but also a conceptual shift about what types of phenomena could produce data and to what uses the information could be put. This move from representing the physical to the social world is perhaps the most important legacy our current moment inherits from its so-called golden age. It is also one that, as we’ll see, places techniques of data visualization in league with another mode of representation, namely photography and film.

The Re-Birth of Data Visualization

Before considering the relationship of data visualization alongside other forms of visual media, we should first bring our narrative about the history of the medium up to the present moment. Skipping ahead roughly a century (through what Friendly refers to as the “modern dark ages”) we find that the current body of practitioners, theorists and researchers working on data visualization maintain a curious relationship with the medium’s past. On one hand the field demonstrates a clear awareness of its own history. Textbooks on visualization often begin with an introductory snapshot of successful examples and important milestones, each perhaps covering different periods but all invariably highlighting a fairly consistent canon of work. And yet, despite this historical awareness, the claim is often made that what unites all of these materials is a kind of timeless, universal aesthetic that appeals to an innate, almost biological aptitude for this particular mode of representation. Thus, data-visualization has a history, but it is simultaneously and consequently thought of as timeless. As Tufte states, “The principles of analytical design are universal–like mathematics, the laws of Nature, the deep structure of language– and are not tied to any particular language, culture, style, century, gender, or technology of information display.”²²⁷

At the heart of what connects, say, early diagrams in Euclidean geometry with the computationally rendered scientific charts and graphs in the latest issue of *Nature* is the long-held faith in the apparent connection between vision and human cognition. As Martin Jay, WJT Mitchell and others working on visual culture have pointed out, the connections between seeing as one of the human senses and cognitive concepts like understanding, knowing and believing and related concepts like reality, truth and rationality is one that reaches back to the ancient Greeks and persists in varying degrees to the present day.²²⁸ Regardless of whether historians conceive of the connection as culturally/historically determined or more biologically based (and Jay for example has shown there are certainly cases to be made for both) for current visualization researchers the ability of a particular visualization technique to provide insight is foundational for the discipline.²²⁹ In this context, visualizations of phenomena become models capable of both defining and communicating knowledge about the world in a process that Ben Shneiderman calls both 'external cognition' and 'extended intelligence.'²³⁰ For Shneiderman, diagrams, charts, maps and any number of other visual records of externalized, observed phenomena are tools that both represent our observations of the world but further enable us to discover new forms of knowledge about it.

Indeed, if the rebirth of data visualization has an academic center, it is arguably the Human Computer Interaction Lab at the University of Maryland founded by Shneiderman in 1983 which focuses on developing new tools and forms for visualizing large scale data sets.²³¹ In a series of textbooks for the field, Shneiderman and his colleagues stake an intellectual ground and a scientific importance for contemporary data visualization that even echoes intellectual histories in the field of visual culture. *Readings in Information Visualization*, significantly subtitled "Using Vision to Think," begins:

To understand something is called 'seeing' it. We try to make our ideas 'clear,' to bring them into 'focus,' to 'arrange' our thoughts. The ubiquity of visual metaphors in describing cognitive processes hints at a nexus of relationships between what we see and what we think...The interweaving of interior mental action and external perception (and manipulation) is no accident. It is how we achieve expanded intelligence.²³²

For Shneiderman and others working in the field, there is a clear belief in the untroubled connection between seeing, thinking, investigating and communicating.

Outside of academia, this same faith in the connection between vision, visualization and insight is further echoed by the person commonly thought of as the popular culture guru of the field of data visualization: Edward Tufte. Trained as a political scientist, Tufte began looking at the power of data graphics when he co-taught a seminar on statistics to a group of journalists alongside the famed Princeton statistician and graphics pioneer John Tukey. After completing a manuscript on the subject, Tufte became frustrated when an academic press refused to print his book to the exacting standards he maintained the subject matter demanded: high resolution graphics, archival paper, reader friendly formatting. He took out a second mortgage on his home to self-publish the book, which

became *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* in 1983. Instantly a run-away success, the book is now hailed as one of the touchstones in the field of data visualization, and his follow-up texts *Beautiful Evidence* and others continue in the same vein. Tufte retired from Yale in 1999 and now tours the world giving one-day seminars on data visualization to sold-out crowds of academics, graphic designers, software developers and product managers.²³³

Owing to his presence both inside and outside the academy (in addition to the seminars, he has consulted with dozens of private companies,) Tufte's influence on the contemporary field of data visualization is difficult to overstate. And Tufte in turn stakes the greatest social and intellectual claims for it. Indeed, the opening lines of *Beautiful Evidence* might almost be the governing ethos of the field as a whole:

“Evidence is evidence, whether words, numbers, images, diagrams, still or moving. The intellectual tasks remain constant regardless of the mode of evidence: to understand and to reason about the materials at hand, and to appraise their quality, relevance, and integrity. Science and art have in common intense seeing, the wide-eyed observing that generates empirical information. *Beautiful Evidence* is about how seeing turns into showing, how empirical observations turn into explanations and evidence.”²³⁴

The connections he makes between empirical observation, explanation and evidence demonstrate that through data visualization what might otherwise be simple facts or observations about the world are thereby transformed into narratives that account for a

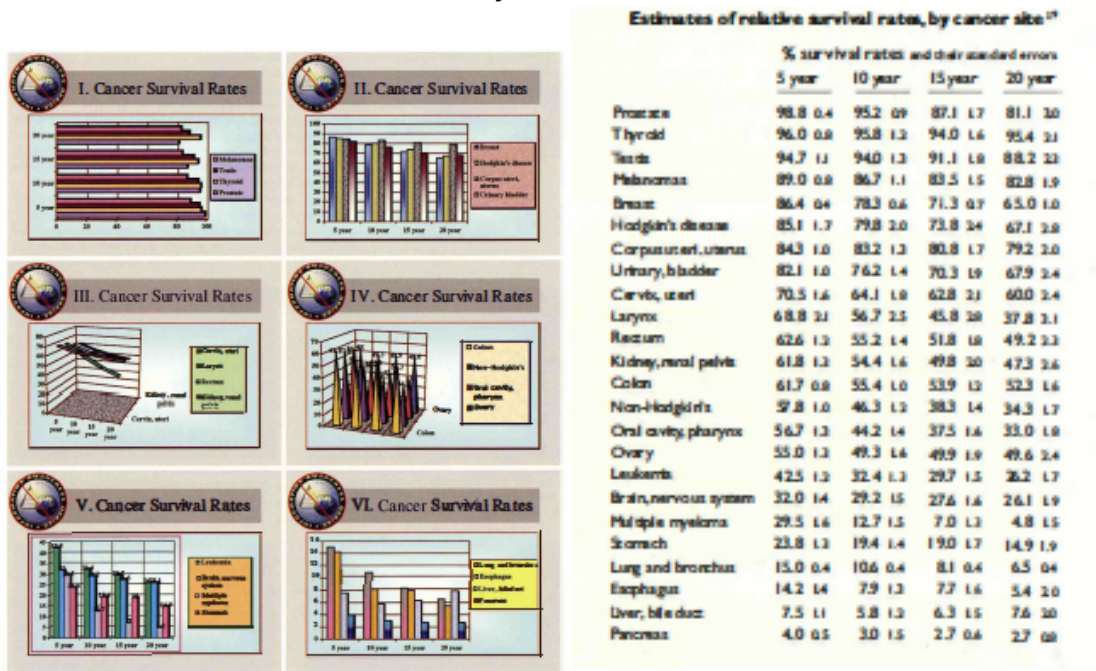


Figure 4.3 & 4.4 Tufte notes that translating a simple table of information like these cancer survival statistics over into power point form actually lowers the clarity of the information they offer.

particular mode of existence. Given the potential for such evidence to mislead, he calls the creation and consumption of evidence presentations a “moral act” in which presenter and audience are tasked to hold one another ethically, intellectually and factually accountable. While such claims might easily be dismissed as mere hyperbole, Tufte himself has provided evidence of the mortal importance of the particular form in which we choose to present information. In an essay called the “Cognitive Style of PowerPoint,” Tufte convincingly argues that the default hierarchical format of the popular presentation software used by Boeing to present their analysis of damage to the Columbia Space Shuttle during its launch in 2003 was in part responsible for NASA’s inability to identify the problem that eventually led to its destruction upon re-entry.²³⁵ While many have derided PowerPoint for its facile display of information, few have argued that it is also a matter of life and death.

Thus, whereas Shneiderman and others champion data visualization’s ability to produce new cognitive insight and classify certain examples as either effective or ineffective, Tufte himself is more broadly aware of their uses and misuses and their implications in the social world. Beyond a tool for scientists to better understand their observations about the world, Tufte recognizes the impact of data visualization on the realm of social and political discourse. Instead of explaining ‘what’ is in the world, he notes the extent to which data visualizations are further called upon to narrate ‘why’ a given situation exists and dictate ‘how’ an audience should respond. It is clearly no coincidence that he started his work in the field as a political scientist teaching the craft of visualization to a class of journalists.

Moreover, what further differentiates Tufte from the more classically trained scientists currently working in the field is his emphasis on the decisive role that aesthetic form plays in this process. Significantly, he relies on photographic metaphors as measures of the relative merit of a given technique or form. Visualizations are evaluated throughout his work on their particular “resolution” which for Tufte refers not to the density of a photographic image but rather the amount of data contained within a given visual space. High resolution graphics like the ‘sparkline’ can present thousands of points of data in a space no bigger than the average printed word, while low resolution formats like PowerPoint slides produce no more than a few dozen. Visualizations are further evaluated on their “clarity” which again refers not to photographic depth of field or focus but rather to the extent to which essential information is brought to the fore and extraneous details are excluded. Entire chapters of his book are devoted to detailing the dangers of what he calls ‘chart-junk’ and ‘PowerPoint Phluff’ which both refer to the extraneous formal features added to low resolution graphics to hide their inadequacies. Throughout his work, data visualization is for Tufte an aesthetic form in which every choice should be made with an eye toward maximizing the amount of relevant data that can be represented by a given visual feature.

Photography and Data Visualization: Conjoined Twins...

Tufte's reliance on photographic metaphors to discuss his work raises the intriguing connection between data visualization as a means of representing the world and the medium of photography itself. Though radically different on some measures, the two mediums nonetheless share similarities on a number of fronts including their individual histories and the social and political uses to which they have been put.

Part of the similarity between data visualization and photographic media is explained in the co-incidence of their emergence and historical development. About the time that William Playfair and others were pioneering the techniques and models that would initiate Friendly's "golden age of data visualization," Joseph Nicephore Niepce and Louis Jacques Daguerre were beginning the collaboration that would produce the first reliable method for chemically recording and reproducing images captured in a camera obscura style device.²³⁶ By the time Dominique Francois Arago arose in the French Chamber of Deputies to formally announce the procedure perfected by Niepce and Daguerre in 1839, its incorporation into scientific practice as a "valuable aid" of calculation and observation in fields as far ranging as astronomy, microscopy and anthropology were already clear.²³⁷

The debate which seems to have dogged photography from its earliest uses, whether it constituted an art or merely a technological reproduction, is notable for the fact that it seems to have always gone unquestioned that photography was always, at least, a tool for science. Indeed it was the automatic reproduction of images without the mediating hand of the artist that rendered photography both suspect as an art form and ultimately useful to scientists. Photography became both a symbol of the standard of scientific objectivity as a whole as well as one of the tools by which individual scientific results were documented. As Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson put it, "Photography's promise as a mechanical form of objectivity was a regulative ideal that insulated the laboratory archive from the predilections of human subjectivity...In the laboratory what secured the facticity of the photograph was less the mechanics of photography per se than a distinct form of scientific comportment that harnessed photography to rigid protocols."²³⁸ In tones reminiscent of contemporary accounts of the importance of data visualization for generating insight, scientists utilizing early forms of photography to stop motion and freeze time hailed it as capable of offering humans a power of observation their eyes could not. Like data visualization would a century later, photography seemed to cast light on an aspect of the world that otherwise remained hidden from human sight.²³⁹

As a medium emerging in and amongst the same social and scientific changes which gave rise to the "taming of chance" and the establishment of the world as statistically calculable, photography was energetically identified as one of the forces of modernity shaping social life at the time beyond the laboratory. Oliver Wendell Holmes' much cited celebration of stereoscopic photography places the automatic reproduction of images alongside the railway and the telegraph as one of the inventions whose "significance forces itself upon us daily."²⁴⁰ For Holmes, the ability of the representation to stand in for the referent and its transportability made photographic images a tool reminiscent of other technologies capable of annihilating time and space, a connection Tom Gunning and others

would later credit film with as well. Holmes' prediction of a time "when a man who wishes to see any object, natural or artificial, will go to the...stereographic library and call for its form" evinces the same desire for ubiquitous documentation of the world that drove the "avalanche of numbers" that Hacking and Friendly credit with the birth of data visualization during the same period.²⁴¹ In the late 19th century the world was becoming representable and represented, not simply calculable but increasingly actually quantified and measured, in means beyond the written word and the painted image, and photographic media (both moving and still) and data visualization were increasingly the means by which this was achieved.

Given this close connection between scientific observation of the world and photographic documentation, it is perhaps unsurprising that the first moves from still photography to motion pictures were undertaken by scientists seeking to perfect the still image as a means of observation. While the story is often told by film scholars that Etienne Jules Marey and Edward Muybridge both stumbled on motion pictures while doing 'other' scientific work, for Marey at least it seems that motion reproduction was the least relevant by-product of his photographic work. While Marey would later lament that the moving image's ability to capture "simply what the eye can see" rendered it useless as a tool of scientific observation, film's ability to accurately and automatically document the world immediately cemented its place in the popular imagination as a substitute for physical presence at a profilmic location.²⁴² While documentary film in the standard use of the term wouldn't appear until the mid-1920's, from the Lumiere brothers on the impulse to document the world and consume the resulting footage has manifested itself in a variety of forms over the last century. From early actualities to the latest user-submitted YouTube clips and from individual records like home movies to social/historical records like network news coverage of important events, nonfiction moving images have, nearly from the time of their emergence, been deemed capable of documenting, preserving and revealing the world in a manner not unlike the way in which scientists and data journalists turn to visualization today.

Of course, like early forms of data visualization and the discourses in which they took part, photography and film have both been criticized for mediating and shaping the historical world as much as they were recording and reproducing it. As Kelsey and Stimson point out, much of the critical work undertaken in the last fifty years has gone toward pointing out the lie behind photographic indexicality's seemingly untroubled connection with the physical world. A photograph is now thought to reveal as much about the photographer as it does about the subject, a by product they call its "double indexicality."²⁴³ Moreover, as the work of John Tagg makes clear, photography itself was as much a part of the rise of the bureaucratic state and the normalizing of every day life as was the data collection and statistical representation of the late 19th century. From the use of photography as a means of surveillance by police to the documentation of slums by governments seeking to rid society of their social ills, photography has played an equal part in the power of the state alongside its more statistically driven counterpart.²⁴⁴ If we add to this the extent to which closed-circuit television, satellite imagery and other optical forms

of state surveillance have created a panopticon of power within modern social life that affects everything from urban planning to individual behavior, then moving images come up for as much scrutiny as tools of state power as their still forerunners.²⁴⁵

...Separated at Birth

In spite of their co-incident histories and the similar roles they have played in scientific, social and political contexts, photographic media and data visualization are nonetheless extremely different mediums which offer starkly different modes of representation. Relevant to the discussion here, the differences between the two can perhaps be most clearly illustrated by considering the role that each form has played in relation to the transparency movement, both historically but also in relation to its iteration in the Obama administration's open government initiative and the revelations it faced by Wikileaks.

For all of the discussion of the extent to which photographic media have been used as tools of the state in its administration of power, it would be misleading to conclude that in the realm of political discourse photographic images have only benefited or been utilized by those in power. Indeed, a long tradition of social issue photography exists in the United States stretching as far back as the work of Jacob Riis' documentation of New York slums in the 1890's and continuing through the work of Lewis Hine, Dorothea Lange, Margaret Bourke White and Walker Evans in the early 20th century and extending on up through the work of photojournalists like Kevin Sykes and others today.²⁴⁶ While charges of exploitation and patronizing paternalism has always been levied against such work, the connections between the photographic representation of social issues and the healthy functioning of representative democracy continue to inform the impulse to visually document and distribute certain images as a tool for social justice.²⁴⁷

The work of Lewis Hine, for example, is often considered to have played a major role in the implementation of child labor laws in the early 20th century and in rise of labor rights more generally throughout the 1920's and 30's. In words reminiscent of Tufte's more ambitious claims for data visualization, Hine often claimed a utopian strength for the power of documentary photography. He wrote:

The picture is the language of all nationalities and all ages. The increase, during recent years, of illustrations in newspapers, books, exhibits and the like gives ample evidence of this.

The photograph has an added realism of its own; it has an inherent attraction not found in other forms of illustration. For this reason the average person believes implicitly that the photograph cannot falsify. Of course, you and I know that this unbounded faith in the integrity of the photograph is often rudely shaken, for, while photographs may not lie, liars may photograph. It becomes necessary, then, in our revelation of the truth, to see to it that the camera we depend upon contracts no bad habits....The dictum, then, of the social worker is "Let there be light;" and in this campaign for light we have our advance agent the light writer – the photograph.²⁴⁸

Hine draws here on the full weight of enlightenment notions of the connection between truth and social justice and utilizes their metaphorical and physical connections to the process of photographic exposure. In doing so, he gives full voice to the deep-seated desire amongst a certain liberal elite for a clear connection between information about a problem and action and social justice upon it. This faith, that some problem only need be made known and it will immediately be resolved, is one that runs throughout the notion of government transparency and political accountability, regardless of which medium is acting as the channel as transmission.

As Jonathan Kahana points out, much of the history of political documentary film in the United States rests on the notion that moving images can be used to achieve social change, whether this change is political accountability for those in power or greater justice for those without it.²⁴⁹ In considering a range of formal practices from the Depression era through the social crises of the 1960's and on into contemporary political work, Kahana writes "In an emancipatory gesture that [we] find repeated over and over...each style of documentary claims in its way to liberate its viewers from ignorance, prejudice false consciousness or illusion."²⁵⁰ Indeed, much of the moving image work considered in each of the previous chapters echoes this same gesture. From the overt skepticism of Errol Morris through the straightforward polemics of Robert Greenwald on through the virtual walls of Guantamo Bay, each of the works considered thus far use a variety of formal approaches but share the basic aim of educating viewers on a set of issues. As a medium built on the same physical and photo-chemical principles utilized in still photography, political and social issue documentary have also inherited to a large extent the faith in the connection between the light which exposes the film and the light which can expose social injustice that Hine so clearly articulated.

If we turn instead to the issue of government transparency and the medium of data visualization we find a somewhat different history, one in fact that is far shorter. While notions of openness and transparency have been an ideal of democratic states from their earliest instantiations, the usual organ for achieving this has been the existence of the principle of freedom of the press. Access to government meetings and records at all levels by the press has been a consistent source of conflict, one in which degrees of access and publicity have varied throughout different countries and time periods. During the progressive era, for example, reformers like Louis Brandeis and Woodrow Wilson called for greater information sharing on the part of the government in order to counteract the perceived corruption of politics by business interests. Brandeis' notion of 'publicity' drew on his belief in the ability of the public gaze to root out corruption if given proper access to the information. Thus, one of the clear goals of Brandeis and others was making information known to the government available to the public.²⁵¹ Indeed, his well worn observation that "Sunlight is said to be the best disinfectant" evokes metaphors similar to Hine's and directly connects a belief that information can be equated with optical visibility in terms of its ability to access truth.

These early parallels notwithstanding, something like a comprehensive or even limited collection of information or records from and about the government which could be

subject to analysis by independent groups and visualized for the public has only emerged within the last few years. This is in part the result of two factors that we have already seen in the history and development of data visualization. The first is that for much of its history as it relates to social and political life, data visualization has been a tool for the state to more effectively administer power. Large scale data collection and record keeping often required the resources of the state to be carried out, and such records, moreover, were often kept secret by governments.²⁵² For example, one of the first uses of the IBM Hollerith sorting machine was in tabulating the 1900 census, and IBM would long count on sovereign governments around the world as the main customers for its cutting edge computing technology. States were the only entities who had both the resources to purchase these technologies and sufficient quantities of data to justify them. By the next centennial census in 2000, technology like the Google mapreduce algorithm had made large scale computing a commodity open to anyone capable of networking two or more computers together, and the ubiquitous presence of computers for the previous fifty years had created mountains of data that were increasingly available to anyone with an internet connection.

The second change that enabled the current explosion of transparency related activity was a further redefinition of what counts as data, and thus what can be visualized. In the same way that the golden age of data visualization was fueled in part by expanding the notion of data to include certain measures of social and political life, the current resurgence of the field is similarly expanding what falls within its purview. Part of the recent revolution in the field of data visualization, for example, has been the development of a related field known as natural language data processing (NLDP for short.) NLDP analyzes written texts and categorizes them according to various criteria, thereby generating data about them and hence the ability to visualize this material. Unlike a census in which data must be collected and classified, NLDP allows one to turn any written material into a data source (not just books, but e-mail, websites, tweets, etc.) In political circles, the same army of bureaucrats it takes to conduct a national census also produce an overwhelming archive of written material in the process of everyday governance. Even though reforms in the United States like 1966 Freedom of Information Act and the Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (passed in response to the Watergate scandal) have long given citizens access to this information, until recently such records have only been made available in printed form, thus requiring an equally sized army of individuals to sort and make sense of such information. The advent of digital record keeping and NLDP makes this archive a viable source of data that can be analyzed and visualized by anyone with relatively little computing power.

Thus, if photographic media and access to government information have both been invoked utilizing enlightenment metaphors of light, optics and vision as a direct access to truth and justice, it is only in the last decade that information has become a form of visual media in the manner that photography was from the beginning. Until recently, free access to information as an avenue toward government transparency typically meant access to printed records in a specific government agency during prescribed hours. Any public insight into what such records contained was usually provided via written reports from the

press or a specific watchdog group. Once these records become digital, they become open to investigation by a much wider segment of the population using a broader array of tools for summarizing and accessing their contents.

Obama's Open Government

With his election to the White House in November of 2008, then president-elect Barack Obama immediately set to work fulfilling what had been his campaign's most amorphous and perhaps most compelling promise: change. Capitalizing on voter dissatisfaction over the protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and increasing anxiety over the global economic downturn, Obama's promise of change stretched from the specific (closing Guantanamo within a year) to the general (bridging the polarized, winner-take-all politics of the previous eight years.) Attempting to demonstrate his intention to make good on these promises, his transition team established the change.gov website to outline and track progress on many of his administrations nascent policies. Although some of these long-term ideas would prove to be, like most campaign promises, overly ambitious, his administration's use of digital technology as a channel of open communication was meant to be change in and of itself. Signaling an immediate break from the perception of secrecy and dissimulation that had for many characterized George W. Bush's White House, the transition team's early utilization of web technology became a hallmark of his approach to governing.

While this turn toward technology was a move away from his predecessor, for both Obama and the left it was simply more of the same. Indeed, his entire candidacy had been marked by a utilization of the net-roots strategies of organizing and fundraising that had become a pillar of progressive activism during the Bush era. From his move to post the President's traditional weekly radio address on YouTube to his very public desire to hold onto his Blackberry while in office, Obama signaled early on that he intended to incorporate technology into every aspect of the new administration.²⁵³ Just as George Bush had styled himself the first "CEO president," Obama clearly wanted to claim the title of the first online or digital president.²⁵⁴

Nowhere was the embrace of technology more apparent than in the new president's approach to government transparency. On January 21st, 2009, on his first full day in office, Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum with the subject heading "Transparency and Open Government." Part of a move advocated by several government watchdog groups to embrace "openness on day one," the memo outlined his administration's approach to sharing information about the government and directed various individuals to coordinate an "Open Government Directive" which would revise standards for releasing information to the public.²⁵⁵ Reminiscent of the idealism surrounding his first days in office and echoing the heady optimism surrounding Web 2.0 initiatives which had launched nearly a decade earlier, the memo outlines three general principles to be followed by all federal agencies: 1) Government should be transparent, 2) Government should be participatory and 3) Government should be collaborative. Along with moves to de-classify documents and speed up the response to FOIA requests, these new policies were roundly applauded by the

coalition of groups which made up what was by then becoming known as the transparency or sunshine movement.²⁵⁶

The influence of entrepreneurial webspeak on the Presidential memo turned out to be more than just coincidental. In the years that followed, the Obama administration went on to institute a range of new IT driven policies and transparency initiatives from websites and dashboards to blogs and data feeds under the direction of the government's first ever Chief Information Officer, Vivek Kundra.²⁵⁷ Kundra had made a name for himself in the public sector by spear-heading a number of open government initiatives in Washington D.C. under the reformist mayor Adrian Fenty, many of which would eventually come to characterize the Federal government's approach to technological transparency. For example, he collected and published data that the city routinely collected on a webpage he called the "D.C. Data Catalog"²⁵⁸ that included access to everything from crime statistics and arrests to applications for building permits and city maintenance requests. Kundra realized that all of this data was both public information and potentially useful to citizens, but that there was currently no way to connect the audience with its source. To address that problem, he borrowed what was quickly becoming a well-established model from the business world and held a contest that challenged people to come up with apps that would make the data more useful. The result of these efforts was a portal of tools and information that Kundra and the city hoped would be a "a catalyst ensuring agencies operate as more responsive, better performing organizations."²⁵⁹ Significantly, the page also included links and tools that would "allow users to create and share a variety of data visualizations" and informed each user that "you can create your own visualization using already uploaded datasets or slice and dice data the way no one did before."²⁶⁰ The site was so successful that it was eventually won the Harvard Kennedy School award for "Innovations in Government."²⁶¹

After the 2008 election, Kundra was appointed to the transition team as a technology adviser, and part of his charge was to replicate the success he had in D.C. at the Federal level. The result was the Open Government Initiative which undertook a range of projects to push government transparency onto the web using a variety of tools. These included everything from sites like USASpending.gov, a dashboard which was intended to expose, and hence streamline, spending on government projects, to the OpenGov dashboard, a sort of meta-chart tracking progress toward transparency across several dozen federal agencies. Amongst all of these initiatives the two that best exemplify the government's current approach to transparency are the data.gov and recovery.gov projects that launched early in Obama's first term. Together, they represent both the potentials and the pitfalls the government faces as it seeks to make itself more open to its citizens.

Recovery.gov

Roughly one month after taking office, Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (known eventually as the 'stimulus package' or the 'recovery act') which appropriated \$787 billion dollars of tax relief and government spending to counteract the effects of the ongoing global economic downturn. Two days

later on February 19th, 2009, the website Recovery.Gov went live, welcoming visitors with the following message:

Recovery.gov is a website that lets you, the taxpayer, figure out where the money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is going. There are going to be a few different ways to search for information. The money is being distributed by Federal agencies, and soon you'll be able to see where it's going -- to which states, to which congressional districts, even to which Federal contractors. As soon as we are able to, we'll display that information visually in maps, charts, and graphics.²⁶²

This initial page also featured a video of Obama explaining that the unprecedented size and scale of the recovery act demanded new methods of transparency and oversight to “root out waste, inefficiency and unnecessary spending.” Toward the bottom of the page was a simple bar chart breaking out the amounts dedicated to different spending projects. In spite of its rather limited initial offerings, however, the original homepage for the site already contained all of the elements that would be essential to later versions. A test case for his administration’s transparency agenda, the site was a first step in what was intended to be a complete overhaul of the federal information infrastructure.



Figure 4.5 The initial recovery.gov page.



Figure 4.6 Recovery.gov as of 9/1/2011.

And after two years of updates, the site eventually became populated with a great deal of the information it initially promised. It is currently possible to search through hundreds of thousands of projects by size, geographic location, federal agency, or subcontractor. A number of different tools make this information available via charts, graphs, maps and other visualization tools that allow one to analyze and interpret the data. The “video center” on the site now lists over 30 clips (totaling just over 3.5 hours of running time) each of which explain how to navigate the site and its overall mission. As an information source, recovery.gov represents an ambitious attempt to document and display the flow of federal revenue, dollar by dollar, from the treasury into the multitude of projects it supported and the jobs that it created, a virtual showcase of recently re-embraced Keynesian economic principles. But as an object of visual culture, the site is perhaps even more groundbreaking still. In the economy of information it utilizes to document the impact of the stimulus package, recovery.gov represents a clear faith in the ability of quantitative information to sufficiently represent reality, and thus signals in its way the partial advent of a post-photographic form of the documentary impulse.

Placing a non-fiction, multimedia text like Recovery.gov in the same conversation as documentary film is not without precedent. As Tom Gunning has convincingly argued, illustrated lectures and narrated slideshows by social reformers like Jacob Riis place early documentary still photography in the pre-evolution of later forms of voyeuristic, observational ethnography.²⁶³ In Gunning's formulation, a series of still images narrated by the speaker provided the same format (photographic evidence, timed delivery, narrative progression) that would later be united in form of the sound documentary film. In this context, the combination of evidence, argument and political narrative that recovery.gov offers might be seen as a third iteration of the form, one in which all elements sit side by side rather than being delivered sequentially.

The purpose of the site, moreover, is one that places it squarely within the documentary tradition, or at least that part of the tradition populated by state sponsored films which effortlessly (if overtly) conjoin civic edification with political persuasion. On an explicit level, the site's goal of openness and transparency can be read as providing information and issuing a call action, both common items on the documentary agenda. Indeed, the ominous presence of a large red button adorning the top of every page which asks visitors to "Report waste, fraud and abuse" simultaneously notifies them that they can take action but also assures them that action is being taken. Beyond its stated aims, however, the site also narrates for visitors in basic beginning middle and end structure the story of how the stimulus package moved from being a piece of legislation in Washington to a series of concrete projects carried out in the real world.

The meta-narrative for all of this is of course the implicit political message that such spending works, and works for "real Americans." Part of a series of massive government spending measures intended to safeguard the economy from slipping into a depression, the Stimulus package took its place alongside the Troubled Asset Relief Program and the auto industry bailouts which together set aside nearly \$2 trillion dollars to address the state of the economy. Of these, the stimulus package was the only clear example of a classic Keynesian stimulus investment by the public sector. While the other programs may have prevented the collapse of such iconic names in American business as General Motors and Bank of America, the stimulus package stood apart in that it was designed to inject new capital into the market. Within the Keynesian model, this public spending will then cascade across the economy as people paid by the government spend their paychecks for other goods and services, which are then used on other goods and services, and so on. The site's invitation to "Track the money" is thus an invitation to witness what economists call the multiplier effect in action. Recovery.gov thus seeks not only to persuade conservatives that the historic spending levels were effective and necessary but also to reassure taxpayers that they too would be the beneficiaries of the government's largesse.

Contrary to the fervor of the debate surrounding it, the size and scale of both the stimulus package and the economic threat it was meant to address were not unprecedented. The similarities between the great depression of the 1930's and what was quickly dubbed as the "great recession" were widely discussed, and many parallels were drawn between the policy responses of Obama and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Indeed,

these policy parallels might also be suggestively extended to the media both administrations created in support of them.²⁶⁴ After all, in attempting to carry out the controversial resettlement of destitute farmer's and migrant laborers, Roosevelt's Resettlement Administration sponsored what eventually became the era's most iconic and influential media representations. In addition to the well known and widely distributed photographic work of Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and Gordon Parks, the RA also produced two 30 minute documentary films meant to educate the public: *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1938.)

The River, in particular, offers both formal and rhetorical features that make its comparison to Recovery.gov particularly productive. The film focuses on the mismanagement of the Mississippi river watershed over the last century as the nation pushed westward and documents the ecological and social destruction that resulted. Using a mix of statistics, maps, and images tied together with voiceover narration, the film argues for the need to control the river and restore the damage, both of which would involve the large public works projects that have come to be associated with the New Deal. As Paul Arthur has argued, the film directly positions new forms of technology as the solution to bridging the existing conflict between man and nature, but presents these solutions in a poetic, lyrical style that blunts the heavy handed role government would necessarily play in carrying them out.²⁶⁵ In rhetorical terms, while the film does contain sufficient logos driven data to convince the audience of the size and scale of the problem (acres of farmland flooded, percentages of deforestation, tons of top-soil erosion, etc.) its primary appeals are the pathos laden images of the destruction itself and the people whose lives have been ruined.²⁶⁶

Returning to recovery.gov, we find a similar mix of elements with a decidedly different sense of proportion and emphasis. Whereas films like *The River* utilize data and statistics to support an overarching framework of photographic images, recovery.gov utilizes images to support what is otherwise intended as a data delivery system. Rather than using a map to demonstrate the context and scale of the subject as *The River* does, the maps on recovery.gov instead become navigational tools through which specific data points may be accessed. While both texts seek to document specific flows and the impact they

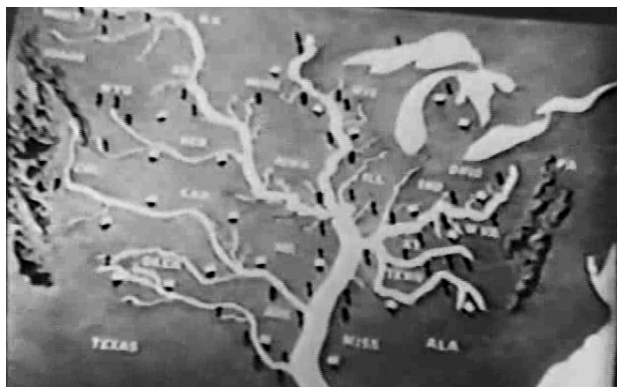


Figure 4.7 Data Visualization in the *The River*.

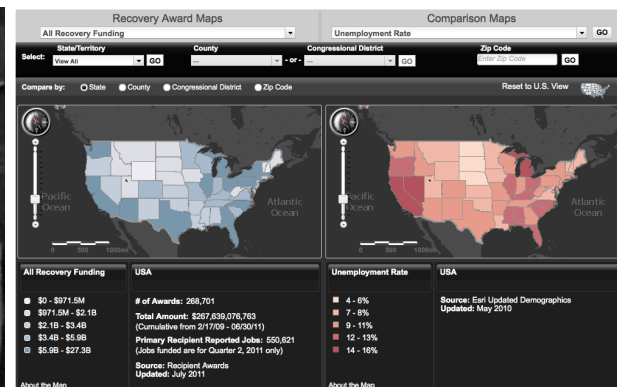


Figure 4.8 Mapping recovery funds on recovery.gov.

have on people's lives, for one this flow is the photogenic tempest of the nation's largest waterway, for the other it is the flow of capital for the nation's largest fiscal outlay. In spite of historically similar origins and an overall shared political purpose, the two objects thus utilize radically different media to achieve it.

A great deal of this difference can be explained by the technological and social contexts in which they emerged. For the average audience member of the 1930's, moving images were the primary portal to the wider world, and for the governments and institutions who sponsored them, documentary was seen as the best means of edifying and persuading the mass publics which gathered to see them. Like the hydroelectric dams that it promoted which it promoted, sound documentary films like *The River* were among the cutting edge, mass media technologies of the time. Seventy years later, this slot has of course been filled by the Internet. While the information agnosticism of the internet's design stipulates no difference between the types of data it carries—all packets are created equal—in the information economy of Recovery.gov, data as data takes precedent over image as data. The site certainly does contain images both still and moving, but these clearly play a supporting role in relation to the data visualizations which are its main focus. The vast majority of the site's 3.5 hours of video, for example, are dedicated to tutorials on using the site's data interface. Hence, most of the images the website presents are ironically images of the website itself: screen captures, frame grabs, etc. If both texts seek to "show" people what the government was doing to address its problems, in earlier era this meant photographic evidence whereas in our own era it means empirical evidence.

If data thus provides the core of the evidentiary claims that support the larger political argument the site levies, it also embodies the specific elements that form its basic narrative structure. Rather than the textual narration of the voiceover heard on *The River's* recorded soundtrack (groundbreaking technology itself at the time,) recovery.gov's temporal beginning, middle and end is laid out on the horizontal time axis of the charts and graphs detailing the allotment of funds and the completion of projects. While this varies depending on the particular statistical lens one chooses to use (time isn't always among the correlated factors) the site's focus on procedures like allotment, project completion, etc. means that one nearly always encounters graphs trending in an upward direction, subtly implying notions of uplift and progress as time moves forward. This impression is both reinforced and potentially predetermined by the framing the site's title provides. 'Recovery' of course refers to a process of moving from a diminished state to an improved state one had previously inhabited, but used in its noun form in this context it also implies that this process is an object that might be purchased and put on display. While a given chart might be labeled "Funds Allocated by the Department of Education" the larger channel of

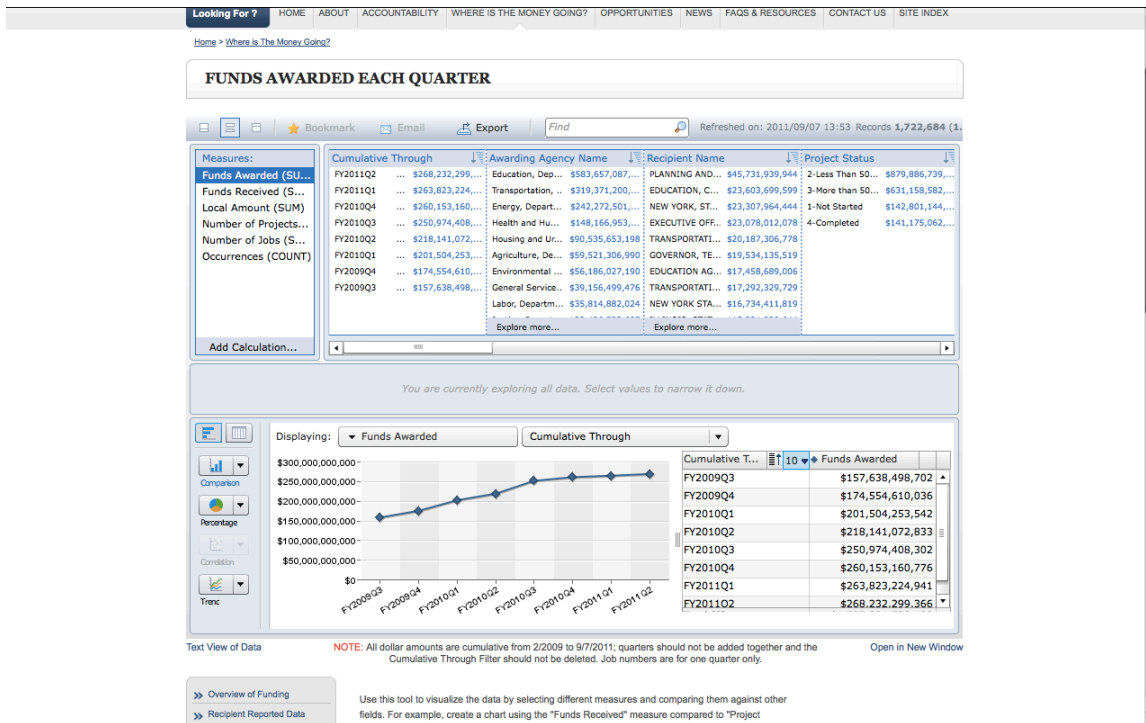


Figure 4.9 Uplift and recovery in the 'Recovery Explorer'.

transmission continually reminds that what we are really looking is the recovery of the US economy.

Beyond its evidentiary and narrative capacities, however, the extent of the government's faith in data's documentary capabilities is also born out in the site's

transparency purposes. In addition to convincing people of the effectiveness of the program, the site also seeks to enlist the public's help in safeguarding these funds. By exposing the data to public scrutiny, the argument goes, any instances of "waste, fraud and abuse" will be highlighted and addressed. This implies a one-to-one correspondence between what's represented in the data and what's taking place in reality. Certainly a film might succeed in uncovering some level of malfeasance or graft via hidden camera techniques of the sort pioneered by filmmakers like Nick Broomfield, but a project like recovery.gov claims to have already supplied all the relevant information. Wrong-doing in one instance must be captured, in the other it need only be uncovered. It is only through the sort of totalizing archive of documentation that such claims might be made.

One final note worth mentioning on the documentary efforts of recovery.gov relates to the appropriateness of selecting data visualization as medium through to explore this particular subject. Throughout the financial crisis which started in 2008 with the collapse of Lehman Brothers and continued on through the collapse of the US housing market, the 'credit crunch' faced by major US banks, and various other cascading factors and effects, what seems to have become glaringly apparent is the completely intangible nature of money and wealth in the modern global economy. While money itself has always been an abstraction of sorts based on various forms of value created through labor and the exchange of goods and services, this abstraction took on an extreme form in the various exotic financial instruments which were partially blamed with causing the crisis in the first place. In an odd way, this level of abstraction found its perfect corollary in the data visualizations on recovery.gov. Though intended to document the process of repairing the damage to people's jobs and lives, quantitative visual media of this sort also ideally reflect the intangible nature of the information based economy that caused the damage itself. While this data is intended to be a gateway to the multitude of real world projects on which the money was spent, viewed cynically, it appears as though data is the solution itself.

Data.gov

Launched several months after Recovery.gov on May 21st, 2009, data.gov was intended to be a clearing house for all of the government data sets that were already being collected by the different agencies that make up the federal government. Prior to this, the default approach to information sharing by federal agencies was typically to err on the side of secrecy, owing either to legitimate concerns over national security and individual privacy or a more general fear that such information could lead to criticism or embarrassment by the agency that collected it.²⁶⁷ As the White House's own blog described the situation: "For years, agencies have collected data in support of their particular missions. But before the ubiquitous use of technology, data often sat in filing cabinets and agency basements."²⁶⁸ Even when agencies did release information, it often took the form of reports published in PDF format or as charts and graphs without any of the underlying data exposed, both of which would be unreadable by computers and other programs that wanted to put the data to use. While this may have given agencies the sense that they were being open with their data, from a technological perspective it was no different than the basement or filing cabinet.

Responding to the President's Memorandum on Transparency, the release of the Open Government Directive in December of 2009 put in place official policies dictating how agencies should handle their existing data. Agencies were not only reminded of the three principles set out by the President ("transparency, participation and collaboration") but were also given a primer on the value of these principles, stating details like: "Transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about what the Government is doing."²⁶⁹ In addition to these general principles, the document sought to change the very culture of each agency, claiming:

To increase accountability, promote informed participation by the public, and create economic opportunity, each agency shall take prompt steps to expand access to information by making it available online in open formats. With respect to information, the presumption shall be in favor of openness (to the extent permitted by law and subject to valid privacy, confidentiality, security, or other restrictions.)²⁷⁰

The document also put in place specific deadlines each agency had to meet in order to be considered "in compliance" with the directive. These included milestones like placing 3 high-value data sets online within three months (which would then link back up to the data.gov site) as well as goals for targeting and publishing all of the data an agency collected. In order to hold the agencies accountable, the Open Government Initiative set up, of course, a dashboard measuring each agency on ten different benchmarks.²⁷¹

The combination of creating a specific goal tied to a transparent progress report seems to have worked. When data.gov launched prior to the Directive it featured just 47 different data sets. On its one year anniversary this number had grown to 250,028, and by two years it was well over 379,000.²⁷² The site as it currently stands is a teeming mass of information, featuring lists of everything from the "Failed Bank List" published by the FDIC to the "Farmer's Market GEODATA" list put out by the Department of Agriculture. Alongside all of the data sets are tools for viewing the data in different visualizations (charts, graphs, maps, timelines) as well as options for downloading the raw data itself in machine readable formats (.csv and .xls.) Beyond this, an 'apps' category featuring a number of readymade tools and visualizations enables visitors to utilize the data and share their interpretations with one another, and a 'community' forum enables people to provide help to one another on using the site and feedback to the agencies for improvement.

At first glance, it's difficult to see what use all of this data might be put to, which in essence is part of data.gov's strategy. Rather than try to anticipate what might be useful for people, or force people to anticipate what might be useful before they have access to it, the site is designed to give users complete access and allow them the freedom to create new views on the data by filtering and combining data sets to reveal insight. Responding to criticism that the site was too intimidating for average users (as one gender suspect review put it, it failed the "mom test"), visualization tools were added so that users could interact with the data right in their browsers and then save and share their visualizations with other users.²⁷³ To further the aim of innovation and accessibility, agencies were required to create apps that visitors could use to navigate the data in meaningful ways, and several

contests have been held by outside groups seeking to test the site's usefulness. SunlightLabs, a project of the Sunlight Foundation, for example, held the "Apps for America" contest that solicited projects from the community and awarded prizes to the best submissions.

Since its creation, the data.gov website has indeed had some high-profile successes both in a general, public way, but also behind the scenes. Some apps like the "Airport Status Service" enable travellers to determine, in real time, whether the airport they are flying through is experiencing delays providing small conveniences to citizens, while others like the "Hospital Report Card" enable them to make important health care related decisions and push hospitals to improve their level of care.²⁷⁴ Behind the scenes, as agencies began standardizing and sharing data, some unexpected conveniences also emerged. The Department of Education and the IRS, for example, found that by sharing data they could allow users to pre-populate the DOE's FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) with information from their electronically filed income tax returns.²⁷⁵ Such things have the potential to be of enormous benefit for citizens simply by making public data the government already had. Essentially all of these tools are designed to make the data that Foucault once deemed the essential tool of the sovereign open to the populace.

For the most part, however, data.gov remains more of a potential benefit to citizens than an actual one. While it is still relatively new, the site has generated two well placed criticisms that raise significant transparency issues. The first of these is the basic trade-off in the flexibility of completely unformatted data (what's referred to as wholesale data) and the more user friendly but less flexible pre-packaged data (retail data.) Given varying levels of technological fluency, raw data will essentially be unusable for most people (or put another way, opaque rather than transparent.) But retail data, like user friendly charts and graphs, flies in the face of entire ethos of open government initiatives by creating a layer of mediation between the information and its audience.²⁷⁶

While proponents of transparency and open government tend to favor some combination of both methods (which data.gov offers), allowing a completely free and open interpretation of the data runs a significant risk of error and misinformation. Even supposedly user-friendly applications that make use of data.gov like datamasher.org require a basic understanding of the way that statistics work. The site, which won the SunlightLabs "Apps for America" contest and is often held up as an example of the power that data.gov opens up, allows users to combine any two data sets, like poverty levels and high school graduation rates, on a national map to reveal correlations between different facets of social life in the United States.²⁷⁷ But the potential for misapplication of the tool's parameters and hence misinterpretation of the data is readily apparent. To use our previous examples, consider a map which correlated the location of neighborhood farmer's markets with failed banks, claiming to demonstrate some relationship between the two. While a numerical relationship between the data would be easy to map to create using the tools the app provides, it would be difficult to claim that any causal insight had been gained as a result. The simplicity with which these visualizations can be created and their

connection to supposed 'facts' about the world masks a complexity to the science underlying the meaningful information we always hope such things will provide.

Moreover, as these tools and visualizations migrate off of the data.gov website and into the blogs and forums in which political discourse increasingly takes place, it becomes conceivable that numbers might be found to support any range of politically loaded interpretations. Kundra once claimed that he aspires to making data.gov so easy to use and share that it might play a role on blogs the way YouTube does now, offering direct access one's underlying evidence in data rather than moving image form.²⁷⁸ While the open source ethos holds that any egregious mis-use of information will be spotted and quickly corrected (on the Wikipedia model,) in the paranoid, relatively polarized atmosphere of online political discourse it is equally plausible that such corrections will themselves be quickly dismissed. While the potential for mis-use certainly isn't a reason to avoid providing the information in the first place, it is a cause to question the utopian aims to which it aspires.

The second, equally serious, criticism that data.gov faces deals with data that doesn't appear on the site. Many open government proponents question the extent to which relatively useless data is giving the government the appearance of transparency even as the most important material for greater accountability is left off of the site. The inherent problem with gauging transparency progress is that most citizens and independent groups don't know the extent of the government's information holdings to begin with. As Ellen Miller of Sunlight Labs puts it, "We don't like high-value data that involves [things like] wild horse counts...We suspect they have data that would be of more interest to citizens."²⁷⁹ As Aliya Stierenstein points out, this might include information like which sections of private industry had been cited by the government for failing to meet public safety standards.²⁸⁰ The paradox that all open government initiatives quickly hit upon is that without complete and total transparency, it is difficult to gauge just how transparent the government is actually being. And yet, as many have pointed out, issues like national security and individual privacy do dictate the need for some "defense of secrecy" even if such concerns are often overblown.²⁸¹

The Obama government has proven itself to be open to the criticism surrounding its new initiatives and capable of responding when warranted with the 'change' it promised. For example, after an extensive audit of such programs timed to coincide with the celebration of "Sunshine Week" in March of 2010, the National Security Archive's Executive Director Tom Blanton stated "The Obama administration deserves an 'A' for effort but an 'Incomplete' for results."²⁸² Sensitive to the criticism, the administration quickly announced on its "Open Government" blog a redoubling of its efforts, providing a "Tour of the Horizon" which reiterated that "Transparency is one of the core principles of democracy."²⁸³ The result was the launch of 2.0 versions for many of its sites that addressed the concerns brought by the administration's critics. But in an odd twist of irony, these technology driven principles of transparency would be quickly put to the test by another open government initiative, one operating outside of the Washington DC beltway

headed not by an Obama appointee, but instead by self appointed activist/anarchist Julian Assange.

Wikileaks

The moths following Sunshine Week 2010 would indeed be, as the White House blog predicted “chock full of examples of concrete efforts -- not lip service -- to making open government happen” but these efforts were in large part the result of the alleged collaboration between Julian Assange and Bradley Manning to release several hundred thousand classified documents and other media from the US government’s SIPRNet.²⁸⁴ As if heeding Obama’s call for transparency, collaboration and participation, the open data was at once hit upon by a number groups utilizing a range of new technologies to analyze, visualize and make sense of the avalanche of information. As the ensuing drama and debate over Wikileaks played out, a number of the groups who supported the Obama administration’s initial open government efforts once again stepped up to support the new poster child of transparency, in the process creating an uneasy juxtaposition between idealistic government bureaucrats on one hand and renegade anarchist whistleblowers on the other. In spite of clear legal and procedural differences, however, the two groups shared a common belief in the need for governmental transparency, and a clear faith in technology as the best means to achieving this.

Although Wikileaks had been around for several years on the fringes of the activist and hacker communities, prior to 2010 its largest leaks had focused on fraud in private entities like the European banking giant Julius Baer and on political corruption in places like Kenya and Peru.²⁸⁵ The organization had attained a reputation amongst hackers and transparency advocates for creating technology that would allow anyone to securely and anonymously upload large caches of previously secret data for publication on its servers. Its early successes also earned it the attention and appreciation of both the media and the non-profit sectors, which both recognized its positive disruptive potential for information freedom and social justice.

Throughout this early phase, Wikileaks seems to have largely positioned itself as a basic conduit for information, publishing any and all contributions it deemed authentic and leaving the interpretation and investigation of the material up to journalists and activists. In essence, the site attempted to bring principles from the open source software movement like community collaboration (memorably expressed by Linus Torvald “with enough eyes, all bugs are shallow”) and open information exchange (Stewart Brand’s equally memorable “information wants to be free”) to the practice of whistleblowing and investigative journalism. In April of 2010, however, Wikileaks began a series of high profile leaks that would eventually earn it intense international legal and media scrutiny. The leaks, taken from classified US government databases, related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and US diplomacy around the globe. But even as this series of leaks brought the issue of transparency to the fore, the treatment of the source material itself reveals a great deal about the peril and promise of total informational freedom. Even as Wikileaks and the trials of its controversial founder Julian Assange became the poster children for lofty goals

like freedom of speech and governmental transparency in the age of the internet, the migration of its leaks across a myriad of representational forms and media outlets provide an interesting test case in which these ideals were put into practice.

Collateral Murder

The first of these leaks, the “Collateral Murder” video, was released by Wikileaks on April 5th 2010 on the site’s main page (<http://www.wikileaks.org>) and on a connected site set up by wikileaks (<http://www.collateralmurder.com>). Both sites featured a set of videos drawn from an encrypted video file the site had received several months earlier captured by a camera mounted on the gunsight of an Apache helicopter in Iraq. The footage shows the helicopter shooting and killing 18 people, including two Reuters journalists, and wounding two young children.²⁸⁶ After vetting the footage to ensure its authenticity and sending people to Iraq to conduct interviews and notify relatives, Wikileaks broke the footage into several versions. Among these was the original 38 minutes of almost unedited material and a second, shorter version which excerpted relevant portions of the film and provided both a prologue and epilogue to the footage giving context and soliciting donations to the site. Both films are accompanied by radio transmissions between the crew of the helicopter and soldiers on the ground. Although not exactly graphic, the footage is nonetheless horrifying to watch and troubling on a multitude of levels chief among them the fact that, regardless of the context, they depict violent death on a scale, and in a manner that few of us are ever forced to confront.

As an example of the Wikileaks style of technological transparency, the “Collateral Murder” footage is something of an anomaly. In spite of the attention the film generated with its release in April of 2010, it seems to have been virtually forgotten in the wake of other subsequent, high profile leaks, most notably the Iraq and Afghanistan War Diaries and of course the now infamous Cablegate release. In all of the press surrounding the US diplomatic cables, the film barely rates a mention except as part of the ‘other material’ allegedly released by US Army Private Bradley Manning through his access to the government’s SIPRNet. Moreover, its status as video footage taken from a single incident sets it apart from the other Wikileaks releases, which have almost exclusively consisted of document collections spanning broader time frames. And yet, there is a great deal this film and its treatment reveals, both about the status of visual media and visible evidence in the information age, but also about the value of information itself for citizens in a democracy in which the political debates around Wikileaks played out.

As was noted at the time, the shortened version of the film represented something of a departure for Wikileaks. Until this point it had contented itself with summarizing and contextualizing the information it released but left the material itself entirely unaltered. The move was criticized on two fronts. One set of critics felt Wikileaks hadn’t simply contextualized and interpreted the shooting, but rather mis-represented it entirely by leaving out certain mitigating details, including the possession of weapons by several members of the group.²⁸⁷ A second set of critics felt Wikileaks had overstepped its role as a self-branded leaker of information and become something more akin to a news

organization than a simple conduit connecting sources with the public. Even Steven Colbert, in a rare moment of seriousness, confronted Assange on the issue, stating: “You have edited this tape, and you have given it a title called ‘collateral murder.’ That’s not leaking, that’s a pure editorial.”²⁸⁸ Assange, both here and elsewhere, justified the move by stating that part of Wikileaks’ promise to its sources included generating what he called “maximum political impact” with the information it releases, an aim echoed in statements by other members of the organization.²⁸⁹ While this usually meant partnering with journalists at major news organizations like *The New York Times*, *Der Spiegel*, *The Guardian* and others, in this case Wikileaks took on the job itself. In doing so Wikileaks wasn’t playing the role of editor or journalist, but rather the role of filmmaker, and in the process was creating what eventually became a documentary.

The case for claiming “Collateral Murder” as a documentary is a fairly straightforward one. Whether we take John Grierson’s oft-repeated if equally contested definition “the creative treatment of actuality”²⁹⁰ or Bill Nichols’ more recent reworking “telling stories with evidence and argument” documentary is generally accepted to consist, in varying degrees, of a creative or critical interpretation of events in the historical world, often with the intent of convincing viewers to accept this particular version of events as ‘true,’ loaded as that last term may be. Regardless of the degree of nuance these definitions leave out, or the expansive domains to which documentary scholars and practitioners have recently pushed the canon, “Collateral Murder” clearly fits comfortably within these boundaries.

As evidence of this, consider the film’s opening inter-titles, which historically situate the footage and cast it with a particular critical frame. After a quote by George Orwell about the speciousness of political language²⁹¹, we’re given a brief synopsis of the event and informed that two of the men killed, Saeed Chmagh and Namir Noor-Eldeen, were Reuter’s news reporters and we’re shown images of both. We’re then told that Reuters petitioned the US government to release the video under the Freedom of Information Act, and the ominous final title declares “this video has not been released...until now.”

In documentary terms, this opening segment is clearly doing a great deal of work, or what we might call, after Jonathan Kahana, intelligence work.²⁹² It organizes the field of knowledge by orienting it both specifically– this particular event, these individuals– but also generally, via the Orwell quote, as part of the larger struggle between truth and lying in political discourse. The pathos laden background information on the reporters, that both were respected, talented, and in Chmagh’s case, survived by a wife and children, cements the event’s status as a genuine tragedy. Indeed, this implicit emotional framework becomes explicit in the first still image we see of Chmagh, an image itself framed in the grief of the son who clutches it to his chest. And lest we miss the point, the film’s very title has already rendered judgment on the event by declaring it not simply a tragedy but one involving murder, an overt allegation calling for a judicial response that would hold those responsible for the killing accountable for their actions.

Outside of the prologue and the title, the film goes on to elucidate its source material with a variety of alterations that include cutting out nearly half of its original length, enlarging the image at specific points to highlight specific details, and supplementing its onscreen information with labels and arrows that identify certain figures and details in the frame even as they, controversially, ignore others. The presence of these alterations and annotations further cement the piece's status as a documentary. Most of the footage left out of the shortened version of the film contains a second offensive by the helicopter crew some twenty minutes later in which three missiles are fired into a building believed to contain enemy fighters and weapons. As Raffi Katchadourian reported, this second attack was arguably the bigger story, and a more open and shut violation of the 'rules of engagement' followed by the US military.²⁹³ While Wikileaks may have passed up the opportunity for a second 'smoking gun', the omission yields a more coherent 'beginning middle and end' structure that works in the service of, to return to the definition of documentary, telling a story with evidence and argument. Simply put, this is what separates the document of the raw footage from the documentary of 'collateral murder.'

These alterations of the footage also evince a need to clarify for the viewer what would otherwise not be self evident, a need which points to a curious indexical duality inherent in the source footage itself. In terms of rendering the event visible for its viewers, it offers both too much and too little. On one hand, its original purpose has endowed the footage with a wealth of informational artifacts visible on screen: the camera's position in space, its angle relative to the horizon, the exact center of the frame, the time of day, etc. And yet, for us as viewers, all of this information is relatively meaningless. On the other hand, the resolution of the image is far too poor to yield the relevant details that we care about in our attempt to understand what really happened. As evidence of its insufficiency we might simply consider the failure of both the pilot and the gunner to distinguish between a weapon and a camera, both of whom were actually present on the scene. Indeed, the disturbing nature of the footage comes not from the images themselves, but rather our secondary knowledge about what they depict. Ironically, the maximum political impact that Wikileaks sought comes almost entirely from the context surrounding the leaked material, of which the material itself is a fairly faint signifier.

And if "Collateral Murder" is operating here as a documentary film, one with a clear political bias and a set interpretation of events, Colbert was right to distinguish between what he called 'leaking' and the 'straight editorial' of the film. The editorial section, after all, has traditionally been that portion of the broadcast where the unreachable ideal of objectivity is momentarily cast aside and the source of the text is able to voice their particular opinions. As a contrast, for example, more traditionally objective treatments of the material were offered by every major news outlet from Al Jazeera to Amy Goodman.²⁹⁴

What seems less obvious, however, is why this additional layer of mediation was needed at all. Journalism's traditional role within a liberal democracy is putting eyes and ears on the ground where citizens can't be to provide them with the information they will need to make informed choices. As Ulrich Keller has demonstrated, it was at the exact moment in the 19th century when war was no longer waged as public spectacle that the war

correspondent was born.²⁹⁵ If, as the rhetoric surrounding it claims, Wikileaks can 'transparently' connect the 'source' of the information with the public, why has the middleman persisted?²⁹⁶

On one level the answer is obvious, and born out readily enough in "Collateral Murder". As the film demonstrates, the raw information itself is anything but readily intelligible. And if the average viewer can't understand what's going on in 40 minutes of video footage without help then he or she stands even less chance when the object of consideration is vastly more complex, say a cache of 90,000 documents. This is what makes the "Collateral Murder" video an essential example of the problems posed by the larger Wikileaks project. Even with direct access to a visual recording of a single event, the need for interpretation, and hence mediation, is immediately apparent. In this sense the public relies on journalists and filmmakers to process the information so that it can be made accessible to a general audience. By offering multiple versions, Wikileaks is just fulfilling its desire to create what it calls 'scientific journalism' by placing the original evidence alongside the analysis so that one might always consult it to arrive at one's own conclusions. But on another level, we might wonder if this leaves us any better off than we were before.

At the heart of what Wikileaks offers is the belief that contained somewhere within the organizational and institutional archives that are its targets lies information that can and should be made public with the promise of justice, accountability and ultimately truth on the other side. Steeped in the enlightenment faith of reason's ability to deliver one to the truth and reminiscent of 18th century debate on the freedom of the press, it should come as no surprise that this promise is at once alluring and controversial.²⁹⁷ Indeed, the term 'scientific journalism' itself belies an uncritical faith that, simply provided with the evidence, all rational individuals might arrive at the same conclusions. The right and left are largely in agreement on this issue, with the difference being that the left maintains the public has a right to know the truth whereas the right believes that secrecy is a valid trade off for some other good, presumably security. Whether its release is seen as liberating or threatening, the belief in the 'truth' of the leaks persists.

This same logic even extends to the radical left, where Slavo Zizek recently claimed, in what can only, I think, be read as a parody of Donald Rumsfeld: "The real disturbance [of wikileaks' release] was at the level of appearances: we can no longer pretend we don't know what everyone knows we know."²⁹⁸ For Zizek, the truth contained in the disclosures isn't the mundane truth that this or that injustice occurred in the midst of war, this was already known even without direct evidence of it, but rather the true face of the power wielded over us by the State, a truth that is "made more shameful by being publicised."²⁹⁹

Indeed, the same sentiments were echoed with another high profile release of secret materials from an unlocked archive, in this case the Abu Ghraib images that emerged from the cameras of Charles Groener and Sabrina Harmon in 2006. In relation to those images, Judith Butler argued that they, and the illicit manner in which they escaped, were a striking counterexample to the ongoing battle by the State to regulate the field of intelligibility for

the public through its policies of embedded reporting.³⁰⁰ For Butler, the problem of embedded journalism was the clear possibility that the journalist, the supposed objective party, would simply adopt the ideological viewpoint of the individuals whose action they were supposed to be covering.³⁰¹ And this possibility has been born out by several recent analyses of the practice.³⁰² But alongside the high-profile role of reporters embedded within different units of the military there has also been a contingent of unilateral reporters covering the conflicts. Left on their own to cover the war as they saw fit, these reporters were neither protected by the military nor subject to the subtle indoctrination this situation may create. Indeed, Chmagh and Noor-Eldeen were both operating unilaterally when they were killed, apparently attempting to cover events beyond the perspective, and hence the safety, of troop units moving through the area. Despite the long history of comparisons made between the camera and the gun, never has the connection between the two been so direct, so mistaken, and so tragic.

The irony, however, is that for all of the debate surrounding the role of both embedded and unilateral reporters in covering the wars, some of the most high profile events have been the leaks themselves, from Abu Ghraib through to Wikileaks. If the recent war in Iraq is, indeed, the “most covered war in history”³⁰³ then the distinction owes as much to Julian Assange and Charles Groener as it does to journalists. And while *Collateral Murder* highlights the dangerous role of both embedded and unilateral reporters on the ground, the next two Wikileaks releases would bring a third type of journalist to prominence: the data journalist.

The War Logs: Iraq and Afghanistan

In spite of the attention *Collateral Murder* received, Wikileaks was apparently just getting started. Over the course of the next few months, the video would be joined by several subsequent leaks of classified material including what became known as the “Afghan War Diary” and the “Iraq War Logs” on July 25th, 2010 and October 22nd, 2010 which would collectively become known as the “The War Logs,” and a final release of US diplomatic cables on November 29th, 2010. While each of the releases is unique and offers interesting points in its own right, for current purposes I’ll focus on the “The War Logs” for the contrasts they offer to both *Collateral Murder* as well as the US government’s official transparency projects.³⁰⁴

Unlike *Collateral Murder*, Wikileaks decided early on to partner with major news organizations both to increase the impact of the releases and to outsource the work involved in identifying the relevant information contained in the masses of data they offered. Shortly after the video’s release, Wikileaks contacted both *The Guardian* and *Der Spiegel*, offering them a scoop on the next set of data in exchange for a simultaneously publication date (the *Guardian* eventually brought in the *New York Times*.) All three news organizations spent about a month decoding the cryptic terminology of the reports, verifying the data against other sources and determining what material would be of public interest. On the day that Wikileaks released the full dataset online, all three news sources went public with the reporting they had prepared over the previous month.

Looking at the data itself, what stands out immediately is the extent to which a professional, third party source is needed to interpret the data and make its contents legible to a wider public. While the term transparency implies an unobstructed or unmediated connection between observer and subject, the “War Logs” demonstrate the necessity of several layers of mediation between the two. If the optical transparency of *Collateral Murder* required basic identifying labels and arrows to clarify its contents, then the “War Logs” would need an outright translation. Of the approximately 90,000 documents it obtained, for example, the *Times* identified and published on its website a selection of the most relevant material (about two dozen, in total.) A typical line from one of the documents reads:

JCC REPORTS THAT IP REPORTED THE IED STRIKE ON CF CIV VIC MB 4265 9065. IP CLAIM THAT 1X LN AMBULANCE DRIVER WAS KILLED BY UNCONTROLLED SMALL ARMS FIRING BY THE CF CIV CONVOY AFTER THE IED STRIKE (SEE ASSOCIATIONS FOR DETAILS OF IED STRIKE). JCC NOTIFIED 4/101AA AND REQUESTED THAT THE CF PATROL AT THE SITE INVESTIGATE.³⁰⁵

Needless to say, this is hardly material that’s clear to anyone outside of the military communication channels in which this particular terminology is used. In addition to the necessity of decoding the terse acronyms and obscure identifiers (e.g. MB 4265 9065) there is also the need to identify what of the underlying information is actually new. Both the of wars have been extensively covered by news media around the world which, with whatever degree of bias, had been reporting the sorts of daily events that the “War Diaries” recapitulated, so much of this was old information. Given the scale of the leaks and the quantity of information against which it could be cross checked it is no surprise that all three news organizations turned to “database experts” in order to “mine the data.”³⁰⁶ Thus, whatever level of truth these reports contained, it would apparently need to be unearthed by very specialized machinery.

What was unearthed, it turns out, was at once surprising and unsurprising, at least in terms of the news media and its relation to the accounts official and un-official coming from the government. The unsurprising aspect of both leaks was the largely sensation-less nature of the information they offered. Overall the assessment of the three news organizations seems to be that the actual conflict was less promising than the official government assessment (“bleaker” in the *Guardian’s* terms, “more grim” in the *Times*.) Aside from several specific revelations (the Taliban likely used a surface to air missile rather than an RPG in bringing down a US helicopter, for example) the logs themselves reveal no smoking gun. In a post-Watergate, post-Iran Contra era, this sort of official spin seemed to shock few. Ironically, the leak itself ultimately became the biggest story.

More surprising than the actual information contained in the “War Logs” was the coverage it received by the news organizations which had early access to it. Simply reading the headlines published by the three primary outlets, one would get the impression that the “War Logs” had unearthed the truth of the combat itself. *The Guardian’s* website, for example, claims in headlines that the “War Logs” offer the “the unvarnished picture” and

“expose the real war.”³⁰⁷ The *Times* coverage claims the documents take us “Inside the Fog of War” and offer a “real-time history” of the conflict.³⁰⁸ On closer inspection, however, all three of the outlets carefully qualify and circumscribe the information contained in the reports. *Der Spiegel*, for example, included an FAQ section on its website, detailing all of the qualifiers that should be taken into account when going through the documents (level of classification, source, etc.). The *Times*, the most circumspect of the three, notes:

“It is sometimes unclear whether a particular incident report is based on firsthand observation, on the account of an intelligence source regarded as reliable, on less trustworthy sources or on speculation by the writer. It is also not known what may be missing from the material, either because it is in a more restrictive category of classification or for some other reason.”³⁰⁹

In essence, then, the “War Logs” offer *another* account of the wars, but not *the* account.

While the prospect of any “definitive” account is of course an impossibility, the guarded reception the *Times* offers of the unofficially-released official material is indicative of the uncertain nature of government transparency in general. So long as some information remains secret, a necessity argued for by all but the most radical advocates, there will always be the suspicion that true ‘truth’ lies at an even deeper, more classified level. This sentiment echoes the concerns voiced by Ellen Miller of Sunlight labs over data.gov cited earlier (“We suspect they have data that might be of more interest to citizens.”) While any information may be potentially useful, what remains unseen casts doubt on what’s visible.

Outside of their narrative coverage of the “War Logs” material, both the *Guardian* and the *Times* also put together interactive visualizations of the data they contained. Of these, the *Guardian’s* “IED” visualization stands out as an excellent example of the visualizations generated from the “War Logs” data. Using the data contained in the “Afghan War Diaries” release, the *Guardian* sifted out reports of IED (improvised explosive device) attacks in the country and used the embedded dates and GPS information to place them on a time layered map of Afghanistan. Different targets and casualties were represented using both size and color codes (red for civilians, blue for coalition troops, the smallest dot 0-5 casualties, the largest 20+, etc.) Viewed on a website, the resulting visualization can be played like a streaming video. Over the course of a few minutes, a map of Afghanistan is slowly dotted to reveal the number and location of IED attacks in a given time period.

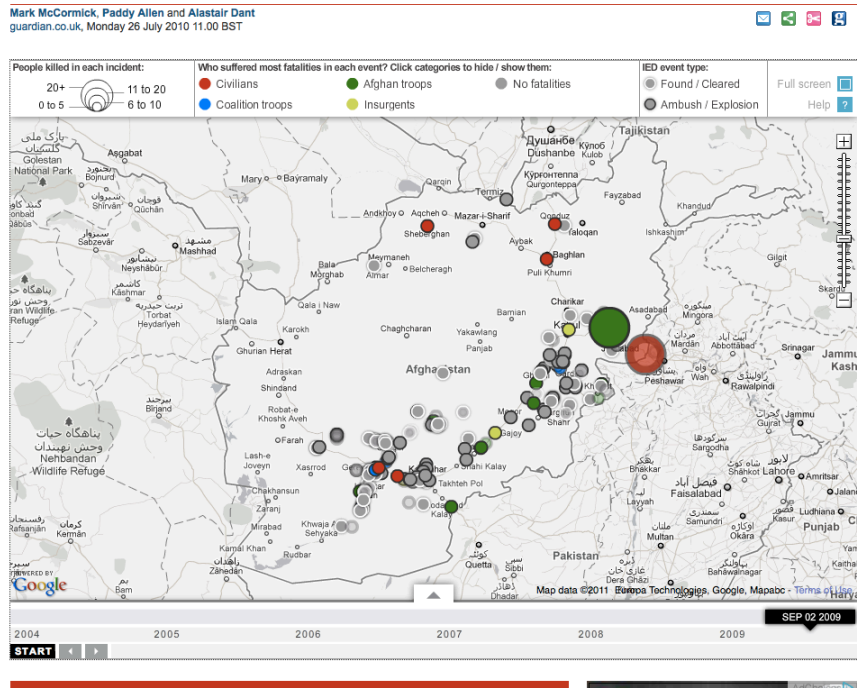


Figure 4.10 Interactive IED visualization tool on the Guardian website.

In its own right, the visualization certainly opens up an interesting and otherwise unseen aspect of the conflict. The dots, starting slowly at first and building to a sustained crescendo, reveal in their concentrated location and apparent simultaneity both the contested regions of the war (primarily the beltway between Kabul and Kandahar) and the coordinated efforts of the Taliban insurgents. Even to a relatively attentive viewer of the news from the period these aspects of the conflict become clear through the visualization in a way that they had not been previously. Seen thus, a surprising quantity of information is condensed and made accessible in a relatively short time frame.

But beyond this initial impression, the insight such visualizations offer doesn't appear to penetrate very deep. In other words, in spite of the quantity of information it provides, such views of the event are hardly sufficient to understand the nature and meaning of the conflict itself outside of some additional context. While one can certainly see that the number of IED attacks rises and falls at certain specific points, without additional sources of information it becomes difficult to ascertain the importance of any particular development. Seen through the lens of visualization, the "War Logs" can once again be said to reveal another account of these two wars, but are very far indeed from revealing the account. Even transparency, it seems, threatens to further obscure our view.

But what should be most striking about the assertion of truth contained in the Wikileaks material (both the video as well as the data,) and I hope I've shown that virtually everyone is in agreement that they contain some level of truth, is the amazing capacity of the existing ideological frameworks to absorb it as further evidence of their beliefs and

move on. The left claims this as evidence of the injustice of this war, the right claims it was a regrettable consequence of it, the extreme left as evidence of a larger ideology of American Empire, the extreme right as an instance of justice served. Very little can be said to have changed.

Lest it seem that I'm sliding the debate over into the realm of an all too easy post-modern relativism, let me stress that I'm not claiming that all of these positions are factually or ethically equivalent, but rather, that they, despite their mutually irreconcilable positions, often remain unchanged in the face of new information. Nor am I claiming that transparency projects serve no purpose. As Micah Sifry points out many such projects have achieved incremental improvements in government accountability.³¹⁰ But while the transparency movement may uncover cases of overt corruption and political manipulation, their potential for radical change against dominant ideology seems fairly limited. We certainly know more after Wikileaks, but it seems we don't know any differently. In providing everyone direct access to the 'truth' it seems everyone's pre-existing truth just become a little truer.

Conclusion

Writing on his blog "net critique," theorist, commentator and sometime agitator Geert Lovink published with Patrice Riemens what they called "ten Theses on Wikileaks." Taken together, their observations amounted to an initial attempt to understand what Wikileaks was by sidestepping the ongoing debate about whether or not Wikileaks should be at all. The post contains a number of interesting points, concluding that Wikileaks (and organizations like it) amount to pilot projects in what will be an ongoing process of greater information overload. Insightful in their own right, their observations stand out even further in this context for insight they offer on the US government's transparency as well as the work of Wikileaks. In theses 3, for example, Lovink and Riemens point out that while Wikileaks deserves credit for opening up US Government archives, its efforts cannot be seen as ushering in the 'age of global transparency' that many have claimed given the extent to which other equally large players (China and Russia, to name only two) remain beyond the grasp of whistle blowing prowess. The same might easily be said of Obama's open government projects, which do a great deal to open up what is arguably already the world's most scrutinized government. Important though this is, it hardly lays out a map which other governments will follow. Their point that Wikileaks is a classic Single Person Organization (SPO) and hence rises and falls with the fortunes of its founder might be translated with a few caveats to Obama himself. While data.gov is certainly thriving at the moment, nothing guarantees that a new administration might summarily pull the plug in the name of security or cost-cutting or both.

While I will stop short of simply claiming the Assange and Obama are interchangeable, what a closer inspection of the efforts of both has hopefully revealed is the extent to which their efforts utilize surprisingly similar rhetoric to justify parallel projects which themselves face equal challenges. Both official and un-official transparency projects see themselves as part of a larger open-source, hacker ethos which provides a set of raw

materials for the public to make whatever use of they see fit (theses 7) and both neglect the essential role that the traditional apparatus of investigative journalism must play in achieving any real level of insight from the information provided (theses 5.)

What Lovink and Riemens leave out, however, and what this chapter has tried to convey, is the extent to which this move into data transparency necessitates the embrace (or the re-embrace) of visualization techniques to render and make sense of it. This move from an image based media (film and television) to a data based media (online databases, the internet) represents a regime change of sorts that has been in the making for much of the last two centuries. Thus, as Dominique Francois Arago and Oliver Wendell Holmes were establishing photographic images as the gold standard of objective observation and documentation in the mid 19th century, quantitative data and their visual display were busy opening up this other window on the world. Over the last century the two fields have continued to develop alongside of one another, with the widespread diffusion of camera technology promising a panoramic if not panoptoconic view of the world while developments in digital technology continue to generate an exponentially expanding quantity of data about it.

Even as digital technology has continued to erode a faith in photography's ability to un-problematically represent reality, a faith itself that was never entirely unquestioned, it has increased the role that data plays within it. Consider, for example, the extent to which debates about individual privacy have migrated from the fear that someone might optically witness and record one's physical actions to the fear that someone might access the information these actions inadvertently left behind: credit card transactions, health records, etc. If Lovink and Riemens are right that Wikileaks is "a 'pilot' phase in an evolution towards a far more generalized culture of anarchic exposure, beyond the traditional politics of openness and transparency" then data visualization is the only means by which we might witness this evolution.

Conclusion: The More Things Change...

The evolution I have described here may not be entirely complete. In fact, the underlying historical circumstances behind this evolution continue on with little sign of abating. Politically, the dark period that began the decade has scarcely subsided. Conflicts in Syria and Iran still loom on the horizon, an ongoing hunger strike at Guantanamo renews debate about prisoner status, and a domestic terrorist attack has prompted investigations and debates around profiling and civil liberties. The headlines of 2013 look surprisingly like the headlines of the prior decade. New technologies for optically recording and gathering data about the world continue to appear, with devices like Google Glass and other augmented reality interfaces uniting the two. Together, these ongoing trends continue to forge new forms of coverage and documentation, as the amateur investigations of the Boston marathon bombing on the website Reddit recently demonstrated.

But regardless of which direction they eventually take or the final form they assume, these political and technological developments continue to respond to the same forces that have driven their development for the last decade. As the binary, dialectical structure of each of the preceding chapters indicates, the birthplace of this ongoing formal evolution lies in a conflict between competing representations and narratives, opposing claims about the truths of the world around us. It was a conflict of nations that led to the adoption of synchronous sound, a conflict of generations that spurred the jump to 16mm, a conflict of identities that ushered in the use of video, and finally the conflicts over the last decade that initiated the move to digital. Far from being a simple format shift, these changes reflect major ideological and cultural battles, a conscious rejection of one "truth" and the nomination of another to take its place. At the same time, each technology was instrumental to the process. Only the speed and portability of 16mm could allow Newsreel to document the student occupation of the campus in *Columbia Revolt* (1968) from inside the buildings, while the mainstream media covered the event from outside.³¹¹ Similarly, only the low cost of video and the extended recording length of tape could enable Tom Joslin (and his partner Mark Masse) to document the toll AIDS/Hiv took on his life and relationships in *Silverlake Life* (1992).³¹² While these shifts would have likely have happened eventually, the use of each new format in these contexts legitimated their novel modes of expression. Both the specific technology and the larger social context are essential to the process.

Documentary film is, of course, not the only site that registered these larger cultural and political shifts, but it does nonetheless offer a privileged vantage point for identifying the different stakes involved. As a non-fiction mode of expression targeted at a mass audience, documentary film has, for the last century, been the primary means by which one group seeks to convince others of the merits of its case. Situated outside of the mainstream media, it has offered an outlet for the marginalized and disenfranchised to make their voices heard. By fulfilling this role, moreover, documentary also offers a glimpse of an overt form of rhetorical, ideological expression. Just as Adolph Hitler's speeches lay bare the roots of National Socialist political thought, when edited alongside Leni Riefensthal's camera movements and crowd choreography, the total expression captures some essence of the broader political and historical period,³¹³ so much so that even Allied filmmakers

would use her images to ‘represent’ the Nazis in their films. One group puts forth this expression as truth, another group seeks to discredit it as a lie. The intervening struggle between them is a battle to determine where truth lies.

Because of its role as political seismograph for the last century, documentary is a natural place to look for the changes registered in the United States since the turn of the millennium. Documentary quickly digested not just the means of shooting and distributing on digital, but also something of the larger underlying logic of digital technology itself. In seeking to explore wars past and present, films like the *Fog of War* and *Standard Operating Procedure* began to manifest the plasticity of digital archival material as well as the mutability of database aesthetics. In response to specific political issues, groups like MoveOn.org and Robert Greenwald’s Brave New Films pushed the boundaries of crowd-sourced production and distribution, seeking to transform a disparate digital network of individuals into a massive mobilized group. In order to document possible battle scenarios and an impossible juridical limbo, the United States military and activists alike used video games and virtual environments to issue calls to action both for an against the war on terror. And finally, in order to expose the inner workings of the US Government to the light of day, both the Obama administration and Wikileaks turned to data visualization to render millions of documents legible to the widest possible audience.

As all of these cases illustrate, there is a documentary impulse that cuts across the broad spectrum of digital political discourse, even as the capacity of digital technology to encapsulate everything stretches the term ‘documentary’ almost to the point of breaking. While *Standard Operating Procedure* and the Iraq War Diaries seem worlds apart, both implicitly make the claim “this is of world, therefore, this is true.” One question left unanswered thus far is the extent to which digital media threatens to destroy the credibility of traditional documentary even as it adopts its underlying logic. Much as Photoshop and Instagram transform photography from an impression of reality into a projection of our desires, will similar mainstream tools for film radically undermine our faith in moving images? Moreover, does the seemingly objective quality of data collection and analysis along with the ubiquity of sensors and the commodification of computing power open a more transparent window to world? Will the era of so called ‘Big Data’ dominate the next century just as moving images dominated the last?

Though it is too soon to declare a victor in the forthcoming battle between the camera and the computer, such questions ignore the extent to which current realities were always so. Long before Nate Silver was proclaimed the oracle of the 2012 election for the correct predictions his data models provided, groups such as the Gallup organization and scientists such as Alfred Kinsey were seeking to collect data about the world and aggregate individual expressions into broader truths about the human character.³¹⁴ Rather than altering the fundamental character of photography, Photoshop and Instagram are merely the latest manifestation of a long tradition of fakery and selection. That is, both forms of media are by definition part reflection of reality and part expression of desire. The move to digital doesn’t change the reality of data or documentary so much as it combines them in novel ways, thereby enabling them to fulfill our desire for a means of expressing the truth we believe about the world. We adapt our modes of expression and adopt new

technologies because they seem more capable of expressing what we feel needs to be said about the world, but this technological progress cannot be confused with an ever better picture of reality. Both always were, and will always be, mediated forms of doing so. Whatever form documentary expression takes in the future, we can count on it to remain what it has always been, namely a truth...that lies.

Endnotes

¹ The original phrase was uttered on the September 16th, 2001 broadcast of the NBC show *Meet the Press* in an interview with Tim Russert. The entire interview can be found in *Reining in the Imperial Presidency: Lessons and Recommendations Relating to the Presidency of George W. Bush*, January 2009, pp. 75-76, a report prepared at the direction of Rep. John Conyers, Jr., Chairman of the US House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary.

² For a discussion of coverage of the base and the alleged abuses that took place there, see "Inside the Salt Pit," accessed April 18, 2013, <http://harpers.org/blog/2010/03/inside-the-salt-pit/>.

³ The original phrase appeared as a slogan in *Vent D'Est, 1970*. For a discussion, see Marcia Landy, "Just an Image: Godard, Cinema, and Philosophy," *Critical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2001): 9-31.

⁴ Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (Verso, 1989), 71; Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual* (Duke University Press Books, 2005); Roger Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2009).

⁵ By worldview I am referring not just to the more familiar usage that describes one's outlook or individual cosmological interpretation of events, although this is undoubtedly part of it. My conception of worldview encompasses not just personal, social and political ideology that we use to organize events and objects in the world, but also the technological and media driven means by which we come to know the world in the first place. In this sense I am attempting to marry the literal 'frame' of the computer, television, tablet, etc. to the more abstract, psychological 'framing effect' that any particular representation imposes. Documentary aesthetics in this sense both instantiate a particular worldview as well as shape express the worldview of the audiences who see and agree with them.

⁶ Jacques Ranciere and Gabriel Rockhill, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 1st ed. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 12.

⁷ A brief note here on terminology. The two mediums listed here are enormously capacious and lend themselves to widely divergent interpretations in different contexts. 'Moving Image' of course can refer to both film and television, two separate forms of media that have unique histories and disciplines, and yet the two overlap in that they share similar properties, producers and content. My point here is not that all forms of moving images are identical (nor are all internets or digital technologies), but simply that, taken together, these general groups point to larger historical trends.

⁸ In this sense my study draws on the model of media emergence Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin outline in their influential work *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. They describe the process as a double action in which any new form of media both draws on and influences prior forms of media. Thus, a new technology like the web will draw from existing media like newspapers (in both form and content) in order to gain legitimacy while at the same time these older forms will adopt characteristics of new forms in order to remain viable in this shifting media landscape. In my formulation, new forms of networked

political action will thus draw on certain tendencies and characteristics of documentary film even as documentary itself evolves to take advantage of newly available digital technologies. Given this, my aim is to chart a spectrum of different work from mainstream political documentaries on one end to those that bear little actual resemblance to documentary on the other.

⁹ Not all of the blame for this extreme polarization can be laid at Bush's feet. The protests that emerged during the WTO meetings in Seattle, the Clinton impeachment over the Monica Lewinsky scandal, or Newt Gingrich's 'Contract with America' in 1995 might all be cited as further starting points for a political trend that has hardly ceased since Bush left office. Wherever we place the starting point, however, it should still be noted that events during Bush's tenure pushed this general political enmity to a fevered pitch.

¹⁰ Any number of examples might be included here from the canonical account Eric Barnouw includes in his Erik Barnouw, *Documentary* (Oxford University Press US, 1993), to Brian Winston's discussion in "The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription" in Michael Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* (Routledge, 1993), to the recent book length discussion Dave Saunders, *Direct Cinema* (Wallflower Press, 2007).

¹¹ The same scenario plays out again with the transition from film to video and the mainstream emergence of cable television and the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in the 1970s and 80s. The decreased production cost of shooting on video enabled an explosion of new documentary forms from the autobiographical work of people like Sadie Benning, Abraham Ravett and Alan Berliner to the political documentaries of other filmmakers like Jill Godmillow, Rea Tajiri, Marlon Fuentes and Marlon Riggs. Like the major television networks that first exhibited the work of many Direct Cinema film-makers, PBS and Public Access both proved to be important distributors and exhibition sites for documentary work produced on video. As with Direct Cinema, changes in technology accompanied changes in the form, subject and audience of documentary film. To borrow the taxonomy that Bill Nichols puts forward, we might simply state that just as 16mm and network television in the 50s and 60s gave rise to the "Observational" and "Participatory" modes of documentary, video and public television gave rise to the "Performative" mode.

¹² Quoted in Richard Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* (Thames and Hudson in association with the British Film Institute, 1970), 163. Significantly, his remark is directed at Richard Leacock's assertion that Direct Cinema's technological enhancements enabled it to foster subject-driven observation.

¹³ The responses to the specter of technological determinism run the gamut from those who openly embrace it as a motor of history like Friedrich Kittler, to those who posit social and cultural forces as the motor of technological development, as Brian Winston does. A typically neutral position is offered in the work of Carolyn Marvin. See Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New* (Oxford University Press US, 1990), Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford University Press, 1999). and Brian Winston, *Media Technology and Society* (Routledge, 1998).

¹⁴ The term 'performative' comes from Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries* (Indiana University Press, 1994). Specifically Chapter 5, "Performing Documentary" and the term on/scene is Linda Williams. Linda Williams, *Porn Studies* (Duke University Press, 2004); Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*.

¹⁵ Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work* (Columbia University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ See Chapter 1, "Early Newsreel" in Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

¹⁸ See for example Trinh's films *Reassemblage* (1983) and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) and either of her books Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Framer Framed: Film Scripts and Interviews* (Routledge, 1992); Thi Minh-Ha Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹⁹ The move I am describing here can be seen in work by Paper Tiger TV, Chris Marker, Harun Farocki, Lynne Sachs, Peter Forgacs, Leandro Katz, Jeffrey Skoller and others. All of these artists demonstrate in one way or another the connections between an expressive aesthetic form and a committed engagement with politics.

²⁰ Jonathan Kahana's recent text *Intelligence Work*, which reiterates, incidentally, the same three periods outlined above, deals in particular with films after the emergence of postmodern skepticism but before 9/11. His reading of *Journeys with George*, Alexandra Pelosi's 2000 documentary about the first Bush election, characterizes ideally the situation of political ennui indicative of pre 9/11 documentary.

²¹ One, admittedly limited, indication of this increased engagement is the 12 year shift from 1996's record low voter turn out, to 2008's nearly record breaking turnout. For a discussion of this, with statistics, see the New York Times caucus blog at <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/voter-turnout-near-a-record>

²² "Film Truth in the Age of George W. Bush". *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*. 48, no. 2: 9-35.

²³ The importance of the internet when combined with a DVD as a distribution channel cannot be overestimated. Not only does this cement documentary's claim to providing an 'independent' point of view outside of the mainstream media, but it also allows documentary films which would have lacked the resources to mount a theatrical release or television commitment from a major network (all of whom, including PBS, were increasingly less willing to give time to 'political' films for fear of being branded organs of liberal/conservative media) to eventually find a niche-market in the 'long-tail' online.

²⁴ A note here on terminology. While the phrase 'database aesthetics' was formalized with the recent publication of Viktorija Vesna Bulajić and Victoria Vesna, *Database Aesthetics* (U of Minnesota Press, 2007), a number of uses spring up prior to this, most notably for me here Lev Manovich's 2001 chapter "The Database as Symbolic Form" in *The Language of*

New Media. An extended discussion of the term forms part of this chapter, particularly since my reading here stretches its usage somewhat by arguing that a film text (Manovich's primary example of narrative aesthetics, and hence the binary opposite of the database) is nonetheless with Morris overtly at work.

²⁵ Roy Grundmann and Cynthia Rockwell, "Truth Is Not Subjective: An Interview with Errol Morris," *Cineaste* 25, no. 3 (June 2000): 4, doi:Interview.

²⁶ See Jane Gaines, "Political Mimesis" in Jane Gaines and Michael Renov, *Collecting Visible Evidence* (U of Minnesota Press, 1999).

²⁷ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens a Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

²⁸ Alex Galloway has described the difference between those texts that seek to uphold the status quo vs. those that seek to challenge it as 'realistic' vs. 'realist' games. See Galloway, A. R. "Social Realism in Gaming." *Game Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004): 23–26.

²⁹ A few examples: DNA provides the "code" of life, we can track our health and well being through various personal metrics and record all of our relationships on social networks that in turn provide a "social graph" of our most intimate connections, the health of the state is measured through various and administered by various statistical indicators which models attempt to optimize through various 'tweaks' to the data.

³⁰ www.errolmorris.com circa December 2000, retrieved via www.archive.org April 2010.

³¹ The transmediation of analog material to digital archives on the internet has been a topic of concern both for those actually doing the work (librarians, archivists, and others) as well as for New Media scholars concerned with the theoretical frameworks that ground such projects. Wendy Chun, for example, has pointed out that memory and storage are often erroneously conflated in progressivist accounts of the Internet's ability to save analog media while providing complete, instant, permanent access to the world's information. Marija Dalbello, writing as a librarian and archivist, worries on the other hand that digital archives as currently instantiated don't present a complete enough historical record, focusing on the popularly accessible collection over the complete and rigorous approach. See Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2008): 148–171. and Marija Dalbello, "Institutional Shaping of Cultural Memory: Digital Library as Environment for Textual Transmission," *The Library Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (July 2004): 265–298.

³² As in all of his films, Morris is still interested in the way that given individuals arrive at the startlingly idiosyncratic and erroneous conclusions that they do, but in these two recent films his focus is more directly on the media laden road that they took to get there. See, for example, his 2000 *Cineaste* interview about his film *Mr. Death* where he states, "Ultimately, it is a movie about denial. Denial about the obvious, denial of self, denial of death, denial of the Holocaust. But at its center, it is a failure to see the world, to see reality. Living in a cocoon of one's own devising. Fabricating a universe that one occupies, that may

in fact be divorced from the real world.” Grundmann and Rockwell, “Truth Is Not Subjective,” 6.

³³ For a discussion of the collaboration between McNamara, the Wilson Institute and the authors of the film’s companion book see *The Fog of War* companion volume, page 9.

³⁴ The Interrotron is Morris’ signature, self-invented camera set up for conducting interviews. It essentially consists of two modified tele-prompters placed in separate rooms which each project the feed from a camera placed behind the other. This allows the subject to look Morris, and consequently the camera, in the eye as the interview is conducted. On screen in the final film the set-up produces an unsettling degree of eye contact between subject and viewer.

³⁵ On a side note, “Lesson 1: Empathize with your Enemy,” which draws on McNamara’s experiences with both Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev, also seems to double as an enjoinder to the audience, many of whom might vilify McNamara for his role in Vietnam, to check any prejudices against McNamara at least long enough to hear him out.

³⁶ See Blight and Lang’s *The Fog of War* Chapter 2, “Rationality Will Not Save Us,” and Robert S. McNamara and James G. Blight, *Wilson’s Ghost* (PublicAffairs, 2003), 237–244.

³⁷ The original airing of the show was September 25th, 1963 on CBS.

³⁸ As Vinzen Hediger points out in his discussion of Hollerith in early German Industrial films, “Both technologically and in institutional terms, the Hollerith data processor is a predecessor of the modern-day computer. The Hollerith tabulating machine uses punched cards to tabulate statistics from data.” (133) See Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, *Films That Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam University Press, 2009).

³⁹ The controversy to which I refer was set off by the publication of Edwin Black’s book detailing the relationship between IBM and its German subsidiary Dehomag. Black, a science fiction writer, has steadfastly defended the book’s claims while denouncing its detractors as corporate thugs for IBM. The book was both widely lauded and condemned, achieving best-seller status while earning Black both awards for his work and condemnation as a crank. See Edwin Black, *IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance Between Nazi Germany and America’s Most Powerful Corporation*, 1st ed. (Dialog Press, 2008). For refutation of the book and outline of its faults, see Michael Allen, “Review: Stranger Than Science Fiction: Edwin Black, IBM, and the Holocaust,” *Technology and Culture* 43, no. 1 (January 2002): 150–154.

⁴⁰ Weiner’s role in creating military targeting systems under the direction of Vannevar Bush lead him to conceptualize future human/machine relationships in the nascent field of cybernetics. See his “Men, Machines, and the World About” in Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, *The NewMediaReader* (MIT Press, 2003).

⁴¹ See Bush’s “As We May Think” collected in *Ibid.*, 37–47.

⁴² Weiner's ethical stance on government funding is still commemorated by the annual Wiener Award which the Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility group hands out. See *Ibid*, 65.

⁴³ See <http://www.film.com/features/story/interview-errol-morris-director-standard/20838579> and <http://www.documentary.org/content/career-achievement-award-cinematic-investigations-errol-morris>.

⁴⁴ See Terry Gross, "Interview with Errol Morris." NPR, 12:00 Noon EST, Monday January 5, 2004. Produced at WHYY, Philadelphia, PA.

⁴⁵ The 'domino theory' as it came to be known, held that if one country fell to communist control, the other countries in Southeast Asia would quickly follow. As Gordon Goldstein puts it: "By 1964 the domino theory had the force of doctrine, becoming a de facto feature of the political debate over Vietnam, the teetering domino that could ostensibly unleash communism across Southeast Asia." Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (Macmillan, 2008), 139.

⁴⁶ This of course is hardly the only account of these events, or of their interpretation. Eric Alterman's account of the incident describes Johnson as being "deliberately deceptive" about the event in order to pass the Gulf of Tonkin resolution which gave him the unconditional authority to escalate the war. See "Chapter IV: Lyndon B. Johnson and the Gulf of Tonkin Incidents" in Eric Alterman, *When Presidents Lie* (Penguin, 2005).

⁴⁷ Indeed, David Mosen's analysis of the film in *Film Quarterly* sounds eerily reminiscent of *The Fog of War*. He states: "In Conner's eyes society thrives on violence, destruction, and death no matter how hard we try to hide it with immaculately clean offices, the worship of modern science, or the creation of instant martyrs. From the bullfight arena to the nuclear arena we clamor for the spectacle of destruction." David Mosen, "Review: 'Report' Bruce Conner," *Film Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1966): 55. For an extended analysis of the film which expands upon the connection the film and its media roots (what he calls the "complicity of the moving image media in the rise and fall of John F. Kennedy" [250]) see Bruce Jenkins' "Bruce Conner's *Report*: Contesting Camelot" in Ted Perry, *Masterpieces of Modernist Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 236-251.

⁴⁸ In the interview with arts blogger Greg Allen, Morris actually claims "dozens" of such stills were created for the film, but that this is the only one which survived into the final cut. Greg Allen, "Greg.org: The Making of: Learning at Errol Morris's Knee," accessed September 19, 2010, http://greg.org/archive/2004/02/20/learning_at_errol_morriss_knee.html.

⁴⁹ Consider, for instance, the recent evolution and ongoing debates in the discipline of History itself. While the field is hardly unified into a single body of practitioners espousing a single set of concerns, several recent texts might be pointed to as evidence of a larger disciplinary evolution including: the rise and fall of both social and cultural history as chronicled in Chapter 2 of William Sewall's *The Logics of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 2005 and more fully elaborated in Peter Burke's *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park: Penn State Press) 1992 and 2001, the effects of post-

structuralism and the larger linguistic turn as explored in Frank Ankersmitt and Hans Kellner's *A New Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1995 and Attridge, Bennington and Young's *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1987, or, more generally, the ongoing scandal incited by the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* or the overall influence of the French *Annales* school.

⁵⁰ This lack of transparency regarding the past, and the ability to misinterpret evidence, explains in part Morris' continued fascination with those individuals who delude themselves for whatever reason about the information they are presented with, be it the Dallas Police Department (*The Thin Blue Line*), Fred Leuchter (*Mr. Death*), or Robert McNamara.

⁵¹ Here we could point to such high-profile endeavors as the Google Book's scanning project which seeks to create a digital copy of every book ever printed (see <http://books.google.com/googlebooks/library.html>), on down to the activities of individual libraries and archives which work on specific collections of photographs and historical documents, to subject focused archives like the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, which consolidates and digitizes historical records from a number of historical sources relating to the trans-Atlantic slave trade (see <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>). Other notable examples include the Archive.org Prelinger Archives, which digitizes and distributes found films, and journal and newspaper databases such as the popular JSTOR project or the *New York Times* archive, which makes every article published in the *Times* 150 year history searchable online (see <http://www.archive.org/details/prelinger>, <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/index.jsp> and <http://query.nytimes.com/search/alternate/#top> respectively).

⁵² Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory."

⁵³ See Stephen Bann, "History as Competence and Performance: Notes on the Ironic Museum" in F. R. Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, *A New Philosophy of History* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 200–210.

⁵⁴ Linda Williams, "Cluster Fuck: The Forcible Frame in Errol Morris's Standard Operating Procedure," *Camera Obscura* 25, no. 1 (2010): 33.

⁵⁵ See, for example the reviews by Manohla Dargis in the *New York Times* and J. Hoberman in the *Village Voice*. Ironically, Morris' budget for *Standard Operating Procedure* was \$5 million dollars, roughly the amount that *The Fog of War* had grossed, but only went on to make a scant \$350,000 in worldwide release. Manhola Dargis, "We, The People Behind The Abuse," *The New York Times*, April 25, 2008, sec. Section E; Column 0; Movies, Performing Arts/Weekend Desk; MOVIE REVIEW "STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE"; Pg. 1, http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/lnacademic/frame.do?reloadEntirePage=true&rand=1277490677951&returnToKey=20_T9628858063&parent=docview&target=results_listview_resultsNav&tokenKey=rsh-20.62929.55636901543. Jay Hoberman, "Errol Morris Lets Torturers Off Easy," *Village Voice*, April 22, 2008, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2008-04-22/film/get-out-of-jail-free/>.

⁵⁶ In spite of contentious discussions of the film at the 2009 Visible Evidence conference and the SCMS conference in 2010 (both in Los Angeles) between parties who defended and attacked the film, it seems only its proponents have taken the additional step of publishing their thoughts on the film. See, for example, Linda Williams, *ibid.*, Charles. Musser, "Political Documentary, YouTube and the 2008 US Presidential Election: Focus on Robert Greenwald and David N. Bossie," *Studies in Documentary Film* 3, no. 3 (2009): 199–218. Hilary Neroni, "The Nonsensical Smile of the Torturer: Documentary Form and the Logic of Enjoyment," *Studies in Documentary Film* 3, no. 3 (2009): 245–257. Julia Lesage, "Torture Documentaries," *Jumpcut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 51 (Spring 2009), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/TortureDocumentaries/index.html>. and Caetlin Benson-Allott, "Standard Operating Procedure: Mediating Torture," *Film Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 39–44.

⁵⁷ Raymond Bonner, "The Dogs of War," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2008, sec. Books / Sunday Book Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/25/books/review/Bonner-t.html>.

⁵⁸ Consider, for example, the difference in the two companion volumes. The Blight and Lang companion text for *The Fog of War* offers something like a set of footnotes to the historical documents and other materials that the film references in passing. In essence it substantiates the claims the film makes with an expanded set of materials as evidence. Gourevitch's narrative for *Standard Operating Procedure* is something closer to a complete story or expanded version of the events in the film. Whereas the ancillary media on errolmorris.com for *The Fog of War* were directly about the film, the ancillary media for *Standard Operating Procedure* extend the issues discussed in the film.

⁵⁹ Errol Morris, "Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire - NYTimes.com," July 10, 2007, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/07/10/pictures-are-supposed-to-be-worth-a-thousand-words/>.

⁶⁰ Errol Morris, "Cartesian Blogging, Part One - NYTimes.com," *Opinionator*, December 10, 2007, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/12/10/primae-objectiones-et-responsio-auctoris-ad-primas-objectiones-part-one/>.

⁶¹ Errol Morris, "The Anosognosic's Dilemma: Something's Wrong but You'll Never Know What It Is (Part 1) - NYTimes.com," *Opinionator*, June 10, 2010, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/the-anosognosics-dilemma-1/>.

⁶² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Macmillan, 2004).

⁶³ Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War* (Gordon and Breach, 2001).

⁶⁴ Irina Leimbacher, for example, claims that the reenactments are "a subject of fetishistic display or perverse ornamental possession for Morris." See Irina Leimbacher, "Response to Papers and Comments on Standard Operating Procedure," *Jumpcut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 52 (Summer 2010), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/sopLimbacher/index.html>.

⁶⁵ As Linda Williams puts it “the humiliation, abuse and torture are so often enacted as if for the camera.” Williams, “Cluster Fuck.” 48.

⁶⁶ Errol Morris, “Which Came First? (Part Two) - NYTimes.com,” *Opinionator*, October 4, 2007, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/10/04/which-came-first-part-two/>.

⁶⁷ These three films obviously place *Standard Operating Procedure* in a constellation of films on torture and detainee abuse. Read alternatively as a film about the direction of the war in Iraq, the film might be seen alongside others like *Iraq in Fragments* (James Longley, 2006), *Gunner Palace* (Petra Epperlain and Michael Tucker, 2004), *Uncovered: The War in Iraq* (Robert Greenwald, 2004) or *No End in Sight* (Charles Ferguson, 2007).

⁶⁸ I place the term ‘like’ in scare quotes simply because it is hard to claim that one likes a film about such a horrific topic. It should be taken therefore to stand-in for something more akin to my earlier formulation, namely that one does or does not find merit in the film’s approach.

⁶⁹ The controversy to which I am alluding to here was nicely formalized in a panel presentation at the 2010 SCMS conference in Los Angeles which brought together scholars on both sides of the issue. Their points were later printed in the journal *Jump Cut* (issue 52). On the side of the film were Jonathan Kahana and Linda Williams with Leimbacher and Nichols both criticizing it. The discussion afterwards largely mirrored the split on the panel. See *Jump Cut* 52, Summer 2010, “Conference Report: Reframing *Standard Operating Procedure*—Errol Morris and the creative treatment of Abu Ghraib” <http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/index.html>.

⁷⁰ Bill Nichols, “Feelings of Revulsion and the Limits of Academic Discourse,” *Jump Cut* 52 (Summer 2010), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/sopNichols/index.html>.

⁷¹ Lesage, “Torture Documentaries.”

⁷² Williams, “Cluster Fuck.”

⁷³ Benson-Allott, “Standard Operating Procedure,” 41.

⁷⁴ The term is taking from Victoria Vesna’s new collection of the same name. In it, Vesna collects discussions from several prominent New Media artists as well as theorists like Warren Sack and Lev Manovich, and curators of digital art like Christiane Paul. See Bulajić and Vesna, *Database Aesthetics*.

⁷⁵ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

⁷⁶ The term ‘Universal Media Machine’ is Manovich’s, one he uses to describe the rise to prominence of the computer as an essential tool in the creation, distribution and consumption of various forms of media.

⁷⁷ It should be noted that this does not mean that the database itself is unstructured, but simply that interacting with a database from an end user perspective is open to many different structures and interpretations.

⁷⁸ Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, Reprint (Penguin (Non-Classics), 2009).

⁷⁹ Thomas Waugh, *"Show Us Life": Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary* (Scarecrow Press, 1984).

⁸⁰ Theodore Hamm, *The New Blue Media: How Michael Moore, Moveon.org, Jon Stewart and Company Are Transforming Progressive Politics* (New York: New Press ;Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2008).

⁸¹ "MoveOn.org: About," accessed February 10, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/about.html>.

⁸² The eventual interconnection between moving images and social technology seems to provide further evidence of the "convergence culture" that Henry Jenkins and others describe. Instead, I'll argue that documentary's long connection to social change pushed it to prominence at a time when the utopian hopes it inspired were increasingly placed instead on newer digital forms of social organization.

⁸³ Robert Boynton, "How to Make a Guerrilla Documentary - The New York Times," *New York Times Magazine*, July 11, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/11/magazine/how-to-make-a-guerrilla-documentary.html?pagewanted=1>.

⁸⁴ Charles Musser, "Political Documentary, YouTube and the 2008 US Presidential Election: Focus on Robert Greenwald and David N. Bossie," *Studies in Documentary Film* 3, no. 3 (December 2009): 199–218, doi:10.1386/sdf.3.3.199/1. For Musser, Greenwald was ahead of the curve (and, significantly, ahead of conservative activists working toward the same end) on moving from the traditional theatrical release first to DVDs and then to YouTube as a means of allowing greater access to his films in critical periods before the national elections in '04, '06 and '08.

⁸⁵ Christian Christensen, "Political Documentary, Online Organization and Activist Synergies," *Studies in Documentary Film* 3, no. 2 (November 2009): 77–94, doi:10.1386/sdf.3.2.77/1.

⁸⁶ Victoria Carty, "New - Information - Communication - Technologies - and - Grassroots - Mobilization - Pb - Routledge," *Information, Communication & Society* 13, no. 2 (2010): 155, doi:10.1080/13691180902915658; Victoria Carty and Jake Onyett, "Protest, Cyberactivism and New Social Movements: The Reemergence of the Peace Movement Post 9/11," *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 5, no. 3 (2006): 229, doi:10.1080/14742830600991586; Marc Eaton, "Manufacturing - Community - in - an - Online - Activist - Organization - -- the Rhetoric of Moveon.org's E-Mails," *Information, Communication & Society* 13, no. 2 (2010): 174, doi:10.1080/13691180902890125; Paul Ferber, "Cyberdemocracy and Online Politics: A New Model of Interactivity," *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 27, no. 5 (October 1, 2007): 391–400; Noriko Hara and Zilia Estrada, "Analyzing the Mobilization of Grassroots Activities via the Internet: a Case Study," *Journal of Information Science* 31, no. 6 (December 1, 2005): 503 –514, doi:10.1177/0165551505057013.

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- ⁸⁷ See, for example, Brian Stelter, "Released on Web, a Film Stays Fresh," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2009, sec. Movies, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/23/movies/23gree.html>.
- ⁸⁸ Robert Greenwald, "Robert Greenwald's Documentaries," accessed January 27, 2011, <http://www.robertgreenwald.org/docs.php>.
- ⁸⁹ Musser, "Political Documentary, YouTube and the 2008 US Presidential Election," 201.
- ⁹⁰ Robert Greenwald, "UNCOVERED: The War on Iraq Director's Introduction," *Uncovered: The War on Iraq Director's Introduction*, accessed January 28, 2011, <http://www.truthuncovered.com/introduction.php>.
- ⁹¹ Hamm, *The New Blue Media*.
- ⁹² Bill Nichols, *Newsreel: Documentary Filmmaking on the American Left* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); D. Halleck and Magnan, N, "Access for Others: Alter(native) Media Practice" (n.d.); Bill Nichols, "The American Photo League," *Screen* 13, no. 4 (1972): 108.
- ⁹³ Robert Greenwald, "UNCOVERED: The War on Iraq Director's Introduction."
- ⁹⁴ Boynton, "How to Make a Guerrilla Documentary - The New York Times."
- ⁹⁵ Stelter, "Released on Web, a Film Stays Fresh."
- ⁹⁶ Musser, "Political Documentary, YouTube and the 2008 US Presidential Election." As Musser points out, it was only with the appearance of YouTube in 2006 that a turn-key solution for online video streaming was made available to a wide audience of producers and consumers, making it a natural outlet for those on both sides of the media equation seeking a way around what Greenwald referred to as 'the traditional gatekeepers.'
- ⁹⁷ Christensen, "Political Documentary, Online Organization and Activist Synergies."
- ⁹⁸ Katie Hafner, "Mobilizing on Line for Gun Control," *New York Times*, May 20, 1999.
- ⁹⁹ Robert Cwiklik, "MoveOn Targets Campaign 2000 Voters Web Fund-Raiser Tries to Revive Impeachment Angst," *Wall Street Journal*, February 2, 2000.
- ¹⁰⁰ Alex Jordanov and Scott Stevenson, *MoveOn: The Movie*, DVD (Brave New Films, 2009).
- ¹⁰¹ "FOXNews.com - Anti-War Group Revives LBJ-Era 'Daisy' Ad Campaign," January 15, 2003, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,75670,00.html>.
- ¹⁰² Jordanov and Scott Stevenson, *MoveOn: The Movie*.
- ¹⁰³ "Bush in 30 Seconds," accessed February 2, 2011, <http://www.bushin30seconds.org/>.
- ¹⁰⁴ "MoveOn Denied Super Bowl Slot," *AdWeek*, January 25, 2004, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/>?
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- ¹⁰⁷ Terry Eastland, "Filibuster Again! And Again! | The Weekly Standard," *Weekly Standard*, May 19, 2003, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/002/657frimm.asp>.
- ¹⁰⁸ MoveOn collected the full set of sources for the accusations on its website. "MoveOn.org Civic Action: Documentation for 'Fair and Balanced?'," accessed February 8, 2011, http://civic.moveon.org/mediacorps//fairandbalanced_sources.html.
- ¹⁰⁹ Boynton, "How to Make a Guerrilla Documentary - The New York Times."
- ¹¹⁰ K. Auletta, "Vox Fox: How Roger Ailes and Fox News Are Changing Cable News," *The New Yorker* 26 (2003).
- ¹¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹¹² Jonathan S. Morris, "The Fox News Factor," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 56 -79, doi:10.1177/1081180X05279264; Stefano DellaVigna and Ethan Kaplan, "The Fox News Effect: Media Bias and Voting*," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122, no. 3 (February 8, 2011): 1187-1234, doi:10.1162/qjec.122.3.1187.
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- ¹¹⁵ "MoveOn.org Civic Action: Unfair and Unbalanced," accessed February 8, 2011, <http://civic.moveon.org/fox//>; "MoveOn.org Civic Action: Democracy in Action: Fox Comments," accessed February 8, 2011, <http://civic.moveon.org/news//fox-comments.html>.
- ¹¹⁶ "Press Release: The Republican News Channel," accessed February 8, 2011, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CBUQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.moveon.org%2Fpress%2Fpdfs%2Ffoxparrotsbush.pdf&rct=j&q=site%3Amoveon.org%20foxparrotsbush&ei=r9ZRTZGcDovksQOF07C_Bg&usg=AFQjCNHqi8gpd3dMlvtEXTTdW5zv1jO7Tg&cad=rja.
- ¹¹⁷ Auletta, "Vox Fox."
- ¹¹⁸ "OUTFOXED: Take Action!," accessed February 9, 2011, <http://www.outfoxed.org/ActivismPartners.php>.
- ¹¹⁹ Boynton, "How to Make a Guerrilla Documentary - The New York Times."
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- ¹²¹ Seth Ackerman, "The Most Biased Name in News," August 2001, <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1067>; Hamm, *The New Blue Media*.

¹²² Lesage, "Torture Documentaries."

¹²³ Jeff Howe, *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business* (Random House, Inc., 2008); Jeff Howe, "The Rise of Crowdsourcing," *Wired*, June 2006, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html>.

¹²⁴ <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=avatar.htm>

¹²⁵ David Whiteman, "Out of the Theaters and Into the Streets: A Coalition Model of the Political Impact of Documentary Film and Video," *Political Communication* 21, no. 1 (2004): 51, doi:10.1080/10584600490273263-1585.

¹²⁶ Randy Kennedy, "A Screening With Stars But a Focus on Politics," *The New York Times*, November 6, 2003, sec. Arts, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/06/arts/a-screening-with-stars-but-a-focus-on-politics.html?scp=1&sq=A%20Screening%20With%20Stars%20But%20a%20Focus%20on%20Politics%20&st=cse>; Rick Marshall, "Party for the Right to Fight; Local Activists Gather to Screen anti-Fox Film as Part of a Nationwide Day of House Parties," *Metroland* 27, no. 30 (July 22, 2004): 14.

¹²⁷ As David Rodowick asserts: "home theater has already overtaken commercial exhibition in popularity and economic importance." David Norman Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 109.

¹²⁸ Interestingly, although video posts are only semi-frequent, the site's message boards regularly get posts from users, indicating that it is still a frequently trafficked destination for people interested in the issue. Its tongue in cheek approach to the material runs closer to parody than the film version does, but the site also offers a special "FOX ATTACKS: *Special Edition*" of the film that includes some of the viral videos created for the website alongside the film.

¹²⁹ Boynton, "How to Make a Guerrilla Documentary - The New York Times."

¹³⁰ Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary* (Columbia University Press, 2008), 3.

¹³¹ Consider, for instance, the enormous popularity of Netflix's "Watch Instantly" streaming option.

¹³² Musser, "Political Documentary, YouTube and the 2008 US Presidential Election."

¹³³ "Shame on ABC: Enough Distractions!"

<http://www.youtube.com/user/karinmoveon#p/u/9/8s3vbk1TXd0>

¹³⁴ *Lieberman Socks*, 2009,

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vS6klbJu64&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

¹³⁵ *Host an Event!*, 2007,

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAyGUjIusRM&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

¹³⁶ Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*.

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- ¹³⁷ Gaines and Renov, *Collecting Visible Evidence*, 85.
- ¹³⁸ Ellen Jones, "Reel to Real: Can Documentaries Change the World? | Film | The Guardian," October 6, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/oct/06/documentaries-puma-creative-impact-award?CMP=EMCGT_071011&.
- ¹³⁹ J. Gaines, "The Production of Outrage: The Iraq War and the Radical Documentary Tradition," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 48, no. 2 (2007): 36–55.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.
- ¹⁴² Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (Penguin Books, 2009), 85.
- ¹⁴³ Whiteman, "Out of the Theaters and Into the Streets"; B. Abrash and D. Whiteman, "The Uprising of '34: Filmmaking as Community Engagement," *Wide Angle* 21, no. 2 (1999): 87–99.
- ¹⁴⁴ Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell?currentPage=all.
- ¹⁴⁵ Salwa Ismail, "Civilities, Subjectivities and Collective Action: Preliminary Reflections in Light of the Egyptian Revolution," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 5 (2011): 989–995, doi:10.1080/01436597.2011.578976.
- ¹⁴⁶ Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*, 106.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 307.
- ¹⁴⁸ Clay Shirky, "Political Power of Social Media - Technology, the Public Sphere Sphere, and Political Change, The," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (2011): 28.
- ¹⁴⁹ Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (PublicAffairs, 2011), xvi.
- ¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 309.
- ¹⁵¹ Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Blogs, MySpace, YouTube, and the Rest of Today's User-generated Media Are Destroying Our Economy, Our Culture, and Our Values* (Random House Digital, Inc., 2008), 25.
- ¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 206.
- ¹⁵³ Ironically, Keen does decry the 'outing' of men seeking casual hook-ups online whose reputations were ruined when their offline identities were revealed. Apparently in Keen's formulation anonymity is good in this instance but evidence of a general social decline in forums like Wikipedia and the Blogosphere.
- ¹⁵⁴ Morozov, *The Net Delusion*, 207–208; Shirky, "Political Power of Social Media - Technology, the Public Sphere Sphere, and Political Change, The."

¹⁵⁵ Garret Keizer, *Privacy* (Macmillan, 2012), 39.

¹⁵⁶ G. Coleman and M. Ralph, "Is It a Crime? The Transgressive Politics of Hacking in Anonymous," *Social Text* 28 (2011): 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Helen Fay Nissenbaum, *Privacy in Context: Technology, Policy, and the Integrity of Social Life* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

¹⁵⁸ Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 17–25.

¹⁵⁹ Gladwell, "Small Change."

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99728679>

¹⁶¹ The cynical view of the delay, one with certain foundations, is that it is a product of the administration's desire not to close the base at all, or to close the base in name only by shifting its duties (and crimes) to other locations cloaked under other legal auspices (like the detention center at Bagram, Afghanistan.) See, for example, Salon Radio: "ACLU on Obama, Bagram and Secrecy," Glenn Greenwald and Jonathan Haefetz of ACLU National Security Project, Feb. 24, 2009 <<http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/radio/2009/02/24/aclu/index1.html>>

¹⁶² "Rand Paul Leads Filibuster of Brennan Nomination," *The Caucus*, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/03/06/rand-paul-filibusters-brennan-nomination/>.

¹⁶⁵ By represent I'm referring here both to efforts to offer political and legal representation to the detainees of Guantanamo and to the efforts by media makers to figuratively represent the place onscreen, something throughout the Bush era that was notoriously difficult to do. It is the conflation of the political and the aesthetic (following Ranciere in *The Politics of Aesthetics*) that sits at the heart of the chapter that follows.

¹⁶⁶ The project's blog, <http://gonegitmo.blogspot.com>, recounts the various stages, sabotages and setbacks the project went through before reaching its current state as well as the various conferences, events and press coverage in which it has appeared since.

¹⁶⁷ Excerpted from the *Gone Gimto* blog post (<http://gonegitmo.blogspot.com/2008/01/aclu-calls-11108-event.html>), accessed July, 2009.

¹⁶⁹ The relationship between fiction film and the historical past is of course well plowed ground. See, for example, historian Robert Rosenstone's Rosenstone, Robert. *History on Film/Film on History*. 1st ed. Pearson, 2006.

If we take the proponents of SLs ability to fulfill one's physical, material and sexual desires from the ease and safety of one's own seat, then its similarity to mainstream fiction film becomes clearer.

¹⁷⁰ In a recent article about 'Torture Documentaries' in *Jump Cut*, Julia Lesage puts the issue

of documentary's facts cum ethics thus: "Their films give information about the subject, indicate ways of dealing with the issues, invite an emotional response, and invoke an ethical stance. They offer a path to mastery over a complex topic, even if it is only a provisional mastery that becomes more nuanced and revised the more we consider other facts and other voices on the subject." See "Torture Documentaries" in *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, No. 51, spring 2009.

¹⁷¹ Fiction film of course has its own, less overt politics, and the same could certainly be said of *Second Life* in general, but again *Gone Gitmo's* overt approach to politics puts it in the same oppositional stance to the rest of *Second Life* that documentary occupies in relation to the majority of fiction film.

¹⁷² Check with Goetz about a reference for this in relation to video games.

¹⁷³ As reflected on the site's blog, the closing of camp x-ray and the construction of Camp Delta are both developments which took place during the site's construction. See <http://gonegitmo.blogspot.com/2008/05/camp-delta.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Consider, for example, the debate that always seems to accompany a filmmaker like Michael Moore, whose work tends to occasion more debate about himself and his account of certain issues rather than the issues themselves. Ironically, there is nonetheless a kernel of photographic 'truth' lurking in some of the images on the site in that its designers used digital images of the camp itself to create faithful virtual images in *Second Life*. See <http://gonegitmo.blogspot.com/2008/01/building-cages.html> for an account of replicating the actual razor wire used in the real camp.

¹⁷⁵ See, for example, the discussion board attached to the YouTube clip of Bernhard Drax's report earlier.

¹⁷⁶ See FOX, BEN. "Military Blocks Media Access to Guantanamo." *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2006, sec. World. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/15/AR2006061501506.html>.

¹⁷⁷ For Agamben this specific 'state' is neither a historical development (indeed, its antecedents include the Roman *iustitium* and *auctoritas*, used in state funerals) nor the product of any specific form of constitution. In this sense 9/11, Guantanamo and the Patriot Act aren't so much new developments but rather clear examples of the extreme limits to which the state sovereignty and individual rights can be pushed under the right conditions. Agamben himself makes the rather scandalous comparison in the book between Hitler's 'Decree for the Protection of the People' and the Patriot Act itself. What this persistence points to for Agamben is the impossibility of any outside to the 'State of Exception' which also nullifies any possibility of a future free of such things (in essence, the rule always contains the possibility of its exception—the exception is the condition of possibility for the rule, or maybe even the act of ruling as such.) While this may be so, it nonetheless fails to account for the possibility that developments like the Patriot Act or Guantanamo can be reversed and closed, respectively, something that the forms of representation I'm addressing here specifically seek to achieve. The exception may always

exist, but as a potentiality rather than an actuality, a difference that would make a difference for those groups and individual subjected to its application. See both *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, as well as his earlier text in which he more fully discusses the foundations of sovereignty. Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. 1st ed. Stanford University Press, 1998. Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell. 1st ed. University Of Chicago Press, 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Butler's primary goal in this text is primarily discursive in the sense that she is particularly concerned to demonstrate how the replacement of one form of discourse (considerations of why the US was attacked on 9/11) with another (the political designation of detainees as 'illegal enemy combatants') carries political, ethical and moral stakes. Moreover, for my purposes here, the representation of the Other to the self, particularly in forms of media representation and their exclusion or censorship, is part of the way in which such discursive shifts are enacted. See Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2006.

¹⁷⁹ The Uighurs are Muslim Chinese separatists who had gone to Afghanistan to receive terrorist training in order to overthrow their secular government who were rounded up after the invasion and ended up in Guantanamo. As proclaimed enemies of the state they clearly could not be sent back to China, and yet they can't be legally detained as a threat to the US (not to mention the political outrage the suggestion of resettling them in the US sparked.) Where then, to send them? In an aid deal negotiated in 2009 by the Obama administration with the governments of Bermuda and Palau, the Uighurs will end up on one of the few island nations smaller than Cuba.

¹⁸⁰ "Guantanamo Echoes U.S. 'Gunboat' Past / Anti-American Forces Use Navy Base as Rallying Symbol." *SFGate*. Accessed May 14, 2013. <http://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/Guantanamo-echoes-U-S-gunboat-past-2600919.php#src=fb>. The original terms of the contract stipulated that the US pay the Cuban government an annual sum of \$4,085, which it has faithfully sent every year but which have remained un-cashed since 1960. Purportedly Castro keeps the checks themselves in a drawer in his desk. Long before September 11th and the prison camp that it would eventually bring, US occupation of the base itself and the terms under which the US has occupied the territory have been a point of contention for otherwise politically friendly countries in the region. To add to the irony, there is now a proposal by the Council on Hemispheric Relations to litigate the US off the island by claiming that the original terms of the lease, which prohibited commercial operations of any sort, were broken by the military when it opened McDonald's, Starbucks, and Subway locations on the base in order to offer soldiers stationed there some of the amenities from home.

¹⁸² Kaplan, Amy. "Prisoners and Rights: Guantánamo's Limbo Is Too Convenient." *The New York Times*, November 24, 2003, sec. Opinion. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/24/opinion/24iht-edkaplan_ed3_.html.

¹⁸³ Taken from Second Life's own reporting, which is the only available source for traffic information. See <http://community.secondlife.com/t5/Featured-News/The-Second-Life-Economy-in-Q3-2011/ba-p/1166705>.

¹⁸⁴ A great deal of Dreyfus' work has gone into working out what and why artificial intelligence systems (both those in existence as well as those in development) fail to achieve philosophical standards and expectations of 'mind' and cognition. See his 1972 *What Computers Can't Do* and his 1992 follow-up *What Computers Still Can't Do*. Dreyfus, Hubert L. *What Computers Can't Do: The Limits of Artificial Intelligence*. Revised. Harper & Row, 1979. Dreyfus, Hubert L. *What Computers Still Can't Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason*. 1st ed. The MIT Press, 1992.

¹⁸⁵ See Dreyfus, *On the Internet*, chapter five, "Virtual Embodiment: Myths of Meaning in Second Life." A phenomenologist of the first order, Dreyfus draws from both Martin Heidegger ('focal experience') and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (gesture and intercorporeality) for his discussion of what's most rewarding in real life, sources which are then supplemented with recent research in cognitive and neuropsychology (mirror neurons, social proxemics, etc.) Dreyfus, Hubert L. *On the Internet*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2008.

¹⁸⁶ See Boellstorff, Tom. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press, 2010. Of particular use here was "Chapter 5: Personhood: The Self-The Life Course-Avatars and Alts-Embodiment-Race and Gender-Agency."

¹⁸⁷ Boellstorff's most extreme example of this is the case of a user named 'Pavia' who occupied Second Life as a female, but real life as a male. In the course of his/her time in Second Life, Pavia came to identify far more with the female gender in real life, to the extent that he/she decided to undergo a full transgender operation. See pgs. 138-9.

¹⁸⁸ See Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, in which the authors argue that new visual media achieve their cultural significance precisely by paying homage to, rivaling, and refashioning such earlier media as perspective painting, photography, film, and television. They call this process of refashioning "remediation," and they note that earlier media have also often refashioned one another: photography remediated painting, film remediated stage production and photography, and television remediated film, vaudeville, and radio.

¹⁸⁹ The specific irony of the term 'black sites' as those which don't exist under legal and rhetorical terms, but which must, by definition, exist in some physical space (and hence be open to some form of representation) has been extensively mined by the geographer Trevor Paglen in his explorations of the secret, internal workings of the CIA and related government agencies which seek to work under the veil of secrecy. Paglen has produced two relevant studies of such places and their by products including his *Torture Taxi*, co-authored with AC Thompson, a text that investigates CIA policies of extraordinary rendition by capitalizing on the fact that such secret flights still have to adhere to the exigencies of any given flight including taking off and landing at airports, refueling, etc., and also his *Blank Spots on the Map*, a study which documents 'black sites' from Area 51 in

Nevada to the elusive 'Salt Pit' in Afghanistan, to even more secret locations for which the names are unknown. See Paglen, Trevor, and A. C. Thompson. *Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA's Rendition Flights*. Melville House, 2006. Paglen, Trevor. *Blank Spots on the Map: The Dark Geography of the Pentagon's Secret World*. Updated. NAL Trade, 2010.

¹⁹⁰ Ed Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* (PublicAffairs, 2006); Alexander R Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming," *Game Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004): 23–26; Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames* (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2011); Nina B. Huntemann and Matthew Thomas Payne, eds., *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2009).

¹⁹¹ Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.*; James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2009).

¹⁹² Huntemann and Payne, *Joystick Soldiers*.

¹⁹³ Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (The MIT Press, 2010).

¹⁹⁴ Huntemann and Payne, *Joystick Soldiers*.

¹⁹⁵ Military Trainer FactSheet

¹⁹⁶ Bogost, *Persuasive Games*.

¹⁹⁷ Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming."

¹⁹⁸ Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig De Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 112.

¹⁹⁹ Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox*.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 118.

²⁰¹ P. W. Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*, Reprint (Penguin Books, 2009).

²⁰² Media Effects in general is the study of the impact of media on individual and social behavior. Priming effects refers to the (controversial) theory that exposure to a certain behavior pattern in a media context will 'prime' the affected individual to repeat that behavior in real life. For a discussion of priming effects see Leonard Berkowitz, Ronald Corwin, and Mark Heironimus, "Film Violence and Subsequent Aggressive Tendencies," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (June 20, 1963): 217–229, doi:10.1086/267162; for a more general discussion of media effects see Elihu Katz, "Communications Research Since Lazarsfeld," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 51 (January 1, 1987): S25–S45, doi:10.2307/2749186.

²⁰³ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Harvard University Press, 1974), 200.

²⁰⁴ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Indiana University Press, 1991).

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- ²⁰⁵ “Boredom, Terror, Deadly Mistakes: Secrets of the New Drone War,” accessed August 7, 2012, http://www.salon.com/2012/04/03/boredom_terror_deadly_mistakes_secrets_of_the_new_drone_war/.
- ²⁰⁶ Nicola Abé, “Dreams in Infrared: An Unpopular Job,” *Spiegel Online*, December 14, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/pain-continues-after-war-for-american-drone-pilot-a-872726-2.html>.
- ²⁰⁷ Elisabeth Bumiller, “Drone Pilots, Waiting for a Kill Shot 7,000 Miles Away,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2012, sec. U.S., <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/30/us/drone-pilots-waiting-for-a-kill-shot-7000-miles-away.html>.
- ²⁰⁸ These soldiers are often consulted on their experiences for future iterations of the game. Oddly enough the game goes one step further and produces collectible action figures of these soldiers, thereby allowing very young children to engage in the play of war. See “America’s Army - Army Values & Plenty of Action | Article | The United States Army,” accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.army.mil/article/26405/>.
- ²⁰⁹ “How to Prevent Drone Pilot PTSD: Blame the ‘Bot | Danger Room | Wired.com,” *Danger Room*, accessed August 7, 2012, <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/06/drone-pilot-ptsd/>.
- ²¹⁰ Louis Dembitz Brandeis, *Other People’s Money: And How the Bankers Use It* (F.A. Stokes, 1914), 92.
- ²¹¹ Edward Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence* (Graphics Press, 2006), 9.
- ²¹² Ed O’Keefe, “Obama Finally Accepts His Transparency Award... Behind Closed Doors,” March 31, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/federal-eye/post/obama-finally-accepts-his-transparency-award-behind-closed-doors/2011/03/31/AFRpl09B_blog.html.
- ²¹³ “About Sunshine Week,” accessed May 12, 2011, <http://www.sunshineweek.org/About.aspx#howdid>.
- ²¹⁴ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (U of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20–22; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (Vintage, 1960), 201–204.
- ²¹⁵ “IBM - Smarter Planet - United States,” CT402, April 8, 2011, http://www.ibm.com/smarterplanet/us/en/?ca=v_smarterplanet; *IBM Smarter Computing: A New Kind of Computing Is Required for a Smarter Planet*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0ZnIkp9dLU&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
- ²¹⁶ “CNN Hits The Wall for the Election - Washingtonpost.com,” February 5, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/04/AR2008020402796.html>; Doyme Shannon, “Lesson Plan | Data Visualized: More on Teaching With Infographics - NYTimes.com,” *The Learning Network: Teaching and Learning with The New York Times*, April 8, 2011,

<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/08/data-visualized-more-on-teaching-with-infographics/?partner=rss&emc=rss>.

²¹⁷ See for example: “Data Journalism Broken down: What We Do to the Data before You See It | Visualised | News | Guardian.co.uk,” April 7, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/apr/07/data-journalism-workflow>. Which outlines the way in which large datasets become stories. For background on the field, Geoff McGhee prepared this online report through a John S. Knight grant at Stanford University: <http://datajournalism.stanford.edu/>.

²¹⁸ The literature here is vast. For a discussion of sensor networks see Stacey Higginbotham, “Sensor Networks Top Social Networks for Big Data: Cloud Computing News »,” *GigaOm*, September 13, 2010, <http://gigaom.com/cloud/sensor-networks-top-social-networks-for-big-data-2/>; Gregory Pfister, *In Search of Clusters*, 2nd ed. (Prentice Hall, 1997). For a more general history of the recent development data visualization, including what the authors define as a the 15 year ‘foundational period of the field’ see Stuart K. Card, Jock Mackinlay, and Ben Shneiderman, *Readings in Information Visualization: Using Vision to Think*, 1st ed. (Morgan Kaufmann, 1999), xiii.

²¹⁹ Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence*, 10; Card, Mackinlay, and Shneiderman, *Readings in Information Visualization*, xiii.

²²⁰ See Heer video.

²²¹ M Friendly, “The Golden Age of Statistical Graphics,” *Statistical Science* 23, no. 4 (2008): 502–535.

²²² Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

²²³ Friendly, “The Golden Age of Statistical Graphics,” 532.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 505.

²²⁵ Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

²²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977--1978*, 1st ed. (Picador, 2009), 274.

²²⁷ Edward Tufte, *Beautiful Evidence* (Graphics Press, 2006), 10.

²²⁸ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (University Of Chicago Press, 1987); W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (University Of Chicago Press, 1995); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (University of California Press, 1994), Chapters 1–2.

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