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*Published in:*  
Film-Philosophy

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Pisters, P. (2010). Logistics of perception 2.0: multiple screen aesthetics in Iraq War films. *Film-Philosophy*, 14(1), 232-252. <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/view/221/179>

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## Logistics of Perception 2.0: Multiple Screen Aesthetics in Iraq War Films

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Films about the Iraq War have appeared in remarkable quantities. Recent feature films include *Redacted* (Brian de Palma, 2007), *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis, 2007), *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford, 2007), *Battle for Haditha* (Nick Broomfield, 2007), *Stop-Loss* (Kimberly Peirce, 2008) and *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Among the many documentaries *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004), *The War Tapes* (Deborah Scranton, 2006), *Iraq in Fragments* (James Longley, 2007) and *Standard Operating Procedure* (Errol Morris, 2008) are noticeable.<sup>2</sup> All these films investigate not only the effects of the war but also, and especially, its images as they operate through the overwhelming variety of contemporary mediated screen culture. The presence of multiple cameras and multiple screens in these war films is no coincidence.

Paul Virilio demonstrates in his *War and Cinema* that ‘the history of battle is primary the history of radically changing fields of perception’ (Virilio 1988, 7). While Virilio addresses the ‘logistics of perception’ in the First and Second World Wars, recent films of the Iraq War seem to prove his basic premise on the relationship between war, technology and changing

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<sup>1</sup> I’m focusing here on American productions and films that explicitly deal with this war and the war front from an American perspective. Other related films include *The Mark of Cain* (Marc Munden, 2007) about the British troops in Iraq, *Grace is Gone* (James Strouse, 2007) about a father of two daughters who receives the message of his wife having been killed in Iraq and *Rendition* (Gavin Hood, 2007) which deals with secret detention facilities outside the USA used to interrogate suspects in the war on terror. *Valley of the Wolves Iraq* (Serdar Akar & Sadullah Senturk, 2006) presents the war in Iraq from a Turkish point of view.

<sup>2</sup> See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Iraq\\_War\\_documentaries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Iraq_War_documentaries).

fields of perception. Virilio's thesis about the ultimate implications of this logistics of perception is that it leads to an 'aesthetics of disappearance'. A similar point is made by Jean Baudrillard in relation to the First Gulf War.<sup>3</sup> This vision of a waning reality, however, needs to be revised in light of the latest developments in perceptual technology and urban warfare during the Second Gulf War.

To develop my arguments about this revision of the logistics of disappearance, I will turn to several recent Iraq War films, look at the different types of screens they present and investigate their aesthetic dimensions and ethical implications. Among the multiple screens present in these films, the video war diaries made by the soldiers at the front are most salient. These diaries will be an important focus of my analysis of a contemporary logistics of perception, which, following the implication of Web 2.0 applications, I will call the logistics of perception 2.0.<sup>4</sup>

### *War and the Logistics of Perception*

Paul Virilio has demonstrated how war and technologies of perception are closely connected and developed in mutual feedback. As he argues:

There is no war, then, without representation, no sophisticated weaponry without psychological mystification. Weapons are tools not just of destruction but also of perception – that is to say, stimulants that make themselves felt through chemical, neurological processes in the sense organs and the central nervous system, affecting human reactions and even the perceptual identification and differentiation of objects. (Virilio 1989, 6)

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<sup>3</sup> In *Simulacra and Simulations* Baudrillard describes the development of (mediated) images into pure simulacra in four successive phases: the reflection of basic reality; the masking and perverting of basic reality; the masking of the absence of basic reality; and finally the complete lack of any relation to any reality whatever (Baudrillard, 1983, 5-6). I will refer here to Baudrillard's essay on The Gulf War for its explicit address of the connections between image technology and warfare.

<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that the cinematographic apparatus has turned into a fully fledged surveillance apparatus that not just stands for the panoptic powers of the cinematographic apparatus, but has turned into a networked surveillance system following the complex logic of what I describe here as the logistics of perception 2.0. I have developed this point elsewhere (Pisters 2008).

Discussing the First and Second World Wars Virilio gives many different aspects and examples of the relationship between war and cinema that work both ways. On the one hand war, spectacle and propaganda are closely related: the first film studios in Germany were established during the First World War, colour films multiplied during the Second World War when 'they were the direct result of acts of logistical piracy' in a competition between Agfa and Technicolor (Virilio 1989, 8).

On the other hand military observation techniques have historically led to creative cinematographic applications. The first battlefield observation balloon in 1794 used during the French Revolution indicates the close connection between the development of perceptual instruments and aviation. The military study of movement inspired the chronophotographic rifle camera of Jules Marey (one of the founding fathers of the cinematograph). These are but a few examples that demonstrate that the history of cinema technology and war logistics are entangled in many ways: 'aerial reconnaissance both tactical and strategic became chronophotographic and cinematographic' (Virilio 1989, 17); film directors (D.W. Griffith) became war filmmakers; war pilots (Howard Hawks) became filmmakers. Virilio's argument in *War and Cinema* is more elaborate but his main observations give a first level explanation of the remarkable presence of all kinds of perceptual technology in the most recent war films of Iraq.

However, things have also changed dramatically since the First and Second World Wars and the beginnings of cinema. The dynamic between war and image technology is a complex one which I cannot hope to render in all its aspects. But in the context of current Iraq War films, it is crucial to go back to the perceptual logistics of the First Gulf War of the early 1990s, a war that besides Virilio, was most famously discussed by Jean Baudrillard.

#### *The First Gulf War: Hyper Virtualisation and Aesthetics of Disappearance*

In his essay 'The Gulf War did not Take Place' Jean Baudrillard argued in 1991 that the Gulf War was distanced and cleansed by image technology to the point that it became a purely virtual war:

So war, when it has been turned into information, ceases to be a realistic war and becomes a virtual war, in some way symptomatic [...] everything which is turned into information becomes the object of endless speculation, the site of total uncertainty. (Baudrillard 2001, 242)

It is important to recall that the First Gulf War (1990-1991) had a completely different strategy towards perceptual logistics than the Vietnam War (1959-1975). In both wars television played a crucial role. As is well known, during the Vietnam War photo journalism and television images changed the perception of the war: images of the atrocities of napalm attacks and other horrific events established a turning point in public opinion which changed from seeing the 'just war' to the 'dirty war'. Having learnt from this, military perceptual logistics were quite different in the First Gulf War. In the intervening years television had become a twenty-four hour business and the Gulf War made CNN world famous for their constant reporting.

Television spectators world wide were glued to their screens on which there was actually nothing much to see. Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield were operations of a so called 'clean war' and the camera remained at a distance to emphasise such a view of the war. Baudrillard therefore characterised this war as a non-war<sup>5</sup>, where reported hostages took the place of combatants, and 'hostage value' became synonymous with the media simulation of the war:

We are all hostages of media intoxication, induced to believe in the war [...] and confined to the simulacrum of war as though confined to quarters. We are already all strategic hostages *in situ*; our site is the screen on which we are virtually bombarded day by day, even while serving as exchange value. (Baudrillard, 2001, 232)

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<sup>5</sup> Based on the experiences of Anthony Swofford, an ex-marine that served during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Sam Mendes' film *Jarhead* (2005) shows how even for the soldiers on the ground, waiting in the desert, this was a non-war.

Comparing CNN to a stethoscope attached to the hypothetical heart of the war, Baudrillard denounces the specular and spectacular logistics of a war which has no other object than deterrence and deception:

The war, along with fake and presumptive warriors, generals, experts and television presenters we see speculating about it all through the day, watches itself through a mirror: am I pretty enough, am I operational enough, am I specular enough, am I sophisticated enough to make an entry onto the historical stage? (Baudrillard, 2001, 236)

Baudrillard concludes in 1991 that our screens are invaded by an uncertainty, 'in the image of that blind sea bird stranded on a beach in the Gulf, which remains the symbol-image of what we are in front of our screens, in front of that sticky unintelligible event. [...] We are left with the symptomatic reading on our screens of the effects of the war, or the effects of discourse of the war, or completely speculative strategic evaluations which are analogous to those evaluations of opinion provided by the polls' (236).

In the 1990s Virilio too argues that the Gulf War has turned war into a spectacle that can only take place in a stadium, as a show (Virilio 2001, 41) Both Baudrillard and Virilio agree that the image has been dehumanised by a farewell to both the subjective eye behind the camera as well as to the human subjects in front of the camera. As Virilio puts it in *The Vision Machine*: the culmination of the progress of representational technologies in their military instrumentalisation is 'the complete evaporation of visual subjectivity into an ambient technical effect, a sort of permanent pancinema. Which, unbeknown to us, turns our most ordinary acts into movie action, into new visual material, undaunted, undifferentiated vision-fodder...[which main aim is] a waning of reality: an aesthetics of disappearance...' (Virilio 1994, 47, 49) In other words, according to Baudrillard and Virilio, the First Gulf War marks the end of the logistics of perception 1.0.

The spectacularisation of this war into a purely virtual war of deterrence and the impersonal effects of the surveying candid camera leading to an aesthetics of disappearance still have critical validity today. But it has

become part of a radically changed logistics of perception that includes many more types of images. Looking at recent war images, their multiple cameras, multiple screens and multiple human subjects, it is hard to maintain this position of an ever retreating reality and a desubjectification of the panoramic spectacle as described by Virilio and Baudrillard. Let us turn to one of the striking Iraq War films, Brian de Palma's *Redacted* to begin an investigation into the contemporary logistics of the perception of war through media.

#### *War and Contemporary Media: A Battle of Screens*

*Redacted* is based on a real event that took place in Samara in 2006 when a group of young American soldiers raped and killed a young girl, killed her family and set their house on fire. In order to tell this story De Palma had to fictionalise the characters and some of the details. But the plot follows the real events and also eerily resembles the plot of De Palma's earlier Vietnam film *Casualties of War* (1989). History seems to repeat itself in terms of war crimes on film at least.

However, just as important as the story of the film is the way in which the film is told. And here *Redacted* is very different from his earlier Vietnam War film. In an interview on YouTube De Palma explains that the material that he wanted to use was actually everything that he found on the internet: news stories, documentaries, pictures, blogs, video diaries of soldiers posted on YouTube – everything is already out there on the internet.<sup>6</sup> Yet, in bringing all these media together for his film he had to fictionalise this existing material.

From its first moments *Redacted* foregrounds its perceptual technologies: a video diary by Private Angel Salazar (clearly staged but referring to the countless actual video diaries of Iraq soldiers) is the main device in the development of the events. A French documentary with voice-over narration is another format through which the story is told, but there

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<sup>6</sup> 'Reasons for Making *Redacted*': <http://nl.youtube.com/watch?v=52dC14Od5Ks> (and follow up links of this press conference at the New York Film Festival).

are also Arab news channel reports, candid camera recordings played on Al Qaeda sites, embedded journalist reports, Western news channel items, clips from Soldiers' Wives sites and from Get Out of Iraq campaign sites, military surveillance cameras, recordings from military hearings, skype conversations and actual pictures of collateral damage (that were redacted in De Palma's film for legal reasons). All these different formats and screens are entangled in complex ways and present different point of views of the same events.

Compared to the spectacular television screens of the First Gulf War this different aesthetic is striking. No longer can we speak with Baudrillard of masquerading images that hide a virtual war without human targets and real combat (the discourse of a clean war). No longer is it possible to say with Virilio that the screen gives us only automatic images without human agency.

In Virilio's writing the screen serves as a locus of the technological transformation of space and time, as a metaphorical site of acceleration and disappearance. However, as Anne Friedberg has argued, in the course of his work Virilio never makes a distinction between cinema, television or computer screens: 'As Virilio's screens have multiplied in global extension, distinctions between them disappear, are lost,' Friedberg points out (Friedberg 2004, 183). In times of media convergence this might perhaps not be such a strange conception of the screen but it seems that Iraq War films suggest that different type of screens have different aesthetic, epistemological and ethical implications. At the heart of its new logistics of perception there is a battle of different screens that translates into a conflict of points of views.

*Redacted* shows us first of all that if we can speak of media convergence this takes place on a meta-level in the sense that all different screens repeat, quote or 'remediate' (Bolter and Grusin, 1999) other screens. The computer screen repeats television programs, news and series as streaming data or downloads. It offers a huge databank of cinema images ranging from the avant-garde to blockbusters, from experimental films to advertisements, from early cinema to the latest hypes. It offers information (wikipages, articles), social spaces, blogs and networks. But besides its own



shows and news programmes television also broadcasts old and new films and increasingly relates to websites, YouTube and other digital media. Film aesthetics in its turn is heavily influenced by digital media, not only in production, post-production and distribution, but also in terms of aesthetic remediation and citation of other media.

This does not mean that all these remediated screens lose their specific properties when they appear in another medium. *Redacted* includes a large number of other screens in its aesthetics but it still is a film screen, and, following Gilles Deleuze, the film screen has a natural relation with thinking and reflection, as he argues in 'The Brain is the Screen' (Deleuze 2000, 366). Therefore, before zooming in on the video diaries by comparing them with soldier's diaries in other films, let me first briefly investigate a little more specifically the most salient characteristics of the battling screens as they are presented in a self-reflexive way in *Redacted*.

The war diary footage that *Redacted* opens with and forms its narrative thread, presents shaky images with lots of movement and handheld camera work. Through statements by the soldiers such as 'you are making a video of me making a video of you' and promises to take care of each others' videos should they die in combat, these war diaries confirm the soldiers' existence. Further more the video diaries serve as testimonies of incredible day to day experiences. 'No Hollywood narrative but the real shit,' Private Salazar tells us. So there is also a desire for authenticity (*Tell Me No Lies* is the title of the diaries) and the truth. 'Truth is the first casualty of war,' Private McCoy says to the camera. This may seem a clichéd phrase but in view of the new logistics of perception this aphorism seems not only to relate to the truth of what actually happens, but also refers to the truth of the experience of the reality of war. These images ultimately convey an affective truth. I will return to this point later.

The French documentary in *Redacted* presents a different type of screen. The documentary, entitled *Barrage (Checkpoint)* is presented as a documentary of the reflexive genre that comments on the realities of routines at a checkpoint in Iraq and has more distance to the events than the war

diaries.<sup>7</sup> The filmmaker is clearly an observer and not a participant in the action. The images are filmed with a more classic cinematography, stable camera work, non-diegetic music and a female voice over reflects on the soldiers having to decide every day about life and death or comments on the difficulties of determining who is an enemy. There is also critical commentary about the amount of innocent Iraqis killed at checkpoints. These images point out the moral decisions and ethical dilemmas that the soldiers face, as well as the mistakes, impossible situations and injustices of war.

The television news channels (Arabic channel ATV against European channel CEN) clearly present another particular point of view on the events of Samara. Compared to the CNN-reports of the first Gulf War it is crucial that CNN is no longer the sole channel of discourse but that now there are also Arabic voices that reach the world through satellite television and online. Biased truths presented as objective truth seem to be the main business of the news channels.

Surveillance and candid cameras have a particular grainy and distant aesthetic. They capture people unawares and serve several purposes. The rhetoric of these images is mostly one of crime prevention, serving a disciplining function as argued by Foucault in respect to Bentham's panopticon (Foucault, 1975). De Palma uses the surveillance recordings as witnesses that testify for the morality of the individual soldiers when they themselves speak of their actions. In *Battle for Haditha* (Nick Broomfield, 2007) surveillance images are used to observe insurgent actions and to plan strategic operations.

Most striking are secret recordings of a place near a checkpoint where a bomb is hidden. This camera also films the moment of an explosion that kills one of the American soldiers. This recording is then shown on an Al Qaeda website as part of their guerilla tactics. So images on these particular candid camera screens are literally used as weapons in the

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<sup>7</sup> Bill Nichols has introduced the genre of reflexive documentary. Although initially meant to indicate documentaries reflecting on their own process, it also has come to designate films that reflect upon more general questions of the events portrayed. (Nichols, 1991)

resistance against the Americans. *Battle of Haditha* similarly emphasises the guerrilla function of the camera when images of horrific raids of US marines are filmed and sent as evidence of war crime to other media.

The websites serve several purposes as well. The internet is obviously used as a means of communication: soldiers' wives leave video messages for their loved ones and skype conversations allow direct contact with home. But most striking is the political use of the internet. Both Arabic and American activists against the war use the internet, presenting videos of atrocities and crimes committed on both sides as evidence and a call for action.

Each narrative event in *Redacted* is presented on one or other type of screen, telling the story quite literally as a battle of screens. Obviously there is more to say about these different types of images but most important is that all these different screens are related to different aspects of the battle. They show fragments and perspectives of the whole narrative, which makes it important to both distinguish between the screens, as well as to understand the communication between them. This is what *Redacted* and many other Iraq War films allow us to see.

Contrary to the visions of Virilio and Baudrillard in the 1990s the relationship between war and media is more dynamic than they imply. The logistics of (war) perception has had a second beginning: version 2.0. The first characteristic of the new type of logistics of perception as exemplified by Iraq War images is its dynamic multiplicity in a battle of the screens. It implies an ethics of power and the necessity for multiple points of views.

*In the Soldiers' Shoes: Video War Diaries and Affective Intensity of Experience*

A second characteristic of these Iraq War films is the level of subjective and affective intensity of many of the images. Contrary to the distant 'empty' images of the First Gulf War, images have become highly subjective and chaotically intense. Arguably, the video war diary recordings are paradigmatic for a new logistics of perception. Many actual diaries can be

found on YouTube and looking at them brings to light some interesting points.<sup>8</sup>

In one of the Iraq War diaries made by the Alpha Company, it is clear that war communication technology has been changed by the democratisation of technology and is no longer organised top down. The soldiers make clear that their own cell phone and networked image technology works much better than the official army wired phones ('That only works if God likes you'). They have also appropriated Hollywood and MTV aesthetics ('From the creators of *My War Diary*', fast editing, upbeat soundtracks) and are no longer dependent on hierarchical structures for the distribution of their images. These images can be viewed (and remixed, or mashed up) on the internet by anyone with access to it. This is a completely different logistics of perception of the much more hierarchised logistics of perception 1.0.

In terms of content the images vary from the men showing off their tattooed bodies in front of their barrack walls covered by pictures of naked women, to their tours of duty at checkpoints, their rounding up of suspected insurgents, house searching and violent raids and shootings, sometimes filmed with helmet cameras. All these types of images return in the war films. Given the context of online war diaries, the Iraq War films reframe these diaries in a narrative that express the affective and traumatic intensities of war experiences.

*Battle for Haditha* and *The Hurt Locker*, for instance, present the intensity of an urban guerrilla fight in all its atrocities. Here the cinematographic technology shows not only the emotions of the people involved so that we can engage with them and their situations, but they also make clear how the combat situation is governed by rage, panic and

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<sup>8</sup> Alpha Company Iraq Diary Highlights Pt 1: <http://nl.youtube.com/watch?v=pHwBTddBHV&feature=related> and other Alpha company clips on YouTube. *The War Tapes* (composition by Deborah Scranton, 2006) is a documentary made exclusively from video diaries of soldiers in Iraq. Focusing on three soldier's perspectives (Sergeant Steve Pink, Sergeant Zack Bassi and Specialist Mike Moriarty) the war is rendered through their eyes/cameras. Unlike the diaries that can be found on YouTube, these images have been checked and approved by Army officials before allowing them to be included in the film.

automatic reflex. In his article 'Affect, Agency and Responsibility' John Protevi explores the particular desubjectified states that soldiers need to enter into in order to kill: 'most soldiers must leave the state of 'cold blood' in order to kill one-on-one at close range – they have to dump their subjectivity. They burst through the threshold of inhibition by supercharging their bodily intensity' (Protevi 2008, 7). A common method is to trigger a 'berserker' rage (in itself already a traumatic experience, Protevi rightly insists) which easily leads to a frenzy of killing. The berserker rage is 'naturally' triggered by the death of a comrade, but it is also a trained mode. Protevi mentions reflex training as a common strategy used to desensitise and 'enrage' the soldiers in preparation for a fight. Reflex training such as rhythmic chanting of combat cries while running creates a group subjectivity and desensitises the soldier to a dehumanised enemy. A further method is 'cyborg' training through computer simulation. Soldiers learn to make instant shoot/not shoot decisions based on the gestalt of the situation and a networked chain of commands. Protevi explains:

Such instant decisions are more than reflexes, but operate at the very edge of the conscious awareness of the soldiers and involve complex subpersonal processes of threat perception. In addition to this attenuation of individual agency, cutting edge communication technology now allows soldiers to network together in real time. With this networking we see an extended/distributed cognition culminating in the 'topside' for a commander who often doesn't 'command' in the sense of micro-manage but who observes and intervenes at critical points. In other words, contemporary team-building applications through real-time networking are cybernetic applications of video games that go above the level of the subject. (Protevi 2008, 12)

Many of the most violent scenes in *Battle for Haditha* and *The Hurt Locker* bear a striking resemblance to first-person shooter games. Military training through video games is well known. The American army has posted a free game, *America's Army*, online which entertains, educates, makes propaganda and even recruits for the army (See Nieborg 2004 and 2005). This game aesthetic is an important dimension of the logistics of perception 2.0. Video games look like war and war looks like a video game. Protevi

indicates that the number of ex-soldiers who suffer from severe post traumatic stress syndromes (PTSD) once they are out of the military mode of reflex and group subjectivity, are unable to cope with other affects, such as guilt.

In *Battle for Haditha* this struggle is evident in one of the soldiers involved in revenge raids. Private Ramirez, who enters a berserker rage when he sees his friend dying, takes personal responsibility for the subsequent killings, and experiences a subjective feeling of guilt after a desubjectified, almost hallucinatory battle. In a commentary on *The Hurt Locker* Kathryn Bigelow indicates that by 'putting the audience in the soldiers' shoes' she wants the audience to experience the psychology of warfare.<sup>9</sup> Another implication of the perceptual logistics of the Iraq War films is the re-enactment of the intensity of combat which gives insights into the paradoxical psychological effects of desubjectified pre-cognitive reflexes and feelings of subjective traumatic guilt after combat.<sup>10</sup>

#### *On the Home Front: Undeletable Memories*

In *Stop-Loss* war diaries are also the basis of the film's aesthetic and narrative style. Kimberly Pierce says in an interview that she wanted to create the feeling of the video diaries filmed on camera: everything hand held, fast cut and with added music. In terms of *mise-en-scène* the similarities with the war diaries on YouTube are striking (e.g., the tattooed letters 'Death before Dishonor' on the back of a soldier). Pierce's film could be considered a follow up to *Redacted*, *Battle for Haditha* and *The Hurt Locker* in that it deals with the traumatic effects of the war after combat is over.

The film deals with a group of Texan soldiers when they get back home and cannot forget what they have experienced. They all breakdown in one way or the other, digging trenches to sleep in the garden, having traumatic flashbacks, committing suicide. When they get stop-lossed (send

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<sup>9</sup> See [http://nl.youtube.com/watch?v=-8zJTWJ\\_rGU](http://nl.youtube.com/watch?v=-8zJTWJ_rGU).

<sup>10</sup> Protevi explains this guilt as 'proto-empathic identification which produces psychological trauma at the sight of blood and guts of the killed enemy, despite the common practice of dehumanisation of the enemy' (Protevi 2008: 1).

back beyond their initial call of duty, which happens a lot in the Iraq War) the sergeant of this particular platoon, Brandon, refuses and goes AWOL.

The event in the central war diary of this film is a horrific instance of urban warfare when the soldiers at the checkpoint run after some insurgents and get trapped in the narrow streets of Baghdad. Three soldiers lose their lives and one is badly wounded.<sup>11</sup> Many Iraqis (men, women and children) die in their houses while the rest of the soldiers escape heavily traumatised. Back in the US, images of the war diaries return in constant flashbacks to Brandon's mind. Even when he is in New York in order to obtain false identity papers, the huge city screens present war diaries inviting young men to sign up for the fight in Iraq. There seems to be no escape from these images. If the soldier's bodies are not destroyed in the combat, their minds break down. The war diaries become recurring flashbacks, undeletable memories. Here we could say that the film puts us in the soldier's mind – and as such presents a critical reflection on the effects of the video game logistics of war perception.

*In the Valley of Elah* also deals with the effects of the war on the home front. The video diaries here are in first instance not so much undeletable memory flashbacks, as traces to cling onto for father, Hank Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones), whose son Mike is reported missing after returning from Iraq. The father goes on a search to find out what happened and gets hold of his son's cell phone that was left in his bedroom at the military base. At first all that is visible from the media-data are some scrambled images and a picture that Mike had sent home. In Deerfield's nightmares his son's desperate voice on the phone asking 'Dad, are you there?' keeps on returning. In the course of the film Deerfield (himself a Vietnam veteran) receives the news that Mike was murdered and slowly finds out what the war did to his son and his fellow army comrades. In the background the television news constantly reports on Iraq, and surveillance

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<sup>11</sup> Later in the film Brandon visits the wounded soldier in military hospital. This boy, Rico, is of Latin American descent and argues that if he had been stop-lossed and killed it would at least make sense because his family would then have obtained a green card.

images and a picture of the war turn out to be crucial in finding out the truth of what had happened.

Deerfield, helped by a deputy police officer Emily Sanders (Charlize Theron), has to put all the pieces of information together, combining declarations of witnesses, surveillance footage, statements of other soldiers and bits and pieces of media data from the cell phone that Deerfield receives courtesy of a local hacker. At the very end of the film he understands that the war had turned his son into a drug-using sadist who pokes his fingers in the wounds of victims to film the pain, and that he was killed by his fellow soldiers in a pointless fight. As in *Stop-Loss* we can see how the state of desubjectification necessary in combat is not a simple on/off switch but has lasting, de-realising consequences on the mind.

At the end of the film the video-image of the son on his cell phone son turns into a the father's recollection where he understands what had happened and why his son had called him for help to get him out of the army. In this recollection-image we see the initial event that caused Mike's breakdown. In a convoy, he had run over a girl and against standing orders he stopped the tank and took a picture with his cell phone which he send home. This was the undeletable image that destroyed all ethical sense in the soldiers' minds.<sup>12</sup>

Taken together the war video diaries in these films are both (testimonies of) experiences and memory flashes that show the huge impact of war. Far from being a distant empty image, these images are part of the logistics of perception, version 2.0, that indicate how intensely and traumatically these images operate in the chaos of contemporary screen culture.

Asked for a war story back home, one of the soldiers at the end of *Redacted* exclaims: 'I have these images that are burned in my brain and I don't know what the fuck I'm gonna do with them.' Filmed, distributed and

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<sup>12</sup> In *The War Tapes* the soldiers' most traumatic moment is a very similar accident when the soldiers hit an innocent girl selling cookies and who was completely crushed by the military vehicle. Although the soldiers admit that these images will be forever in their heads, they manage to keep themselves together, unlike the soldiers in *In the Valley of Elah*.



remediated on all kinds of different platforms and screens, these war diary images become the traumatic kernel of our collective screen culture. Because of its complex entanglement in the vortex of multiple screens and multiple perspectives, an ethics of the image seems to be related to a consciousness arising from the paradoxical affects of this new logistics of perception. After being held hostage by the spectacle of the 'non-war', we can now say that in the logistics of perception 2.0 we are all participants in a battle of the screens that is quite literally mind blowing.

### *Pictures of Collective Desire, Memory and Trauma*

The most symbolic images of this collective traumatic kernel of contemporary screen culture are the videos and the photographs taken with cell phones and digital cameras by soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison in 2003. These images are the central focus of Errol Morris's documentary film *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008). In contrast to the feature films that re-enact the realistic style of the video war diaries and connect the fragmented images of the war into a (loose) narrative structure, Errol Morris employs a very constructed and analytical style in his documentary, moving between interviews with the interrogators and picture takers at Abu Ghraib, clearly staged scenes of the prison scenes and the actual photographs.

The photographs themselves were first shown on television (CBS *60 Minutes*, 28 April 2004), which was the mass media introduction of these photographs that have since circulated on the internet. The hooded man on a box with electric wires on his hand has become a symbol for the unjustness of the war in Iraq. Other pictures of naked men with women's underwear on their heads, detainees in sexual humiliating stress positions and other seemingly endless atrocities are well known. In order to make one last step into the affective dimensions of the logistics of perception 2.0 introduced and exemplified by the war video diaries, I want to refer here to Adrian Parr's book *Deleuze and Memorial Culture* (2008).

In a chapter on Abu Ghraib, Parr states that a Foucaultian perspective on the events is useful but not sufficient to indicate the complexity of what the photographs carry in them beyond their frames. Foucault 'insists power

is a system of subjectification that emerges out of social relations and that power can be revolutionary as much as coercive' (Parr, 2008, 98). Many of the testimonies in *Standard Operating Procedure* can be read in this way: that the military's acceptance of humiliating and cruel practices delegitimised the entire exercise. The multiplicity of minor processes imitating and supporting each other 'converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method' (Foucault in Parr, 2008, 101). For Foucault historical processes and circumstances produce behaviour and identity in terms of the power relations (*pouvoir*) of 'disciplined' bodies. The use of female interrogators to humiliate the detainees even was a conscious policy that reflects this Foucaultian logic of the body.

As is known from discussions between Foucault and Deleuze, contrary to Foucault's emphasis on institutional power, Deleuze insists on the affective dimensions of power as *puissance* (force):

The key here is whether the organization of affects establishes a microfascism, for what makes fascism dangerous according to Deleuze and Guattari is its 'molecular or micropolitical power, for it is a mass movement: a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism.' (Parr, 2008, 101)

According to Deleuze and Guattari desire is a fundamental organisational power: the exchange of libidinal intensities, energies and affects run through every system. It is not so much, or not only, that individuals are formed by institutional power in a top down movement from system to individual, but that all sorts of affective dimensions feed the system bottom up. On the level of the individuals involved in the Abu Ghraib pictures, *Standard Operating Procedure* hints at the multiple affective dimension that are behind the pictures.

Of the many dimensions that can be detected I want to mention three salient ones. First of all, it is revealing to hear that Lyndie England, the woman holding a detainee on a leash, says she was simply in love with the Charles Graner, the ring leader of the interrogators, and thus was easily convinced to pose in the photographs. Personal affects of sexual desire and

gendered power relations are elements in the forces beyond the picture frames.

England adds to this that Graner would never have given her the leash if there had not been a camera. Here a second libidinal element comes into the picture. The affective effect of the camera itself makes the pictures partial evidence for good behaviour (Graner wanted to show that he did what he was told to do to prepare prisoners for interrogation) and as trophy-taking for a 'winning team.' In the end these pictures were evidence against him and the other soldiers. Instead of symbols of triumph they have become a symbol of the shame of America.

However, in a twist of this view on Abu Ghraib, Adrian Parr brings in another affective dimension, which is the third point I want to raise. According to Deleuze and Guattari, in the final analysis, desire, even bottom up, is always social and has a collective dimension. Here Parr argues that the images of Abu Ghraib have to be read as a (collective unconscious) counter-strategy against the humiliating images of the falling towers on 9/11:

The images of Abu Ghraib relentlessly counter the images of 9/11 fresh in American minds, testifying to an infrastructure of desire operating at the pre-dialogical and pre-personal level of social memory. [...] On that note, it is interesting that the American media and the US administration didn't even bother trying to get the public to forget what happened at Abu Ghraib. Instead it was amplified [...] [as] a way of countering the memory of 9/11 not on ideological grounds but as a way in which a battered nation saw a way out of the malaise. (Parr, 2008, 107-108)

The photographs can thus be seen as a perverse anti-dote against the humiliating images of the collapsing towers of the world trade centre. The Abu Ghraib pictures and the war diary videos, as traumatic kernels of the logistics of perception 2.0, demonstrate how war and image technology are fundamentally connected, but in increasingly complex ways.

The media has become a gigantic networked battle of screens where perceptual and psychological effects become affectively entangled. We can say that in this new logistics we are not passive spectators captured by

institutional or ideological power, even though this remains a power that needs to be taking into account. What the Iraq War films of the logistics of perception 2.0 show us is that contemporary culture is traversed by multiple desires that are for a large part social, collective and unconscious. Our real and virtual bodies are involved in complex ways that cannot be translated into simple ethical rules. By making new images, or simply by being affected by these images, we can participate in bringing back reality to the heart of the vortex of our multiple screens. Paradoxically it is possible to conclude that in the face of the multiplication of ever increasing screens, reality does not disappear but returns with an affective vengeance.

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