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**PICTURES OF WAR**

## **KRIEGSBILDER**

*Ich habe keine eigenen Bilder vom Krieg.*

*Keine Erinnerungsbilder.*

*Dennoch ist der Krieg, in dem ich geboren bin, immer unterschwellig anwesend.*

*Ich habe versucht, Bilder zu finden, die meine Erinnerung ersetzen könnten.*

*Dabei ist etwas anderes geschehen.*

*Die Suche nach Erinnerung wurde zur Suche nach Bildern.*

*Mein Krieg ist längst durch neue Kriege ersetzt, deren Bilder ich auf Video mitsonneide.*

*Die Bilder haben sich verselbständigt.*

*Tote dürfen nicht gezeigt werden, so lange ein Krieg dauert.*

*Nur die Soldaten tauschen ihre privaten Tötungsbilder gegen Pornobilder im Internet.*

## **PICTURES OF WAR**

*I have no pictures of my own from the war.*

*No souvenir images.*

*Nevertheless, the war in which I was born is always present subliminally.*

*I have tried to find images that could replace my memory.*

*In the process, something else has happened.*

*The search for memory became the search for images.*

*My war has long since been replaced by new wars whose images I witness on video.*

*The images have taken on a life of their own.*

*Dead bodies must not be shown as long as a war lasts.*

*Only soldiers can exchange their private kill pictures for pornographic images on the internet.*

# Pictures of War

CLINT ENNS

## I. THOUGHTS REPLACED BY IMAGES



A memory is replaced by a photograph. Old images are replaced by newer images. The newsreel becomes the 24 hour news cycle, a constant flow of images considered to be breaking news.

The Iraq War is the first major war where every soldier had the ability to indiscriminately document their experiences due to the availability of cheap digital cameras. Before that, soldiers who were amateur war photographers were limited by the photochemical technologies involved. Given that amateur war photographers are not governed by protocol, nor the desire to tell stories of victory, they are often able to document the real lives of soldiers and the hidden costs of war.

A photograph can be a weapon. It has the ability to bear witness and share its perspective with the world. The soldier who acts as an amateur war photographer may capture firsthand accounts of the horrific nature of war. Consider Charles Graner's photographs of the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib or the images of death at the end of Hein's video *Kriegsbilder* (2006). These are images captured by soldiers that were not intended for public consumption; they are private images that have made their way into the public sphere.

## II. THERE ARE PLENTY OF WAYS YOU CAN HURT A MAN



The song “Another One Bites the Dust” by the British rock group Queen accompanies images of drone strikes, the contagious bassline set against lyrics that describe the fleeting nature of life. An infectious groove runs through the song that deals with the inevitability of death, a crowd favourite at sporting events. Somewhat ironically, the song has been used to train medical professionals because the bassline provides the correct number of chest compressions per minute to be used while performing CPR.

At the end of Hein’s video, we watch an out-of-control bus with its roof burning. A soldier sings:

*The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire.*

*We don’t need no water, let the motherfucker burn.*

*Burn motherfucker, burn.*

Immediately after, we hear a metal riff reminiscent of the one in the Coal Chamber song “Sway.” In the song, these lyrics are used to describe the state of mind of someone going insane or losing control of themselves, a classic nü metal trope. These lyrics are also found in

the Bloodhound’s gang’s “Fire Water Burn.” Ironically, the song is a critique of both the absurdity of war and the glorification of violence in American culture.

The lyrics were first used in the chorus to Rock Master Scott & the Dynamic Three’s underground hip hop track titled “The Roof is on Fire.” The song was also famous for the line: “Now throw your hands in the air and wave ‘em like you just don’t care.” Although it remains unclear which version of the lyrics the soldier is referencing, it is unlikely to be this version.

In the soldier’s version, he is literally describing the event unfolding; yet it also a public declaration of apathy towards whoever is inside the bus. It seems the soldier is attempting to be humorous by acknowledging an uncomfortable truth, a way of coping by creating distance between himself and the event at hand. A zoom lens brings the event closer while the camera creates a mediated experience of the event. The camera is both a tool to help us make sense of the world and a way for the photographer to set up a physical and emotional barrier.

### III. AMATEUR SEX & DEATH

Amateur photographers often document an event with little regard for conventional aesthetics or technical expertise. This is clearly one of the appealing aspects of

amateur war photography or amateur pornography. People who want to watch real sex or real death seek authentic images.

While one is a document of desire and pleasure, the other documents conflict and violence. But aren't the sensations that accompany watching these opposite actions similar? Isn't part of the gratification that people find in consuming these types of images found in the fact that they are typically forbidden? In any case, both involve elements of voyeurism, fetishization, and objectification.

In pornography, the photographer remains in a position of power while directing and controlling the actions of the performers. Moreover, they are often implicated in the act and take pleasure in it. Although the soldier who acts as an amateur war photographer is implicated, they may capture the suffering of others without necessarily experiencing it themselves. This is demonstrated by the soldier's footage at the end of Hein's video *Kriegsbilder*. Hein imagines that the soldier who uploaded this video to the internet did it while downloading pornography. The big death in exchange for the little death. The cycle continues.

