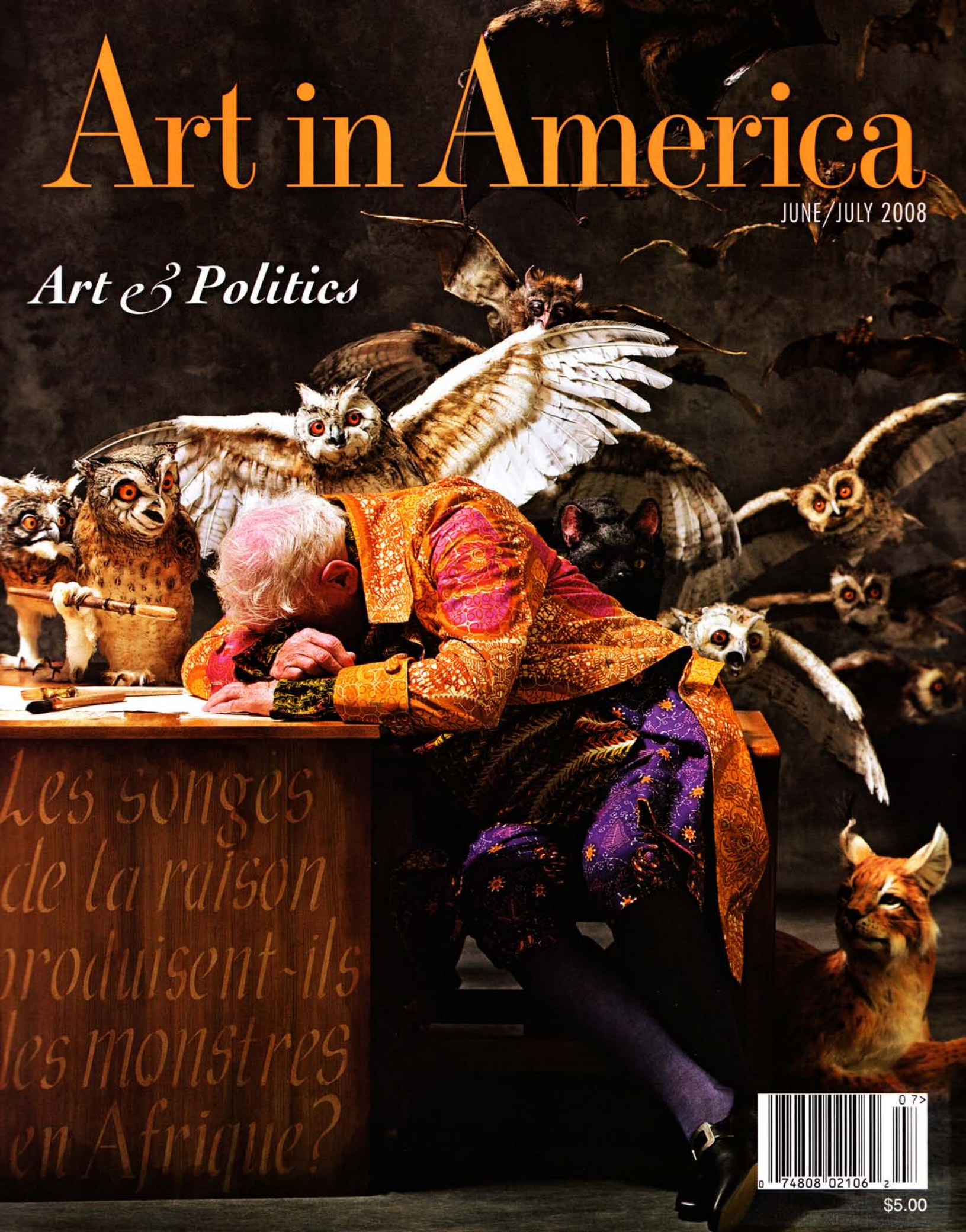


# Art in America

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*Art e? Politics*



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# Rules of Engagement

*With photographic truthfulness no longer taken on faith, some photographers are working out a new set of protocols for making pictures that are seriously real.*

BY MARCIA E. VETROCC

Shortly before the conclusion of *Shattered Glass*, the 2003 film that recounts the downfall of a hot young journalist at the *New Republic* who was found to have fabricated the better part of his reputation-building features, the magazine's anguished editor receives an assessment of how the crisis might have been averted from his assistant. "You know what could have prevented all this, don't you?" she asks solemnly. "Pictures. How could you make up characters if everyone you wrote about had to be photographed?"<sup>1</sup>

The audience I shared the film with greeted that line with waves of derisive laughter. To even casual observers of the field of photography, an expression of unqualified faith in the evidentiary value of pictures would come as a bigger shock than did the details of Stephen Glass's violations of press ethics. Indeed, the "mirror with a memory" cracked well before Glass shattered. Since the early 1970s, the

documentary photograph has been subjected to a lengthy—some would argue torturous—interrogation, leading to an assortment of charges and disclosures about such iconic images as Robert Capa's 1936 *The Falling Soldier* (quite possibly a reenactment) and Robert Doisneau's osculating couple of 1950 (posed, not impassioned) in *Le Baiser de l'Hôtel de Ville*. Pretty much from its infancy—which is to say from the mid-19th-century Crimean War pictures of Roger Fenton and the Civil War images produced by the Mathew Brady Studio—photojournalism has been art directed, with backdrops scouted and purposefully framed, and corpses and firearms repositioned for enhanced narrative or esthetic effect.<sup>2</sup> Not even forensic photography was born innocent. In his 1992 book *Evidence*, Luc Sante tells of his discovery in New York's Municipal Archives of 55 police department crime-scene photographs from 1914-18. Though

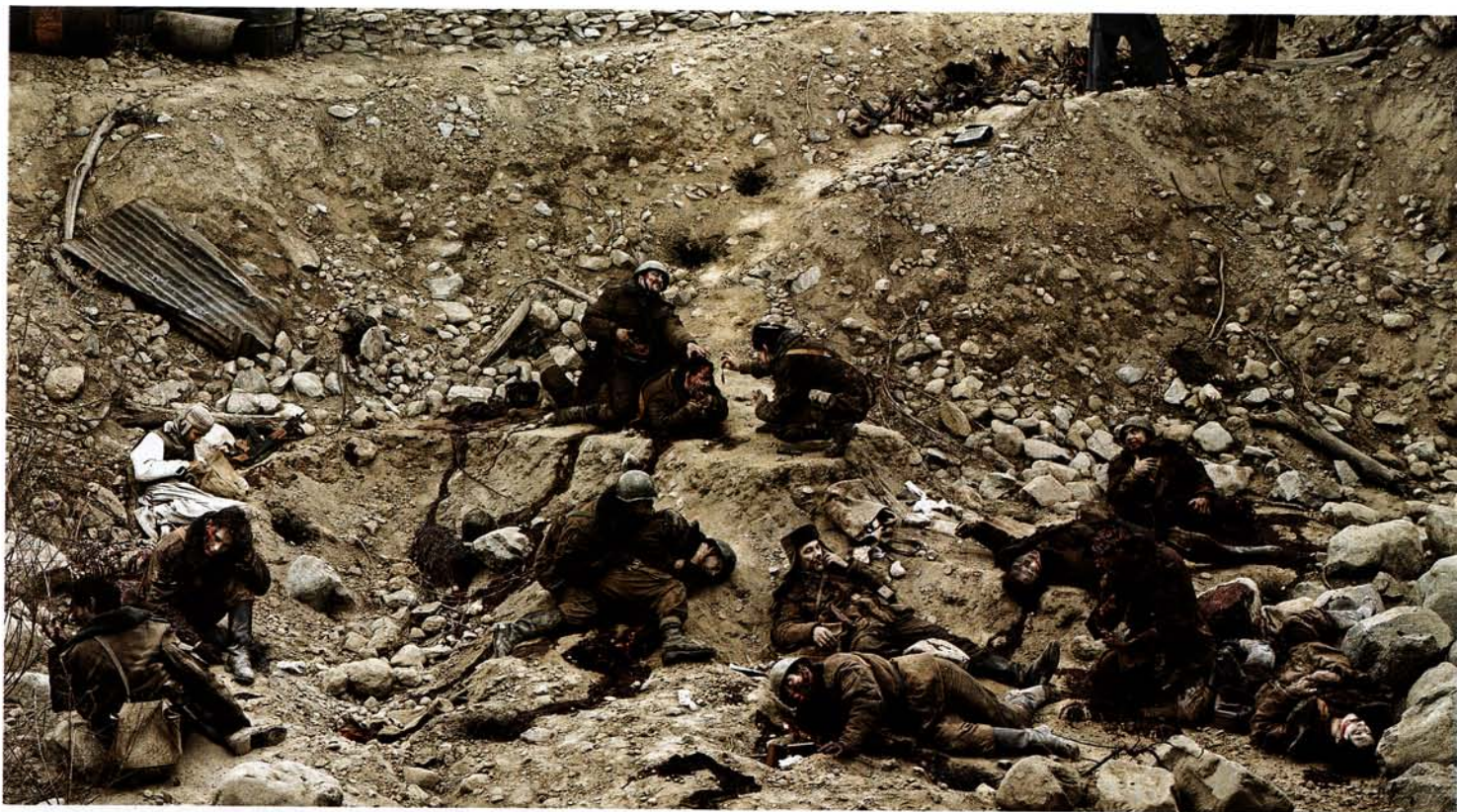
technically primitive, the pictures nevertheless evince a uniform look or "style," and a comparison of views of the same locations disclosed that bodies and objects had been repositioned between shots.<sup>3</sup> The climate of trust in which a photojournalist could submit pictures of the inconceivable with the terse injunction "Believe it"—as did Lee Miller when she sent her photographs of Buchenwald to *Vogue* magazine in 1945—seems irretrievable today.

On the bright side, the long examination of photographic contingency and chicanery has fueled a boom in picture-making aimed principally at the gallery and museum, where a high premium is placed on foregrounding the art part of photography. For more than three decades, a large and diverse contingent of artists (Christian Boltanski, Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, Jeff Wall, Laurie Simmons, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Gregory Crewdson, Gillian Wearing, Walid Raad, Thomas Demand and Andreas Gursky are among the more famous) have worked to bolster and exploit the new photographic dispensation, which stipulates that a photograph is not an inherently transparent representation but rather the crafted product of staging (sometimes) and editing (inevitably), and that a photograph's "reception" (for, like a text, a picture has neither intrinsic nor fixed meaning) hinges on the circumstances of its presentation (context, label) and on the expectations and preconceptions of an audience.

Of course, the triumph of the new orthodoxy didn't banish straight photography from exhibition. For all the macrocephalic mop-pets digitally bred by Loretta Lux, the gauntlet of social embarrassments arranged for Joshua, Charlie White's humanoid puppet, and the full array of suburban nightmares concocted by Gregory Crewdson, we've also seen the awkward adolescent bathers forthrightly pictured by Rineke Dijkstra, a survey of execution chambers across the U.S. compiled by Lucinda Devlin in "The Omega Suites," and Edward Burtynsky's justly spectacular views of the demolitions and excavations for China's Three Gorges Dam. But if the photographic document didn't vanish from view, the audience—like the photographers—did grow more circumspect and self-conscious, more prepared to scrutinize the influence of format, seriality and artistic intention: should we castigate or congratulate Devlin for the disarming serenity and



Clinton Fein: Rank and Defile 1, 2007, chromogenic digital print, 96 by 126 inches. Courtesy Toomey-Tourell Gallery, San Francisco.



Jeff Wall: *Dead Troops Talk* (a vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986), 1992, transparency in lightbox, 90% by 164 1/4 inches. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

handsome chiaroscuro of her prints, which induce us to linger so comfortably over pictures of holding cells, electric chairs and gurneys?

Questions about the applicability and the usefulness of lessons learned about photography came to mind during the last season or so of exhibitions, a period that showed signs of an uptick of interest in pictures that claim a certain measure of documentary credibility or some photo-based engagement with social and political reality. (Let's agree to dispense with ironic quotes around that last word.) No doubt several factors have been at play. We've experienced a succession of critical events—the Sept. 11 attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., Hurricane Katrina, the war in Iraq, the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib—for which the circulation of amateur and professional pictures proved fundamental if not crucial to the formation of public opinion. Probably just as pertinent to a reconsideration of reality-based photography has been a contrary phenomenon: the emergence in the West of a culture of surveillance and secrecy as one aspect of the domestic war on terrorism. Fretting over an image glut or staging polished send-ups of the society of the spectacle can seem beside the point when security cameras are proliferating on the one hand, and, on the other, the government is taking measures to sharply restrict photographic access (whether in the form of a ban on photographing the flag-draped military coffins that arrive at Dover Air Force Base or the recent attempt by the Bloomberg administration to expand the circumstances under which professional and amateur photographers in New York City must register for permits and insurance).<sup>4</sup> When the control of visual access

becomes a flashpoint, the urge to photograph the real acquires the allure of a mission.

An admittedly limited yet still heterogeneous sampling for a deeper look into the matter would include works by Nina Berman, Thomas Demand, Harrell Fletcher, Clinton Fein, Barry Frydlander, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Jules Spinatsch and Taryn Simon. This is far from a return to faith-based photography. Rather, what emerges is a kind of "postlapsarian" practice, wised up—perhaps too self-consciously so on occasion—and shaped in overt and subtle ways by three decades of the critique of truth in pictures. Their photographs and projects generally share (and exceptions will be noted) an emphasis on research; a reliance on the support of captions, statements, interviews and explicatory texts; and often, though not always, a publication that supplies additional images and exposition to clarify and fulfill the artist's intentions.

There is also much attention paid, in texts and in the project's very definition, to the means by which the photographer gained access to the subject or achieved the picture. Sometimes this takes the form of a confession of staging or manipulation, though it can also allow the photographer to reclaim the role of the intrepid (and even crusading) seeker of truth. It may be that the quality of photographic transparency, once presumed dead, has simply shifted from the picture to the picture maker. In such a practice, subjectivity and truthfulness are no longer at odds, and the acknowledgment of point of view is itself a precondition of photographic honesty. These, then, are pictures "told" in the first person, as if they embodied the

limited but unshakable conviction voiced by Anthony Swofford at the start of *Jarhead*, his memoir of the Gulf War: "What follows is neither true nor false but what I know."

### The Hostile Witness

Susan Sontag concluded her final book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), with an eloquent three-page discussion of Jeff Wall's monumental *Dead Troops Talk* (a vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986), 1992. The mural-size (it's approximately 7 1/2 by 13 1/4 feet) lightbox-mounted work presents a broad, horizonless view into a rubble-strewn ditch where ashen, bloodied and broken soldiers engage in a vivid yet impossible colloquy. Sontag's interest in the digitally generated composite is not surprising. Her book has been examined most closely for its partial revision of her earlier doubts about straight photography, but Sontag's essay considers all kinds of images of conflict and suffering. (An etching from Goya's "Disasters of War" is reproduced on the cover.) Moreover, Wall's intention has never been merely to stage pictures that rehearse the tricks and lies of photography (nor has he, for that matter, ever abandoned the documentary image). Rather, he has appropriated the means available to the filmmaker in order to endow still photography with the imaginative reach, emotional power and moral ambition once claimed by painting. Hence his title's sly allusion to Gauguin's *Vision After the Sermon; Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1888)—a painting that, in its day, amounted to a position paper on the inadequacy of realism.

**Demand seems to assert the worth of even an incomplete or flawed record, and to invite us to consider the supplemental value of his own testimony as an eyewitness.**

The belief that a higher purpose can be served by abandoning straightforward appearances, in photography as in painting, is central to Peter Galassi's discussion of *Dead Troops Talk* in the catalogue for Wall's 2007 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art:

Staged over many months in a large rented studio in the vicinity of Vancouver, the picture plausibly could have been made in one shot. In pursuit of the utmost realism, however, Wall photographed the figures individually and in small groups, and patched in their wounds from separate shots of clinically accurate maquettes.<sup>5</sup>

Galassi may sound downright post-ironic when he discounts the single shot in favor of the "utmost realism" afforded by a collage, a fabrication. But flaunting a lie precisely to expose the cracks in the truth has long been regarded as one option in a

progressive photographic practice that pursues honesty without nostalgia for a lost ideal. Martha Rosler, for example, invoked the politically engaged photomontages of Dada and Constructivism when she asserted:

If we want to call up hopeful or positive uses of manipulated images, we must choose images in which manipulation is itself apparent, and not just as a form of artistic reflexivity but as a way to make a larger point about the truth value of photographs and the illusionistic elements in the surface of (and even the definition of) 'reality.'<sup>6</sup>

The works of Barry Frydlander, Clinton Fein and Thomas Demand may be seen as efforts to fulfill Rosler's prescription for photographic staging and manipulation that aims not to dramatize ad nauseam the scandals and betrayals of the medium but to engage the more pressing question of how what we (can) know depends on what we (can) see. With Frydlander, the subject of a small survey at MOMA last year, the backstory is especially piquant: an Israeli photojournalist who had an epiphany about his own complicity in "manufacturing" news during the first Palestinian intifada, Frydlander abandoned photography in 1989, returning after a five-year hiatus only when "he recognized that computer composites could acknowledge their own artificiality—their inherent deceit—by incorporating evidence of the passage of time and thus of the process that produced them."<sup>7</sup>

The photographs at MOMA amounted to a survey of daily life in Israel, the "daily" in that country

comprising experiences both urgent and casual, from a police raid and a peace demonstration to a nearly 10-foot-wide view of a well-stocked convenience store whose tightly packed rows of colorful merchandise harbor a mischievous allusion to Andreas Gursky's own digitally enriched retail mural, *99 Cent* (1999). Constructing compositions that aspire to the aforementioned condition of "utmost realism," Frydlander seems no less conscious of art history than is Wall. The flâneurs of Manet and Sunday strollers of Seurat have been reborn as the black-suited Orthodox men and boys in shirtsleeves who enjoy a holiday outing in *Blessing* (2005). Cézanne's card players haunt the small square tables in the friezelike *Jaber Coffee Shop* (2003), an East Jerusalem café where Palestinian men scrutinize the hands they've been dealt in a hushed, backlit ambient worthy of Caillebotte.

The fullest realization of Frydlander's intentions is the large (roughly 5-by-11-foot) panorama of 2005, *Shirat Hayam* ("End of Occupation?" *Series #2*), which purports to show the departure of 20 Israeli families from coastal land in Gaza that is to be returned to Palestinian control. From an elevated viewpoint, not quite a bird's-eye but commanding enough, we survey a gleaming beach, an orderly ring of soldiers or police, some settlers ambling to and fro, a handful of photographers (a self-referential touch), some insubstantial-looking shelters, and the placid blue of sea and sky meeting at the horizon. According to the catalogue, the Hebrew title is a reference to the deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh's army, and that seems key to explaining the panorama's visual grandeur. But the scale of history painting (or Cecil B. DeMille) starts to seem rather extravagant for what is so plainly an uneventful event. One looks in vain for an act of resistance, for something approaching even the melodrama of Wall's *An Eviction* (1988), a work that becomes a sort of comparison manqué once you read in the catalogue that the Israeli army used force to dislodge the settlers after the cameras were gone.

The constructedness of *Shirat Hayam* may be read in many clues: shadows are inconsistent; the same trio of women appears twice on the beach. But Frydlander seems intent on supplemental disclosure, judging not only by the catalogue's revelations but also by his participation in a recurring feature of *New York* magazine called "The Annotated Artwork." As Frydlander stipulated to the magazine when it featured his panorama:

I made this [*Shirat Hayam*] out of about 50 images taken over the span of an hour from the top of a watchtower. We were there for three days—the second day, the army left the watchtower and we took over. . . . It took two months on the computer to complete. The credibility of the image as witness is damaged. What we're calling a photograph is not a photograph. I didn't take the picture—I constructed it.<sup>8</sup>

*Shirat Hayam* is neither a self-reflexive exercise in photographic sleight of hand nor an application of cinematic effects for the aggrandizement of photography. Frydlander regards the constructed picture as an image-equivalent of the actual (which is to say fraudulent) historical episode, an episode he describes as having been staged by the Israeli government, right down to the signs in English furnished for foreign cameras to record.



Thomas Demand: *Embassy IV*, 2007, C-print on Diasec, 78 inches square. Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York.



Barry Frydlander: Shirat Hayam ("End of Occupation?" Series #2), 2005, chromogenic print, approx. 5 by 11 feet. Courtesy Andrea Meislin Gallery, New York.

A very different reckoning of photography's role in delivering the truth is offered by Clinton Fein, who repurposed photographic appropriation to make a series of works based on the pictures of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib that came to public attention in April 2004. A South African-born, San Francisco-based First Amendment activist,<sup>9</sup> Fein hired models to reenact the notorious compositions (detainees piled in a human pyramid, forced to simulate fellatio, handcuffed to beds and bars in extreme positions), illuminated the *tableaux vivants* with penumbral and strangely intimate lighting, and displayed the enlarged pictures as high-quality chromogenic prints mounted on panel. (The originals and the reenactments can be compared at [www.clintonfein.com](http://www.clintonfein.com).)

Fein's counterfeits are not intended to reprise tired debates about originality and authorship. Unlike Sherrie Levine, who rephotographed Walker Evans's Depression-era images, or Thomas Ruff, whose enlargements of Internet images preserve and accentuate the flaws of screen grabs, Fein seized upon despicable amateur images, which unexpectedly had acquired public notoriety and probative value, and re-presented them in enhanced, painterly terms. His invocation of old-master painting, far from summoning up Christian martyrdom as do the Abu Ghraib canvases of Fernando Botero, delivers us to the dark threshold of inhumanity conjured by Goya.

A free speech watchdog, Fein also observed that when the soldiers' snapshots were picked up on the Web and disseminated by establishment news sources, online and in print, the genitals of the nude prisoners were blurred (as genitals are when the news media reproduce garden-variety pornographic images). That concession to good taste, Fein contends, served to downplay the sexual sadism and degradation inherent in the forms of abuse devised for the occasion, qualities he sought to restore to the situations when he pictured them. He further notes that the original Abu Ghraib pictures were themselves staged, with body pyramids topped off and thumbs-up signs flashed with an

awareness of the camera's presence and appetite. Curious about the moral proximity between witnessing and instigating, Fein set out to see if he might understand (he says that he did) something of the "mindset" of the abuser by assuming the role of photographer in the reenactment. In the end, and once again in contrast with Botero's canvases, Fein's photographs are about the torturers—the photographers among them—and not about the victims.

Something of Frydlander's determination to expose the processes of photographic contrivance and Fein's determination to reimagine the responsibility of the photographer as a witness came together when two equally uncharacteristic projects by Thomas Demand, *Grotto* and the "Yellowcake" series, were paired in an exhibition in Venice last summer. For both, Demand departed from his established procedure of selecting a found photograph, eliminating any figures, fabricating a life-size cardboard-and-paper replica of the mise-en-scène and photographing the model, which is subsequently destroyed. It's an exacting yet melancholy route to a patently processed image, for each generation of representation is at a further remove from some originary truthfulness.

To create the broodingly romantic photograph *Grotto* (2006), Demand used a hyperdetailed and massively material computer-rendered cardboard model of a cave in Mallorca. The model was spared destruction in order to be exhibited with Demand's photograph and a rambling, garrulous archive (postcards, tourist brochures, travel magazines, geology journals) that is all about caves. With the entire apparatus behind *Grotto* on view, Demand briefly ceased to grieve over photography's shortcomings and elisions, shoring up the photograph with the physical plenitude of model and documentation, and addressing an audience as if it can handle the problematic truth about pictures.

Something less physical but more substantive is afoot in "Yellowcake" (2007), a series of nine photographs that are based on Demand's customary

hand-built models. The pictures show the facade and interior of the embassy of Niger in Rome, a site that figured in the Bush administration's manufacturing of evidence that Saddam Hussein had attempted to buy uranium (called "yellowcake") for weapons of mass destruction. For the first time in his work, Demand committed to a subject without appropriating a preexisting photographic source. He visited the embassy, where photography is forbidden, and based the models on details he committed to memory and on cell phone pictures, which he shot surreptitiously, like a Leica-armed street photographer or Cold War-era spy.

Instead of reiterating the biases of documentation and our insurmountable remove from what a picture purports to represent, "Yellowcake" seems to assert the worth of even an incomplete or flawed record, and to invite us to consider the supplemental value of Demand's own testimony as an eyewitness. The impossibility of photographic objectivity and completeness no longer seems scandalous or even dispiriting, for the truth that is *known* to be circumscribed is better than no truth at all. Of course, Demand could have chosen to exhibit his cell phone pictures, though that gesture, besides wreaking havoc with his esthetic, might have had the effect of glamorizing the subterfuge at the expense of the purpose it served. Then again, how are we to distinguish the "Yellowcake" series—and Demand's intentions for it—from other banal office interiors he has shown? As was made clear by the disinformation that circulated regarding the very existence of Demand's cell phone photographs, the "Yellowcake" pictures can't "testify" without textual explication.<sup>10</sup>

### Photo, by the Book

Between January 2001 and June 2003, the Swiss photographer Jules Spinatsch was on the scene for five meetings of the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the G8 summit that convened in Genoa, New York, Evian/Geneva and Davos. Spinatsch trained his cameras not on the high-profile attendees, the heads of state, their ministers and advisers, but



*Jules Spinatsch: Panorama: World Economic Forum, Davos 2003. Camera A, Congress-Center North and Middle Entry, 2176 Still Shots, 24.01.03, 06h35-09h30, 2003, pigmented inkjet print, 6¼ by 18 feet. Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

on the visible signs of the security measures—floodlights, armored cars, street closures, armed patrols, fortified perimeters—which had been implemented to protect them. These elaborate precautions were instituted following the “Battle for Seattle,” when tens of thousands of antiglobalization protesters overwhelmed the police and National Guard to disrupt a November 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organization. Spinatsch published the photographs, with his own commentary and a pair of encomiums by two other essayists, in the 2005 book *Temporary Discomfort Chapter I-V*, the title being an ironic appropriation of the glancingly apologetic phrase used by law enforcement to describe how the lives of citizens are upended during periods of high threat alert. The book is a graphically eccentric production, with foldouts and composites, cleanly framed panoramas and views that are cropped or serendipitous looking, neat white margins for some pictures and full-page bleeds for others, all of which implies that a falsely uniform vision has not been imposed on the complex whole.

The photographs in *Temporary Discomfort* offer an assortment of recurrent motifs (gleaming limos and unsmiling bodyguards) along with specifics of place, like the firs of alpine Davos and the palms of sunny Genoa. One view of Genoa shows a stretch of the autostrada that follows the Ligurian coast, the highway eerily deserted under a fair sky. The ornamental palazzo facades that face the sea are partly obscured by a line of blocky shipping containers stacked above the roadway like improvised ramparts protecting the heights against a harborside attack. In New York, where the WEF convened in February 2002 in a gesture of solidarity with the post-9/11 city, Spinatsch shot some standard Gotham nocturnes (haloed streetlights, rain-slicked asphalt, prismatic skyscraper lobbies) which are not entirely defamiliarized—this is New York, after all—by the appearance of metal barricades, an NBC satellite unit and a dump truck positioned like a tank to block the street.

Spinatsch’s one conspicuously spectacular effort (it was acquired by MOMA, with accompanying

video, when selections from *Temporary Discomfort* were exhibited there in 2006-07) is an inkjet panorama, a grid of 2,176 stills harvested from a surveillance camera, one of three set up by the photographer around the Congress Center in Davos during the January 2003 WEF meeting. Between 6:35 and 9:30 one morning, the camera took roughly 13 shots a minute, as its orientation shifted vertically and horizontally by degrees with every shot. The edges of the panorama’s component cells don’t quite align, and the resulting Cubist effect (for we read a transit through time and space in the fragmented image) is abetted by the naturally muted colors of the early morning light. The snow-mantled Congress Center remains defiantly picturesque, and the picture stands out among Spinatsch’s otherwise dispassionate and often uningratiating pictures.

All of the pictures carry precisely annotated and bureaucratically repetitious titles (*Temporary Discomfort, Chapter III, Corporate Walls, New York, World Economic Forum WEF, February 2002, Zone B, Near Hotel Astoria, Sector 21/6* is typical), which the book supplements with diagrams and the artist’s detailed accounts of his movements and equipment. If the photographs are laconic, the text is not, and we’re invited to learn as much if not more from the words than from the pictures. Here’s Spinatsch on talking his way past the guards at the Waldorf-Astoria:

With a considerable amount of diplomatic maneuvering, persistence, and ultimately luck, I was the only photographer permitted access to Zone B with a participant’s badge, which was not charged with the electronic access code. . . . This illustrates to what degree images are a question of organization these days. The “decisive moment” often takes place ahead of the actual event.<sup>11</sup>

Time and again, Spinatsch shares how or why he achieved a particular image. By the time we’ve absorbed the book, from which pictures of participants and protesters (with the odd exception, as we’ll see) have been excluded, it’s the photographer who has become the protagonist of *Temporary Discomfort*. This is not unintended. In his essay for the book, NATO bureaucrat Jamie Shea praises Spinatsch for restoring trust in photogra-

phy with pictures that serve neither a message nor a cause but simply the photographer’s own idiosyncratic view of the world. On the precise issue of leaving out people and “incidents,” Shea writes:

Spinatsch does not elicit an immediate emotional reaction to his pictures, which is the essence of the technique of propaganda. . . . The pictures therefore are an introduction to mental analysis rather than a convenient emotional substitute for it. Spinatsch is really the thinking individual’s photographer.<sup>12</sup>

By the time Shea adds that Spinatsch’s project is “the antithesis of the commercial photograph which is produced on demand,” you have a pretty good summation of what is achieved by Spinatsch’s cultivation of idiosyncrasy: he distances the work from photojournalism’s discredited objectivity on the one hand, and from protest photography’s manipulative emotionalism on the other. With the latter disavowal of partisanship, Spinatsch parts ways with the tradition of Bruce Davidson, Danny Lyon, Gordon Parks and Chris Marker. More specifically, though, Spinatsch is distinguishing himself from the practitioners of the subgenre of antiglobalization protest photography, from Allan Sekula, who immersed himself in the Seattle protest,<sup>13</sup> and particularly from Joel Sternfeld, who, like Spinatsch, traveled to Genoa for the July 2001 G8 meeting and published, in 2003, *Treading on Kings: Protesting the G8 in Genoa*. Sternfeld’s book features views of a deserted Genoa that are akin to Spinatsch’s, but its heart is a series of portraits of protesters, which are accompanied by their personal accounts of what drew them to the cause and the city.<sup>14</sup>

Compared with Sternfeld’s album of portraits, Spinatsch’s entire book includes just one close-up of a protester, a lean, bare-chested young man in Genoa, casual as a skateboarder, perched on what seems to be a panel truck bearing protest slogans. You can hear Spinatsch’s dismissal of Sekula and Sternfeld when he writes:

What was there to be photographed? Naturally, there had to be an iconic image of an activist of the type 2001, but then it was necessary to withdraw from the protest in order to not succumb to its predictably sensationalist

temptations. The alternative was a stroll along the red zone, as close as possible to the actual conference location, the Palazzo Ducale—as close to power as possible.<sup>15</sup>

It's a glib remark, and a touch self-congratulatory, too, as Spinatsch portrays himself forgoing seductions to prowl, to infiltrate, to expose.<sup>16</sup> Antiglobalization protesters may be generic and even dispensable, but subversive photographers are not. As the second essayist, Martin Jaeggi, writes, "its cunning, irony, and sober clarity make *Temporary Discomfort* a manifesto against the tradition of historic photojournalism. Spinatsch does not want to be a hero. He is rather a scout behind the frontlines, a spy in the enemy's camp."

If Spinatsch's texts portray him as an intrepid and wily agent, Taryn Simon's suggest the purposefulness of the methodical investigator. Her book *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*

spirit was to be read in everyday faces and found in ordinary places of work and play. Simon even includes an oblique nod to Frank, a picture of the broadcast studio of a U.S.-government-run Arabic-language TV station that echoes her predecessor's view of an early TV studio in Burbank. But where Frank hit the road to encounter America on Main Street, Simon is on the trail of an America that is exceptional, administered and furtive.

Published to coincide with the photographs' debut at New York's Whitney Museum, Simon's book features 57 primary pictures, seven of which face a second, supplemental image of the subject, and one of which consists of a grid comprising six individual portraits. All the plates are horizontal, and each appears above a descriptive title and a more or less fact-filled explanatory text of some 250 words or more. From the sober gray covers to its allotment of just 5¾ by 7½ inches (of a 13¼-by-10-inch page) to each color plate, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* has been designed to resemble a dossier or ledger.

Curators Elisabeth Sussman and Tina Kukielski worked with Simon to select the 17 pictures that were exhibited as chromogenic color prints (each 37¼ by 44½ inches). The more generous size, rich colors and museum context inevitably spoke of art-objecthood and collecting, but each print was paired with its respective text to maintain its status as an "annotated photograph," a format intended as a corrective to the medium's susceptibility to estheticization, a problem articulated in the 1970s, as the curators note, by Sekula and Rosler. Further underscoring the marriage of text and image, Simon's book rested on a lectern positioned just outside the entrance to the Whitney gallery.

Simon's compositions are relatively quiet, even repetitive in structure (they tend to be straight-on or to resolve along a stable diagonal), and they come across as considered but not staged. The theatrical lighting—here murky or selective, there fluorescent and deadening—induces an uneasy anticipation. She can make a windowed jury simulation room look as scary as one of Devlin's gas chambers. In one confessional instance,

where—to be honest—very little is at stake, Simon goes out of her way to expose the infiltration of her own enterprise by trickery: her close-up of the fearsome-looking Death Star II model used in the *Star Wars* film series faces a picture of the banal fluorescent-lit, plywood-floored storage room in which the model languishes along with other props and costumes in the Lucasfilm archive.

If *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* critiques the credulity implicit in mid-20th-century street photography, it also breathes new life into an older photographic tradition, that of bringing the marveling viewer face-to-face with all that is remote, rare and often shudder inducing. Many of the images—a hibernating bear and her cubs in a West

## Spinatsch distances his work from both the discredited objectivity of photojournalism and the overt partisanship of protest photography as exemplified by Sekula and Sternfeld.

Virginia national forest, a Lakota ritual performed in Texas—appeal to the same appetite that once sustained a vast subscriber base for *Life* magazine and *National Geographic*. Sometimes Simon serves up haute trivia or Hollywoodiana, and sometimes things are not so much hidden as stored, like the Nixon "gifts" warehoused at the National Archives and the freshly inked currency at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. On occasion the "hidden and unfamiliar" simply presupposes an urban and even Northeastern audience, one that doesn't know much about clear burning, cloud seeding, avalanche control or charismatic preachers who handle snakes.

Simon courts a particularly ominous mood with topics that involve matters governmental, military, corporate or medical (an avian quarantine facility, a debris field at a treatment center for infectious medical waste, a training center that offers three-day workshops in interrogation resistance), while presenting pictures that are superficially calm, compared to, say, Lewis Baltz's glowering, marrow-chilling pictures of labs and research facilities from 1989 to '91. Oddly, though, Simon's more outré subjects—a woman spread-eagled in a clinic awaiting the surgical reconstruction of her hymen, an inbred and mentally retarded white tiger named Kenny—hark back to the sort of sensationalizing anthology epitomized by the 1962 film *Mondo Cane*, which flogged everything from the liver-fattening practices of goose farmers to an Yves Klein painting performance with the same breathless tagline: "All The Scenes You Will See In This Film Are True And Taken Only From Life . . . If Often They Are Shocking It Is Because There Are Many Astounding, Even Unbelievable Things In This World."

Something of that bombast is furnished by the essayists who weigh in on Simon's behalf. In the foreword, novelist Salman Rushdie declares, "In a historical period in which so many people are making such great efforts to conceal the truth from the mass of people, an artist like Taryn Simon is an invaluable counter-force." He praises Simon for "going to the ambiguous boundaries where dangers—physical, intellectual, even moral—may await." When he writes "I am always immensely grateful to people who do impossible things on my behalf and bring back the picture. It means I don't have to do it," you might be inclined to think that Rushdie read—but missed the sarcasm of—Rosler's summation of documentary photography: "Documentary testifies, finally, to the bravery or (dare we name it?) the manipulativeness and savvy of the photographer, who entered a situation of physical danger, social restrictedness, human decay, or combinations of these and saved us the trouble."<sup>17</sup>

On the whole more measured is the book's principal essay (an excerpt served as the Whitney's intro-



Joel Sternfeld: "Because it's right," A Protester, Genoa, 2001, C-print, 24 by 20 inches. Courtesy Luhring Augustine Gallery, New York.

(2007) is the fruit of four years of research and shooting, during which Simon secured permission to photograph locations and events that are typically off-limits to the public and the camera. An experienced photojournalist, her prior slice of Americana was *The Innocents* (2003), a volume of photographs of 44 men and one woman, all wrongly convicted of violent crimes and subsequently exonerated. If *The Innocents* tells us something about Simon's predilection for the dark story and the righteous cause, her later book's title alerts us to the fact that the new series is, in part, a response to Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938) and Robert Frank's *The Americans* (French edition 1958, U.S. edition 1959), landmarks of documentary photography which posited that the national

**If Simon critiques the credulity implicit in street photography, she also revives an even older photographic mission: bring to the viewer all that is remote, rare, chilling.**



*Taryn Simon: Hymenoplasty, Cosmetic Surgery, P.A., Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 2007, chromogenic print, 37¼ by 44½ inches. Courtesy Steidl/Gagosian Gallery.*

ductory wall text), which was authored by curators Sussman and Kukielski. Yet even their characterization of the project skews toward anxiety and despair. They assert that Simon's pictures show that "the American soil is wrapped up in a political, cultural, and economic quagmire," and that an "unwavering sense of doom is the undercurrent of *An American Index*."<sup>18</sup> Simon's own brief texts (which are written with researchers and editors) are restrained in comparison. Nevertheless, the facts she deploys are plainly intended to weaponize the pictures. A pewter-toned study of the spherical Dynamo III, which is a Boullée-worthy model of the earth's core at the University of Maryland, goes from mysterious to sinister only once we read that it is filled with a highly flammable liquid, and that scientists use the apparatus to study the catastrophic consequences of the decay of the earth's magnetic field. That hymenoplasty patient is neither a trophy wife nor an aging actress, so we read, but a young woman of Palestinian descent who (in a case of patriarchal oppression?) will be deemed unmarried by her family and community unless her "virginity" is restored by Dr. Bernard Stern (a Jewish name?),

whose fee (blood money or fair recompense for honor recovered?) is \$3,500. So much can be insinuated by a just-the-facts-ma'am approach.

While some of the information seems aimed at generating free-floating anxiety or suggesting culpability, other details meant to explain the pictures seem undercooked. What are we to make of the fact that low-vision students from the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults have been employed as flower arrangers at 1-800-flowers.com, or that the thick smoke generated by field burning

two pictures, one full page and one small, for each subject. The little picture sits above a bank of data (the veteran's name, age, brigade or division, date and place of injury, the date and place of the photographic shoot) and faces a sentence excerpted from a longer statement that is opposite the main portrait on the next pair of pages. When some of the pictures were exhibited during the summer of 2007 at Jen Bekman in New York, the information appeared with edited statements on the gallery walls.

Sgt Erik Castro and Lt Jordan Johnson (the one woman among the 20) are shown engaged in rehab exercises. The rest have been photographed by Berman in poses of relative or total immobility and—considering the many shots of the veterans on beds—implied withdrawal from the world. Pfc Alan Jermaine Lewis, head lowered as if in despair, extends one of his prosthetic legs across the bed in his Milwaukee home. Spc Sam Ross is rendered a virtual deer in headlights when Berman silhouettes the blinded veteran, one trouser leg hitched up to expose his prosthesis, against the night sky and illuminates him unevenly with what reads as the sketchy light of low beams.

The quote excerpted from Ross's statement may mock him more than honor him: "It was the best experience of my life." Ross is not alone in harboring good feelings about the old life and his decision to serve. All in all, the veterans express little outrage, although there is bafflement, resentment, resignation and stoicism. The one exception ("I'm burning on the inside. I'm burning.") is Cpl Tyson Johnson III, pictured at home in Alabama backed up against a chain-link fence, who explains that he has to return his National Guard enlistment bonus (\$2,999) because he failed to complete his tour.

Berman's book brims with outrage, even if her subjects don't. Anger shadows the cover, which shows the face of Pfc Randell Clunen as a dissolving specter worthy of Francis Bacon. Anger floods the recurring black pages, and it finds a voice in the afterword written by Tim Origer, a combat Marine wounded in Vietnam and an active member of the organization Veterans for Peace. Origer's final sentence, unexpectedly, addresses Berman, and it sets out her mission in no uncertain terms:

Until literacy again resurfaces in our culture I personally believe it will be necessary to push a mix of text and images such as yours into the faces of our contemporaries to awaken them from their comfortable and complacent dreams.<sup>19</sup>

Origer would have been satisfied with text alone, if that could have sufficed. Berman published no essay of her own in *Purple Hearts: Back from Iraq*, but the statement she wrote to accompany the 2007 exhibition explains the editorializing embedded in the photographs:

Since October 2003, I have been making portraits of American soldiers who were wounded in the Iraq War. I seek them out in their hometowns, after they have been discharged from military hospitals. I photograph them alone, mainly in their rooms, which to me feel like little cages. I strip them of patriotic colors and heroic postures. I see them alienated and dispossessed, left empty handed amid dreams of glory and escape.

While their physical wounds are profound, it is their psychological condition that is my primary focus.

As many of these soldiers joined the military to escape economic and social hardship, seeing them back in a domestic setting all alone with no support sug-

has been "linked to fatal driving accidents"? Given the high bar set by the likes of Hans Haacke and Mark Lombardi, Simon's texts seem thin, and they offer less hard information than a Google jockey would amass in an afternoon. Once you take stock of what has been left out (surely it's pertinent that the transatlantic telephone cable which connects the U.S. and the U.K. is owned by an Indian corporation that can be traced back to the time of British colonialism?), the texts seem as selective, as partial, as *edited* and *manipulated* as photographs. This is no small flaw if words and pictures—on their own merely "two inadequate systems," in the durable words of Rosler—are meant to collaborate in service to the truth.

**T**he portraits and testimonies in Nina Berman's *Purple Hearts: Back from Iraq* (2004) introduce us to 20 severely wounded veterans of the Iraq conflict. She sought them out in military hospitals, on bases and at their homes between October 2003 and April 2004, and her photographs show their scars and prostheses, and also something of the environments or circumstances in which they were living. It's a modest book, just 8 inches square, with



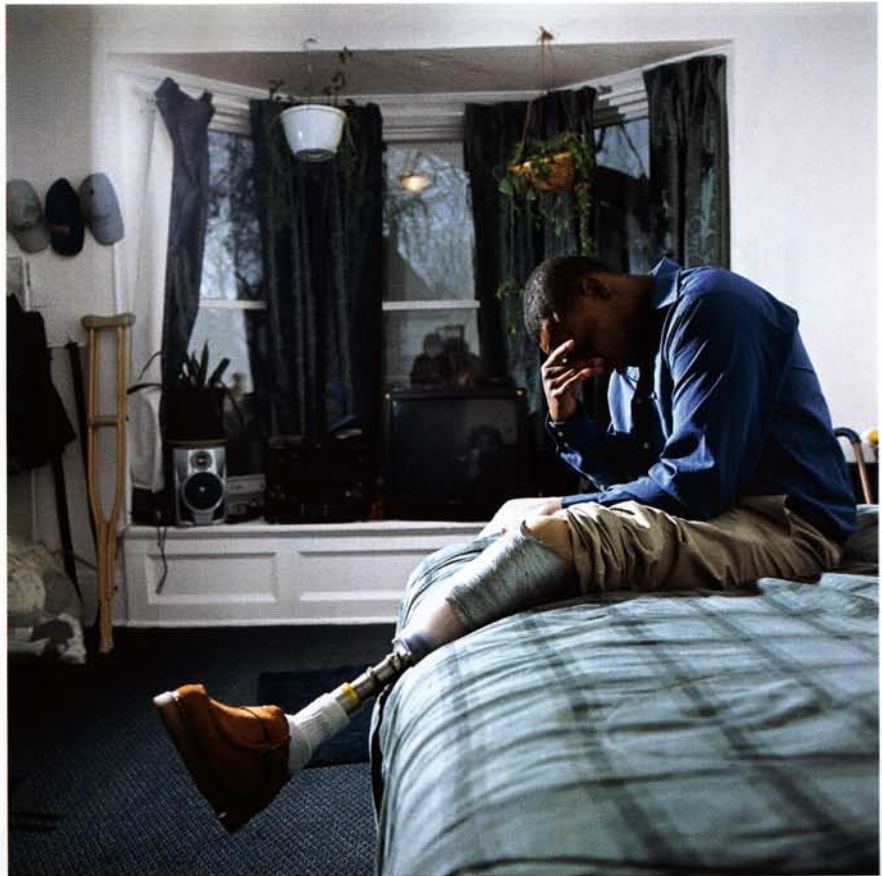
gests that their dreams of transformation and success through military service were painfully naïve.

Meeting so many severely disabled young men and women was deeply disturbing to me. I felt complicit because they had fought in my name. And I felt the divide of privilege because I did not have to make a similar sacrifice.

Is there staging, not to mention exploitation, in “stripping” the soldiers of signs of pride? Are the veterans really “all alone,” or did Berman send the family from the room? Is there condescension in perceiving their homes (furnished with souvenirs, worn sofas, big-breasted pinups and hanging plants) as “little cages”? Feeling “complicit,” Berman arranges for us to feel the same. She seems to have taken as a model Simon’s *The Innocents*, rendering the veterans, like those wrongly incarcerated, as victims of an unjust system, and fortifying the portraits (as does Simon’s book) with data and the testimonies of those portrayed. Some of the connections may even be subliminal. Berman’s portrait of Pfc Lewis seems almost foretold, down to the plaid comforter, by Simon’s singular image of Hector Gonzalez on the bed in his Brooklyn home (though Gonzalez, unlike Lewis, engages the camera directly). And the nocturnal portrait of Spc Ross seems anticipated by Simon’s picture of Charles Irvin Fain (18 years for murder), illuminated from behind by car headlights at the scene of the crime of which he has been exonerated. But the difference is key: where Simon permits, even encourages us to consider what human judgment and evidence—photographic or otherwise—might reliably disclose about the truth, Berman would fan our anger and pity at the expense of such criticality and the veterans’ individual agency as well.

**W**hile Berman’s photographs were still on view at Bekman, another series of portraits of veterans started to appear around Manhattan on

*Timothy Greenfield-Sanders: Dawn Halfaker, 2006, digital pigment print, 40 by 30 inches.*



*Nina Berman: Alan Jermaine Lewis, 2004, pigment print, 28 inches square. Courtesy Jen Bekman Gallery, New York.*

posters for the HBO documentary *Alive Day Memories: Home from Iraq*. (An “alive day” is the date a soldier or Marine sustains, and survives, a traumatic injury.) The photos were the work of Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, who had been on the set in November-December 2006 to photograph the service people interviewed by actor James Gandolfini. The project evolved from an advertising campaign (which also included enormous blowups in the street-level windows, facing MOMA, of the public library’s 53rd Street branch, where a free public screening was held) into a suite of 13 archival digital prints that was exhibited at Steven Kasher in New York (print size 20 by 16 inches) and WG.21 Wetterling in Stockholm (print size 40 by 30 inches).

A “celebrity photographer” in both senses of the term, Greenfield-Sanders is famous for shooting famous people (actors, politicians, fashion leaders, porn stars, art-world luminaries) in what has become a trademark format: the subject is shown against a monochrome backdrop, rarely with a prop or attribute. The negative’s border is often visible at the print’s edges. Artifice declares itself as an enforced paring down. The portraits of the Iraq War veterans observe the same rules, though in this instance there is an additional and touching congruence between Green-

field-Sanders’s reductive style and the abstraction of the human body that is the essence of amputation.

All but two of the subjects wear street clothes and are posed against a black ground. Army SSgt Jay Wilkerson is shirtless (to show his scarred shoulder), while Marine SSgt John Jones is seated against a white backdrop that sets off the dark jacket of his dress uniform and the mirror-polished black shoes he wears on the feet of his prosthetic legs. Cpl Jonathan Bartlett, also a double amputee, stands up and holds a baseball bat (did he bring it to the set?). First Lt Dawn Halfaker clutches her artificial arm in her good left hand. The arm’s design was a main topic of her interview with Gandolfini, but if you cruise Greenfield-Sanders’s website ([www.greenfield-sanders.com](http://www.greenfield-sanders.com)), you might decide that the picture of Halfaker bears a fleeting but uncanny resemblance to his portrait of actress Rose McGowan, whose arm bends across her torso to lift her shirt.

Paradoxically, it’s the very imposition of Greenfield-Sanders’s trademark style that allows the photographer to get out of our way. We *know* that his portraits are posed. We *know* that his particular, direct mode of address democratically imparts a quotient of glamour to all his subjects: attention must be paid. Whether we see a full figure or a close-up of the face, each veteran is imposing in the frame, a standard device of portraiture that conveys an air of self-possession. They all look cool. We look a little longer. Did they fight in a different

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# Rules of Engagement

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war than Berman's veterans? Or does a documentary that honors survival require the selection of more resilient subjects?

There's no official book to contextualize the "Alive Day Memories" portraits, no commissioned essay or artist's statement to lay out the conceptual program the photographs are intended to serve. When the series was shown in Stockholm, a catalogue reproduced the pictures with the requisite information about injuries, a tendentious essay by the dealer and some postdocumentary updates from the HBO website ([www.hbo.com/aliveday](http://www.hbo.com/aliveday)) by the 10 veterans whose interviews made it into the film.<sup>20</sup> In his very brief statement in the catalogue, Greenfield-Sanders simply describes the HBO assignment and his determination, upon meeting the veterans on the set, "to hide my immediate and strong emotional response to their condition."<sup>21</sup> The best, which is to say the most provocative, contextualization of the portraits just may be the one provided by the HBO website, which not only hosts the veterans' blogs but also offers links to their personal pages and shows each Greenfield-Sanders image in the company of family pictures, school portraits and snapshots from Iraq. Not only is the authority of any one picture challenged, but the authority of any one photographer is, too.

## The Tortured Medium

So, just how much do we still want to believe in pictures? Sometimes a sense of historical revelation combined with the apparent righteousness of a photographic project can be enough to relieve us of the burden of total vigilance. Take, for example, the soberly appreciative reception that has greeted "The American War," a traveling exhibition of photographs shot by Harrell Fletcher in June 2005



View of Harrell Fletcher's "The American War" project, 2005; at White Columns.

inside Ho Chi Minh City's War Remnants Museum. That modest institution displays photographs and texts which are intended to document the grievous damage inflicted by the U.S. military on the citizens and the landscape of Vietnam, damage that reaches to the present day in the form of that nation's high rate of birth defects and toxic environment.

The pictures on display in Ho Chi Minh City (which have been harvested from many sources, including American news magazines) and their

descriptive labels were photographed by Fletcher on a walk-through with an ordinary digital camera. To see "The American War" is to see an exhibition of photographs of an exhibition of photographs of photographs. It's a triple-filtered situation worthy of Demand. While the rough immediacy of Fletcher's spectator shots has been praised for underscoring the role played by point of view (American, Vietnamese and Fletcher's own) in compiling a photographic narrative, there has been no speculation about the museum that is the subject of his pictures, no querying of the editing and organization of its displays, the vetting of its photographs, or the accuracy (descriptive, interpretive, statistical) of the captions. Jerry Saltz, for example, praised Fletcher's "The American War" for being "devoid of the furtive fictiveness of Walid Raad's Lebanese Civil War projects" without asking whether the same could be said of the War Remnants Museum itself.<sup>22</sup> Because the Vietnamese people have been sinned against, should we assume that their institutions deploy photographs and information accurately and truthfully?

In October 2007, I visited the Contemporary Art Center of Atlanta to see Fletcher's "The American War," and found that it was being shown with Nubar Alexanian's "S.O.P.," an exhibition of black-and-white photographs taken on the set of Errol Morris's new documentary on the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, *Standard Operating Procedure*.<sup>23</sup> Morris's film (see "War Movies," this issue) includes interviews with military personnel who appear in and took the infamous prison pictures as well as suggestively stylized (cropped, blurred, nightmarish) reenactments of some of those incidents. Alexanian's production photographs include portraits of the principals interviewed as well as pictures of the reenactments, which were based on

*Nubar Alexanian: Reenactment of OGA official with Prisoner, 2007, quadtone carbon print, 20 by 30 inches, from the book Nonfiction: Photographs by Nubar Alexanian from the Film Sets of Errol Morris.*



both the torture photographs (Fein's source) and the first-person accounts freshly recorded by Morris. The photographs are included in a book titled *Nonfiction: Photographs by Nubar Alexanian from the Film Sets of Errol Morris*. A statement on the Atlanta CAC blog describes the pairing of "The American War" and "S.O.P." as intended to provoke conversation about the wars then and now, but it also provokes some thoughts about the meaning of "nonfiction" photography, Fletcher's and Alexanian's.

Not surprisingly, the truth value of pictures was on the mind of Errol Morris as he steered through an analysis of the Abu Ghraib photographs for *Standard Operating Procedure* (a documentary he has called a "nonfiction horror movie"). Along the way, he's been writing essays on photographic veracity and posting them online (in the form of a blog hosted by the *New York Times*).<sup>24</sup> Morris's writings, though perhaps more conversational, possess the structure and momentum of his formidable documentaries: thorough, even dogged, disinclined to grandstand and fiercely principled, he takes an issue down to zero and then orders the facts he has confirmed or unearthed, never losing sight of the moral dimension of the outcome.

The running test case in Morris's essays is the question of whether (as Sontag and others have contended) Roger Fenton staged his most celebrated photograph from the Crimean War, *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1855), one of a pair that shows the same site with certain disparities. Experts in many disciplines (photochemistry, military history, forensics reconstruction) weigh in with curators. Morris even travels to the Crimea to locate the place where Fenton positioned his camera. It's an engrossing tale, at the end of which science and sharp (unprejudiced) eyes join forces to resolve the sequencing of Fenton's two pictures. But no one can say with any authority *who* intervened between the two shots, much less *why*. The rambling yet elegant investigation eventually takes him back to what artists (and Sontag, for that matter) knew 30 years ago: "photographs are neither true nor false in and of themselves. They are only true or false with respect to statements that we make about them or the questions that we might ask of them." Morris's neat summation has all the mundane logic of a truism. But it also has the ring of truth. □

1. The film was based on Buzz Bissinger's feature "Shattered Glass," *Vanity Fair*, September 1998, pp. 176-90.

2. The controversy surrounding Capa's *Death of a Loyalist Militiaman, Cerro Muriano, Córdoba Front, Spain, September 5, 1936*, which has been abetted by the fact that the negative has been presumed forever lost, was minutely laid out in a prominent didactic installation in the recent exhibition "This Is War! Robert Capa at Work" at New York's International Center of Photography [Sept. 26, 2007-Jan. 6, 2008]. As the *New York Times* reported on Jan. 27, 2008, the discovery in the 1990s of thousands of Capa's negatives and their transfer to ICP last December may resolve the dispute.

3. Luc Sante, *Evidence*, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992.

4. In June 2004, the Senate voted to uphold a ban, instituted in March 2003, on photographing flag-draped coffins arriving at Dover AFB. That ban had been challenged when more than 300 such images were posted online at [www.thememoryhole.org](http://www.thememoryhole.org).

5. Peter Galassi, "Unorthodox," *Jeff Wall*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2007, p. 44. If Wall's title evokes Gauvain, his method recalls Géricault's research for the *Raft of the Medusa*.

6. See "Image Simulations, Computer Manipulations: Some Considerations," reprinted in Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, MIT, 2004, pp. 278-79. Rosler reports that the essay was first crafted in 1988 and underwent several revisions in the intervening years.

7. Peter Galassi, "Afterword," *Barry Frydlander: Place and Time*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2007, n.p.

8. Rachel Wolff, "The Annotated Artwork," *New York Magazine*, July 30, 2007, pp. 72-73.

9. Information about Fein's advocacy efforts as well as his art can be found on his website, [www.clintonfein.com](http://www.clintonfein.com). He is also the force behind the website [www.annoy.com](http://www.annoy.com).

10. Of course, text can obscure as well as elucidate. When "Yellowcake" was shown at Venice's Fondazione Cini [June 7-July 7, 2007] the Fondazione Prada, which sponsored the exhibition, issued a press release stating that Demand worked entirely from memory and without any photographic sources. The exhibition catalogue, however, mentions the cell phone pictures. (See Alex Farquharson, "The Paper Trail," *Processo Grottesco/Yellowcake*, Milan, Progetto Prada Arte, 2007, p. 64.) When "Yellowcake" was shown in New York at 303 gallery [Nov. 3-Dec. 22, 2007], the press release (still online, as I write) attributed the compositions to Demand's memory alone. In response to my January e-mail inquiry, the gallery affirmed that cell phone images were used as well.

11. Jules Spinatsch, *Temporary Discomfort Chapter I-V*, Baden, Lars Müller, 2005, n.p.

12. Jamie Shea, "Sorry, But We Did Refugees Last Week," in *Temporary Discomfort*, n.p.

13. Sekula's Seattle pictures are presented as 81 projected color slides in the time-based *Waiting for Tear Gas [white globe to black]* (1999-2000) and appear in the book, authored with Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Claire, *Five Days that Shook the World: The Battle for Seattle and Beyond*, London and New York, Verso, 2001. For Sekula, unlike Spinatsch, the way to the "truth" was through personal involvement and a rejection of high-tech equipment, but he is akin to Spinatsch in his cultivation of indirection vis-à-vis the main event. Describing his own alternative to the empty conventions of photojournalism, Sekula wrote, "The working idea was to move with the flow of protest, from dawn to three a.m. if need be, taking in the lulls, the waiting and the margins of events. The rule of thumb for this sort of anti-photojournalism: no flash, no telephoto zoom lens, no gas mask, no auto-focus, no press pass and no pressure to grab at all costs the one defining image of dramatic violence. Later, working at the light table, and reading the increasingly stereotypical descriptions of the new face of protest, I realized all the more that a simple descriptive physiognomy was warranted. The alliance on the streets was indeed stranger, more varied and inspired" (p. 122).

14. Stefania Galante, Alexander Stille, Joel Sternfeld, *Treading on Kings*, Göttingen, Steidl, 2002. The volume also features a photograph of the family of Carlo Giuliani, a protester who was killed by the police, and a reflection on that death by Stille, who points out that the question of the use of excessive police force in the shooting of Giuliani hinges on the evaluation of a photograph showing the young activist brandishing a fire extinguisher: was it taken minutes before his death or does it show him at the very instant of threatening the police and thus eliciting their fire?

15. Spinatsch, n.p.

16. Elsewhere, Spinatsch is more self-deprecating, as when he describes his failed attempt to coordinate the feeds from three surveillance cameras, but his bravado is undiminished when he explains the reason for using

## The impossibility of photographic objectivity and completeness no longer seems scandalous or even dispiriting, for the truth that is known to be qualified is better than no truth at all.

those devices: "I now wanted to work on par with the security forces and to subversively turn their technology against themselves. Just like in a high-tech war I wanted to create images without being physically present by using remote-controlled cameras." It's interesting to contrast Spinatsch's characterization of his campaign as a sort of DIY project with the work of Trevor Paglen, who uses highly sophisticated telescopes and calculations (he calls the technique "Limit-Telephotography") to pinpoint and photograph top-secret U.S. military installations [see review, *A.i.A.*, Mar. '07].

17. "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)," reprinted in Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001*, p. 180.

18. The curators' gloomy view found expression in a peculiar bias of the selection of 17 pictures for the Whitney's small gallery: there seemed to have been a determination to sharply downplay the human presence in the series. Simon's book includes Klansmen, Orthodox Jews, military personnel, Girl Scouts whose mothers are in prison, an entomologist, the co-founder of a Sikh-run private security company and more. The show, by contrast, confined the human presence to a mannequinlike surgical patient, two wraithlike reflections in the glass of a mock jury room and a cancer sufferer, who is shown in his wheelchair after having procured his life-ending prescription under Oregon's Death with Dignity Act. Because the events, spectacles and facilities in the pictures chosen for the Whitney feature no technicians, professionals or active parties of any kind, the exhibition played to the paranoid conviction that nameless and faceless forces are at work across the land.

19. Tim Origer, "Afterword," in Nina Berman, *Purple Hearts: Back from Iraq*, London, Trolley, 2004, n.p. Verlyn Klinkenborg introduces *Purple Hearts* with an acid meditation on the cheapening of the word "hero" after 9/11.

20. In "Portraits of War," his catalogue essay, dealer Björn Wetterling condemns American aggression and Swedish arms manufacturers, and reports that two "prestigious" New York galleries declined to show the photographs. The absence from the catalogue of personal updates from the veterans not included in the film (and therefore lacking an HBO blog statement) creates an ominous impression. See *Timothy Greenfield-Sanders Alive Day Memories: Home from Iraq*, Stockholm, WG.21 Wetterling Gallery, 2007.

21. In a Sept. 27, 2007, article in the *New York Times*, Greenfield-Sanders simply endorsed the documentary for its effort to provide visibility: "I think we need to see this. We don't see the dead coming back in coffins. We're sheltered from the injured. We just don't see it. It's all been brilliantly hidden from view. So this documentary is very important in letting us see these people, let us know who they are, and make us ask if this war is worth it."

22. Jerry Saltz, *Village Voice*, May 25, 2006, archived at [www.artnet.com/magazine/features/saltz/saltz5-26-06.asp](http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/saltz/saltz5-26-06.asp).

23. The photographs are included in Nubar Alexanian, *Nonfiction: Photographs by Nubar Alexanian from the Film Sets of Errol Morris*, Gloucester, Walker Creek Press, 2008.

24. The postings are at <http://morris.blogs.nytimes.com>.