Visual Conflicts

Visual Conflicts:
On the Formation of Political Memory in the History of Art and Visual Cultures

Edited by

Paul Fox and Gil Pasternak

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Visual Conflicts:
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Gil Pasternak and Paul Fox
The editors

INTRODUCTION

IMAGES OF CONFLICT

GIL PASTERNAK AND PAUL FOX

This collection of essays has its origins in a conference held at University College London in March 2009 which addressed visual responses to politically-motivated acts of violence of all types, including armed conflict. The event provided a platform for developing links between the politics of violence and issues of memory formation and visual representation. Working out of the analytical framework of the discipline of art history it nevertheless considered the entire field of visual representation to include, for instance, documentary film and reportage, as well as images produced by individual agents for private consumption but subsequently made public in one way or another. It considered questions such as how pre-existing narratives of conflict prevailing within popular culture and the academy condition the way in which meaning is derived from representations of politically motivated acts of violence, and explored the implications for academic inquiry posed by shifts in imaging technologies and the experience of war itself.

This book aims to reflect on some of the theoretical and conceptual preoccupations influencing the way politically-motivated acts of violence of all types are addressed across the academic field of visual cultures today, as well as providing a cross section of responses to visual representations of conflict. Like the conference, it was conceived as a reaction to the preoccupation with trauma and the forensic search for indications of its presence, tacitly established today as the "obvious", naturalised, and dominant mode of theorising an "appropriate" response to the experience of conflict. We, the editors, share François Hartog's concern with what he calls the "regime of historicity", understood as both "the way in which a society considers its past and deals with it" and "the methods of self-awareness in a human community"; in particular, we note Hartog's interest in the recent rise to dominance of what he describes as the "presentist" regime of historicity: "the swift development of the category of the present until it has become obvious that the present is omnipresent” (Hartog 2005, 7-8). In contrast with the nineteenth-century “modern” regime of historicity invested in the development of the nation-state as a spatial unit, and in the production of ostensibly objective accounts of irreversible progress over “linear, irreversible and teleological time”, a presentist regime typically privileges memory over history; is located in the quest to hang onto the past and to collapse temporal distance; and finds its home in accounts of trauma, an address to catastrophic events, and a haunting past that is present in everyday life (Lorenz 2010, 70). The presentist conceptual frame shapes contemporary modes of representing the past. But we consider that the contemporary obsession with trauma is merely one of many possible ways of exploring responses to conflict in a disciplinary field of inquiry invested in the roles assigned to both memory and history in shaping the methods of self-awareness in a human community.

A significant reorganisation of knowledge and social practices is occurring today, as digitisation and its technologies transform the ability to produce images and to communicate at unprecedented speeds to mass audiences. Writing about an equivalent period in the nineteenth-century, Jonathan Crary suggests that the era entailed “a massive reorganisation of knowledge and social practices that modified in myriad ways the productive, cognitive and desiring capacities of the human subject” (Crary, Jonathan 1990, 3). For Crary, an “observer” is “one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations” (1990, 6). In a period of rapid change, an observer’s rule-bound responses function as components of a disciplinary field in which they were invested in a struggle for their enduring legitimacy, manifested in the vocabulary of epistemology. The task here will be to identity just some of the vocabulary that is currently being modified, recycled, negated, abandoned–or simply upheld–which serves to establish and police boundaries between what academic authors, critics, and artists claim are legitimate statements about the experience of conflict.

We, the editors, note a general disinclination to deal dispassionately with war and militarism in the disciplines of art history and visual cultures. Theories of trauma and victimhood are commonly invoked as the only possible–acceptable and ethical–start points from which to make meaning from images produced within or in response to political conflicts. Alex Roland’s observations relating to the history of technology are applicable in this context:

> Among the distinguishing characteristics of [the history of technology] is an aversion in scholarly circles to things military ... Many scholars simply

> find war and its associated activities distasteful. Comparable distaste has not stopped historians of medicine from studying epidemic diseases, nor has it stopped historians of science from studying eugenics or historians of technology from studying sewers. But it does seem to deter many scholars from studying war or things military ... Much of the literature on technology and war succeeds in the academy by presenting a decidedly antimilitary tone or interpretation. Indeed, part of its success may be derived from resonance with the antimilitary sentiment within the academy. (1995, S84–85)

In this context we note Michel Foucault's analysis of the regulatory and classificatory work that is constitutive of the "mechanics of power" of the academy:

> In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [disciplinary methods] became general formulas of domination ... The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formulation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely ... The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. (1991, 137-138)

The limitations implicit in this criticism of the "political anatomy" of academic discourse are further explored by Roger Woods (1996), who cautions against research that shies away from engagement with ideas, ideology or imagery, not necessarily because, as he would have it, "they are seen as surface phenomena which are unlikely to produce as much information about motives and purpose as a consideration of circumstantial evidence" (1996, 5), but because the content is deemed unpalatable. Some of the visual material discussed in the chapters ahead falls into the unfashionable, if not necessarily the unpalatable, category today. We hold that it is necessary to address images of conflict even if they may initially appear unattractive because they do not operate as one might wish.

We also consider that it is necessary explicitly to locate research in its broader historical circumstances. In the context of certain literary responses to the First World War, Woods notes that "there is a tendency for modern commentators to indulge in a snapshot approach ... to home in on individual statements, on fragments of text" (Woods, Roger 1996, 7-8). The problem with this, he argues, is that such statements are thereby stripped of their nuance and are presented as unambiguous. The outcome is distorted, "handy" version of the First World War:

> It has been suggested that books on the First World War ... fall into one of two categories: either they show it as a heroic event or as a senseless torture. In nationalist writings on the war it is a test of manhood and heroism, in pacifist writings the collapse of humanity. (Woods 1995, 7–8)

We argue that an equivalent tendency towards a handy version of appraising visual responses to conflict is frequently discernable in the field of visual cultures today, occasioned by tacit rules, codes and practices that serve to police the boundaries of a disciplinary field. Images on the subject of warfare and violence are too frequently considered only in relation to one of Woods's two categories: as heroising narratives, in which case they are likely to be regarded as uninteresting (or unpalatable), or as estimable because they address the horror and futility of violence.

The moral conviction that underpins this liberal outlook is evident in work influenced by the "New Art History" of the 1970s and 80s. Consider, for example, Paul Wood's "The avant-garde and the Paris Commune" (1999). Addressing art practice in the years immediately after the Paris Commune, Wood observes that Meyer Schapiro considered Impressionism had a "moral aspect": that it stands in relation to purposive action and decision in relation to modern life. Wood notes that T.J. Clark points to a "delicate problem" in this context: works including Pierre August Renoir's 1872 *Pont Neuf* do not deal with the recent uprising. For Clark, avant-gardist works that addressed quotidian bourgeois modernity in the years immediately after the Paris Commune of 1871 appear "untroubled by [their] subject's meanings", and that they are "not helped by this innocence" (Wood 1999, 121). The actual, not so delicate, problem here, however, is that for an art historian of the "new left", the "social history of art" is the history of left-leaning opposition to the political right. On these terms other, no less moral, meanings are inadmissible. Hence Wood does not admit the apparent possibility that Renoir's work may be registered as a celebration of the restoration of law and order, neither does he acknowledge that France was such an economic powerhouse that it was already beginning to recover from the material and financial battering it had taken in the recent war it had initiated against Prussia in 1870–amid popular scenes of rejoicing. Wood concludes that Renoir draws "a veil across a chasm in French history" (1999, 121). The clear suggestion is that any contemporary mode of cultural production that fails to mount a more or less explicit critique of capitalism and the bourgeoisie is, necessarily, problematically "innocent".

The long shadow of protest against the Vietnam War, in which the artistic avant-garde was deeply implicated, cannot be ignored in this context. A catalyst for this volume was the conference *Art and the American-Vietnam War*, held by the Courtauld Institute Research Forum in May 2007. The programme trailed a disinclination to consider conflict on any other than terms equivalent to those established above. While we appreciate the motivation to further academic inquiry into this (art) historical moment and to broaden the discourse surrounding its numerous representations, we note that the very title of the conference served to announce the likely political character of the papers–as valorising the work of artists who opposed the conduct of the war by a "neo-imperial" USA: the accepted name for the conflict is not the *American-Vietnam War*, but the *Vietnam War*–because it was fought between North Vietnam, supported by its communist allies, and the government of South Vietnam, supported by the U.S. and other anti-communist states.

Under a reproduction of a photomontage foregrounding a young amputee drawn from Martha Rosler's original *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* series, the programme lists papers including: "Drawing as Drowning Out the Sound of Bombs"; "Peace Towers, Protests and Commemoration"; "The Art of Mourning: Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans' Memorial"; and "Never Trust Anyone Over Thirty: Legacies of Youth Protest". The conference affirmed as an article of faith the view that service personnel were brutalised by their experience of military training and war service during the Vietnam years. Dissent continues to figure as the new (old) heroism of modern life, thereby drawing an exclusive veil of its own making across a chasm in history. Without a hint of irony, participants in such events "mobilise" both themselves and the historiography of the twentieth-century avant-garde to uphold on exclusive terms art practice that privileges pacifism and protest.

We observe that it is difficult to break free of received modes of thinking and writing about conflict and its representation when the subject remains so ideologically circumscribed, and the favoured icons of 1960s anti-war protest go unchallenged. Martha Rosler's reprise of the original *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* series referenced by the Courtauld Institute, above, addresses American experience in Iraq after 2003. Rosler continues to employ a mode of institutional critique established more than thirty years ago. Its reception reflects the legacy of left-wing art historical responses to artists' protests against the Vietnam War, frequently valorised in survey accounts of the history of twentieth-century modernism. Yet Rosler's work is, we consider, anachronistic in circumstances in which the USA's *all-volunteer* armed forces operate in circumstances that bear little relation to those that characterised inter-state conflict during the Cold War. Furthermore, the proliferation of internet access, of hand-held digital imaging and social networking technologies, make it all but impossible to ignore the realities of violent confrontation in and around the homes of people living in conflict zones–a premise of Rosler’s original series.

We identify in the academy a deep-rooted tendency to police discourse about the visual image when the argument focuses on war, warfare, conflict and militarism. We do not suggest that this state of affairs necessarily prevails throughout the disciplines represented here. But we are arguing that it is necessary to be sceptical when encountering art historical work that, by default, adopts a hostile stance to the exercise of military power, or adopts, unreflexively, the naive view that the soldier is necessarily a dupe, or brutalised victim. This latter attitude surfaces continuously, functioning as a frequently undeclared ordering principle for research. Examples in publication include, for example, Richard Cork’s 1994 *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War*, and Linda McGreevy’s 2001 *Bitter Witness: Otto Dix and the Great War* in which the identity of the artist and/or his/her subject as disabused victim surfaces repeatedly.

We take dispassionate note of the fact that for many people in many places in the past, war has been celebrated as a romantic adventure, a dirty job well done, a crusade against evil, or merely a time when life was lived more vividly, an experience shared, however tangentially–and artists have represented it as such. Historians of visual cultures must treat their subject with no less dispassionate academic rigour if they are to develop a diverse social history of the visual image as it pertains to the experience of conflict. Because scholarly literature on artistic responses to the experience of conflict tends to focus on acts of protest against, or resistance to, the apparently arbitrary disposal of power by “perpetrators”, rarely does it explore the use of visual imagery in the *negotiation* of power; neither does it often delve into the political functions of objects as images or objects of exchange. We observe that in avoiding, or ignoring, these aspects of the socio-cultural and political life of the visual image itself, such scholarly literature risks utilising visual representations as primarily a means to validate a political stance, rather than serving the demands of academic inquiry in pursuit of greater understanding of the cultural economy of a historical moment.

The role of images in contesting attitudes to contemporary conflicts, we argue, amounts to more than the mere aestheticisation of historical tension, or the explicit politicisation of the image in propaganda. The visual image in its political formation materialises access to power by mediating a view or an ideology. Donna Haraway reminds readers in *Siminas, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of* Nature that "an optics is a politics of positioning. Instruments of vision mediate standpoints; there is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the subjugated." (1991, 193) The visual image operates on three distinct levels, we suggest: it offers information; it defines the viewer as such; and it subjects the viewer to the mediated vision. Furthermore, a core premise of studies in visual cultures is that the creation of oppositional, or at least supplementary imagery, in response to formal historical accounts, would never have been necessary had existing imagery been perceived as representative of the entire political spectrum: "the production of images serving contested agendas in the historical moment is an indication of conflict and power negotiations that must be acknowledged and explored by the academy." (Roland, 1995, S84-85).

Conflict has been an omnipresent theme of visual representations since the growth of modern mass media. For Susan Sontag (2002), explicit depictions of human suffering–especially photographs–are conventionally understood to evoke sympathy and concern in the viewer, helping to realise the physical and emotional realities of war at one remove. In her view, however, the meaning and effect of such pictures is ambiguous. Their audience sometimes include those who have actually lived within the reality they represent, as well as those for whom such representations function as visual reports on the lives of others. Furthermore, when focusing specifically on photographs of human suffering, Sontag claims that, on the one hand, they can serve to generate animosity towards the perceived perpetrators of violence, thereby prompting viewers to support its reciprocal continuation; while on the other hand, they can also stimulate the repudiation of violence. We argue that the tendency towards ambiguity of meaning offers multiple interpretations of the visual image of conflict and the formation of social, political and cultural memories.

Visual representations of conflict are not to be understood as receptacles containing consistent meanings, nor should we understand them as merely serving their intended function, whatever it may be. Rather, we propose that one thinks of visual representations of conflicts as a segment of what Charles Taylor calls "the social imaginary": the images, stories and legends through which people "imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations." (2004, 23) Visual representations of conflict are core resources in social constructions of memory. They comprise sources to be selected and interpreted selectively to validate the identity of groups wishing to make specific political points about war and violence. By adopting an approach that assesses dispassionately the role played by images in the formation of competing accounts of the meaning of violent episodes, researchers can productively bypass discussions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, without having to compromise their personal stand point; it offers a way to discuss politically significant material without evaluating judgementally the violent historical event they represent, or the parties involved. What is fundamentally at stake is the use to which visual representations are put in political discourse about war and violence. Above all, it allows one to avoid the assumption that one mode of visual address is automatically, or of necessity, more credible or appropriate than others.

The contributors to this volume address a wide range of visual responses to all manner of conflicts. In compiling this collection of essays we, the editors, attempt to contribute to academic discourse exploring the role visual imagery of all types continues to play in mediating the experience of conflict in both public and domestic circumstances. Our intention is to present visual material that has not yet received a great deal of academic attention, and to expose alternative ways of suggesting its relevance to discourse on the experience of conflict.

Sue Walker's "Fragments and the Epic: Soldierly Subjectivity After Napoleon" addresses the content of Napoleonic narratives in text and image that proliferated in the decades after 1815. This chapter conforms most closely to the mode of inquiry we associate with the presentist regime of historicity: she invites questions about the relationship between memory and history as she interrogates Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet's lithographic practice through a reading of the pathology of trauma. She argues that the sheer volume of related material has been conceptualised as an epic composed of a multiplicity of individual, subjective narratives. This network of responses has, she suggests, become a source of aesthetic fascination, and that this has repressed lingering traces of war-induced trauma. Working out of Francois René de Chateaubriand's 1848 *Memoir* and Georg Lukács' 1926 *The Historical Novel*, she points to Chateaubriand's use of higher ranking, more literate, or otherwise exceptional narrators, and Lukács' abstract notion of the "mass", to suggest how accounts of ordinary soldiers and their traumatic pasts have been effaced. The notion of an oral culture, whereby Napoleonic veterans narrated their own stake in history was, she suggests, submerged by nineteenth-century literary authors, such as Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo, who effaced the voice of the veteran as they conflated fiction and historical event.

The appealing idea of a Napoleonic epic composed of individual voices is here challenged by contrasting the idea of proliferation with that of repetition. Repetition, Walker argues, militates for the anonymity of ordinary soldiers and the standardisation of their narratives in the cultural imagination. She draws on psychoanalytical concepts from Freud's “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”; Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam*; and Margaret Iverson's analysis of Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial* to present repetition as a symptom of trauma, and as a response to repression. Through the designation of the veteran narrative as standardised, repetitive and recurring intermittently across Charlet’s *œuvre*, a narrative of trauma is in play. Charlet's lithographs are here understood to function as a check on the romantic notion that the Napoleonic wars operated as a font of cultural inspiration and self-realisation, concealing their destructive and traumatic character.

In “Camp life: News Pictures of Military Men and Domesticity in British and French Imperial Armies c.1870 to c.1900”, Tom Gretton turns his attention to accounts of imperial campaigns published in illustrated magazines in London and Paris in the late nineteenth century. While many of the illustrations addressed the topography of unfamiliar places, others focused on key events, turning places into spaces in which colonising events had recently occurred, including marches, skirmish and battles. This study, however, addresses representations of quotidian life in military camps.

Gretton’s contribution considers peaceful forms of sociability, including images of eating, grooming, rest, and recreation. He explores the iconography of domesticity and of re-enactments of “life at home”, and assesses the contribution made by such images in the context of wider representations of violence, and the prevailing tendency to assert that the application of overwhelming military force against less well equipped opponents was part of a civilizing mission. Gretton argues that these images advance a distinction between the categories “civilian” and “combatant” manifest in the off-duty behaviour of British and French soldiers. Colonial armies in repose are presented as civilising agencies, whose members promote appropriate modes of behaviour by example.

Gretton here distances himself from narratives of related violent events, with their potential for investment in presentist concerns, in order to consider those depicting the quotidian routines of camp life that deflected attention from violence acts, and drew a veil over the implicitly barbaric social arrangements of the subjugated peoples of empire: on the one hand, disciplined, reasonable and domesticated subjects represent civilisation; on the other, there exists only “a howling wilderness”.

Thomas Cauvin's "Commemorating Historical Conflicts during the Peace Process: The Bicentenary of the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland and Northern Ireland", addresses directly the relationship between history and memory and notes how, in the context of political reconciliation, museum curators deliberately distanced themselves from presentist concerns with trauma. It explores how the 1798 rebellion in Ireland was reinterpreted in museums north and south of the border during the bicentenary in 1998. The event coincided with the *Good Friday Agreement*, a major step in the Northern Ireland Peace Process. The curators' challenge was to account for a conflict whose memory had hitherto been divisive in a climate of political reconciliation. Cauvin compares commemorative exhibitions held at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin, and the Ulster Museum in Belfast. He interrogates exhibition guides and catalogues, and casts his eye over two contrasting modes of display to assess the rhetorical strategies of these "official" narratives of the past.

The exhibitions were conceived as part of a wider process that challenged existing narratives of 1798; neither defined the event as a sectarian rebellion, and yet they adopted different approaches to remembering the past. *Up in Arms*–in Belfast–constructed its account around the concept of community relations: the Ulster Museum advanced the idea that both Catholics and Protestants had taken part in the Rebellion: a past people could share really had existed. However, *Fellowship of Freedom*–in Dublin–presented the United Irishmen as agents of conciliation.

Cauvin assesses how the museums explored what they imply are underlying historical truths. While the Ulster Museum appealed to the historical "facts", the Dublin exhibition included exhibits to suggest how the event had been remembered in the service of later political agendas. This distinction permitted *Fellowship of Freedom* to address the United Irishmen's ideals of pluralism and democracy, while arguing that accounts that perpetuated the memory of sectarian violence were an aspect of the later politicisation of the Rebellion: political ideals were presented as historical facts, narratives of sectarian violence as memory. While *Fellowship of Freedom* promoted the United Irishmen as agents of national unification, in Belfast, *Up in Arms*, offered an account of the past that people across the sectarian divide could accede to.

The contents of this book are ordered chronologically in order, in part, to obtain a sense of how the development of photography and related technologies of reproduction and communication have impacted on the way conflict has been represented in visual cultures. Paul Fox's chapter, "Cohesion in the face of chaos: the Ullstein Press remembers the

Spartacist revolution in Germany" is located in the era when cameras were cumbersome and it was not yet technically feasible to print images of acceptable quality in mass-circulation daily newspapers. He addresses an unprecedented illustrated weekly: days after the failed Communist revolution in January 1919, Ullstein & Co, a leading liberal Berlin publishing house, issued *Berliner Sturmtage*, a special edition of its illustrated weekly newspaper, the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*. *Berliner Sturmtage* offered its readers 24 pages of photographs and drawings assembled around two textual accounts of the key events known collectively as "Spartacus Week". Fox addresses the tasks assigned to history and memory by conservative elements of German society after the catastrophe of defeat and revolution in 1918—19. His inquiry into the framing of a narrative account of recent events suggests disciplinary overlap with media studies, represented elsewhere in this volume, while its address to memory formation is indebted to the work of cultural historians.

Fox analyses how Ullstein invited its readers to accede to a coherent narrative that ordered and made sense of the events they had just lived through. With reference to the dynamics of combat and of crowd events, the chapter considers how images of violent standoff were employed to mount a positive account of the actions of Germany's security forces. He concludes that representations of standoff in *Berliner Sturmtage* always falls back on the need to contain memory–to make memory safe–on terms that appealed to white-collar workers, property owners and the business community. The special edition advances a reassuring narrative calculated to establish the terms on which the social memory of its readers would take shape in subsequent months. Fox thereby offers an alternative perspective on an event that has received its share of art historical attention from the revolutionary perspective.

Photography expanded the terms on which the experience of conflict could be addressed. When photography was introduced it was presented as a mechanical device that captured incont estable "reality" (Sekula, 1981). Despite numerous attempts to undermine this misguided perception, starting at least as early as 1840, and in spite of early voices suggesting how the new technology could be manipulated to advance political agendas, the view that the camera never lies still endures in some circles (Batchen 2002; Winston 1998).

Martina Caruso's contribution works out of a reading of selected histories of documentary photography. She reconsiders the genesis of Italian humanist photography in the light of Italian Fascism, arguing against established academic approaches that treat the humanist genre in Italy as no different from its manifestation elsewhere. Her chapter, "The

Counter-regime Photographer Under Fascism", considers aspects of the history of photography in Italy that have hitherto been neglected. She works to identify the early roots of humanist photography in Italy and, in doing so, exposes contradictions in existing scholarly literature. Caruso argues that proto-humanist, photographic practices appear to developed in opposition to Fascist propaganda photography and socialist realist styles. She delivers an account of the character of early humanist Italian photography, which has otherwise been commonly described as a mere appropriation of contemporary French and American trends.

Caruso seeks to recreate links between photography under Fascism and post-war photographic cultures. She argues that the outburst of Italian humanist photography amounted to more than conformism to photographic orthodoxies. Instead, she portrays it as a sub-genre that developed underground, conceived as a reaction to Fascist visual culture. The two external bodies of documentary photography Caruso draws upon in order to highlight the political character of humanist photography in Italy are the Farm Security Administration photographs produced during the American Great Depression, and the 1955 Museum of Modern Art exhibition of humanist photography, *The Family of Man*. Her investigation leads Caruso to a rigorous account of the close link between photographic realism and political ideology. This informs Caruso's reading of humanist photography in Italy as a photography that might have served subversive ends had it not been censored and therefore remained largely unremarked until after 1945.

Caruso challenges art historical orthodoxy. Her discussion of the shifting notions of realism from the 1930s to the 1950s reveals the way realist styles were framed and appropriated to suit diffuse political and ideological agendas. Overall, the notion of a contested photographic field was connected to notions of social renewal and political emancipation from the old order. Fascist commentators employed photography to repudiate liberalism, while the humanist *genre* was employed in Italy during and after the Second World War to advance, in turn, aspirations for national emancipation from the orderings of the Fascist state. By analysing the ambiguities and contradictions located within apparently politically conscious photographic practices during and after the war, Caruso asks questions about the ideological implications of humanist photography, not least in the context of representations of misery, pathos and enmity.

This discussion of the politically subversive potential of photography is further developed by Gil Pasternak. In his chapter, "Playing Soldiers: Posing Militarism in the Domestic Sphere", he explores the political life of family photographs and the social rituals attending the practice of family photography in an attempt to broaden and politicise scholarly literature on this subject. Focusing on Israeli society, Pasternak's contribution delves into the micro-politics of family photography practiced specifically by Jewish-Israelis in the context of the Arab-Zionist conflict that developed after the formal establishment of the Israeli state in 1948.

Pasternak presents an unconventional approach to family photography by addressing images selected from collections belong to his own family. This approach epitomises his desire to develop a conceptual framework distinct from conventional art historical approaches. Pasternak argues for the need to study the photographic apparatus beyond the traditional parameters of dominant social taxonomies and their prescribed significances. In doing so, he questions the common understanding of the family photograph as apolitical.

Pasternak's contribution examines portraits of members of his own family imaged while serving in the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Whereas there is nothing unusual in producing and accumulating family photographs of soldiers, it is a practice, he argues, that reveals the lack of clear boundaries between the state, society, and the nuclear family. In a country such as Israel, where militarism and violent political conflict are part and parcel of the everyday, posing militarism in the domestic sphere appears as necessary. Pasternak introduces sociological and anthropological perspectives on Israeli attitudes to the army and military service in order to enable readers to fully apprehend the values and visions the IDF symbolises in the eyes of the vast majority of Jewish-Israelis. Since the IDF is the one organisation endorsed by both Jewish-Israeli society and the state, he argues that portraits showing members of the family in military uniform operate as declarations of social assimilation and approval. However, while he demonstrates how such family photographs assist in perpetuating and solidifying Israeli social norms, including positive attitudes towards the Israeli army, he also shows how the protocols of the genre of portraiture–not least posing for the camera–can subvert the coherence of their putative message, thereby interfering with cultural constructions of martial identities tacitly endorsed by the state.

State politics and the nuclear family, the family photograph and its perceived cultural values, are also at the centre of Katy Parry's contribution, "Haven't I seen that before? British Press photographs of Family Loss during the Iraq War". Perry's research investigates the conventions of photojournalism. Here, she explores a single trope of news photography: the image of a person presenting a family photo-portrait of a loved one. This type of image attracts interest due to the presence of two photographs, one taken by the news photographer, the other the family photograph clutched by the subject. The mode of representation in which the *private* family portrait is offered to the *public* within the secondary journalistic photograph is a well-established convention often used when reporting accidents, news of people who have “disappeared”, and in coverage of crime and natural disaster. Although this mode of representation dates back as early as the first half of the nineteenth-century, Perry focuses on the application of this visual strategy in the context of contemporary political conflict and loss, with reference to British press photography associated with the 2003 war in Iraq.

The normative working practices of photojournalism frequently lead to a standardised visualisation of conflict, not least in photographs reproduced in national newspapers. According to Perry’s research, photographers and picture editors are well aware of the rhetorical potential of stylised photographs, with their instantly deciphered informative and symbolic content: certain dominant tropes readily offer up their intended meaning and are therefore newsworthy. With reference to some such photographic examples that circulated widely in the British press coverage of the Iraq invasion in early 2003, Perry explores the discursive interconnections established between family, nation, and traditional gendered roles. Her chapter demonstrates how the devices of visual framing are employed to construct particular roles for depicted subjects in conformity with wider narrative accounts of the conflict. In the particular context of wartime journalism, she argues, the affective power of such photographs is in danger of becoming reduced to mere cliché.

In Chapter Eight, “The Authentic Snap? D.I.Y. Reporting in the Age of “We Media”, Alexandra Moschovi leads the discussion of visual responses of conflict into the realm of the World Wide Web, exploring lens-based vernacular practices in the context of the 2008 Greek Riots, when young protestors put digital technology to tactical use in order to organize, mobilize and coordinate nation-wide protest. Moschovi seeks to investigate the formation and sustainability of narratives of conflicts in the light of the wide-spread of new technologies of photographic production and dissemination. Such technologies, she argues, have deprived the mainstream media of the ability to offer exclusive coherent accounts of newsworthy events. Social networking platforms permit users to adopt the role of “citizen journalists“ representing all walks of life. The distribution of mainly visual information is no longer the exclusive concern of media corporations.

Moschovi argues that the ability of people to participate in fact-checking, cross-referencing, and in reporting news has transformed them from mere consumers of reports into the producers of their own copy, collapsing the space between journalism and its consumers. Websites specifically devised for citizen journalists, weblogs, chat rooms, wikis, social networking media, and video- and photo-sharing virtual environments constitute platforms for commentary, interactive synchronous and asynchronous news reporting. Such sites provide a communications framework in which vernacular images of events circulate to political effect. Moschovi's assessment of this virtual environment suggests that attitudes to pictures produced by casual users of imaging devices need to be reconsidered. Thus, she rethinks such recurring themes in visual studies as the credibility of imaging practices and the authenticity of the resulting product; the credibility of the producer of visual news; and the ends the medium of photography can serve in the context of political discourse.

Academics in the disciplines of art history and visual cultures, social and cultural history, and media studies, make a contribution to conflict resolution and the de-escalation of political tension when they expose the role images play in discourse about violent episodes and their political meanings. We argue for a dispassionate address to the relationship between conflict, its representation, and subsequent analysis in the academy. The chapters in this volume are to be understood as contributions that disavow "presentist" concerns. The book privileges research that does not set out to affirm the political convictions of the author; in which the experience of conflict is not merely boiled down to a set of simple binaries that define the terms of the inquiry, such as victim-perpetrator; state v. protestor; or soldier as dupe of the political class. The contributors work out of contemporary theoretical frameworks. However, they search for means to think in a dispassionate manner about the production, circulation and interpretation of images of conflict. The following chapters present research findings that analyse the political involvement of visual depictions in critical ideological processes without setting their object of research in motion. We wish to regard this volume as a dynamic reminder of the visual domain's transitional memory, of the role played by the visual domain in shaping regimes of historicity, and thus of how societies attend to their past.