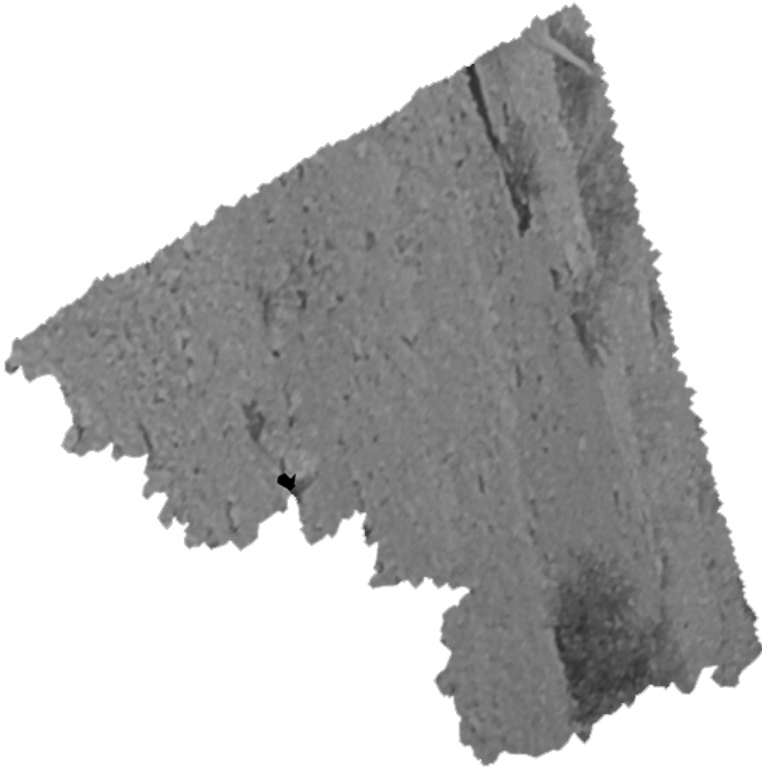


Distant Wars

Seeking understanding behind the
logistics of perception of modern
warfare



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**Distant Wars — seeking understanding behind the logistics of perception
of modern warfare**

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The weaver

“Everything old was once new and everything which is new now, will at some point be old. The oldest is the now, as there has never been anything other than the present. Memory comes into existence in that paradox. It constitutes the present with the resurrection of particles of the ever returning. Its fluid form might change and hit you with the hard reality of the present. And you might ask yourself: memory, what are you doing in this place?”¹

Perceiving the world I feel like I am a weaver, knitting together complex forms of information; holding the thread and putting it into the loom, for it to produce a tense network of relations that are interwoven into each other. The word ‘weave’ comes from the word ‘weft’, meaning ‘that which is woven’. Behind every weft, there is a weaver, weft as an outcome of body related labour. First, all weft was handcraft, linked to the skills of our very body. Then came the loom, a machine to hold the threads under tension to facilitate the body-extended interweaving of the weft. The weave became interlaced with the passive machine, hands the source of motion, navigating the loom. Later, machines got into motion themselves, without the active participation of the weavers body. The actual labour got detached from the body. Now, we are merely conductors of this interlacement of threads and machines telling them what to do, creating complex weft as if they were architecture, spaces of their own.

¹ Excerpt from the voice-over of my video installation *The Weaver / Imposture of Immediacy / Sight Machine*

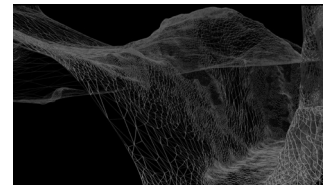
Often, these networks are of such complex nature, that a process of selection is needed for it to become the foundation of what we perceive as history. In Slavoj Žižek’s words, we “...experience history, not in the moment when things move but when we see the remains of what has already being taken away. This is the moment when we get an intuition of what history means.”² The process of weaving, connecting forms of information, is linked to the process of sorting out the interrelatedness of information for it to become history. This is not only a process of expansion, but also of relinking and delinking. A constant development of making visible and invisible. The weft becomes part in the making of cultural memory that members of our societies inherit, and on what basis our web continues to expand on. This weft can also be seen as that which holds the past, present and future together; an unstable web, a constant flow connecting different temporalities together for it to come into existence in the here and now. As the present is an ever moving entity, so is the process of weaving.

Society is a complex web of social, political, and economic forces that depend on the network of links between individuals and the countries they represent.³ These links are constantly rearranging, sometimes because of violence and death. When the level of rearrangement and associated violence

² S. Žižek, *Perverst Guide to Ideology*, dir. Sophie Fiennes, UK, P Guide Productions / Zeitgeist Film, 2012 [DVD]

³ Emerging Technology from the arXiv, [website], *MIT Technology Review*, 2019, www.technologyreview.com/s/612704/data-mining-adds-evidence-that-war-is-baked-into-the-structure-of-society/, (accessed January 4, 2019)

In the text the word we will be used to shape a collective identity that is formed by citizens of countries that sent armed forces to other regions of the world as means to secure their own sovereignty.



² Digital weft rendered by analysing the reenactment of the trench system

risers above a threshold level, we describe the resulting pattern as war. How does our memory of war connect with the web of our current society? In this essay I will elaborate on the question of how historicities of the past get interweaved with the structure of our society today by taking a broader look onto how the interlacement of media, warfare and the shift of perception redefined the concept of the spectator of armed conflict itself. My research starts in my childhood garden, a realm of my personal memory, which was the first entrance into the topic of this essay, an interlacement of different experiences of conflict by members of my family.

Every birthday my Dutch and German grandparents came together and sat down at the table of my childhood garden. When they met, it did not take long until they would talk about the biggest conflict of their lifetime. It was the condition of a war without limits, WWII in central Europe that they were born into. It became an annual tradition whereby they created a script, an alignment of reminiscences from their childhood that slightly differed every time but essentially stayed the same. A collection of anecdotes, sketching their individual experience of a childhood during war. Like that day, when my Dutch grandmother was sent for groceries. The bomb scare went off and when she came back to where her house used to be, there was only a pile of brick stones left. On my brother's 13th birthday, airplanes crashed into the World Trade Centre in New York, and while this action was broadcasted repetitiously on television during the whole day, it put my experience of war into a different scale. The concept



3 My former childhood garden in 2019

of war shifted from my grandparents reminiscences to a live experience of armed conflict unfolding in front of me via a screen. Broadcasts being transmitted by satellite networks around the globe to appear on our home television. The invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan came soon after. The war did not take place in the countries that had declared it any longer, but the population of these countries at war participated via the coverage of the media. War became a media spectacle, transmitted directly into the very homes of citizens witnessing an armed conflict that was not executed in their own country any longer. The physical experience of my grandparents now translated into pixelated images, mostly taken from a distance, or from above. Instead of hearing the breathtaking story from German air bombardment onto the town where my Dutch grandma grew up in, my perspective now was from the airplane that dropped bombs onto houses further down on the ground of a country barely no one had ever visited or knew much about.

War can be experienced in many ways, depending on the specific conflict, and the multiple perspectives and positionalities that are provided. The shift of perspective I went through are only two examples of how entering the field of armed conflict has changed throughout three generations by the expansion of the logistic of perception. Hereby, I understand logistic of perception as using technology to expand the human perception in a way that it can leave its limitations of the body. With this text I will give an understanding of how the expansion of human perception by lens-based systems changed both

the role of the spectator of war but also how combat itself changed by establishing new logistics of perception. This will unfold from the perspective of myself, of someone not having been to war, but still having the feeling that the position of the spectator of war becomes a crucial part in the way these wars are justified by the governmental institutions. This is a privileged perspective, since I stay in the comfortable position of being a spectator without being exposed to all the risks that comes with becoming an active participant of armed conflict. This is also where my agency and possibility to talk about armed conflict ends. This text is ment to be read and understood as a critical attempt to understand what being a spectator of modern warfare means, and what forces are at work around the narration of the conflict the spectator is exposed to.

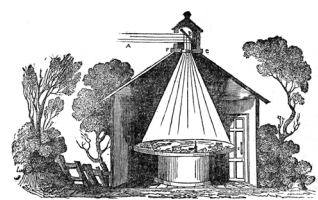
The start of the text sketches the first attempts to expand the human perception by the construction of the camera obscura effect, and how camera-systems more and more merged from documenting armed conflict to become active participants of combat itself. As a continuation, the text focuses on the Residenztheater in Munich, that became the survivor of its own destruction by the same theatre tactics that later will be visible with the case study of the exhibition *Den Fjerne Krig / A Distant War* of the Danish War Museum. Hereby I give an understanding of how theatre tactics are used to create idealised versions of history, a way of how governmental institutions manipulate the public eye onto the history-making of armed conflict, right after Slavoj Žižek's description of the

construction of history. The text later links together Carl von Clausewitz concept of the theatre of war and Jean Baudrillard's reading of the first Gulf War; how the war of objects changed into a media spectacle, a war of images. With the help of Hito Steyerls case study of an embedded journalist of the Iraq War of 2003, I will give an understanding of how documental images shifted from a mode of documentation to a mode of expression, and what that means to the reading of documental images of conflicts after 9/11. I use the exhibition *Den Fjerne Krig / A Distant War* at the Danish War Museum as an example for that. I will argue that the representation of a Danish military camp in Afghanistan can be read as an extension of the mechanism of the embedded journalist and how the Danish War Museum is promoting an idealised narrative of the making of history.

Camera obscura

The camera obscura is a system that would project an inverted image on the opposite side of the box: An inverted interpretation of the situation outside. It consists of a effectively light-proof box with a small hole on the side. No more is needed to evoke an illusion based on the surrounding the box is situated into. This effect is needed for any lens-based system to represent our reality. The thing that was new about it, was the change of perspective it evoked. The gaze does not belong to the human eye any longer, but is defined by the position of the box in relation to its own surrounding. The possibility to move a time-based phenomena into another place; an

Lens-based is a term mainly used in communication design and the arts, sketching the field of media that is based on perception systems by the use of transferring light by an assemblage of lenses into reproductive modes of representation. Concrete examples are photo- and video cameras.



4 Illustration of a simple camera obscura

expansion of human visual perception. To move a time-based situation into another space, a phenomena that is an inherent feature of the theatre as well. It is the trick of a theatre as in that it constructs a representation of a space that is not part of the one it is projected onto. A place of spectatorship of something that is happening in the outside.

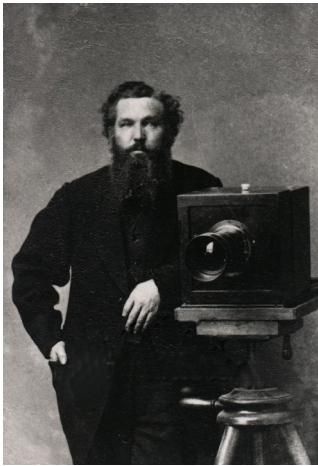
The Greek word *theatron* translates into English as ‘the place or the act of seeing’: in the first instance, theatre is about sited spectatorship. A constructed space of sight, that provides a specific concentration and delineation not only between the spectator and the spectated but also between the theatre space and the outside. What the pinhole creates is a space where all preconditions of the theatre are provided. Unlike the theatre, the pinhole is fuelled by the light that travels through it, but needs the complete separation from the outside to create a projection within. The boundary of its existence erects in the moment the light-proof box is put out of its contemporary situation it should represent.

Putting the contemporaneity on halt

New inventions would disguise this threshold between the theatre space and the camera obscura system. It took until the 19th century before the live image, transmitted into the box, could be paused. With the possibility to ‘capture’ an image, to put it on halt. The image was taken out of its contemporaneity; delinked from its limited presence, from the flow of light coming into the box and renewing the projection inevitably. The light-box was not only a mechanism that inverted the

sunlight into it, it also had a movement to the outside, seeking to ‘capture’, and therefore breaking down contemporaneity into various temporalities: The temporality of the situation, that was designed from the contemporaneity of what it had ‘captured’. This is where two separate forces unfold. The lightwaves, bouncing back from objects and traveling into the pinhole of the box: A movement from the outside into the inside. The movement of the light-sensible surface of the camera, reaching out and fixing the light waves to take the image from the outside.

Lenses were put in front of the light-box to sharpen the erected illusion. The light box, called photo camera could focus and bring the objects of interest either closer to the camera or show its surrounding. Within the 1860s, photographs were exposed on an emulsion, which was a byproduct of the manufacturing of explosives.⁴ Cameras started to have a similar architecture and mutual technical features as weapons. Tripods were used to stabilise them, the trigger had to be pulled to activate the device and when doing so, the device would ‘shoot’ and had to be reloaded afterwards. At the same time there was one big difference: Cameras had not directly interfered into combat yet. In the first wars of which there are accounts of photographers, combat itself was beyond the cameras ken. War photographers could only capture the aftermath of the actual happening. The equipment was still too big, too hard to manoeuvre to take it into combat. The shutter time took up to several minutes, which meant that the



5 Alexander Gardner was a war photographer in the American Civil War. The camera mechanism was yet too slow and too big to document combat itself.

⁴ H. Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit*, Vienna, Turia + Kant, 2015, p. 24



6 No-man's land resembling the surface of the moon, photographed from a British airplane above Belgium during the Great War

surrounding the camera was pointed at, had to freeze to make it appear on the picture afterwards.⁵ Images of that time did not document the actual warfare, but showed its direct result: frostbitten British soldiers during the Crime War, the corpse-strewn landscapes in the American Civil War and 'lunar surfaces' left by trench warfare in WWI. Anything moving could not be captured.

The real thing may not be fearsome enough

First attempts were made to embed cameras into actual warfare activity for documental purposes in the period of WWI. Due to the weight and size, cameras had to be positioned before the transformation of the area into a battlefield. This turned the aim to document, to capture the activities for future audiences, into a paradox of time. The devices, that carried a memorising function, were placed into the situation before the situation was even erected. By doing so, neither the devices nor the photographer had any agency to intervene, change perspective or shift focus, and therefore they had no possibility to react on how the situation unfolded.

While the camera obscura converts contemporaneity into two temporalities, there is another layer at stake here. The camera not only shows a contemporaneity that has already passed, but shows it in a perspective that had been decided on whilst the situation (that would about to be documented) did not unfold yet. The erected photos had three temporalities in one, the situation before, the situation whilst, and the situation af-

5 S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002, p.14

ter the *capture* of the *scenery*. Susan Sontag concludes of this paradox that new demands are made on reality in the era of cameras, since "...the real thing may not be fearsome enough, and therefore needs to be enhanced; or reenacted more convincingly."⁶ The demand might come along with the demand to fuse the simultaneously operated temporalities into one, to be in power of the images, the story, the narrative, the interpretation of what one wants to remember from the conflict. Therefore the first newsreel ever made for a battle – an incident in Cuba during the Spanish-American War of 1898, in fact shows a reenactment that took place right after the battle, since the actual footage taken during the attack had been judged insufficiently dramatic. Fiction started to sneak into new forms of representation of war the moment cameras intervened in it. First, only as a documental purpose, but soon this ability of documentation made the camera transgress from its position of a distant observer to an active participant.

From memorising machine to active operator

The outbreak of WWI turned whole Europe into an euphoric mood, where all participating sides expected a quick end of the war. Soon, reality sketched a completely new picture. In a time when conservative warfare strategies were still based on the warfare of the 19th century, it met the violent and cruel reality of modern trench warfare: defensive systems outdid mass attacks. Therefore, the logistics of perception started to be seen as a new front to be fought on.

6 S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002, p. 15

Capture and scenery are italic here, since it is not clear what the words refer to. What activities were really captured, and what did the scenery consist of exactly?

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, July 1st, 1916, sixty thousand British soldiers were killed or gravely wounded—thirty thousand of these in the first half-hour. At the end of four and a half months of battle, 1,300,000 casualties had been sustained by both sides, and the British and French front line had advanced by five miles.

As Paul Virilio states:

“It is therefore quite understandable that, after 1914, the air arm’s violent cinematic disruption of the space continuum, together with the lightning advances of military technology, should have literally exploded the old homogeneity of vision and replaced it with the heterogeneity of perceptual fields.”⁷



7 Royal Flying Corps aircraft with an attached aerial reconnaissance camera, circa 1916

Due to the newly introduced corps of aerial observers, the German armies could be stopped only thirty miles in front of Paris. The French government had fled the city and the British-Franco armies were retreating under the pressure of the German right flank. Aerial observers reported a 48-kilometer gap between the First and Second German army on the 3rd of September 1914. The following day, French and British commanders halt their retreat and drove a wedge between the German armies. Paris was saved from German occupation but at the same time the Schlieffenplan had failed and a long and costly war began in earnest.

The expansion of the old homogeneity of vision became a new frontier on military warfare technology. When the first cameras were mounted onto airplanes, to enter vertical territories that were not claimed by combat yet, the pilot’s hand automatically triggered the camera shutter with the same gesture that releases the soldier’s weapon. The function of the eye was now aligned with the function of the weapon.

“I am the camera’s eye. I am the machine which shows you the world as I alone see it. Starting from today, I am forever free of human immobility. I am in the perpetual movement. Approach and draw away from things - I crawl under them - I climb on them - I am on the head of a galloping horse - I burst at full speed into a crowd - I run before running soldiers - I throw myself down on my back - I rise up with the aeroplanes - I fall and I fly at one with the bodies falling or rising through the air.”⁸

7 P. Virilio, *War and Cinema*, New York, Verso Books, 2009, p. 34

8 In 1919 Verton published an article in Wladimir Majakovsky’s avant-garde *Lef* which condemned the narrative film and, in terms reminiscent of the Futurists, declared war on the psychology of bourgeois film-scripts.

This article by Wladimir Majakovsky, a Futurist filmmaker from the Soviet Union, is written based on his experience as a soldier in WWII. It describes the potential of the camera to widen the human vision by expanding the potential of perception to beyond the boundaries of human perspective, whilst at the same time aligning the camera’s eye to a new sort of weaponry. The battlefield is not any longer a horizontal surface, but erects into an multi-dimensional space. The perception does not end at the horizon any longer, but at the movability of the camera.

Saving a theatre by the act of theatre

With the heavy bombing of big European cities from both the Allied Forces and the Luftwaffe in WWII, the war finally enclosed the civilian population of Europe. War activities that were mainly noticed via television, radio, newspapers and private letters from soldiers at the front, *en fin* found its physical way over the frontlines into the backlands of the countries at war, and that in a horrifying fashion. Until then war was only experienced as a narrative composed by propaganda. It was now felt by the actual bodies of the civilian population and became part of every day life in the city. While whole cities feared its complete destruction, decisions were made what should be saved for the time after the war.

Munich was suffering heavy bombings in 1944. To safeguard its Residenztheater for later generations, the city administration decided to dismantle its Rococo decor, packed it into wooden crates and hid it outside of the city. Six weeks after the theatre had been successfully concealed, the site was bombed and with it, the original theatre

building. Was it actually the theatre itself that was bombed? Augusto Corielli claims that by that point, the theatre resembled “mostly an empty shell” and that the bombing of the actual theatre, had been advanced to a moment before.

“The dismantling of the auditorium can be likened to a simulated detonation, an act of rubble making that preempted the explosion to come. What was rehearsed through that careful demolition was the scene, infinitely slowed down, in which a bomb falls onto and shatters a theatre, its various fragments flying off in different directions. Or we could say: a meticulously planned fictions explosion took the place of the real one, recasting the bomb that did eventually fall on the site as not more than a hollow sound effect, echoing across a city that was genuinely turning to rubble.”⁹

What Corielli describes here is a paradox of time. Due to the ability to pre-enact the explosion, the theatre was saved by slowing down the action of what would have happened in the future; the theatre was saved by an act of theatre. The slowing down of the scene refers to the cinematic effect of slow motion, mostly used to add drama to a scene, or to make actions visible that would remain in the opaqueness of the temporary.

The large cases containing the theatre’s decor were transported to the Befreiungshalle, a memorial place to pay homage to Napoleons defeat in 1815. Since the evocation of heroism was placed elsewhere, the dissembled theatre was safeguarded

there. What matters here is the poetic sidetrack of the site, given that it essentially entailed moving a large auditorium inside a much smaller hall. “It was a case of material synecdoche, whereby the boxed decor represented the whole theatre building.”¹⁰ The theatre was not only saved by an act of theatre, but also by deflating its space into a module-system, where the essence of the theatre, its Rococo decor, was made moveable to become successor of its own destruction: To lever out the rules of scale, to transgress a theatre into an inflatable spectre of dimensionality, to preserve its ineffable space by imaginative labour.

“Real are the ruins...”

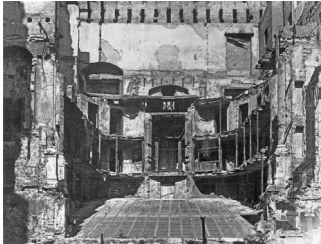
When the municipality of München decided to relocate the theatre onto its original location that was bombed, it was expected that the theatre would re-enter its original status of the time before the war. The theatre was relocated only sixty meters from its original position. Craftsmen reassembled the Rococo decor with the same techniques of that it was originally built with; resulting in a perfect resemblance of its original status. The mode of theatricality it entered, by the pre-enactment of the slowing down of its destruction, did not shift to a mode of authenticity after it was reassembled. The theatres’ original function to assemble an audience reoccured after the *re-montage* of the space. As the pinhole camera is able to resize the dimension of what it is faced onto, the Rococo decor survived its own destruction by deflating

9 A. Corrieri, *A Packed Theater*, Cabinet Issue 56, 2015, p. 25

10 A. Corrieri, *A Packed Theater*, Cabinet Issue 56, 2015, p. 24



8 The Rococo decor in the big auditorium of the new Residenztheater that was rebuilt after WWII



9 The destroyed theatre space of the Residenztheater in 1945

Befreiungshalle would translate into Hall of Liberation

its three-dimensional space to fit into a much smaller room. Both use deflation, resizing, change of scale and dimension as a strategy to survive its own temporality, but at the same time something gets lost in that moment. The physicality of its matter is transferred into another mode of existence; it is not fixed to its geographical location any longer.

What does it mean, when spaces start to travel? When they enter a mode of existence, that qualifies a geographically fixed place to moving through space and time as until it survives its own destruction to rise up again? The mode of movability of the actual physical place is directly transferred into a mode of representation. Another dimension comes into existence, something that is in between the actual physical space and the representation of the latter. As with the first attempts of documentary photography in the trenches of WWI, this paradox is based on its notion of performing different temporalities at the same time. Both modes of existence include the temporalities before, during and after the photograph has been made; or for the theatre, the temporalities before, during and after its own destruction. This makes the photograph a document of history, something that represents an event in the past. But what does this paradox do to the resurrection of the Residenztheater? Did the theatre become an actual document of its own history and what version of history does this theatre come to represent?

According to Michel Foucault, there are two possible methods

to tackle a document.¹¹ The historical method asks, what the document means, if it tells the truth, whether its authentic or fake. Here, the document is understood as a placeholder of an event which can be reconstructed. The archaeological method does not focus on the interpretation of the document. It rather puts it into an order, distributing it onto different layers and/or series. The historical method takes the document as a given negative imprint of an event lost in the past. The archaeological method sees the document as a singular part of a positivist 'architecture of knowledge'. The historical method makes the monument of our past into documents. Events are transformed into traces of the missing event. The archaeological method transforms the document into a monument, an 'architecture of knowledge' that comes into existence due to the arrangement of its documents. While the first method rather refers to the problem of the missing witness, the second method refers to the problem of the archive. The order of the archive is underlying a specific politics of truth, which authorises its statements as being truthful. Based on this, it is decided which documents enter the archive and which are irrelevant or simply wrong. This makes the archive to one of the most important monuments in which documents are ordered into a seemingly neutral but mostly illusional architecture of information. For Foucault, the archive is not a set of things or even a set of statements, but rather a set of relations: It is the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.¹² The archive contains the relational network of

¹¹ M. Foucault, *Archäologie des Wissens*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1994, p. 14-16

¹² M. Foucault, *Archäologie des Wissens*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1994, p. 14-16

which specific parts of history become visible - or not. As for the Residenztheater, there is a notion of denial in its mode of existence. What it performs is an idealised version of history, one in which München was never destroyed. Here, the positivist approach onto the archive becomes clear; the denial of the period between dismantling the auditorium and the reconstruction of the theatre building. Although this period is documented, it is not reflected in the building any longer. The Residenztheater denies its destruction by its own resurrection. This denial of history was also observed by Hanna Arendt during her visit of post-war Germany: "...and one wants to cry out: But this is not real – real are the ruins, real are the past horrors, real are the dead whom you have forgotten."¹³

The example of the Residenztheater shows how intertwined the representations of wartimes are by the traditional notions of theatricality, by the way of performing in front of an audience. The attribute of performing, of getting into a role, playing a scene can be taken over by a house, architecture, leaving specific periods of its history *behind the scene*. The decision of the municipality of Munich, to save the theatre for the survivors of the war can be seen as an act of brutality by itself. While Goebbels called out for the 'Total War' with its aim to completely militarise the German civil population by involving any capacities into the industrial-military-complex, the municipality of Munich already decided of what should have been saved for the times after the war instead of using all available capacities to help the people that had not died yet. In a time

¹³ H. Arendt, *The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany, Essays in Understanding 1930 - 1954*, London, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1994, p. 45

in which the question of who would be surviving the war was still to be sorted out, the municipality already decided what the survivors of the war should be left with. The example of the Residenztheater shows, that the 'architecture of knowledge' is present in any form and structure that contributes to history making. In that sense, the process of history making is a chosen one and therefore it is deeply imbedded the workings of politics, in the decision making process of what comes to the fore and of what will be remained unnoticed.

From a theatre of war towards a war of theatre

The act of war upholds parallels to a traditional theatre play. It unfolds in an auditorium, a stage, a goggle-box according to the understanding of Carl von Clausewitz.¹⁴ Firstly closed, the narrative unravels with all its cruelty after the curtains opens. The stage is defined by the locality of the conflict, enclosed by a borderline of a country or due to geographical circumstances. There can be several theatres ongoing during a conflict. They differ from location, time and phase of the conflict but all together form a unity. The closing of the curtain represents its definite ending. War activities stay in the pre-defined territory. This precondition of war changed at least since WWI, where the new logistics of perceptions entered the battlefield and changed it into a multi layered, de-territorialised area as until the wars of today, where the spatial boundaries of war are completely dissolved.

¹⁴ C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, London, Pelican Classics, 1982, fifth book, second chapter, second part, p. 64

Here I understand Josef Goebbels definition of a 'Total War' as a war, that includes all civilian-associated resources and infrastructure as legitimate military targets, mobilises all of the resources of society to fight the war, and gives priority to warfare over non-combatant needs. The terminology became famous after his Total War speech on the 18th of February 1943 at the Berliner Sportpalast.

In June 1991 the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* published an interview in respect of the operation that just unfolded in Iraq. The invasion of the international military coalition under the leadership of the United States just came to an end. While for more than a year the world was confronted by the daily broadcasting that went directly onto the screens of the televisions, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard sat down with a journalist in Hamburg and stated that the war actually did not take place. “The war not only volatiles into the media, the war itself is not real.”¹⁵ The journalist did not know how to react and stated that the war actually did happen. Baudrillard continued “The Virtual not only dominates the media, it also attacked the real. The Gulf War is executed electronically. The enemy as the opponent, as the personal enemy, disappeared. The arena of war only is present on the screens of the radar and the target devices.”¹⁶

As contradicting Baudrillard's statement on the disappearance of the war was, as clear became the inevitable connection between the war and the virtual as a new battleground. The transformation of the battlefield in this war changed from a real place, where the opponents met face-to-face, to a multi-layered *mise-en-scène*, where American pilots flew thousands of feet over the actual battleground to watch their enemies on their screens. The reproduction of the Iraqi soldier on the screen led to the destruction of the actual individual on the ground. The virtual representation succeeded over the real by the new logistics of perception. The war of pictures and

¹⁵ J. Baudrillard, *Der Feind ist verschwunden*, interviewed by Nikolaus von Festenberg and Claudius Seidl, *Der Spiegel*, Issue 6/1991, Hamburg, 1991

¹⁶ J. Baudrillard, *Der Feind ist verschwunden*, interviewed by Nikolaus von Festenberg and Claudius Seidl, *Der Spiegel*, Issue 6/1991, Hamburg, 1991

sound replaced the war of objects. While the disappearance of the enemy came along with the new strategic use of (re-) produced images on the battlefield, reality started to mingle with the embodiment of its surrounding.

The spectator and the witness

Propaganda and strategies of making invisible were always part of war. What changed is how the battlefield expanded as until the living room of the civilians whose countries were active in wars. The war of picture redefined the role of the spectator and the witness. Waged wars outside of the countries border became media spectacles at home. Looking at war by indulging the constant stream of photos, moving images and sound was a way to become a spectator and witness. But what did the public become a witness of? Could these images really be seen as a proper representation of the ongoing activities? With the example of the live-broadcast from a CNN-journalist covering the American invasion of the Iraq war in 2003, Hito Steyerl questions whether these pictures are an authentic representation of the evolving events.¹⁷ The journalist streamed the invasion from his phone, while the American tank the journalist was sitting in entered deeper into Iraqi territory. The camera transformed the unfolding event into a pixelated representation and transmitted it directly onto the tv-screens at home. The journalist seemed satisfied. The spectators could be there in ‘real time’ through the live broadcast, almost sitting next to him in the tank. Looking from a

¹⁷ H. Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit*, Vienna, Turia + Kant, 2015, p. 7

perspective of today, the broadcast was an unsharp, pixelated live-stream. The spectator had to guess, what the few pixels should actually show. Pixelated fog instead of documental images. Steyerl's conclusion is that the images changed from a mode of representation into a mode of expression. "At the level of form it is, where the truth of these image is demonstrated: The form of their construction represents the real portrayal of their condition."¹⁸

The CNN-images revealed more about their mode of production than about the event they should document. For Steyerl, this unfolds the paradox of documentary images of our time: Images, that fit into a specific mode of production, raid their potential for documenting events, but paradoxically the more shaky, pixelated, foggy a document of our time becomes, the more it fits into the narrative of an understanding of what an 'authentic' image is. The more the image is occupied with its own mode of production (and therefore, the less it actually 'shows'), the more real it is perceived. Did the spectators of the CNN-images really see images of the invasion? And if not, what did the images really show? Baudrillard already gave his verdict.¹⁹ What is consciously executed here is a new form of censorship. The spectators view onto the unfolding armed conflict deprived from the spectators by new means of documentality. Representation became expression, distance became intimacy, the new mode of transparency morphed into the opaqueness of an eternal live-stream of pixelated images.

¹⁸ H. Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit*, Vienna, Turia + Kant, 2015, p.14

¹⁹ J. Baudrillard, *Der Feind ist verschwunden*, interviewed by Nikolaus von Festenberg and Claudius Seidl, *Der Spiegel*, Issue 6/1991, Hamburg, 1991

Although the public had access to every day images of the conflict, only parts of the war scenery became visible and the rest remained a foggy stream of pixelated nothingness; or in Foucaulian terms, the spectators in front of the tv screens became part of a positivist selection of images that became indifferent to the layers unfolded by the war of theatre.

Hans-Joachim Lenger and Friedrich von Borries came to a similar conclusion:

"We didn't get to see pictures of corpses or destroyed houses, but instead, some sort of fireworks: green shimmering, noticeably nice pictures of a night sky, over which rockets drew away in elegant tracks, accurately and allegedly without any collateral damage. What was depicted were impressions and expressive intensifications of every day images in the media without really getting up to the point."²⁰

This is a shift in the way that war is documented. In the beginning, cameras were only able to document the aftermath of military actions due to technological restrictions. The actual evolvment of the battle was beyond the camera's ken. In the Second Gulf War, the public mainly consumed pictures of the military machine and its actions in an almost impressionistic style. The actual (and deadly) consequences of the armed combat were sighted out. The public only saw the release and humming of the bomb through the air. But within the *edit* of the spectacle, the destruction which the dropping

²⁰ H.J. Lenger & F. von Borries, *Metastasen des Krieges*, Hamburg, Merle Verlag, 2017 p.18



10 Footage from the shock and awe attack by US forces in the start of the Iraq War in 2003 covered live by CNN

of the bomb let to, was left out of sight. The actual war of objects disappeared. The way the conflict was documented left international spectators with the idea of a ‘clean war’. A war, in which the blood on the streets only remained visible to the local public.

The ‘phenomena’ of embedded journalism came to the fore with the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11.²¹ Journalists entering the military intervention agreed to report only from the perspective established by military and governmental authorities. These journalists, and with them the spectators of the media, were offered access to the war only on the condition that their gaze remained restricted to the official narrative; a narrative that should represent the military power of the invader. The aim of the journalist was to document the unfolding conflict, but it ended up into a distorted approach to the actions. The mode of documentation changed into a form of expression, directed by the angle the journalists were provided. What does this form of expression look like and does it have any limitations? The mode of expression does not only remain in the realm of the war as media spectacle, but also merges into a theatre of objects that is performing the mutual mode as the images perform that the public received from the Second Gulf War.

The archons house and its mode of expression

21 B. Azab Powell, *Reporters, commentators visit Berkeley to conduct in-depth postmortem of Iraq war coverage*, [website], 2004, https://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2004/03/15_mediawar.shtml, (accessed 12 February 2019)

Slotsholmen Island is a little island in the city centre of Copenhagen. The name refers to the several castles and palaces that have been located there since its erection during the middle-ages. Today, it is lined with central governmental institutions and ministries, of which: the Danish parliament, the Prime Ministers Office and the Supreme Court of Denmark. The complex and dense population of institutions on this island are crucial to shape a national identity. Therefore, the island is also a metonym as the ‘Island of Power’.²² Next to Christiansborg Castle, the National Library is accommodated. With its dense population of ministries and governmental institutions, it comes close to be the physical place for the breathing heart of the nation. The island itself can be seen as an archive, a place of intrinsic importance for the identity of the nation.

“*Arkhe* we recall, names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence* — physical, historical, or ontological principle — but also the principle according to the law, *there* where *men* and *gods* command, *there* where authority and social order are exercised, *in this place* from which order is given — nomological principle. *There*, we said, and *in this place*. How are we to think of *there*? And this *taking place* or this having a place, this taking of the *arkhe*?”²³

22 J. Hilden, Slotsholmen, Magtens Ø, Copenhagen, Schultz Forlag, 2006, p.202
23 J. Derrida: *Archive Fever*, Diacritics, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1995, p. 9



11 Christiansborg Castle hosts the Danish Parliament, the Prime Ministers Office and the Supreme Court of Denmark



12 Aerial view based on satellite images from Slotsholmen Island with the Tøjhus situated right next to the Danish parliament

In *Archive Fever* Jaques Derrida combines a linguistic consideration of the word ‘archive’ with an attempt of its localisation. Derrida describes, how the greek root of the word ‘archive’ coordinates two principles at the same time. The principles are connected to a non-specific physical space, that he marks as ‘there’. As Derrida continues in the text, he describes that the latin root of the word ‘archive’ derives from an actual home. He specifies it of being the home of the “residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who command.”²⁴ These archons do not only have the function of a “physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate”, but they also “have the power to interpret the archives”. For Derrida, the archive — and therefore the memory, is always already linked to a specific place, and cannot operate without a “substrate” or “residence”.²⁵ For him, the archive is not only a location for the origin of the ontological field, but it is also has an intrinsic tendency of judgement in the form of interpretation. He localises the archive to a location of the beginning, the commencement, what has been, and the execution, what is going about to be executed. Therewith the archive itself forgets, something that entails an active operation. Derrida argues, that the origin of the word ‘archive’ is literally housed in the location of the one in power. Opposing this theory onto Slotsholmen, the commandment would appear in the three branches of government in Christiansborg Castle (‘...there where *men* and *gods* command’). The commencement could be located in the Royal Library (‘there where things *commence*’) as the collecting and memorising organ. Reversing Der-

24 J. Derrida: *Archive Fever*, Diacritics, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1995, p. 9

25 J. Derrida: *Archive Fever*, Diacritics, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1995, p. 9

rida’s theory of origin, it occurs that Slotsholmen contains all attributes necessary to be an archive in its original meaning. It is the archive of its national identity. In between the house of commandment, Christiansborg Palace and the house of commencement, Royal Library, a long stretched house on the eastern side is situated. It is called *Tøjhus* and used to be the *Royal Arsenal House* and was later used to gather military weaponry, equipment and trophies of former operations since its erection in 1604. Nowadays, it houses the Danish War Museum. The museum presents war objects from the middle ages until today and narrates the war history of Denmark. What all these wars have in common is to protect the sovereignty of the nation.

Since 2012, the durational exhibition *Den Fjerne Krig/A Distant War* is on display. The aim of this exhibition is to describe “...a young Danish soldier’s journey from the safety of his childhood bedroom in Denmark to distant Afghanistan, through Camp Bastion, the Green Zone and Gereshk, then home via Tune Airport”.²⁶ What is new with this war is the unspecificity of both the actual enemy and in what way it is threatening Danish sovereignty. The Danish contribution to the ISAF forces was underlying the ‘War on Terror’, a war against a tactic, terror, without a more specified enemy.

Slotsholmen inhabits a geographical location, that one normally expects outside of Denmark’s territory. On the island a representation of a country without any mentionable relati-

26 Danish War Museum, [website], <https://en.natmus.dk/museums-and-palaces/danish-war-museum/>, 2019 (accessed 3rd of January 2019)

The ISAF forces main purpose was to train the Afghan National Security Forces and assist Afghanistan in rebuilding key government institutions, but was also engaged in the war with the Taliban insurgency.

During a televised address in 2001, George W. Bush said, „Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” Hereby I use the term to make understand the aims of the Bush administration, to implement a war, which’s aim was not to be won, but to implement a new mode of a continuous state of emergency in which democratic standards could be set aside for to the security interest of the country.



13 Danish soldiers remain in the same mode of representation as the public experienced them already during the conflict by the media coverage and do not materialise in the way the Afghan environment does



14 A detail of a model of the Den Fjerne Krig exhibition through photometry based animation

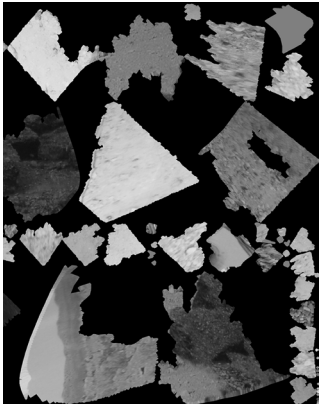
onship to Denmark is to be found. In the Danish War Museum you will find a distorted camera obscura, which demonstrates Denmark's commitments to secure its sovereignty also outside of its territory. It is a representation of a Danish military camp from Afghanistan. The exhibition is a documentation of the deployment of Danish soldiers in Afghanistan that was sent as a contribution to the ISAF forces. And when the mission came to an end, it was not only the soldiers that came back. With them, a whole military base was set up in the museum. By that, a small part of Afghanistan could now be located right next to the Danish parliament.

As mentioned before, representations of combat situations and conflicts underlie the mechanism of representational politics. As with the case of the embedded journalist, there is a mechanism of reduction, filtering and translating what can be retraced back to the mechanism of the camera obscura. What the exhibition does in its attempt to have a more 'objective' approach in representing combat and armed conflict, is using the same mechanisms image-based representations in the realm of embedded journalism. The spectator of this exhibition is confronted with the same mode of operations as images of recent armed conflicts inherited the moment they started to circle around. Often, these photographs tell more about their mode of existence than about what they actually should represent. Who is the producer of this imaginary? From what perspective is this imaginary taken from? And what is left out?

A physical place based on virtual imagination

The exhibition is constructed as if scattered images have been used to construct a location physically. Big wallpaper photographs display the horizon. Leftovers from the camp were brought back from Afghanistan creating a scene with additional props were gathered for the exhibition. The exhibition was created a similar way as algorithms use the method of photometry to assemble digital 3d-objects based on a multiplicity of photographs. Scatters of images being puzzled together to form a virtual locality.

Photometry is a process used by algorithms to create virtual three dimensional objects by bending multiple photographs into small triangle surfaces that produce a three-dimensional model. The use of photometry creates a virtual space, which is only based on pictures of a physical geographical location that it is fuelled by. It does so, by analysing every singular picture and comparing its recognisable similarities and mutual patterns with the remaining stack of pictures. It notifies the similarities with dots that are spread out over the whole picture. Those are linked with each other by lines, creating a point cloud consisting of lines and dots. After having found all mutual signifiers, it starts to bend and transform this web of similarities in such a way, that the dots of mutual signified align with each other. This is the moment, when the two-dimensional pictures merge together, creating a three-dimensional object. In this process of trying to merge pictures and physical locations into virtual model, it is where the physical



15 Scatters of images used to overlay a rendered photometric model with photo texture

‘reality’ meets the virtual ‘fiction’ intermingles with a understanding of the real. How much real is left within this process of virtual making?

Hereby I use the term angle in two different indications it gives in the realm of media coverage. The one is the physical angle that the camera and the position of the photographer was pointing at the scenery it photographed in the moment the trigger was released. The other is the indication of a political angle, the biased way of looking at or presenting something.

Based on the quality and the angle, the missing content of the image leads to gaping holes in the digital 3d-model. Those are concealed afterwards, by filling up the wholes with fictional, additive content, in animation terminology called ‘mesh’. This ‘mesh’ can also be retraced in the physical exhibition. One-sided media coverage produced leaking gaps of the narrative. They were filled up by using the same technique. Non-authentic material was added without casting any additional information to the narrative. Where are the civilians? Where are the children? Where are the dead? Where is the blood? Where are the soldiers that did not make it back alive?

As the photographs of journalists in embedded war were filtered already before taking the picture, the exhibition is living up to the same pre-filtered mechanism. Visitors of this exhibition become spectators of a scattered representation of the armed mission outside of Denmark; the idealised version constructed by a governmental institution; the way the armed conflict should be remembered. Filtered images create filtered memories, filtered memories create filtered realities. The way the war in Afghanistan was covered by the media is transformed into a physical space here. In a Derridian sense the exhibition is the place where the authority of the *arkhe*, the house of the ruler, commands which parts of history will be engraved into the archive and collective memory. It is a place

where the mode of documentation shifts to a positivist mode of expression. Specific parts of history became visible while other parts of history were lost in the process of materialising a conflict that was only remembered by its virtual character of the media spectacle it produced.

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