

Adam Broomberg  
& Oliver Chanarin  
Geissler/Sann  
Claudio Hils  
An-My Lê  
Richard Mosse  
Sarah Pickering  
Christopher Stewart

*Staging Disorder* considers the contemporary representation of the real in relation to photography, architecture and modern conflict. The book includes selected images from seven photographic series that were made independently of each other—Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin’s *Chicago*, Beate Geissler & Oliver Sann’s *personal kill*, Claudio Hils’ *Red Land Blue Land*, An-My Lê’s *29 Palms*, Richard Mosse’s *Airside*, Sarah Pickering’s *Public Order* and Christopher Stewart’s *Kill House*. The portrayal by these artists of mock domestic rooms, aircraft, houses, streets and whole fake towns designed as military and civilian architectural simulations in preparation for real and imagined future conflicts in different parts of the globe provoke a series of questions concerning the nature of truth as it manifests itself in contemporary photographic practice. In capturing an already constructed reality—the images in all seven projects are ostensibly documentary images of something real that has in itself been artfully staged to mimic a disordered reality—the works offer a meditation on the premeditated nature of modern conflict and an analysis of a unique form of architecture where form is predicated on fear rather than function.

Essays by David Company, Howard Caygill, Jennifer Good, Adam Jasper, Alexandra Stara, Christopher Stewart and Esther Teichmann provide an accompanying narrative for the photographic works and contribute to this timely thesis on the nature of the real in relation to contemporary photography, architecture and conflict.

*Staging Disorder* has been supported by London College of Communication, University of the Arts London.

edited by **Christopher Stewart** and **Esther Teichmann**

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# STAGING DISORDER



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## PREFACE

*Staging Disorder* considers the contemporary representation of the real in relation to photography, architecture and modern conflict. This book, which has been supported by London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, includes selected images from seven photographic series that were made independently of each other in the first decade of the new millennium. The portrayal by these artists of mock domestic rooms, aircraft, houses, streets and whole fake towns designed as military and civilian architectural simulations, in preparation for real and imagined future conflicts in different parts of the globe, provoke a series of questions concerning the nature of truth as it manifests itself in current photographic practice.

In capturing an already constructed reality—the images in all seven projects are ostensibly documentary images of something real that has in itself been artfully staged to mimic a disordered reality—the works offer a meditation on the premeditated nature of modern conflict and an analysis of a unique form of architecture where form is predicated on fear rather than function. The concept of staging disorder in relationship to the images collected here looks not to how the photographers have staged disordered reality themselves, but rather to how these artists have recognised and responded to a phenomenon of staging that already exists in the world.

In highlighting the resonance that these seven projects have with one another, the images along with the accompanying essays, develop a timely thesis on contemporary photography at a point when we are currently witnessing a shift away from a critical photographic discourse that has been preoccupied by theoretical concerns related to artifice, illusion and the constructed tableaux—practices that often rejected or acted to deconstruct the *real world* outside of the studio. In contrast, what we are seeing is the emergence of a type of *post-illusion realism* in documentary photography that incorporates a sophisticated accommodation of its own limitations and contradictions whilst still seeking to make sense of the external world.

The photographs in Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin's *Chicago*, 2006, are of an artificial town built by the Israeli Defence Force. It is an approximation of an Arab town and a site for urban combat training. As Chanarin & Broomberg have previously stated: "Everything that happened, happened here first, in rehearsal." The photographs in *personal kill*, 2005–2008, by Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann, working as Geissler/Sann, are of domestic-like spaces that are part of a vast phenomenon known as MOUT (Military Operations on Urban Terrain) training sites that from the middle of the 1990s onwards became a particular focus for development by war strategists around the world. MOUT sites replicate the urban environments that modern-day combat troops encounter on their tours of duty. They are approximations of the familiar domestic, but now reimagined as the dystopias of a new world order. *Red Land, Blue Land*, 2000, by Claudio Hils is the earliest body of work here and documents the extensive

troop training grounds built in Senne, North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany, an area connected with the preparation of troops for combat since the nineteenth century. These are sites where the British Army constructed their mock towns and trained their soldiers prior to deployments in such places as Northern Ireland. In *29 Palms*, 2003–2004, by An-My Lê, we witness American combat troops training in the Californian desert for the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. This is where US Marines imagined and acclimatised to the Middle East, its heat, and the likelihood of extreme violence. The images in *Airside*, 2006–2008, by Richard Mosse show the fuselages of aircraft, or the approximation of them. These are structures that are at once familiar and yet strange, they are the repository of our contemporary fears about flying and international travel and are a representation of a loss of innocence in the age of the War on Terror. *Public Order*, 2002–2005, by Sarah Pickering includes photographs of the fake town of Denton and is one of the locations where Pickering documented the sites where the Metropolitan Police Service trains for the eventuality of civil unrest and riots on the streets of Britain. Familiar high-street shops, tube stations and nightclubs are all here, along with violence and trauma, both enacted and imagined. The photographs in *Kill House*, 2005, by Christopher Stewart show the interiors of an over-sized, poured concrete, fake house in Arkansas, USA. A prominent private military company trained here. Iraq and Afghanistan are the wars that were imagined and prepared for. This is where the War on Terror met the global free-market hyper-industry of subcontracted security.

As co-editors of *Staging Disorder*, and co-curators of the exhibition at London College of Communication, University of Arts London between January and March 2015, we are grateful to all who contributed to the project. At the heart of the book are the artists—Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann, Claudio Hils, An-My Lê, Richard Mosse, Sarah Pickering; and writers David Company, Howard Caygill, Jennifer Good, Adam Jasper and Alexandra Stara. We are extremely grateful for their inspiring work and for recognising something interesting in the thesis that *Staging Disorder* develops. We would like to thank Duncan McCorquodale and the Black Dog Publishing team for their enthusiasm for the project; Rut Blees Luxemburg for putting us together; our colleagues and students in the School of Media, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, and the School of Design, Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building, University of Technology Sydney. And finally, we would like to thank Natalie Brett, Head of London College of Communication and Pro Vice-Chancellor of University of the Arts London and Karin Askham, Dean of the School of Media at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, who initiated the project and enthusiastically supported its development through to publication and exhibition.

Christopher Stewart and Esther Teichmann

## STAGING DISORDER: ARCHITECTURE, WAR AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Christopher Stewart

*To photograph what exists on the verge of catastrophe entails one's presence at the onset of a catastrophe, looking for its eventuation, that is, being able to see it as an event that is about to occur.*

Ariella Azoulay, The Civil Contract of Photography<sup>1</sup>

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### Architecture

The spaces depicted in *Staging Disorder* are approximations of ordinary spaces—domestic, urban and familiar. With the end of the Cold War and the lessening of the threat of conventional warfare, in either its battlefield or *mutually assured destruction* guises, the flavour of war became dictated by the complicated reality of *asymmetric warfare*, where two forces of significantly unequal military strength confront one another.<sup>2</sup> Confront, in this context though, is more metaphorical than actual as the force with inferior military strength relies on a lack of confrontation to achieve its victory. Insurgent and guerilla warfare is where this avoidance of confrontation becomes an almost existential art form. The fox-holes and tunnels of the South-East Asian wars were one version of this nightmare for more conventional military forces and the *improvised electronic device*, another more recent iteration of a deadly threat that hides in plain sight.

The constructed and disordered interior and exterior rooms, houses and whole fake cities documented by the artists here are part of a military-industrial architecture that simulates the familiar of the domestic as *unhomely (unheimlich)* space. Anthony Vidler, in his seminal text *The Architectural Uncanny*, reminds us that “the uncanny arose, as Freud demonstrated, from the transformation of something that once seemed homely into something decidedly not so, from the *heimlich*, that is, into the *unheimlich*”.<sup>3</sup> These are mostly crude spaces, approximations of the comfortably familiar, but all encompass an aesthetic vision of domestic space that allows for a crooked version of that space to take hold in the minds of the protagonists training in and around them. These are acclimatising sites for combat personnel whose contemporary battlefields will be as urban and domestic as the towns and cities they grew up in, and will come back to, after their tours of service are over. These are spaces that have been artfully staged to mimic a disordered reality—a unique form of architecture where form is predicated on learning to fear the familiar and for the familiar to be transformed into something that cannot be trusted. In their anticipation, these structures are deeply disturbing. Vidler, continues—“Lacan himself tied anxiety directly to the experience of the uncanny, claiming, indeed,

that it was through the very structure of the *unheimlich* that anxiety might be theorised. The ‘field of anxiety’ is framed by the uncanny, so to speak.... ‘The horrible, the suspicious, the uncanny... situates for us the field of anxiety.’”<sup>4</sup> Vidler suggests that the uncanny is:

Aesthetically an outgrowth of the Burkean sublime, a domesticated version of absolute terror... Its favourite motif was precisely the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of an alien presence; on a psychological level, its play was one of doubling, where the other is, strangely enough, experienced as a replica of the self, all the more fearsome because apparently the same.<sup>5</sup>

In the contemporary fairy-tale *Coraline*, Neil Gaiman’s novel for children, he perfectly evokes the domestic uncanny as a doubling.<sup>6</sup> After discovering a corridor behind a small door in the drawing room of a sub-divided old house that her family had recently moved in to, Coraline crawls through the passageway from her own domestic familiarity into a space that first appears to be identical to her own home that she has just crawled away from. It is here that she encounters her *other parents*. As the novel plays out, Coraline gradually loses her connection to her real home and parents and becomes trapped in the gathering nightmare of this terrifying mirrored space. What was at first intriguing becomes a seemingly inescapable trap, one that she herself was at least partly responsible in choosing over the comfort of her own familiar home and parents. Of all the novels that I ever read to my daughter in her first ten years, it is this one that by far and away fascinated and frightened her (and me) the most.

In many ways though, these spaces of military and civilian training represent the first step in a circuitous route that goes beyond just doubling. The combat personnel who go on to encounter the doubled spaces at the actual sites of conflict that they have trained for also bring their experience back home again. These spaces, and by extension the photographs of these spaces, are a warning to us that we are at risk of recreating a third iteration of this dystopian aesthetic, not just in the *over there* of a foreign conflict, but in our own familiar domestic and city spaces as well. The increasing militarisation of our police forces in the service of managing both the threat of civil unrest and the constant threat of terrorism that has accompanied the aftermath of both the global financial crisis and the War on Terror, along with the reality of our now thoroughly surveilled society, means that we may also look at these photographs as a reference point, as documents that will allow for the comparison of what has been anticipated to what is, now.

But how do these ‘dark’ and unfinished spaces fit within a broader conception of a history of architecture, predicated as it has been on a narrative of Enlightenment progression and transparency and whose seemingly perfect iteration, in Foucauldian terms, is the ubiquity of ultimate transparency in the form of surveillance? Indeed, in writing about “dark space”, Vidler raises a question mark against a set of familiar theoretical assumptions and how we might conduct a “theorisation of spatial conditions after Foucault” by contextualising Bentham’s idea of universal transparency and reminding us that:

such a spatial paradigm was, as Foucault pointed out, constructed out of an initial fear, the fear of Enlightenment in the face of ‘darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths’. It was this very fear of the dark that led, in the late eighteenth century,

to the fascination with those same shadowy areas—the ‘fantasy-world of stone walls, darkness, hideouts and dungeons’—the precise ‘negative of the transparency and visibility which it is aimed to establish’. The moment that saw the creation of the first ‘considered politics of spaces’ based on scientific concepts of light and infinity also saw, and within the same epistemology, the invention of a spatial phenomenology of darkness.<sup>7</sup>

Vidler suggests that eighteenth-century architects, and here he cites the architect Etienne-Louis Boullée, were completely aware of this “double vision” and went on to develop a conception of architecture and spatial juxtaposition that incorporated this “absolute light” and “absolute darkness” as the most powerful instrument to induce that state of fundamental terror claimed by Burke as the instigator of the sublime<sup>8</sup> and that during his exile from the *political sublime* of the French Revolution’s Great Terror, itself predicated on a narrative of transparency through confrontation with death, “Boullée formed a notion of an architecture that would speak of death.”<sup>9</sup> Here, Vidler describes in detail examples of Boullée’s architectural designs that pitted light against dark in perpetual allegorical struggle. Perhaps then, it is the contrast of these contingently rough and often dungeon-like spaces against the penetrative gaze of the near universal surveillance society that we have imposed upon ourselves in the name of security and safety, that evokes our contemporary spatial sublime:

Here the limits of Foucault’s interpretation of Enlightenment space become evident. Still tied to the Enlightenment’s own phenomenology of light and dark, clear and obscure, his insistence of the operation of power through *transparency*, the panoptic principle, resists exploration of the extent to which the passing of transparency and obscurity is essential for power to operate. For it is in the intimate associations of the two, their uncanny ability to slip from one to the other, that the sublime as instrument of fear retains its hold.<sup>10</sup>

War

The history of the representation of war necessarily takes two distinctive and essential forms—the one that exclaims the truth by showing directly its disasters and the one that attempts a symbolic truth by recourse to allegory. There is a temporal element here also—as in the first plate of *The Disasters of War* where Goya’s *Sad presentiments of what must come to pass* (*Tristes presentimientos de lo que ha de acontecer*), shows a man disembodied from his surroundings kneeling with arms outstretched in anticipation of the catastrophe to come; and then with a later image in the series—*I saw this* (*Yo lo vi*)—that shows the ravaged aftermath of battle on body and landscape.<sup>11</sup> Symbolic truth and witnessed truth, anticipation and aftermath. It is in war that the desire for a currency of truth and the real are at their height and yet in no other place that the currency of both have been so powerfully contested. And it is with the photography of war that we really want truth, but where truth has been most sorely manipulated.

The earliest known photographic depictions of war are the surviving 51 Daguerreotypes photographed by an unknown photographer during the Mexican-

American War that were made in 1847 and which set the scene for the complicated relationship between photography, conflict and truth.<sup>12</sup> In one, a General leads a column of mounted soldiers through a street. The photograph is by necessity set up, as the technology would have made it impossible for the men and horses to have been as still as they are. In another in this series we see an amputation in progress—but it is more reminiscent of a tableau painting where all of the protagonists are strategically placed for their clear objectification. The truth is aesthetically represented but the reality is absent. These scenes are staged for the camera. And again include anticipation and aftermath. More complicated is Robert Capa’s long contested Spanish Civil War photograph *Death of a Loyalist Soldier, Spain*, 1936, which unlike the purportedly manipulated aftermath photographs of both Roger Fenton’s Crimea War photograph *Shadow of the Valley of Death*, 1855, and Alexander Gardner’s American Civil War photograph *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg*, 1863, depicts, although long disputed, the *I saw this* of death.

Flawed as the photography of war has been, in both its photojournalistic and more self-consciously constructed forms, we know that these depictions of conflict are preferable than the alternative cleansed version that was fed to us in the first Gulf War by a US military machine that managed its image as tightly as any corporate entity would, and that had fallen out of love, particularly after the Vietnam War, with the more liberal access previously given to war photographers and journalists. Jean Baudrillard described this, in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, as a war that “along with the fake and presumptive warriors, generals, experts and television presenters we see speculating about it all through the day, watched itself in a mirror”.<sup>13</sup> For Baudrillard, this was a symptom of a new control where we had come to “prefer the exile of the virtual... to the catastrophe of the real”.<sup>14</sup>

Photography

The images in *Staging Disorder* are unashamedly documentary photographs, in that they belong to a tradition of photographing that sees the photographers recognising a set of social and cultural conditions and then responding by negotiating access to closed worlds, travelling to those worlds and coming away with images that are in some way evidential. Whilst ideas of truth and the real are certainly to the fore here, the approach that these artists have taken stands in contrast to the more self-consciously constructed photography that until recently, and for nearly three decades, dominated critical art historical narratives relating to the photographic.

Broadly speaking, these other more explicitly non-documentary practices played their part in the necessary dissection of photography’s complicated relationship to truth, by essentially rejecting the ‘real-world’ outside of the studio along with any idea that the real was somehow autonomous. Emerging out of a critique of the foundational tenets of documentary photography and its indexical relationship to the real, the turn to the photographic studio heightened engagement with illusion and artifice and with the idea of the photograph as an image rather than as a record of some external event. Subsequently, the possibility of documentary as an essentially progressive and innovative force was effectively and necessarily marginalised within wider critical art discourses. It was photography’s time, again, to tell stories through recourse to the image as allegory and in the form of the orchestrated tableaux. Photography as an art form at this time migrated

from its peripheral status in relation to other art forms to a place right at the centre of the museum and the market. In contrast, many documentary photographic practices were perceived to be suffering from a *form-fatigue* that often resisted the self-referential or any overt notion that the photographic real was in itself an ideological construct.

These are well-rehearsed narratives now and ones that usually include reference to a range of work that embraced a wholesale rejection of the obviously evidential in photography. In 1978 Jeff Wall produced his first large-scale light box piece, *The Destroyed Room*, his reworking of Eugène Delacroix’s *Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827. Wall says of his work of that time that he wanted to make something that was “anti-documentary, blatantly artificial... photography not to necessarily record a passing event”.<sup>15</sup> Referring to *The Destroyed Room* he says “Through the door you can see that it’s only a set held up by supports, that this is not a real space, this is no-one’s house.”<sup>16</sup> The large-scale cinematic photographs of Wall and others were preceded by numerous examples of photographic works, such as Martha Rosler’s *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*, 1974–1975, that were crucial in laying the ground for how the document could be used as both a conceptual and political tool whilst at the same time rejecting documentary photography’s tendentious naturalism.<sup>17</sup> That these works were accompanied by the arrival of a literature that challenged the currency of the photographic document, such as Susan Sontag’s *On Photography*, 1977, further pushed documentary photography to the very far margins and away from critical relevancy. Other literature set the scene for photography’s inclusion in wider art historical narratives and prompted the exit of photography from what could be seen as its medium-specific ghetto into wider art historical narratives, as in Craig Owens’s two-part essay, *The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism*, 1980. Here, the real, and by extension the documentary real, was obliquely problematised within a broader critique of the modernist work of art:

Modernist theory presupposes that mimesis, the adequation of an image to a referent, can be bracketed or suspended, and that the art object can be substituted (metaphorically) for its referent.... When the postmodernist work speaks of itself, it is no longer to proclaim its autonomy, its self-sufficiency, its transcendence: rather, it is to narrate its own contingency, insufficiency, lack of transcendence. It tells of a desire that must be perpetually frustrated, an ambition that must be perpetually deferred.<sup>18</sup>

The influence of Brecht, through the Weimar era writings of Walter Benjamin at this time, become crucially important for art historians such as Owens. Indeed, for Benjamin as well as his contemporary Siegfried Kracauer, the apparent struggle with the contradictions of a seemingly autonomous documentary reportage finds its resolution, in their writing at least, with the incorporation of the photographic document as a fragment. In an echo of Benjamin’s more familiar narrative in a *Little History of Photography* where he quotes Brecht on the need to construct something more from a “photograph of the Krupp works or AEG”<sup>19</sup>, Kracauer can be seen wrestling with the common contradiction of needing to show the world in order to make it strange:

100 reports from a factory do not add up to the reality of a factory, but remain for all eternity 100 views of a factory. Reality is a construction. Certainly life

must be observed if reality is to appear. Yet reality is by no means contained in the more or less random observational results of reportage; rather, it is to be found solely in the mosaic that is assembled from individual observations on the basis of comprehension of their import. Reportage photographs life; such a mosaic would be its image.<sup>20</sup>

Owens acknowledges that “Allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete—an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin, which Benjamin identified as the allegorical emblem par excellence.”<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly, the works collected together in *Staging Disorder* articulate the condition of a ruin, but it is an anticipatory ruin—a ruin before ruin.

The works in *Staging Disorder* are deeply indebted to these more overtly postmodern practices and the critical milieu from which they emerged. They are a type of *post-illusion realism*, a documentary in light of the postmodern, whose existence is predicated on an earlier wholesale critique of documentary photography. In capturing an already and overtly fabricated reality—the images represented here are ostensibly documentary photographs of something real that has in itself been artfully staged to mimic a disordered reality—the seven bodies of work, all made in the first decade of the new millennium, are by artists who have recognised and responded to a phenomenon of staging that already exists in the world. These photographs are documents as well as allegories of anticipation. In many ways these photographs mark a series of moments in that decade, where practitioners in different parts of the world acknowledged both the ontological and aesthetic complexity of photograph’s relationship to reality, whilst noticing and responding to, through recourse to a *straight* observational mode of photographing, a phenomenon out there in the world that was in itself an overtly contorted and ideological construction of reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Azoulay, A, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, New York: Zone Books, 2008, p 289.

<sup>2</sup> Mack, A, *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict*, *World Politics*, vol 27, no 2, January 1975, pp 175–200.

<sup>3</sup> Vidler, A, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, England, 1992, p 6.

<sup>4</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p 224.

<sup>5</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p 3.

<sup>6</sup> Gaiman, N, *Coraline*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p 168.

<sup>8</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p 169.

<sup>9</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p 170.

<sup>10</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p 172.

<sup>11</sup> Goya, Francisco, *The Disasters of War (Los Desastres de la Guerra)*, 1810–1820.

<sup>12</sup> Marien, M W, *Photography: A Cultural History*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 2002, pp 47–49.

<sup>13</sup> Baudrillard, J, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Paul Patton trans, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995, p 31.

<sup>14</sup> Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, p 28.

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Wall in discussion with Isobel Crombie, National Gallery of Victoria, Channel, *The Destroyed Room*, 2012, 2014, <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/multimedia/view/?mediaid=581794>.

<sup>16</sup> Jeff Wall, Tate, Jeff Wall: room guide, room 1, *The Destroyed Room* 1978, 2005, 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/jeff-wall/room-guide/jeff-wall-room-1>.

<sup>17</sup> Edwards, S, “Photography out of Conceptual Art” *Themes in Contemporary Art*, Gill Perry and Paul Wood eds, London and Milton Keynes: Yale University Press in association with The Open University, 2004, p 149.

<sup>18</sup> Owens, C, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, p 85.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin, W, “Little History of Photography”, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2 1927–1934*, Michael W Jennings, Howard Eiland, et al eds, Cambridge, MA, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, p 526.

<sup>20</sup> Kracauer, S, in Steve Giles “Making Visible, Making Strange: Photography and Representation in Kracauer, Brecht and Benjamin”, *New Formations*, 61, Summer 2007, p 72.

<sup>21</sup> Owens, *Beyond Recognition*, p 55.

# THE SKIN OF THE SOLDIER — BEAU TRAVAIL AND THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF WAR

Esther Teichmann

It is the bodies, always multiple, singular plural, which I think of when looking at the stage sets constructed here. The photographic works in *Staging Disorder* are of spaces which act as theatrical backdrops to bodies rehearsing for an imagined futural of violence to come.

Growing up, I first saw these bodies in fragments, glimpses at a distance. Through the forest, behind barbed wire, over walls in fields. Specks on the horizon in formations, moving gracefully across assault courses.

Then she moved to my street, a soldier’s daughter, her mother having left her father and the American South to return home to her parents in the black forest with her child. The girl was a few years older than I, quiet in a way that made her mysterious, kind and gentle in a way that seemed so much older than her adolescent self. I loved her from the moment I saw her, mesmerised and in awe of her skin, her beauty and feline grace in a way that a ten year old becomes fixated. For several years we became a double and pieces of stories from the life before moving to our village emerged at unexpected moments. Descriptions of the military bases that were home, of music, food and smells from Mississippi fed my desire for her—I still spell it out in my head hearing her voice rhyme emaah—esesah-esesah—peepeeah. Her mother had worked for the US army, so continued to do so on the bases that occupied southern Germany after the Second World War. And so I entered this world within another world and looked at the same bodies from less of a distance than I had before. We drove through checkpoints into a self contained heterotopia I had been only peripherally aware of growing up, turning in the back seat of the car to catch a glimpse, noticing my American mother’s silent connection to something that whispered of home, yet had little in common with what she had known of the country symbolically represented.

It is the bodies I remember as well as the sounds inside the barracks vibrating from cars with tinted windows, skin and music so different to the country these concrete repeating structures were hidden within. My friend was at home here and so, by affiliation and at her side, was I. We watched from afar, dangling off swings, eating candy that was sweeter than that outside, as men trained for Desert Storm. We watched, listening, mouthing the words waiting for her mother to finish work. Later as friends and lovers drifted in and out of her mother’s life, their bodies appeared not just in groups on the horizon. We were lifted up into the sky, our 11 and 13 year old bodies hanging off biceps as weights, push ups with us lying on backs holding on tight to not fall off. Hardened bodies with an easy gait, strength that spoke of daily training rituals. It is these bodies I remember, or more precisely, skin, so aware of their physicality. Sand coloured fatigues against shades of brown. Days spent outdoors in preparation



*Beau Travail* (Claire Denis, 1999). Artificial Eye DVD, 2000. Screenshots.

before being deployed. Even the name of the tours seemed exotic rather than the war it was. Thundering planes breaking the sound barrier of swampy summer days, were a physical reminder however of where those bodies were going, a sound which vibrates throughout the nervous system. Displaced bodies further displaced.

Claire Denis’ *Beau Travail* is also accompanied by a 90s soundtrack, although more European and Arab, than the African-American rap of my memories. *Beau Travail* is a dream-like film in which bodies without a war, the bodies mostly unseen in *Staging Disorder*, (present only in their haunting of the architectural spaces imaged), rehearse and train against the arid and unforgiving landscape in the horn of Africa. The nonlinear structure, the slow out of time temporality of the soldiers, tells less of a completed narrative, than of bodies coming into being. Training here appears redundant, yet is a ritual and practice in and for itself, a meditative choreography seemingly without further purpose or end. These bodies become transformed, skins hardened, as they move through the inhospitable dry landscape engulfing them. Exposed to desert sun and a brutalising regime, skin turns into smooth impenetrable armour covered in dust embodying the colonial history of the remote coastal outpost in Djibouti where the French Foreign Legion are stationed.

Denis’ layered mythical work of comradeship, masculinity and beauty within a military society, is a poetic and free adaption of Herman Melville’s 1888 short story, *Billy Budd, Sailor*<sup>1</sup> (on which Jean Genet more closely based *Querrelle*).<sup>2</sup> In *Beau Travail* the tensions and taboos of homosexuality within such an all male community, are at once implied but also suppressed and complicated, the desiring gaze moving from camera and thus viewer to the bodies on screen, rather than between the soldiers themselves. The gaze onto these beautiful bodies turned automated machines, is of course that of a female director as well as Denis’ female cinematographer, Agnès Godard, and editor Nelly Quettier, further complicating the question of where the tension of desire depicted here lies. Our eyes caress and touch their skin, and yet rarely do the men touch one another. A moment of visual and physical poignancy however, shows an intensity of contact within a training ritual, emphasising the spiritual strangeness of combat exercises. Smooth yet scarred bare chests slap into one another, embracing and clutching the other violently for an instant, before withdrawing again. In choreographed unison, the silence of the mountainous landscape behind the soldiers, echoes with the thudding sounds of muscle and skin





*Beau Travail* (Claire Denis, 1999). Artificial Eye DVD, 2000. Screenshots.

hitting each other. Singular plural, exhausted bodies used to their limit, collide to form one being, momentarily in a state of togetherness before pulling apart. The loneliness of masculinity is emphasised here in this binary being-together and separateness, the space between real and performed violence confused.

It is in scenes such as this one, that Denis challenges the mythical ideals of the unified military community, through which assimilation, the individual and desire is eradicated in the place of ritual, discipline and uniformity. Jean-Luc Nancy examines the necessary sublimation required to uphold the fascist, operative community, in which the body becomes its own image, an image of power.<sup>3</sup> In both his work and that of Denis, the body is always foreign and other, fleshy surface and screen separating us from one another as well as ourselves from our own image. It is within the moment of touching another, that we become paradoxically most aware of our own otherness, contact between skins constituting a coming into being.<sup>4</sup>

It is that strangeness, foreignness that characterises from the very beginning any relationship to the skin and body of the other. Julia Kristeva speaks of the “aneasthetised” closed skin of the foreigner, he who has lost his mother tongue and home, “a stranger to himself”.<sup>5</sup> Steven Connor describes the hardened tanned skins of oiled trained bodies becoming armour-like cinematic screens of reflection.<sup>6</sup> Denis’ Legionnaires embody this state of absolute image and dislocation, of a solitary eroticism, the body pushed to its physical boundary.

Everything in the film indicates something of a nonrepresentational, non-figurative affirmation of the image: the power, the intensity, the fire even of a self-presentation.... This a-religion is made up of a body of observances closed upon itself, referring only to itself, and in this it is similar to the corps of underemployed legionnaires on the fringes of the desert, on the fringes of the South, on the fringes of misery, on the fringes of possible conflicts, suspended between idleness and guard duty, preoccupied with its appearance: body, clothing, virile gestures of combat simulated in an empty building.<sup>7</sup>

This description echoes the French Foreign Legion as a monastic order based on ritual. The cinematography emphasises the repetition of rituals which fill time; training,

marching, song. A community of order becomes its own image of power and beauty, represented in the bodies of the men.

Denis fractures this operative community not only with narrative tensions of desire and jealousy, but also by showing the body as fragile and wounded in contrast to the image of strength the soldier’s body stands in for. Nancy (referring to George Bataille) sees death as having the potentiality to rupture the closed operative fascist community, as it is in death that our self-containment is destroyed. In the witnessing of the death of another we are thrown outside ourselves, looking for a relationship to the absolute otherness of death within the inoperative community.

In Bataille’s thesis, a state of ecstasy may only ever be reached when we are aware (if only peripherally) of death or annihilation. In *Erotism*, Bataille speaks of the discontinuity and distinct solitariness of man, and how paradoxically it is together, while touching, that this gulf of separation is most dizzyingly apparent:

The whole business of eroticism is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still. The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists within the realm of discontinuity.... The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives.<sup>8</sup>

The gulf Bataille speaks of is that of death, which can only ever be our own—vertiginous, hypnotising, it is strangely also what provides continuity. This play between birth into discontinuity and death leading to continuity intimately links the two. The desire for touching this continuity is, Bataille argues, a dominant element within eroticism. In the wrenching of the discontinuous subject into the continuity of death, eroticism lies within the domain of violence and violation.

<sup>1</sup> Melville, H, 1985, *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories*, Harmondsworth: Penguin. (Written 1888, although unfinished at his death in 1891. First published in 1924).  
<sup>2</sup> Querrelle, 1982, directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder is based upon Jean Genet’s 1947 novel *Querelle de Brest*. Genet had himself briefly joined the Legion at 18, expelled for homosexual transgressions. The French Foreign Legion was created after the French Revolution to allow foreigners to serve within the military. Cloaked in romanticism as a place of refuge for those escaping a troubled past, the foreigner is here both a legal description, and also he who is already other, dislocated and lost.  
<sup>3</sup> Nancy, J L, “The Inoperative Community”, Peter Connor, ed and trans, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Also see *Film—Philosophy*, vol 12, no 1, Denis, C, and Jean-Luc Nancy, “Beyond the Human Body: Claire Denis’s Ecologies”, Douglas Morrey and Laura McMahon eds, (2008), *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* 7, Summer 2014.  
<sup>4</sup> Nancy, J L, *Corpus*, Richard A Rand trans, Berlin: Diaphanes, 2007, 2000.  
<sup>5</sup> Kristeva, J, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Leon S Roudiez trans, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.  
<sup>6</sup> Connor, S, *Mortification in Thinking Through the Skin*, Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey eds, London: Routledge, 2001. These relationships between skin and narrative, skin and memory and our investment in the legibility of this deceptive, fantasmatic surface, parallel the projected cinematic image’s ability to turn any surface into a screen, a skin.  
<sup>7</sup> Nancy, J L, “A-religion”, *The European Graduate School Journal of European Studies* (originally published in *Vacarme*, January 2001), Julia Borossa trans. Denis was commission by the television channel Arte to make a film on the subject of foreignness, which led to researching the French Foreign Legion and the making of *Beau Travail*.  
<sup>8</sup> Bataille, G, *Erotism*. Mary Dalwood trans, San Francisco: City Light Books, 1986, 1957.



# CHICAGO

2006

Adam Broomberg  
& Oliver Chanarin







# PUBLIC ORDER

2002-2005

Sarah Pickering



# AIRSIDE

**2006-2008**

Richard Mosse





# PERSONAL KILL

2005-2008

Geissler/Sann







# 29 PALMS

2003-2004

An-My Lê







# RED LAND, BLUE LAND

2000

Claudio Hils







# KILL HOUSE

2005

Christopher Stewart





List of Plates:

**Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin**

All works from *Chicago*, 2006

**Sarah Pickering**

All works from *Public Order*, 2002–2005

*Lola Court*, 2004  
*River Way (Road Block)*, 2004  
*Behind Flicks Nightclub*, 2004  
*Semi-Detached*, 2004  
*Magdalen Green*, 2004  
*High Street*, 2002  
*Denton Underground Station*, 2003  
*Off Vickers Way*, 2004

**Richard Mosse**

All works from *Airside*, 2006–2008

*707 San Bernardino*, 2007  
*737 San Bernardino*, 2007  
*747 Heathrow*, 2008  
*747 Schiphol*, 2007  
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*A380 Teesside*, 2008

**Geissler/Sann**

All works from *personal kill* 2005–2008

*personal kill*, #16, 2006  
*personal kill*, #1, 2006  
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*personal kill*, #15, 2006  
*personal kill*, #21, 2006

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*Marine Palms*, 2003–2004  
*Security and Stabilisation Operations*, *Marines*, 2003–2004  
*Security and Stabilisation Operations*, *Graffiti II*, 2003–2004  
*Security and Stabilisation Operations*, *Iraqi Police*, 2003–2004  
*Security and Stabilisation Operations*, *Graffiti*, 2003–2004

**Claudio Hills**

All works from *Red Land*, *Blue Land*, 2000

*Target on Bravo Field Firing Area*, *Box Body from Inside*  
*Painted Idealistic View of the Senne as Backdrop to the Büren Small Bore Range*  
*Tin-City*, *Outside the Village*  
*Close Quarters Battle Range*, *Village Centre with Car*  
*Close Quarters Battle Range*, *Dead End Street*  
*Tin-City*, *Breeze-Block Houses From the 1980s*  
*Close Quarters Battle Range*, *Village Centre with Church*

**Christopher Stewart**

All works from *Kill House*, 2005

Contributors:

**Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin** are artists living and working in London. Together they have had numerous international exhibitions including at The Museum of Modern Art, Tate, Apexart, The Gwagnju Biennale, the Stedelijk Museum, the International Center of Photography, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, The Photographers Gallery and Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art. Their work is represented in major public and private collections including Tate Modern, The Museum of Modern Art, the Stedelijk Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Musee de l'Elysee, The International Center of Photography. In 2013 they were awarded the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize for *War Primer 2*, and most recently they were awarded the International Center of Photography Infinity Award 2014 for their publication, *Holy Bible*. Recent exhibitions include Dodo at Museo Jumex, Divine Violence at Mostyn, Conflict, Time and Photography at Tate Modern and the Shanghai Biennale 2014. Broomberg & Chanarin are practitioners in residence at London College of Communication.

**David Campany** is a writer, curator and artist. He is the author of *The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip*, 2014, *Art and Photography*, 2003, *Gasoline*, 2013, *Photography and Cinema*, 2008, and *Walker Evans: the Magazine Work*, 2014, the forthcoming *Looking at Photographs and A Handful of Dust*. He has published over 150 essays on subjects as diverse as forensic photography, film stills, photojournalism, surrealism, conceptual art and architectural photography. He writes for *Aperture*, *Frieze*, *Source*, *Photoworks*, *Art Review*, *Oxford Art Journal* and *FOAM* magazine. Recent curatorial projects include two shows of the work of Victor Burgin at AmbikaP3 and Richard Saltoun Gallery (2013) and Mark Neville: Deeds Not Words for The Photographers' Gallery, London (2013). In 2010 he co-curated Anonymes: Unnamed America in Photography and Film, the inaugural show at Le Bal, Paris. David is a recipient of the International Center of Photography Infinity Award for his writing on photography. He teaches at the University of Westminster, London.

**Howard Caygill** is Professor of Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University and prior to this he was Professor of Cultural History at Goldsmiths University. His research interests are in the fields of the history of philosophy, aesthetics and cultural history. His many publications include: *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*, 2013, *Levinas and the Political*, 2002, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, 1998, and *The Art of Judgment*, 1989. He is a regular contributor to the journals *Radical Philosophy*, *Parallax*, *Angelaki*, *Photographies* and *Theory, Culture & Society*.

**Beate Geissler/Oliver Sann** Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann have been active as a collaborative partnership since 1996. Their work concentrates on inner alliances of knowledge and power, their deep links in western culture and the escalation in and transformation of human beings through technology. Geissler/Sann's artistic research utilises a variety of forms of visualisation: these include photography, video, installation, games, performances, internet-based work and books. On the threshold dividing document from created reality, on the border between factual occurrence and fictional bringing-into-being, their work scrutinises the inherent idiosyncrasies of media. Within the collaborative space of an artist duo and interdisciplinary research, the artists' work spans science, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, political science and contemporary art. Geissler and Sann were born in Germany and live and work in Chicago.

**Jennifer Good** is Senior Lecturer in the History and Theory of Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at London College of Communication, University of the Arts, London. She trained as a printmaker and textile artist before completing her PhD in visual culture at the University of Nottingham. She has also worked as a researcher for the UK Government Art Collection and as a faculty member at the Foundation for International Education,

London. Her research interests include photography and conflict; history and memory; trauma theory and psychoanalysis, and media representations of the War on Terror, as well as pedagogies of reading and writing. She is the author of *Photography and September 11th: Spectacle, Memory, Trauma*, 2015, and co-editor of *Mythologising the Vietnam War: Visual Culture and Mediated Memory*, 2014. Her work on photography and trauma has also been published in a number of journals including *The International Journal of the Humanities and Health*, *Risk and Society*, and she writes regularly for *Source* magazine.

**Adam Jasper** completed his PhD in Art History at the University of Sydney and has written widely on philosophy, art and culture and is a regular contributor to Cabinet Magazine, Frieze, Art & Australia and Vice. In 2013 he co-curated the exhibition Living in the Ruins of the Twentieth Century for the University of Technology Gallery in Sydney. He is a lecturer on the Photography and Situated Media programme in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney.

**Claudio Hills** is an artist, curator and Professor of Photography at the Fachhochschule Dornbirn, Österreich and a member of the Deutsche Fotografischen Akademie. His publications include *Abseits-aside- á l'écart*, 2012, *Archive Belfast*, 2004, *The Making of the Euro—Ein Historienmosaik*, 2001, and *Red Land*, *Blue Land*, 2000. Exhibitions include Northern Ireland: 30 years of Photography, Belfast Exposed and the MAC (2013), Biennale internationale de la Photographie et des Arts visuels, 2010, and Les Chiroux, Centre culturel de Liège (2010).

**An-My Lê** was born in Saigon and left Vietnam in 1975 and settled in the United States as a political refugee. She graduated from Stanford University, California in biology in 1981, and graduated in photography from Yale School of Art in 1993. She lives and works in New York and is Professor of Photography at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. She has had solo exhibitions at Baltimore Museum of Art (2014), DIA: Beacon (2007–2008), the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle (2007), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2006), The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago (2006), and PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2002). Her work is held extensively in public collections in the United States, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, and the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and Queensland Art Gallery, Australia. She is the recipient of MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellowships.

**Richard Mosse** was born in Ireland and is currently based in New York. He earned a Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art from Goldsmiths, London in 2005 and an MFA in Photography from Yale School of Art in 2008. Mosse is a recipient of the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize (2014), Yale’s Poynter Fellowship in Journalism (2014), the B3 Award at the Frankfurt Biennale (2013), an ECAS Commission (2013), the Guggenheim Fellowship (2011), and a Leonore Annenberg Fellowship (2008–2010). Mosse's work, *The Enclave*, was commissioned for the national pavilion of Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 2013. He has published two monographs with Aperture Foundation. *Foreign Policy* Magazine listed Mosse as a Leading Global Thinker of 2013.

**Sarah Pickering** received an MA in Photography at the Royal College of Art in 2005. She has exhibited widely including at How We Are: Photographing Britain, Tate Britain (2007), New Photography in Britain, Galleria Civica di Modena, Italy (2008), Signs of a Struggle: Photography in the Wake of Postmodernism, Victoria and Albert Museum (2011), Theatres of the Real, Fotomuseum, Antwerp (2009), Manipulating Reality, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence (2009/2010), An Orchestrated Vision: The Theater of Contemporary Photography St Louis Art Museum, USA (2012) and Living in the Ruins of the Twentieth Century, UTS Gallery, Sydney (2013). Solo exhibitions include

Ffotogallery, Wales (2009), Incident Control at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago (2010) and Art and Antiquities at Meessen De Clercq, Brussels (2011). Her most recent body of work, *Celestial Objects* was commissioned by Locust+ and exhibited Durham City as part of the North East Photography Network event in 2013. Her monograph *Explosions, Fires and Public Order* is published by Aperture and MoCP Gallery.

**Alexandra Stara** is Associate Professor and Reader in the History and Theory of Architecture at Kingston University London. She is a qualified architect with Masters degrees in advanced architectural studies from University College London and the history and philosophy of architecture from the University of Cambridge, and a doctorate in the history of art from the University of Oxford. She has been lecturing and publishing on the hermeneutics of architecture, photography and the museum for the past 20 years. She chairs the Royal Institute of British Architects' President's Medals Dissertation panel since 2012, is on the panel for the Global Architecture Graduate Awards, and on the editorial board of *The Architectural Review*. Her work appears in several journals and anthologies, most recently *History of Photography*, 2013, *Skiascope*, 2015, and the anthology *Migration and Culture*, 2015. Other projects include: curating Strange Places: Urban Landscape Photography, Arts Council funded exhibition at the Stanley Picker Gallery, London (2009); co-editing *Curating Architecture and the City*, 2009, and *The Edges of Trauma: Explorations in Visual Art and Literature*, 2014, and authoring *The Museum of French Monuments 1795–1816: Killing Art To Make History*, 2013.

**Christopher Stewart** received his MA in Photography from the Royal College of Art in London and has exhibited widely including Darkside II at Fotomuseum Winterthur, the Victoria and Albert Museum's Something That I'll Never Really See, East End Academy at the Whitechapel Gallery, and Fabula at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, Bradford. *Dark Pacific Sun*, in collaboration with the artist Mohini Chandra, was shown at Gimpel Fils in London in 2014. His work is featured in photographic surveys including *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, Thames and Hudson, *100 European Photographers*, EXIT Madrid, and *Basic Photography*, Focal Press. His work is held in public and private collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum's permanent collection in London and the Martin Z Margulies collection in Miami. His catalogues essays include “From Periphery to Centre and Back Again for Made in Britain”, Krakow Photomonth, 2010, “Photography in Pieces” for *Hijacked III*, Kehrer Press, 2012, and “Dialecturnal” for the University of Technology Sydney Gallery, 2012. He is Associate Professor of Photography in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney and was previously Principal Lecturer and Course Director for MA Photography at the University of Brighton.

**Esther Teichmann** received her PhD from the Royal College of Art and has exhibited and published internationally. Recent group exhibitions have included InAppropriation at the Houston Centre of Photography, The Constructed View at the Dong Gang Museum of Photography in South Korea and Femina at the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Pavillion Vendome in Paris. Forthcoming solo shows will be held at Legion TV in London and Reiss-Engelhorn Museum Mannheim in Germany. In 2014 she was the recipient of the Levallois Award and the subsequent exhibition Fractal Scars, Salt Water and Tears was shown in Paris and in London. Her work is featured in important survey publications including *In Our World: New Photography from Britain*, edited by Filippo Maggia, *100 New Artists*, edited by Francesca Gavin, Laurence King and Phaidon's *Looking at Photographs*, by David Campany. In 2014 Self Publish Be Happy published her work as their Book Club Volume V. In 2012 she was a guest professor at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco and is currently a Senior Lecturer at London College of Communication, University of the Arts London and a lecturer at the Royal College of Art in London.

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