"What Made a Story, to Begin With?" Visibility and Vantage Point in the War Correspondence of Martha Gellhorn, Michael Herr, and Dexter Filkins

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> War as a spectacle, as something to see, ought never to be underestimated.
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> —J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (1959)

If one takes as a horizon certain contemporary discourses on warfare, the latter appears increasingly as a conflict between different arrangements of sight. During recent decades a strong thread within critical and theoretical writing about war has identified the interplay of visibility and invisibility, secrecy and exposure, as a primary axis around which to examine institutions of armed force, whether in work by Paul Virilio on technologies of vision, Samuel Weber and Rey Chow on targeting, or, more recently, Trevor Paglen and Laleh Khalili on rendition, confinement, and military black sites.[1] At the same time, this period also manifests a concern with first-hand witness and the lived experience of combat, from John Keegan's "face of battle" and Caroline Forché's "poetry of witness" to Samuel Hynes's "soldier's tale"—stories from those who were there, telling tales from the ground.[2] While there may seem to be little connecting these approaches, the two paradigms arguably address warfare from within a shared framework, just from contrary directions: as the former tracks the expansion of a military perceptual apparatus of unparalleled oversight, from observation towers and reconnaissance balloons to precision munitions and drone surveillance, the latter develops narratives of what Yuval Harari has called "flesh witnessing," a phenomenology of combat told from the participant's eye-level point of view.[3]

Divergences between these two perspectives are significant, not least because crucial power differentials are inscribed within them: there is a world of difference between the mode of sight manifest in aerial photography and that of the proverbial view from the trenches—at the extreme, between the visual act of targeting and the experience of being a target.[4] On the other hand, the concurrent development, since roughly the 1980s, of these two strands of writing about armed conflict and military technology suggests a relationship not only contrasting but also, in part, complementary. Sight from above and sight from below—opposed in important respects, but also two sides of a shared coin, tethered to one another by a common emphasis on problems of perception, in tandem generating a portrait of warfare and the military that privileges the latter's relationship to, and reshaping of, the human sensorium.

This emphasis on witnessing, vision, and perception provides a useful framework for examining war correspondence, while, in turn, the latter offers a productive archive for considering paradigms of sight as they develop in relation to a host of contextual factors during the twentieth century.[5] The genre suggests itself because it has long wrestled with problems that revolve around point of view and perspective—indeed, such problems are arguably central to its status as a distinct genre: What is the proper position from which to represent armed conflict? How can the correspondent gain a vantage point providing purchase—geographic, political, conceptual—on both the conflict and the correspondent's position within it? In grappling with such questions, the figure of the war correspondent exists suspended between the two polarities of sight outlined above—first-hand witness and broader regimes of mediated vision—neither a direct participant, in the sense of soldier or combatant, nor necessarily a representative of techno-visual oversight. This ambivalent positioning generates a productive situation for criticism seeking to track historical changes in the practice and representation of wartime

witnessing, distinctive moments of vision indexed to underlying mutations in the technological and operational milieu of battle.[6]

The perceptual challenges confronting war correspondents may be traced to the genre's roots in the nineteenth century, but they become acute during the twentieth, as transformations in both the scope of combat and the media landscape generate new formal problems.[7] Martha Gellhorn's correspondence from the Spanish Civil War provides a useful ground state from which to measure these shifts in the genre. Facing in 1930s Madrid one of the earliest sustained campaigns of aerial bombardment, Gellhorn registers the challenge of witnessing this novel operational space—that is, for Gellhorn, seeing the war is understood as a problem, rather than presumed as a given. At the same time, her writing doesn't extensively question the immediacy of her sense perception of the war: despite, or perhaps because of, the introduction of 35 mm cameras and other machines of apparently direct visual recording, the problematic of vision is comprehended in her dispatches primarily vis-à-vis the war's scale, indexed to the relative novelty of airpower, but not yet explicitly in terms of sight's technological mediation.[8] In turn, during the US war in Southeast Asia, Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, first published in 1977, responds precisely to the latter situation: as a statistically driven American war machine creates what historian James William Gibson has called a "double reality" in the war, Herr recognizes that the genre must become self-reflexive in response, inhabiting both—and exploiting the disconnect between—the solipsistic world of wartime representation, and that of war on the ground. Finally, a generation later, as US military-media policy in Afghanistan and Iraq shifts from information management to blackout and embedding, Dexter Filkins's *The Forever War* (2008) echoes Gellhorn and Herr, but under new conditions. Rather than intensify a field of total media access to highlight its contradictions, Filkins turns embedding against itself, using it as his book's

formal organizing principle. By documenting his own increasing isolation from the very conflict he is meant to report, Filkins records a claustrophobic world devoid of perspective or insight, until embedding itself becomes the only story he can tell.

Taken in tandem, these three moments in twentieth-century war correspondence document the particular ways practitioners contend with the space of a battlefield increasingly totalizing and abstract, and also with changes in media technologies that shape attempts to observe modern war. The movement from Gellhorn to Herr to Filkins traces a substantial transformation, if not partial eclipse, in the capacities of wartime witnessing, arguably leading to an increasingly frayed relationship between the two key terms in this analysis: war and sight. Indeed, while these writers may at times be recruited in retrospect as exemplars of eye-witnessing, their own writings often appear quite cognizant of their ambivalent and conflicted positions.[9] Following these readings, then, this essay's brief conclusion shifts attention away from particular examples to pose more general questions about the privileging of the visual or sensory apparatus as a dominant framework for considering modern war—that is, it queries paradigms that apprehend war primarily as something to see. No doubt, as the readings below attest, there is much to be gained from such an approach, but what might its status as a primary paradigm indicate, or elide—for all its value, is there an opportunity cost, as it were, of conceptualizing war through tropes of perception and visuality, visibility and invisibility?

Bomb Sight: War from the Air in Spain

In a world-weary introduction to the 1959 edition of her collected war correspondence, *The Face of War*, Martha Gellhorn casts war as an unchanging same, more archetypal than historical: "There is a single plot in war … Starving wounded children, in Barcelona in 1938 and in Nijmegen

in 1944, were the same. … War is a horrible repetition" (*FW* 6). In her interchapter framing her reporting from the Spanish Civil War, however, she highlights the reverse, noting the novelty of that conflict: "What was new and prophetic about the war in Spain was the life of the civilians, who stayed at home and had the war brought to them. … The people of the Republic of Spain were the first to suffer the relentless totality of modern war" (*FW* 16–17). While one might debate the exact origins of so-called modern war—mass mobilization under Napoleon, logistical advances of the US Civil and Franco-Prussian Wars, entrenched combat in the Russo-Japanese War or World War I—there is something to Gellhorn's periodization that locates a critical turning point in the specificity of modern armed conflict in airpower, which might be exemplified by sustained aerial bombing as first practiced extensively in 1930s Spain.[10]

Accounts of reportage in the Spanish Civil War have tended to revolve around matters of partisanship and commitment—the dramatic intersection of politics and affect, and how this impacted journalistic objectivity—while less attention has been given to effects following from the novel technological cum operational environment of war from the air.[11] Yet it is not coincidental that interpretive paradigms linking war and techniques of sight have tended to correspond with the periodization of what Martin van Creveld has called the "age of airpower": from its inception the latter has arguably been the military branch most directly linked with sight and vision, most clearly in forms of reconnaissance and targeting.[12] In keeping, from Gellhorn's perspective, this development poses for war correspondence new questions of point of view and perspective—from what angle, and in what settings, can one best represent a war in which shelling from the air plays a prominent role? Rather than a circumscribed field of combat, which, for all its novelty, even the carnage of the First World War held to, the would-be witness and reporter is met with a situation in which the battle is indistinguishable from "daily life" in an

urban environment: "a whole city was a battlefield, waiting in the dark" (*FW* 16, 15). While it might be argued that cities under siege throughout history have suffered this strange double-life, airpower nevertheless creates a new vertical dimension in urban battle, rendering the space of the war more an abstract container than a walled site: the boundaries of the battle expand and contract according to the scope and periodicity of the bombing. Rather than documenting clashes between opposing forces on the ground, or conversations among soldiers during down time—though there is that, as well, in Gellhorn—the correspondent seeking to capture, on the ground, the particularity of war from the air must develop a different kind of seeing. Nor can the witness take a proverbial bird's eye view, because it is precisely this perspective that has now been incorporated within the weaponry systems that frame the conflict. What might once have provided a perspective outside the battle is now enveloped within it: the place of the witness is replaced by that of the weapon, and the former must reposition herself accordingly.[13]

In this respect, it is noteworthy that Gellhorn's first piece of correspondence from Madrid begins not with sight but with hearing: "At first the shells went over; you could hear the thud as they left the Fascists' guns, a sort of groaning cough; then you heard them fluttering toward you. As they came closer the sound went faster and straighter and sharper and then, very fast, you heard the booming noise when they hit" (*FW* 19). The fact that Gellhorn does not see the shells, or their source, is significant: the opening foregrounds the fact that she will have to work to witness the war, to find points of view that will allow her to bring it into focus. Even when she does describe bombers in correspondence from the following year, she emphasizes their distance; they appear hardly relevant, driving home a disconnect between cause and effect, a collapse of narrative sense-making: "It was cold but really too lovely and everyone listened for the sirens all the time, and when we saw the bombers they were like tiny silver bullets moving

forever up, across the sky" (*FW* 37). Seeing the war in order to articulate its coherence is registered as a problem, not presumed. Much of her correspondence from the Spanish Civil War—her inauguration as a war reporter—might be taken as a response to that foundational problematic, indexed to the transformation of the techno-operational environment of warfare.[14]

Though Gellhorn does report from the trenches dug into the streets of Madrid, and also constructs scenes to showcase having witnessed the destructive effects of shelling in the moment of impact—as when, in an oft-cited scene, she describes a mother and son seeking cover just as a piece of shrapnel catches the boy in the throat (*FW* 23)—most of her reporting focuses on the aftermath of bombings, and hence takes place at locations seemingly removed from a conventional conception of the battlefield: neighborhood apartment buildings, community theaters, hotels, shoe stores, cafés, hospitals.[15] In part this is because the bombings, by their nature, are virtually impossible to predict—to witness one requires a moment of serendipitous misfortune. But in its choice of such settings, Gellhorn's reporting also indicates the extent to which she is grappling with a new kind of war that cannot be limited to the space and time implied in previous notions of combat; war from the air creates new settings that collapse everyday life and wartime living, settings which in turn become the foundation for new scenes of war correspondence. "Disaster had swung like a compass needle, aimlessly, all over the city," she writes. "Near the station, the architect asked a concierge if everyone was all right in her house. Four shells had come that way. Yes, she said, do you want to see it?" (*FW* 30) Alongside the metaphor highlighting the disorienting effects of aerial bombing, the way it overturns markers distinguishing safety and danger, apartment building and battlefield, the passage also indicates that this new kind of war recalibrates the act of witnessing and reporting, as the question from the concierge becomes Gellhorn's for the reader: Do you want to see it? While it

is certainly the case that Gellhorn's attention to the civilian victims of the conflict derives from her strong moral conscience, and from her position as among the first women to inhabit the largely masculine field of war correspondence—those "experienced men who had serious work to do," she writes laconically, but perhaps not entirely ironically—her choice to report primarily from the spatial and temporal margins of battle also registers the lesson that the boundaries of the latter could no longer be clearly established (*FW* 16).[16]

If it is difficult to see or witness war from the air, then it is equally challenging to reconnect events apprehended only in their aftermath within a broader narrative articulating cause and effect. How does one refashion a story out of sudden, discrete occurrences defined primarily by the force of rupture and discontinuity? The episodic, almost picaresque structure of Gellhorn's reporting goes some way toward reflecting this reality, as in her third piece of correspondence for *Collier's*, from November 1938, which juxtaposes disparate settings in Barcelona without clarifying the connections between them: moments recorded in bread lines, living rooms, hospital wards, and movie theaters, a few paragraphs on each, some lines of dialogue, certain scenes placed within extended parentheticals to emphasize the device of montage. On the other hand, this same report, which opens with the aforementioned depiction of distant bombers crossing the sky, also gestures toward deeper structures that link the various wartime scenes presented to the reader: while the piece begins with bombers viewed high above, and then highlights their destructive effects in a mosaic of scenes of aftermath, it ends, significantly, with a tour of a munitions factory.

At first the latter operates as yet another example playing into the new visual logic established in this mode of warfare; as the cityscape, from the perspective of the bombers, is increasingly defined by its complete visibility, invisibility becomes a dominant defensive strategy:

"You never know exactly where the munitions factories are, and are not intended to know. We drove over many streets I had not seen before and stopped before a great grille gateway, somewhere at the edge of town. The factory looked like a series of cement barns, not connected particularly, and shining and clean and cheerful in the winter sun" (*FW* 47). Even as the formal appearance of the factory partakes in the dynamic of sight and concealment that animates aerial war, however, its function allows Gellhorn to re-narrativize episodes of destruction by reconnecting them to the production of explosives. In other words, whereas most of her reporting from Spain bears witness to the effects of aerial bombing, her tour of the munitions factory relates those scenes back to their causes. Gellhorn thus closes the loop as she concludes the piece: on the one hand, she alludes again to the bombers depicted at its opening, now flying over the munitions factory outside of which she stands; on the other, she returns to the dichotomy of hearing and sight with which she raised the problematic of witnessing aerial war in her first piece of correspondence: "I could not see the planes but I heard them; on a clear day they fly high for safety, so you rarely see them. … The planes now showed themselves clear and silver just a little way down the sky, the sky dotted with a few small white smoke bubbles from anti-aircraft shells" (*FW* 49).

Gellhorn's war correspondence after the Spanish Civil War continued to highlight the distinctiveness of twentieth-century war from the air, whether in a 1943 piece on RAF bomber crews or, more extensively, her reporting from the US war in Southeast Asia, which reads in certain respects like a reprise of her reporting from Spain.[17] Here, too, her work focuses on the devastating effects of aerial bombing—with the key difference that, as she puts it, these are now "our bombs"—and here, too, this takes her to sites that foreground a tragic temporality of aftermath, from hospitals and orphanages to refugee camps and Saigon living rooms (*FW* 252).

While there is some attention given to novel aspects of the conflict, in particular the changing environment of public relations and information management—the "war of words," as Gellhorn labels it—this transformed media milieu does not prompt a noticeable shift in her approach to reporting; her prose still aims to tell what she sees, to tell it straight, and is still animated by the same sharp moral vision, seeming at times to be carried over from an earlier historical moment defined by an ethos of committed journalism and documentary reportage: "I date from an older America," she writes at the close of one piece about the US war in Vietnam, explaining this older moment as one in which distinctions between "propaganda" and "truth" appeared to hold more water (*FW* 253, 260). More than a simple lament about the consolidation of an ever-more-sophisticated US wartime spin apparatus, Gellhorn's remark gestures at, without fully elaborating, a new set of historical conditions for war correspondence.

Television Eye: Media Saturation in Southeast Asia

Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), his classic account of the US war in Southeast Asia, begins with Herr's description not of the war itself, but of a representation—specifically, a map: "There was a map of Vietnam on the wall of my apartment in Saigon and some nights, coming back late to the city, I'd lie on my bed and look at it."[18] Alluding to the conflict's layered history, Herr notes in passing that "the map had been made in Paris," and describes it as "a marvel, especially now that it wasn't real anymore … laying a kind of veil over the countries it depicted"; in turn, the unreality of the map creates a virtual reality that covers, distorts, even replaces, the world it is meant to represent: "If dead ground could come back and haunt you the way dead people do, they'd have been able to mark my map CURRENT and burn the ones they'd been using since '64" (*D* 3). Herr's cartographic meditation functions as a thick metaphor introducing one of the

book's central themes: the disconnect—sometimes absurd, often tragic—between the war in its concrete lived experience and the war as abstracted into numbers, charts, and graphs by US command. The passage outlines a complex interweaving of world and imagining, hence the transformation of map into veil, and ground into ghost. If maps purport to represent ground, then this first-order abstraction is further dematerialized by the similarly paired figures of veil and ghost, a process brought full circle when the map itself becomes more "current," more present and real, than the terrain it appears merely to portray. Underlying these figural metamorphoses is the war itself, which generates the slippage between materiality and dream that Herr documents throughout the book, as when the metaphoric cluster of map-veil-ground-ghost accretes a final layer, becoming a figure for the war: "We knew that the uses of most information were flexible, different pieces of ground told different stories to different people. We also knew that for years now there had been no country here but the war" (*D* 3).

Though one might account for the distinctive features of Herr's narration by treating him under the wider umbrella of 1960s New Journalism, the latter's signature features of immersive reporting, emphasis on scene over detail, and blurred lines between participant and observer, had already, in the field of war correspondence, been developed by the Spanish Civil War, as exemplified by Gellhorn's reporting.[19] Likewise, as noted, Herr's war in Southeast Asia is, also like that of Gellhorn, shaped significantly by airpower, with its concomitant problematics of scale and sighting, an aspect Herr highlights through recurrent reflections on the helicopter, a "collective meta-chopper" becoming a kind of icon or metonym for US power in the war (*D* 9).[20] While not unimportant, such factors are arguably overshadowed by, and situated within, another: the war's new media landscape. Herr's specific narrative and rhetorical strategies emerge in response to the novelties of a war experience whose sheer abundance of coverage,

combined with and enabled by a distinctive US press strategy of information management, requires that he rethink the position of the war correspondent.[21] Just as war from the air forced Gellhorn to reconsider the act of witnessing, recalibrating the apparently commonsense acts of seeing and noticing, so too for Herr the work of looking is rendered increasingly complicated by the media landscape encouraged by American command structures. One is driven by a shift in the physical space of the war, while the other grapples with a mutation in its representational space, but for both reporters the work of witnessing can no longer be treated as unproblematic.

In this light, Herr's map operates as commentary on what James William Gibson, in *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (2000), has called the war's "double-reality."[22] With this phrase Gibson designates the way US command, incorporating tools of public relations and systems analysis to a then-unprecedented degree, constructed a skewed image of the war from manipulated calculations and euphemistic language—a doppelgänger in the realm of representation. Gibson documents how US "war-managers" represented the war to themselves "as a productive system that can be rationally managed and … scientifically determined by constructing computer models. … What constitutes their knowledge [in this system] is an array of numbers—numbers of U.S. and allied forces, numbers of VC and NVA forces, body counts, kill ratios—numbers that appear scientific. Yet these numbers, the official representations of Technowar, had no referent in reality."[23] Herr echoes Gibson: "Nothing so horrible ever happened upcountry that it was beyond language fix and press relations, a squeeze fit into the computer would make the heaviest numbers jump up and dance" (*D* 42). Though conscious falsification of such numbers occurred, encouraged by a structure that indexed promotion to escalating numbers of enemy dead, more frequent was an unconscious technophilia, a love of one's own algorithms. In this context, numeracy becomes a means of perception, a mode of

seeing the war as a set of figures displayed on screens and documents. The turning point in such a paradigm occurs not when the public is seduced by such abstract modeling, though that may happen, but rather when the creators of the models come under the sway of their own formulas, and base their actions upon them, allowing representation to drive decision-making.

Parallel to this manipulation of statistics was the generation of virtual reality in the realm of language. As Herr writes, speaking of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office: "That office had been created to handle press relations and psychological warfare, and I never met anyone there who seemed to realize that there was a difference" (*D* 216). The pairing recalls, and updates, Gellhorn's dichotomy of "truth" and "propaganda" from her reporting on the same conflict, though here the gulf between terms has widened in both directions, as Gellhorn's *truth* becomes Herr's *press relations*—the latter phrase already operating as a gently coercive inducement framing a particular conception of the journalist's duty—and *propaganda* no longer speaks its own name, but is now hidden behind the jargon and justification of military necessity: "psychological warfare." Even the language used to describe what might be seen as a distinction between honest representation and lies has been resignified by US media strategy, encouraging those writing about the war to grant a foundational conceptual concession before the first report has even been filed.[24]

The war's transformation of language not only reinforced the creation of a double reality at the level of command, but also created disenchantment on the ground, via a cheapening of concrete experience and actual suffering. Literary critic Paul Fussell's commentary on the Second World War applies equally well to the situation in Southeast Asia described by Gibson and Herr: "What was it about the war that moved the troops to constant verbal subversion and contempt? It was not just the danger and fear, the boredom and uncertainty and loneliness and

deprivation. It was rather the conviction that optimistic publicity and euphemism had rendered that experience so falsely that it would never be readily communicable."[25] *Free fire zones* become *specified strike zones*, *search and destroy* is reimagined as *sweep and clear*, *hearts and minds* is rendered *community spirit*—not only does such semantic re-engineering short circuit any purportedly clean transfer of witnessed events into the prose of testimony, but it also has a retroactive effect on the category of experience itself: local knowledge grounded in the lived everydayness of the war is effaced, delegitimized as not real knowledge of the war, recast as merely anecdotal.[26] At the same time, such phenomenological knowledge refuses to disappear completely into abstract algorithms, remaining to haunt official knowledge like the "dead ground" underlying Herr's cartographic metaphor, creating battle lines on the plane of representation itself, where divergent renditions of the war maneuver for position.

This wholesale manipulation of reality is not a contingent byproduct of US command structures, but an essential systemic feature of the war effort, central to American media strategy in Vietnam. If war correspondence since its emergence had usually been dominated, from the command point of view, by strategies controlling access, US operations in Southeast Asia marked a turning point in this narrative, a shift from secrecy and censorship to public relations and information management. In other words, the US offered correspondents unprecedented access to the war, a development Herr highlights: "At the height of the Tet Offensive alone, there were between 600 and 700 correspondents accredited to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam … There was no nation so impoverished, no hometown paper so humble that it didn't get its man in for a quick feel at least once" (*D* 220–221).[27] Paradoxically, abundant coverage reinforces rather than reveals the double reality generated by US management of the war's representation. Whereas in previous conflicts—say, for Gellhorn in 1930s Spain—the

correspondent's capacity to tell what she sees performs an important epistemological and ethical function, for Herr this laudable role can no longer be taken as unproblematic: the correspondent now not only confronts dangers, whether physical or political, associated with exposure, but also risks contributing to the war's *over*-exposure in a flood of documentation. Increased information threatens to muddy rather than clarify the stakes of the conflict: "The spokesmen spoke in words that had no currency left as words, sentences with no hope of meaning in the sane world, and if much of it was sharply queried by the press, all of it got quoted. The press got all the facts (more or less), it got too many of them. But it never found a way to report meaningfully about death, which of course was what it was all about" (*D* 214–215).

Crucial in this respect is the advent of television: from 10,000 US TV sets in 1941, there were at least 100 million by the time US troops set up shop in Southeast Asia, ushering in what intellectual historian Perry Anderson has called a "saturation of the imaginary" qualitatively different from that of radio or print-based media.[28] Cementing the impact of television as a looking glass through which both audiences at home and US command abroad passed, Herr writes, "We'd all seen too many movies, stayed too long in Television City, years of media glut had made certain connections difficult. The first few times that I got fired at or saw combat deaths, nothing really happened, all the responses got locked in my head. It was the same familiar violence, only moved over to another medium" (*D* 209). Herr once again twists and complicates relations between the material world and its representation, as televised mediation becomes the immediate data of sense consciousness—the "too many movies" that precede his time in Vietnam—while media representation, in turn, derealizes the war, transforming it into "another medium." As he writes earlier, observing the aftermath of a firefight soon after his arrival in country: "I couldn't imagine what I was seeing" (*D* 23)—before Herr can see what is in

front of his eyes, he must be able to imagine it; before he can witness the war, he must work through the war as imagined by the "years of media glut" that came before him: "Conventional journalism could no more reveal the war than conventional firepower could win it, all it could do was take the most profound event of the American decade and turn it into communications pudding, taking its most obvious, undeniable history and making it into a secret history" (*D* 218).

Herr's reportage captures the irony that wartime overabundance of mediated communication generates not exposure but instead, after a point, the opposite: secrecy and opacity. On one level, such conditions limit the effectiveness of any reporting that takes for granted its capacity simply to write what it sees—how can such "conventional journalism," for all its value, avoid either reproducing the mediated myths of "Television City" or becoming one more eddy in an ocean of information, channeled by deeper public relations currents? On another level, perhaps more seriously, they erode the capacity for historical thinking, turning the war's own past into a "secret," as the sheer abundance of each day's coverage leaves no room for integrating it with previous events. In this context, Guy Debord's comments on state power in the age of media spectacle might be applied to Herr's war: "once the running of a state involves a permanent and massive shortage of historical knowledge, that state can no longer be led strategically."[29] While not dismissing certain journalistic mainstays, Herr also reveals the way they serve to obscure the war they claim to illuminate. In contrast, Herr's approach uses satiric juxtaposition and self-reflexive exposure to turn the wartime media glut against itself. By keeping one eye on the ground and another on the screen, straddling a bifurcated "double-reality," Herr provides not just a history of the real war buried beneath the war-as-representation—Gellhorn's straight-shooting reportage might have written that—but instead an account of that very divergence, a genealogy of the political function and conceptual

consequences of the war-as-representation. Herr writes from a vantage point self-consciously complicit with this process while also, albeit always imperfectly, seeking to outflank it by examining the ground of his own positioning and point of view, transforming the very act of seeing the war in order to bring to light its "secret history."

Vanishing Point: Embedded Reporting in Iraq

If, for Gellhorn, a transformation in witnessing war can be indexed to the novel scale of war from the air, and if Herr's situation demands confronting the challenge of information management metastasizing into surrealism, then correspondents in the wake of the US war in Southeast Asia have also faced perceptual problems of a distinctive sort, both continuous and discontinuous with those conditioning previous reporting. Key touch points in this post-Vietnam-War history include the British-Argentine Falklands War and the US invasion of Grenada, in 1982 and 1983, respectively: in each case, the relatively isolated island setting provided an ideal laboratory for generating a new kind of information control in contemporary armed conflict.[30] From the full media blackout instituted by the US in Grenada to the virtual censorship agreements reached between British armed forces and would-be correspondents in the Falklands, the strategies of media management developed in these conflicts became the model for both the so-called pool system of the first Iraq War in the early 1990s and the practice of embedded journalism in its sequel, beginning in 2003. In both conflicts the US sought to reinvent the geographic solipsism of island wars within a more extended campaign, creating virtual journalistic islands composed of one's colleagues or unit, secluded from a wider military and geopolitical situation, the contours of which thus become more difficult to articulate.[31]

The Forever War, by Dexter Filkins, his 2008 volume of correspondence from Afghanistan and Iraq, displays many of the marks of embedded journalism. Like Herr, but apparently with less self-awareness, Filkins documents his own bonding with his unit and his loss of objectivity in reporting the conflict. This can be seen, for instance, in the use of pronouns in his account of the assault on Fallujah: "[Captain] Omohundro pointed to a house. His voice was low but he spoke quickly. When the gate refused to budge, Omohundro ordered one of *his men* to open it with a rocket. *We* poured inside and waited. Nothing. *We* waited in silence as the sun set. The stillness outside seemed the measure of *our* ignorance. *The insurgents* were coming, and now *they* were not. *They* were watching *us*."[32] This fusion of the point of view of American soldiers and reporters also runs in the other direction, as when Filkins recounts the death of a US soldier while clearing a staircase for the unit's photographer: "Ashley needed a corpse for the newspaper. So he asked Omohundro and he gave us a dozen guys. They liked us now; we'd been through hell with them, seen their buddies die. They wanted to help us" (*TFW* 207). Here, as with Herr, but more explicitly, the demands of representation precede and drive action; as the weave between war and media becomes tighter, Filkins's own position appears increasingly partisan, apparently leaving him blind to the war's narrative beyond the human-interest story of his own unit.

At the same time, there are moments where Filkins meditates on this very problem, that is, on the process of embedding that shapes his capacity to gain perspective on the war. For instance, in one of the book's vignettes interspersed between its chapters, Filkins juxtaposes two technologies of war—the helicopter and the car bomb—and the disparate viewpoints they offer:

> The Black Hawk skirted the date palms and the mud-colored roofs, the altitude and the movement of the helicopter offering a cubist view of the world below … It was useful to fly in helicopters for this reason, I thought to myself, useful to think in this way, to take a wider view of the world … Not long before I'd been to the scene of a car bombing, stood amid the screaming mothers and the flesh with dirt, and I had thought that this was all there was. In the Black Hawk I wondered whether I needed to stand back, to take a longer view (*TFW* 145).

Indexing his shift in perspective to the technological apparatus of war from the air, the passage recalls Gellhorn, but inverted: rather than looking up at the bombers from the ground, Filkins's point of view corresponds to that of the targeting mechanism. In this respect, the passage can be read as equating the "longer" and "wider" view with a perspective enabled by US airpower, as if only the latter knows what is best in the long term. On the other hand, this might also be interpreted as a reflection on the transformed perceptual landscape of contemporary counterinsurgency. The reference to a "cubist view" of the war, for instance, suggests that the vantage point from the air is not only "wider" but also necessarily fragmented and abstracted, implying a conception of observing the war that cannot but factor the viewer's work of reconstruction and interpretation into the very act of perceiving.[33] In this way, the passage indicates a level of narrative reflexivity, concerning itself with questions of focalization, point of view, and the mediated construction of the reporter's perception.

This can be seen, more substantially, in the way Filkins uses the process of "embedding" as formal device for structuring his book's narrative arc, documenting, through his own isolation, a deepening divergence between *war* and *correspondence*—that is to say, he records his own

inability to see the very conflict he is meant to be witnessing. Hence his work provides a skeptical commentary on the tradition bridging sight and war traced here: he takes up this lineage, only to drive it into a cul-de-sac. Filkins highlights this in another, linked set of vignettes that depict him jogging in Baghdad. In the first of the sequence, Filkins describes a scene in which neighbors wave as he runs by; though his jog is interrupted one night by a wall of razor wire erected by US forces—"A barricade now stood between me and the rest of the neighborhood" (*TFW* 112)—the wall is dismantled shortly after and his usual route reopened. A hundred pages later, however, this pathway has been re-shaped by American engineers into what they call "Tigris River Park," complete with playground, barbecue pits, and a winding sidewalk for strolling couples. Filkins reflects on the park's contrast to the rest of the city, increasingly engulfed in the war, paying particular attention to the isolating effect of the new geography: "The dissonance was jarring: a war was unfolding outside, the war we'd come to write about, and yet more and more we had to seal ourselves off from it, there in the middle of it" (*TFW* 216). Filkins returns to the jogging motif twice more, each time emphasizing his own increasing seclusion: "I pulled on my running shoes and headed outside. I went through the heavy bulletproof door of the [New York Times] compound and down the long cement chute, a gauntlet of blast walls with a checkpoint at the far end. I ran south about fifty yards and swung around the coils of razor wire, jumped from the cement wall into the dirt" (*TFW* 292; cf. 267). While the linked vignettes can be read as commentary on the devolution of the occupation, they also operate as an allegory for embedded reporting. In stark contrast to Herr's reporting, lost in the deluge of coverage encouraged by US media strategy, here the war gradually devours the journalism meant to cover it, signified by the shrinking of the world in Filkins's route—"My route

had shrunk to a fraction of its old self: about three-quarters of a mile between two posts of armed Iraqis" (*TFW* 292).

The book situates these reflections on Filkins's position as an embedded reporter within its depiction of the broader spatial logic of the US occupation, depicted as one of increasing fortification. This underlying tendency generates paradoxical effects that come to echo and reinforce those facing the reporter: on the one hand, it leads to greater separation from the very war one is meant to be observing; on the other, it leads to a proximity that is practically an identification, as conflict and coverage become virtually indistinguishable, yoked to the same driving principles. The challenge thus becomes one of range-finding, adjusting the focus on one's lens: as with Filkins's car-bomb-helicopter metaphor, one is either too close or too far away, unable to find an adequate perspective to bring events into focus. In this respect, too, we can see in Filkins's text a thread of commentary on various traditions of thought linking war and sight: whereas Gellhorn and Herr, in their own complicated ways, affirm their observational capacities, Filkins's portrait is ultimately more dubious of this possibility.

In this vein, in a chapter suggestively titled, "The Vanishing World," Filkins opines: "It was the spring of 2004 when we lost the country—as a place to go, I mean" (*TFW* 219). Later in the same chapter, he describes the physical manifestation of this process, apparent in the transformation of the *New York Times* bureau office into an armed garrison: "The bureau became a fortress, a high-walled castle from another century. We blocked off Abu Nawas Street, one of the city's main thoroughfares, which ran alongside the front of the house. We brought in a crane to erect concrete blast walls, a foot thick and twenty feet high. We strung coils of razor wire across the top. We hired armed guards, twenty of them, then thirty, then forty. After a time, armed guards became our single largest expense" (*TFW* 223).[34] If this were a process unique to

correspondents from the *New York Times*, then it would arguably be of limited significance, but Filkins leverages his own microcosm to describe a deeper logic of the occupation. A few pages later, Filkins visits a newly-appointed US diplomat inside the Green Zone. His portrait of willful ignorance and opacity echoes that of the fortification of his own office: "Most of the diplomats were serious, dedicated and capable people, and they were brave, too. But they couldn't resist the tide that was pulling them deeper and deeper into their fortified bunkers, farther and farther away from Iraq" (*TFW* 230). The consequences of this fortified mentality are devastating; as Filkins interviews the diplomat, he at first interprets the latter's silence as keeping secrets, but then reconsiders: "I realized that the diplomats weren't telling me anything because they didn't have anything to say" (*TFW* 230).

Increasingly, his own disconnect from the war becomes Filkins's primary theme. He reports on the fact that he can no longer report the war, a line of commentary which itself becomes a statement about the representational practice of being "embedded" within it—rather than increasing proximity, apparent immersion in the war generates the opposite: "As Baghdad became more dangerous, and Western reporters were moving around less and less, stories became harder to find" (*TFW* 282). This process culminates, with a twist, in a chapter entitled, again aptly, "The Labyrinth," in which Filkins travels back to the Green Zone to meet with a CIA operative. An American journalist has been kidnapped, and one of Filkins's sources, a man named Ahmad, offers a tip as to her whereabouts; Filkins contacts the US embassy, and is invited to a meeting. The description of the Green Zone in this chapter indicates an apogee of the logic of fortification: "We stopped in the embassy parking lot, and I figured we were going inside. Instead, we climbed into a golf cart … We drove for several minutes … going into areas of the Green Zone I had never seen before … Finally we arrived at the gates of a walled compound.

The Green Zone, of course, was a walled compound itself. Whatever it was I was going into amounted to a walled compound within a walled compound—an inner sanctum" (*TFW* 284). Filkins enters this sanctum, which turns out to be a CIA compound, to talk to a man named Mike, who has heard about Filkins's source and wants information, ostensibly to resolve the kidnapping but also to tap Ahmad's phone. Filkins eventually agrees to the plan, but only after warning Ahmad, and explaining to Mike the following: "I told Mike that if anything happened to Ahmad, I would write a story about the entire episode—about Mike, and the compound, and everything else. It wasn't much, but it was something" (*TFW* 287).

On one level, the story recounts any number of violations of professional principles and ethical norms; on another, it also operates as an ironic enactment of the process of embedded journalism, for it is at this point that the intersecting logics of fortification in the occupation, on the one hand, and embedding in the reporting about it, on the other, collapse into one another, a dovetailing that results in a further ironic reversal: complete separation becomes its contrary—proximity and identification—as Filkins's story becomes indistinguishable from the war it is meant to describe. That is to say, Filkins's own narrative, the very story that we are reading (for Ahmad is indeed burned in the transaction) becomes fully "embedded" in the war: no longer able even to masquerade as coverage of the conflict, the story of Mike becomes itself a tactical move motivated by the war, for the story is meant to expose Mike in the same way the latter exposed Ahmad. Coverage of the war is thus simply the war carried on by other means, perhaps a difference in degree, but hardly in kind. If the increasing isolation of Western reporters and diplomats creates the danger of complete detachment from the events one is seeking to understand, then Filkins's exchange with Mike manifests the inverse risk—a lack of any distance that might place the war into perspective, and hence generate reflection and understanding.

There is no longer any line between story and war, only a spiraling relationship between the two, each feeding on the other with no coherent insight emerging from either.

Despite its arguable blind spots, then, the book offers commentary on the contradictions of embedded reporting: Filkins finds himself in a position of compromised suspension, shuttling between isolation from, or incorporation within, the underlying logic of the war. The cost of witnessing the war becomes acquiescence to a situation in which, to recall Herr's remark about the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, there is virtually no distinction between espionage, public relations, psychological warfare, and war correspondence. For Filkins there appears no escape from this situation; there is only documentation of the impasse. While this is certainly not the sole possible outcome for the line of generic development traced here, it is one potential trajectory: a self-aware meta-narrative in which this tradition, increasingly unable to perform the acts of seeing that are its hallmark, bears witness to its own undoing.[35]

Oversight: War as Something to See

Thus far the analysis has focused on particular examples of ground-level witnessing in modern war, as this practice has developed within specific operational and mediated contexts during the twentieth century. To the extent that the history of war correspondence from Crimea to the present cannot be divorced from an ongoing need to respond to secrecy, cover up, propaganda, euphemism, public relations, and censorship (including self-censorship), it will be important for correspondents to work at bearing witness to armed conflict for some time to come.[36] Nor am I suggesting that it is not important to examine and reflect on the myriad complex ways in which war is mediated, framed, and made sensible.[37] At the same time, taking a page from the self-reflection exhibited by the correspondents treated above, it is perhaps worth framing this

emphasis on visibility and invisibility—and, by extension, sight and vision, exposure and surveillance, camouflage and concealment—as itself a dominant theoretical framework for apprehending contemporary wars. After all, aside from commonplace associations with violence and destruction, warfare can be comprehended from a wide range of angles: as a space of work and labor, a laboratory for technological development, a complex system of organization and command, a means for the formation of identities and the mobilization of social relations, or a site for meaning-making through figurative, archetypal, and conceptual experimentation. Approaching war as something to see is but one angle among others. What are the roots of this relatively contemporary concern, why might it have become a privileged paradigm, and what might it elide or downplay, even as it continues to generate important insights? Some concluding gestures suggest possible future lines of thought.

In scholarly and critical writing, one place from which to date theoretical accounts constructed around a link between war and vision is the work of Paul Virilio, whose *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, published first in French in 1984, offers itself as titular representative and historical marker. Virilio exemplifies a moment of convergence between media studies and the study of war, with scholars such as Friedrich Kittler and James Der Derian bridging martial and media technologies, as well as a turn to theorizations of networked, information-centric, or cybernetic warfare.[38] As noted at the outset, concerns animating such work appear at first glance distant from, even opposed to, the challenges of perspective and witnessing confronted by the correspondents just examined. One seeks to see war from below in all its immediacy, while the other documents the increasing power of a mediated apparatus of oversight and reconnaissance adapted from military research and development.

At the same time, whether the field of contemporary war is comprehended from the perspective of the intrepid individual witness or that of surveillance mechanisms, the two converge on a shared concern with perception as it intersects with the shifting technological landscape of modern war, creating together a shared matrix of interpretation. The roots of Virilio's own work suggest this convergence: for all its novelty his writing may be understood as an extension of a line of thinking about war stretching back at least to *fin-de-siècle* and interwar periods, in writers such as Ernst Jünger, Erich Remarque, and Stephen Crane—that is, a phenomenological tradition privileging the representation of experience, in particular experience of combat, as the *sine qua non* in writing about war.[39] When placed in this lineage, Virilio, who himself acknowledged a debt to the foundational work of Edmund Husserl, becomes a thinker problematizing immediate experience in war by attending to the mediating technologies of vision that modern warfare itself has generated, while nevertheless representing a continuation, in altered form, of this existentialist school of war writing.[40] Not only in a schematic sense, then, but also in terms of conceptual genealogy, the distance, even antagonism, between experiential witness and military oversight may not be as great as it first appears.

Sketching this shared context is not intended to downplay the important insights of either perspective on war, but rather, by considering their commonality, to open a space for querying the hermeneutic frame to which both contribute. At its most capacious, beyond the scope of these concluding reflections, such thinking touches on the relationship between modern warfare and the aesthetic sphere—that of the senses and contemplation—and in particular the capacity of war, as diagnosed by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s, to aestheticize not only its own operations and environs but also the whole of social life, generating "artistic

gratification" by casting the conscription and choreography of mass movement as a sublime or even beautiful object of reflection.[41] To what extent does a focus on the sensory apparatus in war, on regimes of sight from whatever varied vantage points, remain nested within this problematic, without examining its framing conditions? Even more, in the Cold War and contemporary epochs, such a perspective cannot but risk according perfectly well with a culture of commodified imagery, a sensationalist and glamour-driven society of the spectacle, what John Berger calls the society of "publicity."[42] Whether documenting the mediated sight of reconnaissance and surveillance, or the purported immediacy of acts of first-hand witness—especially when the latter's experiential directness is held up as an exception to mediated abstraction—such an approach remains within a framework that emphasizes looking at the battlefield, comprehending war as something to see.

If this set of dominant commonplaces revolves around sensory perception within the field of war, to what extent might a pivot away require deprioritizing the perceptual in favor of alternate framing categories? How, for instance, might one best, in the case of war, extend the perceptual into the conceptual, the phenomenological into the materialist, the aesthetic into the political, articulating war primarily as, for instance, a site of work, thought, or social being rather than an object of vision? Certain recent work charts different possible pathways. Grégoire Chamayou on drone warfare, for example, begins by examining the drone as a machine of looking, but pointedly ranges beyond this by working toward a "theory of the drone"—that is, a conceptual comprehension of the technology in its legal and political aspects—while Justin Joque's work on cyberwar sidesteps the domains of phenomenology and perception almost entirely, opting instead for a critical paradigm derived from deconstruction. Likewise, Judith Butler, taking up a thread from Susan Sontag on Virginia Woolf, articulates a new social

ontology in human precarity created under wartime conditions, while also examining the ways the latter, by "framing" war from certain angles, works to obscure and deny this shared human condition.[43] Alternatively, scholars such as Keith Gandal and Paul Koistinen attend to the mobilization of manpower and economic resources, substituting a more conventional meaning of logistics for one focused on the logistics of vision and sight.[44] Such work maps lines of thinking divergent from those demarcated by a field organized around perceptual concerns, axes of visibility and invisibility, thus offering a different panorama, as it were, of the development, distinction, and significance of modern war.

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Notes

Quotation in title appears in Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988), 16. Subsequent citations parenthetical in text, denoted as *FW*. Epigraph from Gray appears in *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1970), 29.

[1] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989). *The Vision Machine*, trans. Julie Rose (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994). *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light*, trans. Michael Degener (London: Continuum, 2005). Samuel Weber, *Targets of Opportunity: On the Militarization of Thinking* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005). Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006). Trevor Paglen, *Blank Spots on the Map: The Dark Geography of the Pentagon's Secret World* (New York: New American Library, 2010). Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013).

[2] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Penguin, 1976). Carolyn Forché, ed., *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993). Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (New York: Penguin, 1997). For a discussion of writers within this critical turn under the umbrella of "new military history," see Joanna Bourke, "New Military History," in *Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History*, ed. Matthew Hughes and William J. Philpott (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 258–275.

[3] Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 1, 10, 11. See also 1–25, 34, 40, 55, 59, 80, 111, 125, 143, 193–196, 213, 225, 240, 303–306. Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale*, 1–5, 11–12, 25–28, 205, 282–283. Cf. Virilio, *Vision Machine*, 44.

[4] On this as a founding distinction in thinking through war cf. Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2016), 121.

[5] For broader takes on the historical character of ways of seeing, understanding vision, and constructing the visual field see John Berger et al, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 8–9, 16, 84, 87, 97, 109, 134–139, 144. Jonathan Crary, "Techniques of the Observer," *October* 45 (Summer 1988): 3–35, especially 5, 9, 15, 29–31. For the influence of military technology and operational imperatives on this process see Virilio, *Vision Machine*, 4–17, 34, 47–50, 63.

[6] In articulating this take on the war correspondent, this paragraph borrows from Wendy Kozol on "ambivalent witnessing": *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2014), 6–7, 11–14, 22, 27, 57, 85–91, 165, 199–206. It also generalizes points made by Kate McLoughlin in her study of the work of Martha Gellhorn, treated in more detail below; consider, e.g., "In war, position is vital. … Position is equally vital in writing about war. Should the writer be present in the battle-field and, if so, where exactly? Should the recording figure be present in the text and, if so, in what guise?" *Martha Gellhorn: The War Writer in the Field and in the Text* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007), 1. See also 4, 28, 47, 62, 110. Finally, I have found John Taylor's schema for tracking "degrees of engagement" or "complicity" useful for reflecting on the war correspondent's positioning: *Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe, and War* (New York: New York UP, 1998), 55–56.

[7] On the nineteenth-century roots of war correspondence, which from the beginning confronted questions of vantage point and positioning, see Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 2004), xi, 1–3, 7, 16, 20, 41, 43–49, 63, 65. Cf. McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn*, which locates the roots of the form in the Mexican-American War rather than Crimea: 11.

[8] For statements by, and interpretations of, Gellhorn on acts of witnessing and recording see Caroline Moorehead, *Gellhorn: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 120, 131, 162, 210, 213, 423. McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn*, 3, 21, 40, 58, 66, 73, 75, 110. On the "new style of war correspondent" who emerged in the 1930s see Knightley, *First Casualty*, 184. On the place of eye-witnessing in the period's so-called New Reportage journalism see McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn*, 5, 62; cf. 94–95. Accounting for the camera's new portability, Susan Sontag echoes Knightley in arguing that the Spanish Civil War is "the first war to be witnessed ('covered') in the modern sense": *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 20–21, 24, 30–31. Quotation on page 21. For more on the camera's transformation of sight, and hence witnessing and reporting, see Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 10, 18. Crary, "Techniques of the Observer," 35. Virilio, *Vision Machine*, 20–22, 54. Knightley, *First Casualty*, 14. Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, 29, 32, 34. Taylor, *Body Horror*, 13, 16, 63–64.

[9] For instance, see Fred Inglis on Gellhorn and Herr: *People's Witness: The Journalist in Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale, 2002), 1, 13, 15, 268–270; cf. 43, 214.

[10] For two very different histories of airpower and aerial bombing see Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (New York: The New Press, 2000). Martin van Creveld, *The Age of Airpower* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011). Though both historians consider earlier precedents, their narratives stick primarily to the twentieth century, with portions of each account treating the late-nineteenth. For a take emphasizing links between airpower and conceptions of modernity see Azar Gat on the "sources of Douhetism": *A History of Military Thought* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 561–597. See also van Creveld, *Age of Airpower*, 52–56, 437.

[11] On commitment and partisanship in coverage of the Spanish Civil War see Knightley, *First Casualty*, 207–215, 233–235. Inglis, *People's Witness*, 11. Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 110–111, 125–128. Guernica is the exception to the point made here: see Knightley, *First Casualty*, 219–227. Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 123, 139, 144–145. Van Creveld, *Age of Airpower*, 60, 81–84, 88. For a reflection on the representational challenges posed by aerial bombing, though one that does not address war correspondence, see W. G. Sebald, "Air War and Literature," in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 3–104, especially 4, 10, 23–25, 50–53, 60, 78–81, 93.

[12] Van Creveld's use of this term includes both land-based and naval aviation arms, as well as missile and space technology: *Age of Airpower*, x. For longstanding if not constitutive links between airpower and sight, whether direct or mediated by varieties of radar, surveillance technology, and targeting mechanisms, see *Age of Airpower*, 6–8, 15–16, 21–22, 26–27, 38, 47, 49, 69, 99, 124, 135, 200, 222–223, 229, 318, 331, 352, 407, 431, 439. In both contrast and complement to van Creveld, Trevor Paglen offers an account that approaches this crossroads from the opposite direction, tracking the way that the world of airpower, at the intersection of military and intelligence milieus, from the Manhattan Project to the National Reconnaissance Office, has tended to augment not only visibility but also concealment and secrecy: *Blank Spots on the Map*, xii–xvii, 4, 10–14, 22, 40–46, 64, 69, 89, 95, 101–107, 119–124, 133, 147, 153, 180, 185, 220, 252–253. For a sympathetic critique of Paglen see Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, 95–125. Thanks to Nate Siebert for pointing me to Paglen's work.

[13] This connection between war correspondence and airpower may seem counterintuitive, given that campaigns of the latter are arguably least amenable to being covered by correspondents (Knightley, *First Casualty*, 341, 530); nevertheless, highlighting the fact that the two have long been linked by their concern with sight and vision showcases the way that war from the air and media strategy have tended to converge into a single apparatus during the historical period outlined in this essay, culminating in moments such as when precision targeting and managed viewing reinforced one another in the first Gulf War and the NATO campaign in Kosovo: see Knightley, *First Casualty*, 494–495, 500, 503.

[14] For an alternate reading of Gellhorn's opening scene as a war correspondent cf. McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn*, 43.

[15] On the intentionality of setting in Gellhorn's war reporting see McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn*, 105, 118. Inglis, *People's Witness*, 10. Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 116, 119, 121, 150–153, 348.

[16] On the way Gellhorn's upbringing instilled in her a strong Progressive-era moral conscience, which she maintained throughout her life, see Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 27, 44, 147. McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn*, 20, 74. See also Inglis, *People's Witness*, 6, 14, 21. Gellhorn's attitude toward her position as a woman inhabiting spaces often coded masculine, especially warzones, was complex: though she downplayed the significance

and challenge—one often comes across phrases such as, "refusing to let," in accounts of how her status and identity shaped her access and behavior—the number of incidents and episodes calling forth such phrasing tends to tell a deeper story than simply persistent grit, performed nonchalance, and canny maneuvering, though these were all also present in substantial measure. See McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn*, 23, 100, 115–117, 125–126, 145, 151, 161, 203–214. Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 5, 21, 26, 40, 135, 143, 187, 194, 217, 221, 233, 255, 349–351.

[17] On continuities between Gellhorn's reporting from 1930s Spain and 1960s Southeast Asia see Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 346–358. See also Knightley, *First Casualty*, 427–428, 456.

[18] Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 3. Subsequent citations parenthetical in text, denoted as *D*.

[19] These facets of the so-called New Journalism are taken from Tom Wolfe's pacesetting 1973 essay, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism, with an Anthology*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 35–36, 46–47, 66–68. John Hollowell's subsequent account echoes these formal features, while usefully locating the overall phenomenon (whether labeled new journalism, parajournalism, the literature of fact, etc.) within a wider postwar crisis of both generic system and historical thinking: *Fact & Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1977), 10–11, 15–16, 22–26, 32, 53, 147. Hollowell, like later critics, is less averse than Wolfe to identifying continuity with earlier representational practices, including *fin-de-siècle* muckraking journalism and 1930s New Reportage: *Fact & Fiction*, 33–36, 46–47, 64, 84. Inglis, *People's Witness*, 120, 242, 269; cf. 332–338. McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn*, 5, 21, 31, 34, 47, 62, 175.

[20] On Herr's helicopter as a symbol combining visual and destructive power see Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 117.

[21] Evelyn Cobley puts this well, describing *Dispatches* as "Herr's attempt to sort out this overload of information in order to discover what it conceals": *Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993), 211.

[22] James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000), 177.

[23] Gibson, *Perfect War*, 156. Knightley, *First Casualty*, 418, 432, 495. On counting and war see also James Dawes, *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War through World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005), 25, 29–31, 34. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), xx–xxii.

[24] Blurred lines between reporting and espionage is not unique to Herr's moment: it emerges alongside the rise of permanent intelligence apparatuses during the Second World War; as Knightley puts it, "the dividing line between information gathered by a correspondent and that gathered by a spy is often very finely drawn": *First Casualty*, 240. See also 274, 367, 443.

[25] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 267–268. See also Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), 161.

[26] Gibson, *Perfect War*, 186–191. For earlier histories of euphemistic prose around war see Knightley, *First Casualty*, 13–15, 26, 29–32, 106. Fussell, *Wartime*, 10, 13–14, 26, 143–164.

[27] On the US media strategy, which made the war "unusually accessible," and on the resulting numbers of correspondents and ease of entry into the warzone, see Knightley, *First Casualty*, 410, 413, 419, 437, 441–443, 448, 461, 465, 469, 482. Quotation on page 419. For precedent, of which there was very little, see *First Casualty*, 344–345. Over-saturation of coverage would persist in later wars, but to different effect: *First Casualty*, 502, 504, 528, 542.

[28] Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 2006), 88. Statistic from Knightley, *First Casualty*, 453. On television see also *First Casualty*, 425, 447, 450–456, 476. Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, 30. Taylor, *Body Horror*, 46. Inglis, *People's Witness*, 178, 182, 236. Moorehead, *Gellhorn*, 350.

[29] Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1998), 20. On this aspect of saturation coverage in Vietnam see also Cobley, *Representing War*, 214, 218. Knightley, *First Casualty*, 423, 466.

[30] On the significance of island campaigns during the 1980s (Falklands, Grenada, and, in part, Panama) for the transformation of war correspondence see Virilio, *Vision Machine*, 56. Taylor, *Body Horror*, 165–166, 170–171, 175. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 65–66. Knightley, *First Casualty*, 470, 478–482.

[31] On the development out of the island campaigns of the "media operations" and "pool" systems of Kosovo and the first Gulf War see Knightley, *First Casualty*, 484–485, 489–491, 512–513, 531. On embedded journalism see *First Casualty*, 529–536. Butler, *Frames of War*, 64–65, 71–73, 82–83. On earlier precedent for embedding see *First Casualty*, 103, 111.

[32] Dexter Filkins, *The Forever War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 191. Emphases added. Subsequent citations parenthetical in text, denoted as *TFW*. On such pronoun practice see also Knightley, *First Casualty*, 532.

[33] The allusion is not *sui generis*—on cubism and modern war see Margot Norris, *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2000), 33–34. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003), 302–312. Patrick Deer, *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 44–46.

[34] Risk of death and injury for war correspondents was not new with this conflict, though it has arguably been on the rise since the US war in Southeast Asia: Knightley, *First Casualty*, 445, 475, 537.

[35] On the difficulties of witnessing armed conflict after the US war in Southeast Asia, outside of skillful military-media management, and the concomitant crisis in the role of the war correspondent, see Knightley, *First Casualty*, 492, 525, 531, 547–548.

[36] The persistent work of censorship and propaganda in wartime is a strong thread in Knightley's narrative: among many instances in *First Casualty*, see e.g., 15, 27, 84–86, 98–100, 105–107, 140–141, 193–194, 269–271, 297–300, 318–319, 376–377, 462–463; cf. 43, 367. But the story is not simply one of constraints imposed from above: on self-censorship and ideological blinders, caused most often by nationalism or romanticizing combat and / or technology among war correspondents—all of which indicates the need for theoretical reflection to complement if not check first-hand witness—see *First Casualty*, 117, 153, 160–164, 168, 177, 199, 301, 327, 361, 364, 389, 417, 448, 492, 494, 497.

[37] I am thinking, e.g., of Butler, *Frames of War*, ix–xiii, xxx, 1, 6–12, 29, 51, 67, 80, 180.

[38] See, for instance, James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999). Manuel De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (New York: Zone Books, 1991). Ryan Bishop and John Phillips, *Modernist Avant-Garde Aesthetics and Contemporary Military Technology: Technicities of Perception* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011).

[39] I owe the seed of this line of thinking about Virilio to a conversation with Gopal Balakrishnan. See also Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 66–67.

[40] For Virilio on phenomenology and Husserl see Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Crepuscular Dawn*, trans. Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2002), 141, 152–153.

[41] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Shocken Books, 1969), 242. A related set of debates, to which this account can also only gesture, concerns the intersection of aesthetics and ethics, especially in imagery of war, suffering, and torture; a particularly rich vein of conversation moves from Virginia Woolf's 1938 reflection on atrocity photos in the Spanish Civil War to Susan Sontag on war photography to Judith Butler on the visual "framing" of war. See Woolf, *Three Guineas*, ed. Jane Marcus and Mark Hussey (New York: Harcourt, 2006), 15, 19, 24, 113, 115. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 23, 33, 38–39, 41–45, 49, 53–58, 63, 68, 74–83, 99, 101–110, 118. Butler, *Frames of War*, 13–15, 41, 69, 100, 181. See also Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, 61–94. Taylor, *Body Horror*, 18, 23–24, 84, 132–134, 147.

[42] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 131–133, 140, 149–153. For reflections on the commodification cum spectacularization of war see also Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 13–15, 103–128, 151–152, 168–169, 179, 226, 262–265, 294. Butler, *Frames of War*, xiv. Knightley, *First Casualty*, 44–45.

[43] Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 2015). Justin Joque, *Deconstruction Machines: Writing in the Age of Cyberwar* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2018). On Butler, Sontag, and Woolf see note 41 above, et al.

[44] Keith Gandal, *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010). Paul Koistinen's history of the political economy of American warfare spans five volumes; the most recent is *State of War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1945–2011* (Lawrence: U of Kansas P, 2012).