

March to May

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Abstract reflections on the Iraq war

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March to May is a series of ten colour “durational” photographs of selected televised video news coverage of the Iraq War. These images were taken from an archive of approximately two hundred hours of cable television footage, recorded between March 20th and May 1st, 2003 (those dates being the initiation of hostilities and the declaration of victory).

The photographs were originated on a 4x5 view camera set up in a completely darkened room in front of a 30” colour television. The only light source was from the screen of the television set itself. The average exposures were between three to seven seconds per image—hence, durational. The final images are individual shots of three to seven seconds of moving video footage.

The process of the piece entailed viewing the entire television archive and making a duplicate VHS tape of images of interest. The original VHS archive was sourced from various cable television networks, including, but not limited to, American channels such as CNN, ABC, CBS, Fox and CNBC, and the Canadian network, the CBC. In the spirit of the recently noted phenomenon of channel surfing or “grazing,” the creator of this archive switched between numerous stations, sometimes as often as five times in one hour. This footage then, acted as a necessarily fractured zeitgeist of North American network coverage of the unfolding events, as captured by one consumer of this media.

In keeping with the notion of the fractured and introducing the concept of time compression, I purposely moved through the archival tapes in fast forward mode. First, I was not interested in using images that included the seemingly omnipresent cutouts and tickers that littered the screens (and actually obstructed the visual transfer of the newsworthy event). My intention was to focus solely on the visual spectacle of the coverage.

The fast-forward was also conceptually grounded. As an artist, I am committed to creating a through-line between my initial inspiration, the process and the piece. To me, the time leading up to the war was a nonsensical riot of ungrounded causation, a hurtling-

toward, panic-in-the-face-of. The news imagery and analysis from March 20th on continued in this destabilized and surreal vein. There was nowhere to hold purchase. The fast forward scanning of the archive became an act of recall or, more importantly, an embodiment of the sensation of deluge.

The third and final reason for the fast forward scan-through is significant in terms of the aesthetic and formal concerns of the piece. The heightened pace of visual transfer and the reality that it took many days to move through the material produced a narcosis, the aim of which was to fundamentally alter or subsume my conceptual perception of that which was presented. I wanted to be inundated, bored and awash in imagery so that I might first respond to it on a completely formal level—movement, colour, shape and texture. I wanted to register what stood out from the rest, trusting only the link between my eyes and my brain receptors—this night-vision movement, that light-burst over Baghdad...and so on. Of course, this privileged the aesthetic aspects of the imagery, which I discuss in more detail below. First, however, I will frame the *March to May* project in terms of a concept that I will call the interstitial.

What is the interstitial? It's an anatomical term meaning relating to or situated in the small, narrow spaces between tissues or parts of an organ. Of course I am using it conceptually—the in-between bits. In

between what? Three major things. In between the physical space of a war in Iraq and the physical space of my perceiving of the war in Iraq (TV in Vancouver), in between the expansion and contraction of time—instantaneous satellite transmission and the grinding out of the real time of warfare. In between the bodies, blood and gore of warfare and the painless bloodless depiction on television. In between. Media. Defined as the substances in which an organism, tissue or organ exists. The Latin meaning of being in the middle, even neutral, and of course, technology, television, video, photography. I hope that my work is seen to exist in an interstitial space between all of these terms.



Installation view

One of the contemporary thinkers that I read and wrestled with quite a bit in the making of this work was Paul Virilio, a French cultural theorist, best known for his writings about technology as it has developed in relation to speed and power, cultural production and the military. In fact I preface my artist statement about this work with the following quote, or call to arms by Virilio: “[t]he occupation is by the media. We are occupied by teletechnologies and we must be part of the resistance.”¹

Virilio has written extensively on a concept he calls delocalization in technology and art. “[W]e have gone from spatial dislocation – in abstractionism and cubism – to the temporal dislocation (or delocalization) that is now underway.”² The obvious referent for this tendency in contemporary thinking is telecommunications technology with “its live transmission, global time and near instantaneous intercommunication.”³ Virilio believes that delocalization is nowhere, therefore “art can (also) be nowhere. Existing only in the emission and reception of a signal.”⁴

Addressing Virilio’s idea that contemporary art is derealized, or existing nowhere, this work then is ultimately, and perhaps ironically, a grounding of that concept in the materiality of analogue photography. Compounding the interstitial aspects of this notion of material/immaterial is the fact that I am sourcing my imagery from transmitted digital video that, itself,

because of the downsizing of news gathering staff and field journalists, has been grabbed from a small pool of video news feeds “usually controlled by larger media corporations”⁵ and broadcast in that ambivalent space of the television screen. Yet my final piece ended up as a “weighty object,” with a heavy black border, framed and hung on a gallery wall.

Historically, photography, besides having to fight for a place as art (largely championed by Stieglitz), has also been seen, in terms of traditional artistic practice, as the least material of the plastic arts. Even in my earlier discussion of the materiality of the work, the “thereness” of the work is delimited in terms of its formal presentation—the visual override of black and the glossy plexiglass. Roland Barthes, in his book, *Camera Lucida*, uses these descriptions in his attempt to work through the essence of photography: “a weightless, transparent envelope... vaguely constituted... an emanation.”⁶ Add the idea that photography is considered to be a trace of the object,

and that it is, in the end, substrated only by paper, one then fully grasps its precarious objectness.

Many contemporary artists concerned with the dominance of the market in all fields of cultural production have been playing with the notion of derealizing or de-materializing art practices, ultimately daring the art market to commodify that which isn't there. While I think that this process has concrete antecedents in the work of the avant-gardes (of the 1930s and, later, of the 1960s) and in performance art in the 1970s, the current direction towards de-objectification is even more ephemeral, as two of its explicit directives have been to move outside of the gallery system and to create work that is primarily concerned with what has been labeled "relational" qualities. Relational aesthetics as a contemporary form is a significant enough phenomenon to be mentioned in connection with this work if only because it places photo-based work much further down the scale towards a "bound" or material medium, a place traditionally occupied by the more

plastic arts. This is a situation that would have been unthinkable to early theorists of photography. Virilio also believes that there is art still being created that works against dislocation and delocalization; however, he summarily dismisses these works as holdouts. "The plastic arts are finished, it's over, *alles fertig*, I'm not joking!!"⁷

In relation to Virilio's "get with the program" imperative, I view my continuing use of photography as an intrinsically political gesture. I maintain that working with material in the age of the dematerial is not simply the posturing of a pouty photographic artist concerned with her own relevance. Rather, it is a purposeful opposition to current economic and political trends of economic speculation, floating capital and deterritorialization—movements that leave the citizen/consumer destabilized. So, rather than flow along in the same veins of "late capitalism," I would much prefer to clog those arteries.

Another French thinker, Michel Foucault, believed that the present epoch will be considered, perhaps above all, the epoch of space. "[W]e are in the epoch of simultaneity, ... juxtaposition, ... the near and the far, ... the side-by-side, ... the dispersed."⁸

Whereas Virilio's concept tends toward the absolute dispersal of objects within the delocalized, Foucault, less drastically, does not envision a spatial void, but rather a deconstruction of hierarchical space into "a set of relations that delineates sites—heterogeneous spaces which are irreducible to one another and not superimposable on one another."⁹ And yet they are together. He calls these places heterotopias. Heterotopias. The original definition of which is the displacement of part of an organ from its normal position, or the grafting or transplantation of an organ into an abnormal location. It has a Frankenstein-ian feeling to it. The same with Foucault's notion. His heterotopia involves the juxtaposition of several sites that are themselves incompatible, in a single real space. Foucault notes that heterotopias should be considered to be disturbing because they make it hard to name this and that. A mirror is an example. A television is my example.

The concept of television poses serious challenges to notions of the spatially fixed. Central to these challenges, of course, is the idea that technical media, like television, "[have] become so inextricably woven into the fabric of everyday life... that [they] can no longer be considered 'media' at all, in the old sense of occupying a neutral space between humanity and the world."¹⁰ Ignoring, for the moment, a political reading of the word neutral, media are normally seen as embodied to the extent that they are neither humanity

nor the world, but both at the same time. Contributing to this spatial dissolution, is the very real idea that television "materializes in a relatively immaterial manner."¹¹ Because I am dealing with the slippery concept of the interstitial, it seems important here to also acknowledge the semantic conflation in the use of the word "television." For television is not only that which is shown, but is also a physical object. So, to reintegrate the above thoughts, television exists in an integrated non-neutral space of the material and immaterial that is contained within the limits of a three-dimensional cube that is found in a distinct place in your own home. Got it?

March to May attempts to acknowledge this complexity in part by framing the material that is immaterialized within the real space of the border of the television set—this border being the recessed black frame in older television sets that separates the broadcast image from the larger console. It was important to me that the work be realized in the

same dimensions as the war was broadcast on television. The television set that I worked with was a 30" set whose dimensions were 18" x 24". The images in *March to May* likewise, are 18" x 24". I wanted to remain as true as possible (in terms of size) to the war as broadcast, for the purpose of commenting on the extreme miniaturization of world events within the televisual screen and the flattening of four dimensions to three to two.

My purposeful disavowal of network referent in the piece is a further complication of ideas of space and place in television. Foucault's concept of heterogeneous or relational space is defined as "series, trees, or grids."¹² In this sense, television's definitive spatial form is the network. As Bruno Latour notes, "[n]etworks are difficult spatial phenomena to grasp because they exist on more than one scale; but even a long network remains local at all points,"¹³ hence, neither local nor global, but both at the same time. Much contemporary writing on media is quick to posit that with the globalization of televisual media, the

appropriate framework within which to view this phenomenon is, likewise, global. However, even a cursory knowledge of the way networks actually operate presents this totalization as an overt simplification of what is, in reality, a very complex system. My avoidance of station identification is an attempt to draw attention to a contemporary understanding that it does not matter which agency is carrying the broadcast, as they have all largely become homogenous in their political interpretation (lack of critique) *viz.* the Iraq War.

However, there is a distinct problematic in my exclusion of station identifiers. In doing so, these images exist in an originating void. When this is coupled with the fact that the durational aspect of re-recording the televised video footage as single photograph results in a blurring of the visual referent, questions of this artist's complicity with the destabilization and inundation of media consumers (and viewers of this piece) are brought to the fore. Questions of origination of footage in relation to the American military's almost absolute control of who is in or out of the "media pool" (embedded journalists, government and corporate censorship of what is ultimately used and intra-network politics) are seemingly swept away. These, of course, are very important issues and in fact, often it is these issues that receive the most currency in alternative or academic discourse in relation to the visual framing of the Iraq War. However, I am

convinced that most people are conversant in the facts of military censorship and the increasing hegemony of corporate ownership of North American media. My slippery intention is to insert myself into the undifferentiated morass to draw attention to its undifferentiation. Jean Baudrillard himself posits this as a credible way of working. In an interview with *la Sept* in 1988, he said that “the artist needs to work with the mediated system of electronic and reproducible images, albeit with an ironic strategy, play with the media, accept the deed of this system, ... perhaps not disrupt it, yet make it reversible.”¹⁴ On the other hand, Bennett Simpson, a curator of and writer on contemporary art, contends that, “insofar as art turns increasingly to commercial and spectacle culture for strategies, materials and subject matter, it manifests, whether positively or negatively, the mythologies of its day.”¹⁵ Hence, this work is collaborationist (sidling up to media) or part of the resistance (sidling up to media), depending on claims to irony or whose words you throw your weight behind.

Issues of temporal dislocation are also paramount in *March to May*. The first dislocation is encountered in my use of a video archive. An archive, by definition, is a record of something that has already passed, that is, in effect, historical. It is here that the complications begin. It used to be that the notion of history was “historical,” implying that a length of time had passed in which events could be looked at as having happened

a long time ago, somewhere in the distant past. This is no longer the case. Virilio makes reference to this speeding up of time. “This means virtualization in its very essence: the virtualization of actions *as they occur* and not just simply of *what was*. What is coming into play today is no longer relative velocity, but absolute velocity. We’re running up against the time barrier. Virtuality is the electromagnetic speed that brings us to the limits of acceleration.”¹⁶

History is keeping pace with this virtual velocity. Witness to this is the fact that “*within weeks* of the end of hostilities in the 1991 Gulf War, Time Warner produced a CD-ROM disk on Desert Storm... in their publicity, describ[ing] this interactive multimedia disk as a first draft of history.”¹⁷ In essence, instant history will soon be biting our asses, unless we hurry to keep ahead. If history is only yesterday, then we are all historians.

A precipitous compression of time is also found in other places in *March to May*. The two hundred hours of



It was quiet, then this

archived footage is a modest grab of the actual tens of thousands of potential network coverage hours. I further this compression drastically by the choice of no more than fifty-six seconds of video that are ultimately presented in ten photographs. The end point of all of this is ten images. Issues of the advocacy of artistic agency are implicated in this selection process, jumping into what is a seemingly endless stream of visual transfer, selecting, isolating, stopping what were indistinct, incessantly repeated or trivial moments in this technological flow.

The compression of time has further consequences for our ability to ground ourselves. The tendency of instantaneous transmission is to obliterate any real sense of relational space. As Foucault says, "heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."¹⁸ Iraq is 12,000 km away from the continental United States. (There is a ten-hour differential between where I situate myself as viewer and that which is viewed in Baghdad.) "Real-time" coverage and the hyper-fluidity of transmission convolute this temporal and spatial distance. Again, we inhabit the interstitial. The fact is that the satellite transmissions clearly demarcate the space between the hyper-instant and plodding real time *at the same*

moment. I sit in an evening setting and watch sunrise sorties over minarets. Whole days seem to either disappear or outlive their natural finitude. What day is it there? When did this particular assault take place...yesterday? Today? Tomorrow? It slips into the surreal. If it is a bombing attack that takes place tomorrow how is it possible since I am inhabiting the now that is not tomorrow? Is this a prescient bombing?

According to Foucault, "[t]he heterotopia [or heterochronies] are capable of juxtaposing in a single real place [or time] several spaces [or times], several sites that are in themselves incompatible."¹⁹ Politically, this is a transparent strategy, not one that was necessarily conspiratorially pre-envisioned, but one which, because of the reality of space and time differentials between site of hostilities and site of reception, nicely serves the purposes of a military industry that wants to remain unencumbered by a grounded and knowing nation of viewers.

Beyond problematics with the compression of time is the question of the framing of the Iraq War in a passage of “real time”. Both the working title of the piece, *March to May*, and the self-imposed parameter of my “research” from March 20th to May 1st, provide exact reference points from which to view the Iraq War. Effectively, I am towing the party line that the war began and the war is now over. It is a purposeful gesture, intended to make comment on the mythologizing of this conflict—this war will go down in history in fabricated parentheses.

Over a third of the originally selected images were given over to newscasters and a litany of experts. It was natural to assume that at least one would find its way into the final work. Through the process of editing it became apparent that the experts and newscasters would not be in attendance. However, of the ten final images, eight (*Certainly not this day, And with that we'll take your questions, The rescue, A formal consideration, Reaction is pointedly*

neutral, It was quiet then this, Seemingly endless battle train, and Last rodeo) do include a human referent. In relation to delocalization, Paul Virilio claims, “the last thing that resists is the body.”²⁰ In the spirit of the interstitial, this work manifested these bodies in varying degrees, as ghostly emanations, commenting on the distantiating at work between the actual and televisual Wars, my transference between media, and photography’s primary status as referent. In effect, I am drawing attention to the inability of viewers to find purchase in any realm within the broadcast, even in the recognition or appearance of the human form.

The largest and perhaps most obvious problematic is seen in the grounding of my inquiry into space and time from within the construct of the Iraq War. As you have read, the spirit of my inquiry is largely placed in a disavowal of both the visual and aural referent of this event, which begs the question of Why the Iraq War? If the manifestation of the images and text is diffusion and impenetrability, why concretize this obfuscation in a real event? To this end I again return to the idea of the interstitial. The interstitial by its very nature cannot lay claim to a position of either/or. Perhaps this is an unusual position for a citizen and artist who wants *March to May* to be ultimately read as a politically charged piece about the Iraq War. However, it is my belief that this work, while invested in abstraction and tenets of the pictorial, does work to

political ends. It does not do so in a declarative manner, but in one more nuanced—a position that is indicative of the spatial and temporal complexities of both television and the televisual event. It is my hope that *March to May* will be perceived as critically engaging the convoluted tensions of place/non-place, surface/depth, real/hyperreal, truth/lies, and the struggle to perceive space and time in this contemporary world of the global in all of its immediacy.

Unlike the more traditional arts, and here I am thinking primarily of painting and sculpture, there is a wide gulf between the process and result in the creation of this photographic body of work, one that was significantly full of the unknown. To say that I courted the unknown is an understatement. It was a conscious attempt to play with the strictures acknowledged as an intrinsic part of mechanical reproduction. Analogue colour photography, as was used in *March to May*, has an unavoidable element of *in absentia*—the negatives were sent away for chemical processing and enlargement and the revelation of the work, when completed, was immediate. The significance of the reveal was compounded, in this case, by the element of chance found in the exposing of the negatives. The only real constants in the act of making exposures was that the film was of the same speed and stock and that the camera was set up in a fixed relationship to the television set. The video footage varied dramatically in

terms of both quality and density of image. Extensive bracketing was required as there was always a four to six stop differential between meter readings and proper exposures on test Polaroids. (Subsequent talks with other photographers revealed that it is notoriously difficult to get correct readings from television light.) The moment to open and close the shutter on the camera was decided by me using visual or aural clues on the video stream (e.g. newscaster says “storm” and the image cuts after a pause, the camera pans to the left and zooms in on dog, when dog’s tail comes into focus, etc...). The imprecision of this was furthered by my own counting of the seconds, which most assuredly was not always at the same rate. As well, constant playback of the duplicate tape brought in video glitches that varied each time the segment was shown; the trick was to make the exposure on the playback that did not have this disturbance. Many negatives were immediately discarded and of the bracketed negatives that did get developed and contacted, there was substantial

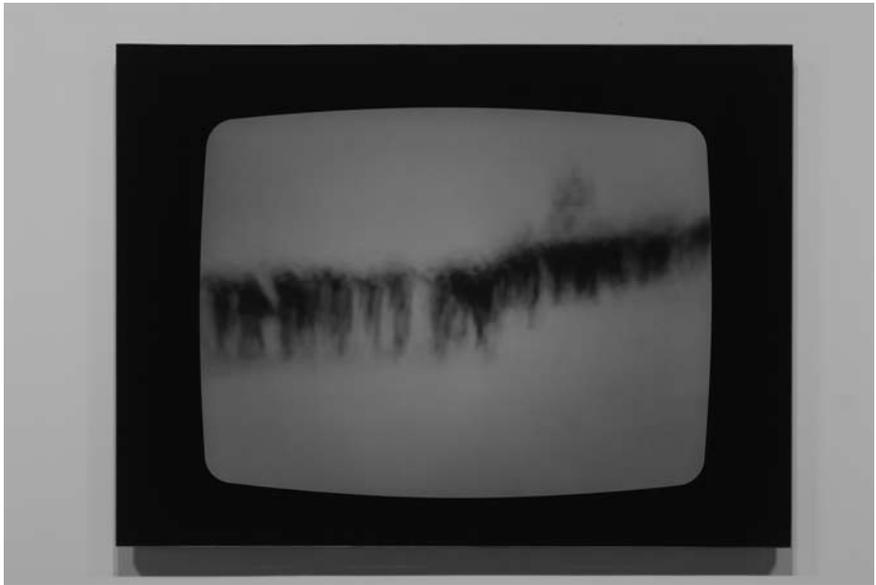
difference between the singular imagery in terms of density and what was actually captured. As well, there was a significant colour shift between what was shown on the television screen and the contact sheets. Why this happened I have never been able to explain. And the moiré pattern was a complete unknown...

Contemporary political artists have eschewed the place of beauty in their work for a number of sound reasons. Primary among these is the debacle of art as commodity that started to bear full fruit in the early to mid 1980s. But the history of politically-committed art is engaged from the inception of beauty as far back as the 18th century, with those roots receding even further still.

The common modern understanding of an integrated artistic aesthetic begins with Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which posits a theory of art as "pleasing without subserving any interest...pleas(ing) without concepts." Important to this notion is that an understanding of what is

pleasing, or aesthetic judgment, is universal and is based on the perception of beauty as being harmonious (or seeming like nature). I do not intend here to speak extensively about Kant's conception of the aesthetic (his words have spawned a veritable industry of academic rhetoric), but I include it here for the express purpose of seeking a source for so much of contemporary art's discomfort with the notion of the beautiful. It is clear why political artists have not found it a compelling ally: conventional aesthetic theories of beauty expressly negate an ideological imperative in art (while disavowing their own ideological basis) and elevate art to a rarefied plane of contemplation of harmonious forms, outside of the world unfolding. Incorporating an aesthetic imperative into *March to May*, whose concept is the disharmony of war, and whose form is largely the disharmony of abstraction, seems an unlikely proposition. As will be seen, my intention is strategic, daring both myself and others to engage with the history of the aesthetic.

I first ran across the idea of the aesthetic as strategy in Suzanne Perling Hudson's article *Beauty and the Status of Contemporary Criticism*.²¹ In this article, the author reviews the recent profusion of recent writing about beauty or creating "beautiful art" and dismisses it as largely regressive or unreflective in relation to contemporary concerns. However, she also concludes that there is a possibility for recuperating the aesthetic, one that lies within the intentionality of the artist



Reaction is pointedly neutral

working with political content, specifically in the acts of “infiltration” or “lure.” Infiltration specifically addresses post-Mapplethorpe institutional exhibition of “hot topic” art while the lure operates at the level of the singular viewer and their negotiation of an art work’s content. Importantly, that negotiation should not be easy; “beauty becomes political at the determinate moment when the credibility of ‘beauty’ as a value or quality is brought into question, forcing the critic or viewer into a difficult confrontation with – and an altogether uncertain relation before – the contradictory work at issue.”²² It is my contention that *March to May* confronts and unsettles in precisely this manner, using formal constructs of colour saturation, framing and the abstract and pictorial manifestations of durational exposure.

Images of war are images of violence. They run the gamut from landscapes of aftermath to moments of death. *March to May* is the surround of death. Iraq is its geographical place. The landscapes are deserts being

moved through or battled on; tanks, guns, barbed wire and aircraft deployed in the sand; troops, technicians and prisoners of war leave their momentary footprints. There are no dead bodies. They did not exist on the videotape.

The dead are a recent inclusion in the photographic record of our catastrophic inclinations. Susan Sontag noted that “[p]ortrait(s) of absence, of death without the dead”²³ were the legacy of early war photography. The dead only became evident as technological innovation lightened the load of the erstwhile-encumbered chronicler of war. *March to May* acknowledges this early history while implicitly questioning the reincorporated absence. The official line is a gesture of respect for the families of the dead (our dead). Implied in this is that it does not make for good television. What does make for good television then?

In the original archive of television broadcast recordings used for this project, an off-camera voice made this comment about the framing of a video segment: “[t]hat’s great television Alec, you had the battlefield commander with smoke in the background. Fine television, sir.” Seemingly, formal construction of the visual was a concern not only for the programmers of the war, but also the videographers who make their living providing the content. But beyond issues of camera angle lies the pointed seduction of the absence

of the mangled, dead human body. The taintless battlefield is political. Beyond platitudes of sensitivity to still-living family members, it is an avoidance of the Vietnam effect and a celebration of technological military evolution with its smart bombs and surgical strikes. Significantly, the bloodless war is grasped only in the totality of this packaged spectacle. *March to May* acknowledges this aestheticization while questioning the legitimacy of doing so.

Photography's history is rife with dialectic: of nature/of culture, science/art, real/not real, document/work of visual art, etc. It is interesting to me that these binaries so easily fall to the wayside when considering a photography whose subject is war. It is almost as if there were no alternative to the photograph but to document; as if to say, this is what you are good at doing, so do it. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag argues that "[f]or the photography of atrocity, people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity or mere contrivance. Pictures of hellish events seem more authentic when they don't have the look that comes from being 'properly' lighted and composed."²⁴

March to May operates in the interstitial space between art form and document. It engages with the history of the photograph as document through the fact of its realization as photograph, but denies the photograph as document through its manifestation as

pictorial and abstract. Ultimately, I want this work to be understood as engaging with *the histories* of photography as they have played out in the history of art—mid-Victorian Pictorialism, experimental photography of the early 20th century, the detournement of the Situationists, and mid-20th century Abstraction. The dichotomy of photographic engagement is also evidenced in the fact that I turned to the Iraq War as subject precisely because I wanted to make a record of that historical moment, to bear witness to it as an occurrence. My agency in this bearing witness is founded on my consideration of the war's construction and the manifestation of an aesthetic that I think corresponds to that construct. I want people to question photography's role in the creation of our visual record of history, ultimately suggesting that even without a formalized and pointedly historical treatment it is still a heavily packaged construct.

Tension between content and form also plays out in the indeterminate relationship between viewer and image. The aesthetic lure operates to different ends, depending on where the singular viewer positions themselves on the continuum between revulsion and attraction to images of war, their avowal of comfort as to this placement, and contemporary notions of viewer fatigue. Given this, the aesthetic lure cannot be said to operate in one or another way. My original intention was that *March to May* be seen to repudiate violence through foreshortening the space between the aesthetic and the catastrophic, but this would only be so if you are one who categorically turns away from such visions. Perhaps – and this is the difficulty of the work – it can also be seen to reinforce the idea that there is no space between beauty and horror, and that instead, they endow each other.

Faith Moosang is an artist who mostly lives and works in Vancouver. She received her BFA from Emily Carr in 1995 and her MFA from Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts in 2005. While she does work in film, video and installation, she is much more closely focused on photography. Her curatorial work with photography has taken her across Canada and she is currently finishing research for a SSHRC grant, contemplating the creation of the scenic view in British Columbia. In terms of her photographic practice, she is now engaged in the creation of a body of work about the Hearst Castle in San Simeon, California.

Notes

1. Paul Virilio and Catherine David, "The Dark Spot of Art," *Documenta Documents 1* (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1996).
2. *ibid.*, p. 47.
3. *ibid.*
4. *ibid.*
5. Timothy Druckery, "Instability and Dispersion," *Overexposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (New York: The New Press, 1999), p. 97.
6. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), pp. 5, 19, 88.
7. Virilio and David, p. 54.
8. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Politics-Poetics Documenta X - The Book*, eds. Françoise Joly, Cornelia Barth and Brian Holmes (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1997), p. 262.
9. *ibid.*, pp. 264-5.
10. Christopher Phillips, "Desiring Machines: Notes on Commodity, Celebrity and Death in the Early Works of Andy Warhol," *Public Information: Desire, Disaster, Document* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1994), p. 42.
11. Samuel Weber, quoted in Anna McCarthy, "From Screen to Site: Television's Material Culture and its Place," *October* 98 (Fall 2001), p. 93.
12. Foucault, p. 263.
13. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) p.122, quoted in McCarthy, p. 95.
14. Jean Baudrillard, "The Work of Art in the Electronic Age," *Artists, Critics, Context: Readings In and Around American Art Since 1945*, ed. Paul F. Fabozzi (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), p. 484.
15. Bennett Simpson, "Specific Spectacles: Art and Entertainment," *Artext* 71 (November/January 2001-2), p. 71.
16. Virilio and David, p. 47.
17. Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 3.
18. Foucault, p. 269.
19. Foucault p. 268.
20. Virilio and David, p. 50.
21. Suzanne Perling Hudson, "Beauty and the Status of Contemporary Criticism" *October* 104 (Spring 2003), pp. 115-130.
22. *ibid.*, p. 124.
23. Susan Sontag, *Regarding The Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Giroux, 2003), p. 50.
24. *ibid.*, p. 26.



A formal consideration

Afterword

Timothy Dallett

Artistic renegotiations of broadcast television representations are a recurring part of the history of contemporary art in North America. Artists concerned to situate their subjective perception in wider frames of social reality frequently bump up against the televisual spectacle. As a photographic project, Faith Moosang's *March to May* engages contemporary image-making's conflicted encounter with the effect of the televisual on perceptions of time, space and referent. In terms of photographic tradition, one of the work's contributions is to open a space of duration and displacement relevant to the gravity of the phenomena that are elided by its ostensible material. The significance and importance of this work is in its acute attentiveness to the specific scene of viewing something that can appear maddeningly unspecific and ungraspable. In collapsing the photographers' and viewers' positions, Moosang helps us to think (television) scale critically—from the room lurking just outside the heavy frames of her images, to the constantly regenerating spectacle of daily, televised war.

Seen from another angle, in the tradition of video art practice, Moosang's work also retraces and builds on a trajectory of media art work that has tried to position itself critically in relation to the broadcast television apparatus. Two to three decades ago, network

television was a somewhat newer, less fully naturalized phenomenon, and the effects of its implicit propositions for the mass viewer's consciousness and autonomy were both more clearly and starkly—though perhaps, for us today, more naively and didactically—presented as a choice or option: an impending, rather than an already seamlessly integrated and enveloping, mode of reality. Considerable effort was expended both in critical media art practice, and in popular discourse on 'television' - understood as a replication of an overarching political and economic structure - on countering, or at least, in an artistic context, figuring "... a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of perception with which human beings normally orient themselves."* At stake was the identification (leading to refusal) of an homology between the network television broadcast and a discourse of conformity and indoctrination.

Made at a time when the relative newness of network television meant that its perceptual displacements were less fully taken for granted, an earlier generation of artists' engagements with the authority of televisual representation and its spatial distribution, offer some interesting points of comparison with Moosang's contemporary project. To highlight a tendency worth rethinking, in conjunction with *March to May*, one might recall some (casually chosen) historical examples:

Vito Acconci's 1976 video work *The Red Tapes* attempted to map (among other things) the continental reach and dispersion of the networked consumer's subjectivity. The scene of the viewer's consciousness is projected as a battleground of psychological impulses being acted upon at a newly, and radically expanded scale of instantaneous televisual distance. At the local node this emerging spatial form, Gary Hill's photograph of a cathode-ray tube television being turned off localizes the network as something that can

be figured only in its negation.** The slowly dimming reverse starburst of a television being extinguished speaks, if nothing else, to the space of the viewer's agency.

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* Frederic Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p.1. Though Jameson's project is a study of cinematic representations of global capital, his comments seems particularly apposite to a discussion of television network space. A number of examples of cultural work on the massifying effects of network television are documented in Matthew Geller ed., *From Receiver to Remote Control: The TV Set* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990).

** This photograph, entitled *Offering*, is reproduced in Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer eds., *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* (New York: Aperture Books, 1989), p. 99.

March to May: Abstract reflections on the Iraq war

Faith Moosang

April 28 - May 27, 2006

Works in the exhibition

All works c-print and acrylic, 18" x 24"

And with that, we'll take your questions, 2004

Stages of seriousness, 2004

Reaction is pointedly neutral, 2004

A formal consideration, 2004

It was quiet, then this, 2004

Seemingly endless battle train, 2006

Certainly not this day, 2004

Last rodeo, 2006

Operation James after Bond, 2004

The Rescue, 2004

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