

Arts of War and Peace
Volume 2, Number 1

War Images

Introduction

The articles gathered in this issue derive from papers initially presented at a graduate colloquium entitled “War images in contemporary debates: critical memories and imaginations,” which took place on April 19, 2013 at the Collège franco-britannique of the Cité internationale universitaire de Paris, with the support of LARCA UMR 8225 (Univ. Paris Diderot/CNRS) and Institut universitaire de France.

The initiative arose from a commonality of research interests and questions emerging among a group of doctoral candidates at LARCA (and elsewhere), and focusing, in broad terms, on imageries of war and their uses. This is by no means a new topic, and it is enough to recall Susan Sontag’s essays, from *On Photography* (1977) to *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), and more recently Georges Didi-Huberman’s work (from *Images malgré tout* [2003] to the ongoing series *L’Œil de l’histoire*) to realize that the representation of war has been not just a privileged or predominant theme of photography, photojournalism, cinema, the media and the arts, but a key issue in the conceptualization and historicization of images and their controversial “meanings.” War images have, for decades now, been analyzed, taught, and exhibited as tools of information and dis-information, revelation and propaganda, truth and art, memory and militancy, especially towards the end of war and the advent of peace.

The colloquium’s specific goal was to expose, share and discuss current reformulations and transformations of these classic questions. What tentatively unified the contributions was a perceived intensification of the critique of war images — and images in general, for which war images, as we tended to agree, function as a kind of paradigm — in the contemporary period. This period is understood, in the American context that serves here as a shared setting, as the era ranging from the end of the Vietnam War to the ongoing American-led “war on terror” and its many ramifications in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe; it also encompasses the Postmodern moment and the digital revolution. It is our shared perception that in this period, and especially in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and their consequences, constructions and deconstructions of war imageries and their relationships to truth and history have been more intense, powerful, and intensely debated than ever before.

Two thematic subsets are particularly engaged by the contributors:
- images of war as memories and memorial productions; memorial conflicts emerging in the uses and re-uses of these images; transformations of pictorial archives;
- images of war as documents for imagination, fiction, education and art: representations of war and trauma in photo-literature, wars in popular imageries, war images and visual archives as “powers” or “weapons” in public debate and public art.

Since 2013 the trends discussed in these papers have not abated; rather, they have continued to mount and demand our attention as scholars and citizens. It is our hope that this publication in *Arts of War and Peace* will foster further interest in the lives of war images, while bringing new strength to the many causes of peace.

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June 2016