



War Culture and the Contest of Images (New Directions in International Studies)

Dora Apel

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War Culture and the Contest of Images analyzes the relationships among contemporary war, documentary practices, and democratic ideals. Dora Apel examines a wide variety of images and cultural representations of war in the United States and the Middle East, including photography, performance art, video games, reenactment, and social media images. Simultaneously, she explores the merging of photojournalism and artistic practices, the effects of visual framing, and the construction of both sanctioned and counter-hegemonic narratives in a global contest of images.

As a result of the global visual culture in which anyone may produce as well as consume public imagery, the wide variety of visual and documentary practices present realities that would otherwise be invisible or officially off-limits. In our digital era, the prohibition and control of images has become nearly impossible to maintain. Using carefully chosen case studies—such as Krzysztof Wodiczko’s video projections and public works in response to 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the performance works of Coco Fusco and Regina Galindo, and the practices of Israeli and Palestinian artists—Apel posits that contemporary war images serve as mediating agents in social relations and as a source of protection or refuge for those robbed of formal or state-sanctioned citizenship.

While never suggesting that documentary practices are objective translations of reality, Apel shows that they are powerful polemical tools both for legitimizing war and for making its devastating effects visible. In modern warfare and in the accompanying culture of war that capitalism produces as a permanent feature of modern society, she asserts that the contest of images is as critical as the war on the ground.



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