

It's time to stop barking!

In conditions of absolute power over their fellow humans, the uniformed flag-bearers of democracy have been giving performances of brutality and sexual humiliation that make *Salò* look like a children's picnic. Images of young and not so young Iraqi men in the blood bespattered Abu Ghraib abattoir testify to orgies of sadistic violence which, like a great deal of mindless brutal activity these days, ended up being photographed by some of the perpetrators. The pictures weren't intended for public consumption, but somebody didn't agree. The code of silence was broken and a few frames reached the media. Suddenly the world is shown some of the more intimate episodes of wars against people in graphic detail.

Photography and film owe much of their development to the 'world wars' of the last century, particularly to the Nazis who had an obsession with documentation and propaganda. Now, in the 21st century, with digital technology and mobile phones, the medium has become available to all, resulting in new wild, uncontrollable levels of documentation.

The motivation behind this amateur filming is neither propaganda nor denunciation. It's more like trophy hunting, having something to take home to brag about or simply so as not to forget, in the same way as our grandfathers brought home pieces of shrapnel, or a Russian soldier might hang the ear of a Chechen rebel around his neck. Wars have their own ferociously surreal aesthetic. It's not our job to psychoanalyse the behaviour of those that submit to institutionalised racism, hierarchy and discipline, when they find themselves wielding power over others in situations of extreme degradation. Which is not to say that these people are not individually responsible for their actions. Equally responsible are those that carry out similar acts in jails, detention centres, remand homes and mental asylums all over the world, from the smallest and little known, to the ultimate showcase, Guantanamo, and we are not talking of 'bringing the culprits to justice' before military courts. Show trials to weed out the bad apples and restore glory and reverence to killers in the pay of the State are no more than the legitimisation of militarism and its devastating weaponry, the sole purpose of which is to subjugate, maim and kill in the interests of capital.

What are we going to do about it? We, who have stood by so many times and seen armies set off from this country to do their dirty deeds around the world? We who have seen our own comrades shackled and blindfolded without batting an eyelid? We who are so well documented on the technology of war, be it against an anti-G8 demo or a poor village in Afghanistan, that all we can muster is an annual appointment in Docklands in front of the cameras?

The ineffectiveness of protests and large demonstrations is well proven. Perhaps it's time to try something else. The paraphernalia of torture - head bags, body nets, chains, body bags, etc. - is not improvised, it is produced. Rubber bullets and tear gas canisters don't arrive from outer space, they are manufactured. Army recruitment centres, and barracks and bases are physical and geographical entities. Soldiers walk fearlessly about the streets.

We know so much, yet we do so little.

The graphic aberrations in circulation mirror not so much the brutality of war as the poverty of the beholder.

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