

The Networked Image and War
A Study of Sean Snyder's
Optics. Compression. Propaganda. (2007)

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Abstract

In the art project *Optics. Compression. Propaganda.* artist Sean Snyder collected and further experimented with appropriated material. Snyder appropriated the images and texts from a number of different sources: televisual imagery, stills and moving images from 20th Century films, and imagery from the Carl Zeiss Archive, which is an archive of optical technologies. Most importantly, the project encompasses samples of Internet-distributed propaganda images and written propaganda strategies of Al Qaeda and the (U.S.) Department of Defense. This material culminated into 36 works and additional untitled archive material that were exhibited at Lisson Gallery in London in 2007.

In Snyder's project, this thesis argues, the Internet is displayed as a new space for visual warfare. The thesis will argue that Snyder's exploration of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense's propaganda is more concerned with the technical infrastructure of propaganda than with it being an intentional construct of semantic information. In the space of the Lisson Gallery, one could see multiple depictions of cameras and other optical instruments that invite inquiries on the production of images. Further, several markedly pixelated images drew attention to digital image production and distribution. Following this, the thesis argues that a thorough investigation of how digital compression technologies function, and what they answer to socially, is crucial to understand Snyder's project.

The terms in the title of Snyder's project have provided the structure for the dissertation. The thesis investigates these elements (optics, compression and propaganda) accumulatively by detailing their individual values in the project in designated chapters. The final chapter provides a cohesiveness that binds them together to display their association. With this, the structure demonstrates one of the claims of the thesis. Specifically, the thesis argues that Snyder's project negotiates the relationship of different image producing actors – such as military organizations, cameras, compression technologies and the distribution platform of the Internet – as networked. Following Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), a network consists of actors that bring their own traits, which lend themselves to the construct of the whole. The complete network at play is here revealed only after the singularity of each player is explored. Also discussed with ANT, the thesis argues that Snyder's project challenges the human/non-human dichotomy where the former is thought to author and control the latter.

With ideas deriving from different sources, ranging from media theory and media archeology (most notably Marshall McLuhan, Friedrich Kittler and Wolfgang Ernst) to political theory (Brian Massumi, Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman), theory on compression (Jonathan Sterne) and geopolitical analyses (George Friedman and Naomi Klein), the thesis argues that the works negotiate how the explored image-producing actors guide perception and affect human bodies and minds.

Foreword

Many people have helped me at different stages with my work on this thesis, and I would like to sincerely thank you all. I thank Ina Blom (supervisor fall-14/fall-16) for introducing me to Snyder's art practice, for brilliant lectures and writings that sparked my interest in new theoretical landscapes, and for constructive criticism along the way. I thank everyone in the research groups *Media Aesthetics* and *Kunsthistorisk arbeidsseminar* at the University of Oslo for valuable discussions and friendships. Special thanks go to those that read and commented on my thesis at the final stages of the work; Tore Falkenås, Ken Oliver, Sara E. R. Yazdani, Andreas Ervik, Synne T. Bull, Liv Brissach, Maria Horvei, Wendy Spader and Mats Bjerke. I also want to thank Sean Snyder and Olga Bryukhovetska for conversations and the time we spent together in November 2016.

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1 Introduction

In the art project *Optics. Compression. Propaganda.* artist Sean Snyder collected and further experimented with appropriated material. Snyder appropriated the images and texts from a number of different sources: televisual imagery, stills and moving images from 20th Century films, and imagery from the Carl Zeiss Archive, which is an archive of optical technologies. Most importantly, the project encompasses samples of Internet-distributed propaganda images and written propaganda strategies of Al Qaeda and the (U.S.) Department of Defense. This material culminated into 36 works and additional untitled archive material that were exhibited at Lisson Gallery in London in 2007.

When *Optics. Compression. Propaganda.* was exhibited at Lisson Gallery in London, 2007,¹ the 36 exhibited works were presented in the white cube of the gallery. The propaganda images that Snyder appropriated from the websites of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense were presented in different ways, some of them as single framed images and several in grids, diptychs or quadriptychs. The images were printed and either framed and hung on the walls, or they were placed in vitrines accompanied by printouts of PDF documents of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense's propaganda strategies. In addition to the multiple exhibited images and documents, four DVDs were displayed on four different technological setups; one was projected on a suspended screen, the three others were displayed on different Sony TV monitors. This thesis analyzes a selection of these 36 works. To be precise, the analysis is based on seventeen images (two of which display textual material), as well as on two of the project's four DVD's.²

In addition to the material previously described, Snyder provided a series of written commentaries that was published in the exhibition catalogue. The text describes topics expressed throughout the project, as well as personal explanations of how some of the

¹ In addition, a selection of the works from the project has been exhibited at many different venues, for instance in the exhibition *Ghost in the Machine* at Kunstnerens Hus in 2008, curated by Susanne Østby Sæther and Elisabeth Byre. Also, a selection of the works was exhibited with an exhibition that was also titled *Optics. Compression. Propaganda.* at Galerie Neu in Berlin, 2007.

² The two DVD works that are not part of this analysis were *Schema* (2006-2007), a 10-minute fragmented montage of broadcasted TV-clips displayed on a suspended screen, and the 3 minute and 48 seconds long video work with the self-explanatory title *Video Excerpts at Variable Frame Rates from Kino Pravda, Dziga Vertov (1922-25) and L'Argent, Robert Bresson (1983)* (2007). This second video was displayed on a Sony TV monitor.

experiments were conducted. This text (hereafter referred to as the project text) is both informative, and conceptual. By conceptual I mean that the text mirrors the presentation of the other material in the project in its fragmented collage structure. Without any coherent narrative, the text is a collection of disparate ideas that attests to complex relationships between some of the elements in the project. In this thesis, the project text is considered part of the material of the project that requires analysis.³

International Politics and Information Technologies: Authorship and Agency

Issue 123 of the art magazine *October*, published in 2008, was dedicated to the responses to a questionnaire formulated by art historian Benjamin Bucloh. The questions posed were concerned with how cultural producers had responded to the Iraq War, and the questionnaire presupposed that there was a lack of artistic and curatorial engagement and opposition to the war, and especially so in comparison to the engagement that could be seen in relation to the Vietnam War.⁴ OCP was mentioned by art historians T. J. Demos and Claire Bishop as an artistic practice that counters such a claim.⁵ This thesis will discuss how Snyder exposes some of the political and economic motivations that underpin the Iraq War by reframing some of the Department of Defense's propaganda images. But more importantly, the thesis argues that the Iraq War is key to Snyder's exploration of the technical agencies that are at work in image production and distribution.

Oxford English Dictionaries defines propaganda as "information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view."⁶ As this definition points to an intentional construct of semantic information, this thesis identifies that Snyder's project displays a concern for what type of cameras and image standards Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense use, and their distribution method on the Internet. This thesis will analyze how Snyder explores the technical infrastructure of propaganda.

³ Also Snyder considers his texts part of his artistic project. See interview with Sean Snyder, Unknown writer, "Text and Other Tools: Interview with Sean Snyder", Chantal Crousel, (2008),

https://www.crousel.com/static/uploads/artists/Sean-Snyder/press/SS_Selectedpress_May2016_WEB.pdf_Unpaginated. (Visited 22.11.16).

⁴ See *October* No. 123, (Winter 2008), Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press Journals.

⁵ In fact, several of the respondents, which stretched from artists, writers, academics, curators and critics, rejected and critiqued the presuppositions in the questionnaire. See *October* No. 123.

⁶ *English Oxford Dictionaries*, © 2016, "Propaganda".
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/propaganda>, (Visited 18.10.16.)

One of the claims of the thesis is that Snyder's technological perspective supplements a humanist reading, and provides a different account of the power relationships at work in the specific historical situation it deals with. The perspective challenges the human/ non-human dichotomy where the former is thought to author and control the latter. This recognition, however, requires an identification of the historical relationship between the Department of Defense and the Internet, and between the Department of Defense and Al Qaeda. The historical connections and hierarchical structures between the two organizations are described below.

The Internet and the Department of Defense

The so-called "first Internet", the ARPANET, was developed in collaboration with the Department of Defense. The reason why the ARPANET was launched in the first place inscribes the platform of the Internet into a history of power conflict and war. The ARPANET was started as a project in 1962 in response to the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik.⁷ In fear of the vulnerability of their communication systems (the telephone system) to a strike of the enemy, the Department of Defense wanted to create a distributed system. In 1962, the scientist J.C.R. Licklider came up with the solution of the ARPANET, a network where computers could talk to each other. Today the Internet is non-governmental, but the Department of Defense has arguably had more power than Al Qaeda over the structure of the Internet, as demonstrated by this historical connection. However, even if they do have an early affiliation with, and 'role of creator' of the precursor to the Internet, in this matter, as the thesis will identify that it does also in several other aspects, Snyder's project deals with a subject matter that debunks the idea of authorship where the creator is in power over that which is created.

In co-creating the distributed platform of the Internet, the Department of Defense did not just secure themselves from being vulnerable to a possible strike of the enemy. They also made a communication system with democratic potential that can be used by everybody with an

⁷ The Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, the worlds first artificial satellite, on October 4, 1957. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. © 2015. "Soviet invasion of Afghanistan". <http://global.britannica.com/event/Soviet-invasion-of-Afghanistan> (Visited 18.10.16.)

Internet connection.⁸ Although it was started as an attempt to maintain their own power and resist weakness to their enemy, the platform they created challenged their potential for centralized power. As this project demonstrates, the platform is a welcoming space for their enemies, and a new space for visual warfare.

The Department of Defense and Al Qaeda

The relationship between the Department of Defense and Al Qaeda can be said to bring about questions of authorship that is worthy of comment. Al Qaeda rose by the help of America when they shared the same goal to drive out the Soviet occupied forces that invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Following this, as described by Steve Coll “during most of the 1980s the CIA secretly sent billions of dollars of military aid to Afghanistan to support the mujahedden – or holy warriors – against the Soviet Union.”⁹ This situation not only successfully drove out the Soviets, but also led to the rise of Taliban and Al Qaeda.¹⁰ The Department of Defense’s participation in the upbringing of Al Qaeda and subsequent rise of Al Qaeda as a powerful actor that later stands up against their "creator" could also stand exemplary of emerging forces that have a will of their own in the project. However, the claim of this thesis is that the relationship between Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense is not what is of interest in the project. Instead of concerning itself with the asymmetric relationship between Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, this thesis argues that the two come about as faceless in the project. This does not mean that the project banally renders these two organizations as flat binary forces. Instead, the thesis argues, it can be seen as a privileging of technological and material entities that is done strategically to make their capacity to act apparent in a network where human intentions are generally more visible. The strategic move to obscure the presence of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense is therefore not a

⁸ In one way the Internet has democratic potential in that it allows any persons (or institution as Al Qaeda here) voice to be heard. However, as described by Galloway, distributed networks create new structures of control. As described by Galloway: "Distributed networks have become hegemonic only recently, and because of this it is relatively easy to lapse back into the thinking of a time when networks were disruptive of power centers, when the guerilla threatened the army, when the nomadic horde threatened the citadel. But this is no longer the case. The distributed network is the new citadel, the new army, the new power". Alexander See R. Galloway, "Networks", in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, (2013), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. p 290.

⁹ See for example interview with Steve Coll, journalist and managing editor of the Washington Post. Steve Coll interviewed by Amy Goodman, *Ghost Wars: How Reagan Armed the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan*, Democracy Now, 10.06.04

https://www.democracynow.org/2004/6/10/ghost_wars_how_reagan_armed_the

¹⁰ Ibid.

flattening out of a complex relational reality, quite the opposite it functions as a gesture to deepen the question of who participates and acts in networks of human and nonhuman entities. The two being rendered as faceless has two effects. The first is that it associates them with the secrecy and non-transparency of their politics, which is discussed throughout the chapter titled “Propaganda”. Secondly, but equally important, it pushes them in the background for the viewer to instead notice the agency of the technologies they use. Indeed, in the exploration of the propaganda imagery of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, it is evident that the systems of distribution of their propaganda imagery, and the technical image resolutions they use, play critical roles in how and to what degree their message affects viewers.

1.1 Background Information

Sean Snyder was born in 1972 in Virginia U.S.A and is currently based in Berlin. His art projects comprise experiments with appropriated information that, often with self reflexive references to art and the art institution, investigate topics such as the politics and mechanisms of information – images, media technologies and the mass media, as well as consumerism and war. He also often writes texts or shorter comments to his projects that, as with the rest of his works, provide additional layers and subtexts to his practice. The found material in Snyder’s practice derives from a variety of sources, as described by Jan Verwoert, Snyder is “a client of, among others, Reuters, the Associated Press, satellite operators, and uses information that the UN makes available on request.”¹¹ Many of Snyder’s explorations display how the ideological concerns of actors in power, be they nations, corporations or people of power, materialize in humorously banal or tragicomic ways.¹² He also works with what can loosely be termed as “personal video essays”. In discussing the genre, Brenda

¹¹ Jan Verwoert, Untitled article in *Sean Snyder*. Ed. by Nikola Dietrich. (2007): 9-12. Köln, Walther König, 9.

¹² See for example the project *Dallas Southfork in Hermes Land, Slobozia, Romania* (2001), where Snyder has assembled material on how a Romanian billionaire in the 1990’s, during the communist regime of Nicolai Ceausceau, had a copy of the ranch from the American TV-show Dallas built in Slobozia, Romania. The way the ranch is displayed in the show does not correspond to anything in reality. With the use of mirrors and wide-angle lenses the ranch was made to look bigger than it really was, and the interior shots were filmed at a movie set that didn’t in reality correspond to the ranch at display in the exterior shots. The copy in Romania is therefore 20 percent bigger than the one displayed at TV. The project comprises several of the elements that can often be seen in Snyder’s project, such as the mass media, the politics of media representations, communism, capitalism and ideology materialized in architectonic structures.

Hollweg compares Snyder's works with those of Hito Steyerl and Ursula Biemann.¹³ However, within this genre as with the rest of his works, what may at first appear as journalistic political commentary soon reveals itself to lack any pedagogical clarity or clear-cut narrative. Facts are mixed with speculations and contradictory information.

With his use of documentary and media technologies that are reflexive of their own medium and genre, Paolo Magagnoli compares Snyder's practice with the practices of Allan Sekula, Martha Rosler and Dara Birnbaum, as well as with the contemporary practices of Steyerl, Walid Raad, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin.¹⁴

The research-based art of Snyder seen in OCP can also be seen in relation to what has been called archive art. Following Hal Foster's article "*An Archival Impulse*", Mark Godfrey notes that it today is: "an increasing number of artists whose practice starts with research in archives."¹⁵ "These varied research processes," Godfrey claims, "lead to works that invite viewers to think about the past, to make connections between events, characters, and objects, to join together in memory (...)."¹⁶ Snyder's research for this project, and particularly his research in the Carl Zeiss Archive, may be placed within this context. However, there is a significant difference between the artistic practices Foster describes in his text, and that of Snyder, and that is how Snyder also deals with the digital archive. The material that Snyder has appropriated has been acquired on the Internet. This is the case for the propaganda imagery and strategies of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, but it is also the case for the material that Snyder appropriated from the Carl Zeiss Archive. Even though the Carl Zeiss in one manner represents a traditional archive, it also represents the digital archive because the material was digitized and sent to Snyder by e-mail. This is discussed in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

¹³ Brenda Hollweg, "Relational subjectivity, impure voice: the video essays of Agnès Varda, Bingöl Elmas and Kathy High". In *Impure cinema: intermedial and intercultural approaches to film*, edited by Lucia Nagib and Anne Jerslev. (2014). London and New York, L.B. Tauris, 166-167.

¹⁴ Paolo Magagnoli, "Let meaning disintegrate: digital compression as revelation in the art of Sean Snyder", in *the Versatile image: photography, digital technologies and the Internet*, edited by Alexandra Mosconi, Carol McKay and Arabella Plouviés, (2013): 223-239. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 224.

¹⁵ Mark Godfrey, "The artist as historian", *October* No. 120, (Spring 2007): 140-172, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press Journals, 142.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 143.

Broadly, Snyder's practice can be seen in relation to Conceptual Art and Art-and-Technology. In OCP we see this in the investigation of the new forms of information production and distribution that come with new technologies. With this, the project draws on Conceptual Art's and Technological-Arts's self-reflexive investigations of how media shape information, and the role of the artist and the art object in the meeting with different technologies.¹⁷ The letters or emails that Snyder sends to inquire about information to obtain his found material are often included in his projects, bringing the process of acquiring information and the meetings with other institutions into the institution of art. Adversely, for example in the work *Ad in the Chicago Tribune (Uncalculated Algorithm)* (October 17, 2015) Snyder has posted an ad in the newspaper Chicago Tribune. As with the concern seen in OCP, both these gestures have Conceptual aspirations that explicitly mix the systems of information (bureaucratic and mass media, newspapers and the Internet) with the art institution.¹⁸

Fragmentation and Dichotomies

In his art practice, Snyder collects and presents fragmented pieces of material. The pieces of material are layered, and as the viewer tries to untangle the complex relationships between the concepts and phenomena that are evoked, she will find multiple connections as well as contradictions. Considering this, art historian Daniel Birnbaum describes Snyder's practice as a "hermeneutical labyrinth" consisting of an "intricate series of references" where "each piece of information is a hieroglyph begging for interpretation," and where each detail "might lead to further traces, presumptions, assumptions and contradictions."¹⁹ This is the case also

¹⁷ There are differences between Conceptual Art and Art-and-Technology, especially in regards of how they relate to materiality. Art historian Edward Shanken, however, argues that the two have been somewhat artificially separated and should be seen in relation to each other. See Edward A Shanken, "Art in the Information Age", *Leonardo*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (2002): 433-438. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press Journals.

¹⁸ The legacy of this practice can be sourced to, for example, Douglas Huebler's advertisement in Artforum announcing the exhibition Douglas Huebler November 1968. (Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual art and the politics of publicity*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2003), 132-33).

¹⁹ Daniel Birnbaum, Untitled article in *Sean Snyder*. Ed. by Nikola Dietrich. (2007): 6-7, Köln, Walther König, 6. Interestingly, with its fragmentary form, the project bears resemblance to for example the fragmentary novels of Franz Kafka, which is precisely what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari refer to in order to establish their notion of the assemblage. As described by geographer Martin Müller: "[in Kafka's novels] everything seems linked to everything else (...) there are new, unexpected realities at each turn." (Müller, "Assemblages and Actor-networks", unpaginated.)

in OCP. The pieces of material in this project provide multiple layers to the concept of image production and distribution.

In addition to what is already a collection of fragmented pieces of material, this thesis identifies that the matters of concern in the project are presented through dichotomies of the visible and the invisible, the secret and the revelatory, the transparent and the obscure. Both the fragmentary form and the dichotomies just described can be seen as responses to specific conditions within the political and technological contexts that the project deals with. In addition to commenting upon the dichotomies as they appear throughout the analyses, this thesis discusses what both they and the fragmentary form of OCP can be seen as responses to in the final chapter of the thesis.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The following list explains the base of the framework for my analysis. Other theories are explained consecutively throughout the analysis.

In associating technologies with information industries and the military, the project recalls ideas brought forward by for example the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler (1943-2011). Throughout several books and articles, Kittler addresses what he calls the military-industrial-complex, describing precisely the close working relationships between these industries. Beyond the acknowledgement of its relevance, this part of Kittler's theory is not employed in the discussion of OCP. What does underpin the discussions in the thesis, however, is the idea promoted by Kittler that technologies play a crucial part in shaping meaning, knowledge and culture. Drawing on the French philosopher Michel Foucault, Kittler discusses how media affect meaning and knowledge production. For Foucault, the notion apparatus is thought to signify a machinery or system of relations that performs power within the social body of society.²⁰ The elements within this system are, according to Foucault, a heterogeneous ensemble of what can be said and what is unsaid, materialized through, for example: "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws,

²⁰ Assemblage is the English translation of Deleuze and Guattari's originally French term *agencement*. According to geographer Martin Müller, the English translation risks losing important connotations to the term *agencement*, for example that the relational assembly of heterogeneous parts creates agency. (Müller, "Assemblages and Actor-networks", unpaginated).

administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical moral and philanthropic propositions.”²¹ A Foucaultian discourse analysis looks at the fact that some communicative events were produced, as opposed to others, and investigates how apparatuses constitute certain regularities that program what can possibly be said or written.²² What can be said is therefore historically contingent upon the setup of the apparatus at a specific time period. Drawing on this, Kittler argues that media technologies are imperative in the production of meaning, and that different technologies, especially concerning their materiality, shape the meaning of what is communicated.²³ The concern for how media affects messages is something Kittler has in common with, for example, Marshall McLuhan, whose phrase "the Media is the Message" has been popularized beyond the institution of media theory.²⁴ As summed up by Winthrop-Young and Wutz in discussing this emphasis in Kittler and McLuhan, "the question of how people operate upon media thus has to be complemented by the equally important question of how media operate upon people.”²⁵ In *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* (1964), McLuhan argues that technologies must be considered extensions of the human body. Following this thought, McLuhan describes the idea that technologies are external to human beings as a comical fallacy:

*as long as we adopt the Narcissus attitude of regarding the extensions of our own bodies as really out there and really independent of us, we will meet all technological challenges with the same sort of banana-skin pirouette and collapse.*²⁶

Also important for the thesis, stating that “electric technology is directly related to our central nervous systems,” McLuhan pays critical attention to how media such as Television is linked to corporate interests.²⁷

²¹ Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", in *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper, (1980), New York: Pantheon Books, 194.

²² Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, Translators introduction to *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* by Friedrich Kittler, xi-xli, (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, [1986] 1999). xxii.

²³ Ibid. xxii.

²⁴ The phrase was first used by McLuhan in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). The phrase was popularized in the Woody Allen movie *Annie Hall* (1977).

²⁵ Winthrop-Young and Wutz, translators introduction, xxii.

²⁶ Marshall McLuhan, chapter 7, *Understanding Media, Extensions of Man*, 126.

²⁷ Ibid. 125.

What is explored in OCP can be understood with the notion “compression” in two ways. First, I argue that the project explores the effect that digital data compression, in the technological sense of recoding of data done to decrease file sizes, has on images (and more generally information). With this, I argue that the project negotiates how compression causes cultural changes. For one thing, compression allows for increased amounts of information as well as faster information distribution. Furthermore, compression can make aesthetical differences in images. The project responds to how both these effects of compression, in different ways, affect human beings.

Secondly, and related to the aspects that are brought up with the purely technical definition of digital data compression, Snyder’s project can be considered with what Jonathan Sterne describes as a “general history of compression.” In the text *Compression: A Loose History*, Sterne describes compression as an alternative narrative through which one can understand media representations. The narrative that it is supposed to replace is what he describes as “the general history of verisimilitude,” where media are considered in terms of their capability to “achieve a full identity between original and copy.”²⁸ Sterne refers to the theories of Jacques Derrida, and specifically his book *On Grammatology*, to point out that the idea of a “pure language” (i.e. a full identity between copy and original) confers to an idea of transcendence that would never be possible. With references to Claude Shannon’s theory of communication he notes that noise will always be part of the equation. As opposed to the history of verisimilitude, the general history of compression is therefore, as described by Sterne, instead about questions that begin from the assumption of finitude. It is in other words about considering specific limits and how those limits are negotiated, be they “technical, perceptual, juridical, or cultural.”²⁹ Also, similar to how I argue that Snyder’s project negotiates human and nonhuman actors as networked, a general history of compression, Sterne insists, is about considering “communication as based in a relational reality.”³⁰

²⁸ Jonathan Sterne, "Compression: A loose history ", in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of media infrastructures*, ed. Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, Kindle Edition. (2015): unpaginated. University of Illinois Press.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

OCP displays a network of actors that can be understood with Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). The project, I argue, could also be considered with the notion “assemblage” that refers to the ontological framework presented by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Indeed, as with so many other aspects, OCP cannot easily be pinned down and can be considered as oscillating between different frameworks that are not necessarily fully compatible. The similarities between the two frameworks are however significant. Both ANT and assemblage thinking have drawn attention to how both human and nonhuman entities, always in relation with a multiplicity of other elements, have the capacities to act. Both frameworks are in other words relational and flat ontologies. There are two differences between the two frameworks that are of significance in this thesis. One fundamental difference is that Deleuzian assemblages are made up by relations of exteriority, whilst actor-networks are not. This means that assemblages are made up by elements that can have intrinsic qualities.³¹ In ANT, on the other hand, there is nothing that exists outside relations, and entities must form actor-networks to become capable to act.³² As opposed to actor-networks, assemblages can therefore have a virtual component, as explained by geographer Martin Müller, they posit “an open-ended set of capacities that is unpredictable and exceeds the properties of the component parts.”³³ This thesis uses the ANT and assemblage-vocabulary sparingly. However, the difference described above is of relevance to see how in particular cameras alternate between, on the one hand being conceptualized as nexuses in actor-networks, and on the other as elements with intrinsic qualities and virtual possibilities. And by all means, with all the heterogeneous elements that are brought to a whole in a camera, it is also itself an actor-network or assemblage.

A second difference between ANT and assemblage thinking is that the former is more empirical and the latter is more philosophical. ANT offers several terms that can, as described by Müller, “help make sense of the formation of associations.”³⁴ For this thesis, the ANT explanation of the term black box is of significance for understanding OCP. Considered as a verb, Latour has noted that black boxing is the social process that goes on when a

³¹ Martin Müller, “Assemblages and Actor-networks: Rethinking Socio-material Power, Politics and Space”, *Wiley Online Library*, (2016).

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gec3.12192/full#gec312192-bib-0037> 31, 28.

³² *Ibid.* 31.

³³ *Ibid.* 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 31.

machine runs efficiently without any other interference from the user than regular input and output, making the knowledge of the internal complexity of an object obsolete for the human user. This, he notes in the glossary of *Pandoras Hope: essays on the reality of science studies*, means that “the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become.”³⁵

With the same line of thought, Samer Farai and Azad Bijan argue that there are weaknesses in how technologies are generally studied. More specifically they argue that technologies are too often accepted within market categories produced by vendors, leading to the technology being reduced to features and designer-intended uses.³⁶ They argue that technologies’ status as black boxes has the unfortunate consequence that technologies that have complex internal workings and differences between them are reduced and considered under general categories that devoid them of their differences.³⁷ Instead they propose what they call an "affordance perspective" on technology, where the materiality of technologies and the way they interact relationally (with for example, but not excluded to, the human user), and importantly where this interaction is not necessarily going on the way the designer intended, is in focus.

The thesis employs the term "affordance," which was first introduced by psychologist James J. Gibson.³⁸ This notion is valuable in my analysis because it can refer to how things, for example cameras, have particular features that allow some actions, and restrict others. Farai and Bijan use the term to pay equal attention to the material and the social.³⁹ In discussing the participation of nonhumans in actor-networks,⁴⁰ Latour details the usefulness of the term in stating that things do not just serve as “backdrop for human action,” but that they might also

³⁵ Bruno Latour, *Pandora's hope: essays on the reality of science studies*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 304.

³⁶ Samer Faraj and Bijan Azad, "The Materiality of Technology: An Affordance Perspective", in *Materiality and Organizing: Social Interaction in a Technological World*, edited by Paul Leonardi, Bonnie Nardi and Jannis Kallinikos, (2012): 237-258. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See James G. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, (New York and London: Psychology Press, [1979] 2015).

³⁹ Faraj and Azad. "The Materiality of Technology: An Affordance Perspective", 237-258.

⁴⁰ There is an anthropocentric bias in distinguishing between humans and nonhumans. This is acknowledged by Bruno Latour, see for example Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 72. This thesis recognizes the same thing, however, the terms are used here for their heuristic value.

"authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on."⁴¹

Finally, a note should be made on how the term “affect” is to be understood in the thesis. The thesis identifies the issues of concern in OCP through the theoretical framework described above. The framework bears strong connections to related theories on affect, deriving from philosopher Baruch Spinoza and elaborated by, among others, Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi. However, with the exception of when I discuss fear-rhetoric through Massumi in the propaganda-chapter, my use of the term affect should be understood broadly in the sense of something that causes a change in something else.

1.3 Method and Thesis Structure

The fragmentary form of Snyder’s project and the dichotomies it plays with (the visible and the invisible, the secret and the revelatory, the transparent and the obscure) has led me to search for connections. The main challenge in this work has been to try to untangle the relationships between the different elements conceptually, in keeping with the complex internal relationships between the materials, and further to organize these concepts within the structure of a thesis. Without any pretense to establish all the connections in a project that explicitly resists such coherence, this thesis aims to make some of the relationships that are at play visible.

The project, I have already argued, displays a network of intricately relational actors and the agency they perform together. To be able to write sensibly about this, I have separated the different elements analytically. This has led to a structure consisting of three main parts, where what I consider the main actors, their relationships, and their co-produced agencies are unpacked in an orderly fashion. These three chapters are named after the art projects title, namely “Optics”, “Compression“ and “Propaganda”. A final section titled “Optics. Compression. Propaganda.” brings the thesis to a conclusion.

⁴¹ Ibid. 72.

OCP pays extra attention to the digital and to compression. The thesis takes this attention seriously, and argues that a thorough investigation of how the digital functions technologically, and what it answers to socially, is crucial to understand Snyder's project. An informative introduction to the aspects of how the digital and digital compression functions that are relevant for this thesis can be found in a preface to the compression chapter.

The following set of questions guided my research:

- What is the relationship between human and technological agencies, and how is their relationship negotiated?
- What are the relationships between the technological telecommunication systems and the socio-political contexts that are brought up in the project?
- What are the relationships between the technological processes, especially regarding their materiality, and the concepts that are brought up in the project?
- How does Snyder's project tell me that there is something I as a viewer, and we, citizens of the contemporary world, don't see? What is it that we don't see, and how does this come forward in the project material?

Thesis Structure

Optics

Introducing the crucial role optics play in Snyder's project, this chapter explores some of the archive material that is included in OCP. The first part of the chapter discusses how some of the references to the Carl Zeiss Archive, in the form of images and comments in Snyder's text, function as a conceptual and historical backdrop for the project. Here we see a particular emphasis on optical technologies, and which concepts and actors they are associated with.

In the second part of the chapter, I use an archive image as an introductory analogy for what I consider three key aspects of the project. The first two are linked to how optical technologies can both aid and restrict human perception. The third points forward to the next chapter where I argue that Snyder's project draws attention to how the visual access to the world contrasts with the invisible digital processes in today's media landscape. An epistemological concern of the project, I argue, is that it highlights the invisibility of these processes in

bringing them to the surface and that the gesture to do so emphasizes how critical they are both in productions of social memory and in the control over human bodies.

Compression

In order to introduce what role compression plays in this project, in both senses of the word as described in the theoretical framework, I present an analysis of what Snyder refers to as experiment one. In short, we see that the experiment includes the steps of having an analog image digitized, to use the digital image as a base for new image standards, and finally to have those images printed. With these steps the project explores some of the effects the digital and compression has on images and information. It shows that the digital is a sphere where it is possible to create an extensive amount of images, and that different technological image standards cause different visual surfaces. As such, both in my presentation of the project and in OCP, the experiment functions as a way to sensitize the viewer to these mechanisms. We will see them at play in a specific case study in the following chapter.

Propaganda

Within a conceptually neutral context, the previous chapter was a display of technological agency. This chapter, on the other hand, explores how the project negotiates technologies as powerful agencies also within contexts that are explicitly loaded with notions of power and control. This context involves close working relationships between the media, information and consumer capitalism, and Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense. All of these are powerful distributed networks in the real world.⁴² In Snyder's project, however, I argue that Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense are nominalized and unified. They have a presence in the project, but they are faceless. What analogically is given a face, on the other hand, and which in line with this is explored more thoroughly, is the video camera Sony DCR PC-120E. Standing out in a context filled with powerful actors, its agency is negotiated.

The first section of the chapter outlines the powerful context described above that makes up the background of Snyder's exploration of the camera's agency. In exploring the

⁴² Galloway and Eugene Thatcker have written specifically about Al Qaeda as a distributed network, and they discuss the tension of discussing Al Qaeda both as a unified enemy, and as a distributed network that evades being pinned down. See: Eugene Thacker and Alexander Galloway, *The exploit: A theory of networks*, (Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

propaganda of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, Snyder's project deals with the contemporary context post 9/11. One of the things that defines this context is how it is a time where the military and political power in society becomes increasingly stronger. In this section, I trace how this aspect sows the historical military context that was discussed in "Optics" with the contemporary one represented by Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense. In continuation of this, I identify how the context is materialized in two of the propaganda images by the Department of Defense that Snyder found to metaphorically display the motivation for the Iraq War.

In the second section of the chapter, I discuss how the particular video camera described above comes forward as the leading actor and most potent actor in the visual war of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense. Here I identify how the project negotiates the role of the camera in several pieces of material from the project. The camera is centered in the project in numerous more or less explicit ways. The function of its centered position, I argue, is to make its agency apparent in a politically loaded context where the faceless agency of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense would generally be more apparent. Having identified the camera as an actor, it is apparent that the camera is networked. The force of the camera and that of the images it produces, is shown to emerge in its collaboration with (among others) the powerful agencies that the project associates it with, namely compression, Al Qaeda and the Internet.

Optics. Compression. Propaganda.

The first section of this concluding chapter briefly argues that OCP's assembly of fragmented pieces of information and the dichotomies it plays with, as well as Snyder's method of sampling information, should be considered a response to the context of war that is brought up in the project, and to some of the changes that the digital, digital compression and the Internet has brought along in the production and distribution of information.

The thesis comes to a conclusion with an analysis of one of OCP's works that I argue epitomize the project. Simultaneously, the work both unpacks and displays the circuit of dependencies between the elements that this thesis heuristically has had to separate. As such, it reflects also the method and structure of the thesis, and more broadly, the relationship between language and complex relational realities.

2 Optics

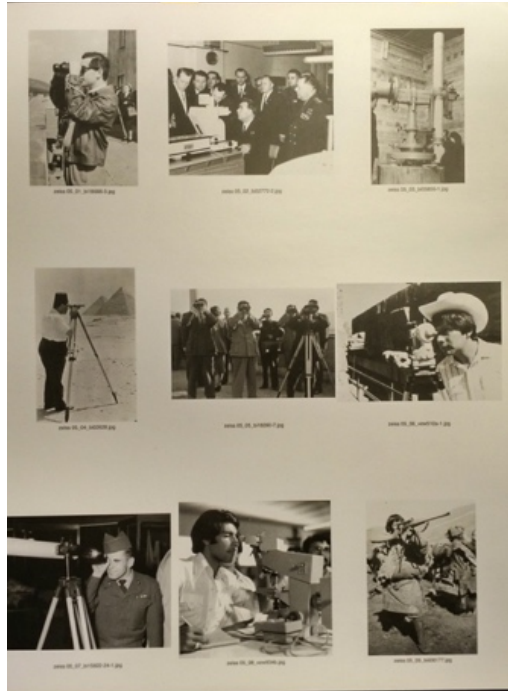
Broadly defined, optics is part of the science of physics, and deals with anything that has to do with light. This includes the behavior and properties of light, as well as its interactions with matter, and of great importance in this art project, the instruments that use or detect light.⁴³ In several aspects, *Optics. Compression. Propaganda.* relates to such a definition of optics in a concrete way. The project includes multiple images that are photographic, which means that they have been instantiated by light and optical instruments. Further, both images and texts in the project have been printed with a light jet technique, a process where unexposed photographic paper is exposed to the light of red, green and blue lasers. In both photographs and light jet printing, light is the energy that is used to inscribe other materials with information. In Sean Snyder's project, however, optics does not merely relate to the production of material, it is also conceptually thematized as such. In the works that I have included for my analysis, there are multiple references to optical instruments, as well as to the concept and materiality of images. Here we see inquiries about optical instruments as interesting in and of themselves, not solely as devices that provide access to a world outside them, or as producers of images with semantic value.

Optics can be seen in relation to information and knowledge factually, but also metaphorically. Because they have allowed humans to explore the world visually, optical phenomena and optical instruments are commonly used as metaphors to point to knowledge and information – and in extension, to collective conceptions of the world.⁴⁴ The scan from the exhibition catalogue seen on the following page (image 1) can be considered introductory to this aspect of Snyder's project. Depicted are some of the optical devices that have brought about scientific information and knowledge to the human being. In the image we see optical

⁴³ Encyclopedia of Science and Technology (5th ed.). McGraw-Hill. 1993.

http://ajaysingh.in/files/3114/1310/5854/McGraw-Hill_Concise_Encyclopedia_of_Science_Technology_5th_Edition.pdf (Visited 12.11.16).

⁴⁴ That the study of optical phenomena, and the study of phenomena through optical devices has been a huge provider of knowledge and shifts in world images is widely known. One such example is of course how Galileo Galilee's observations of the sun through a telescope led to prove Nicolas Copernicus' theory that the world in fact orbits the sun, and not vice versa. As we know, this led to a complete shift of framework for the human being. The move from a geocentric to a heliocentric worldview assigned the human being a humbler position in a vast universe. This is one convincing example that optically obtained information, and information about the optical, can lead to shifts in our knowledge. Another simple and banal example is the fact that light is what enables humans to see anything at all.



(1) Untitled material. (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

instruments such as binoculars, telescopes and microscopes attached to the optical apparatus that is arguably the main provider of the visual world image of humans; the human eye. These images render a connection between humans, their visual access to the world and the instruments that have been made to enhance that access. I argue that the importance of optics in human knowledge production and relatedly in social conceptions of the world, are overarching and crucial concepts in OCP.

Introducing the crucial role optics play in Snyder’s project, this chapter explores some of the archive material that is included in OCP. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss how some of the references to the Carl Zeiss Archive, in the form of images and comments in Snyder’s text, function as a conceptual and historical backdrop for the project. Here we see that optical technologies are of central concern, as well as which concepts and actors they are associated with. Related to the image above, we also see that the potential of optical instruments to create social conceptions of the world makes them desirable for governmental and military organizations, a topic that is explored further in the chapter titled “Propaganda”.

In the second part of the chapter, I use one of OCP's found archive images as an introductory analogy for what I consider three key aspects of the project. The first two are linked to how optical technologies can both aid and restrict human perception. The third is related to the image above; I argue that Snyder's project points to how the visual access to the world, which defines the epistemological value of the optical technologies in the image above, contrasts with a concern for the invisible digital processes in today's media landscape. An epistemological concern of the project, I argue, is that it highlights the invisibility of these processes in bringing them to the surface and that the gesture to do so emphasizes how critical they are both in productions of social memory and in the control over human bodies.

2.1 Setting the Stage: Material from The Carl Zeiss

Archive

Carl Zeiss AG, founded in 1846 in Jena, Germany, is a corporation that produces optical instruments.⁴⁵ In Snyder's project text, the archive of Carl Zeiss AG is stated to provide a conceptual frame for OCP.⁴⁶ As the archive of Carl Zeiss AG contains optical instruments, as well as material concerning these types of instruments in the form of documents, files, photos, patents and the like,⁴⁷ it obviously takes us right to the core of the first term in the title of the art project.

My claim is that the references to the Carl Zeiss Archive structures the project on a thematic level pointing directly to the concept and phenomenon of optics, and importantly, it provides a historical and conceptual backdrop for the project. As will be made clear, the references to be discussed here place optical Zeiss-instruments at the center of attention within very specific contexts.

⁴⁵ Zeiss International, *The Carl Zeiss Archives*, Carl Zeiss International, 2016, http://www.zeiss.com/corporate/en_de/history/archives.html (Visited 12.11.16).

⁴⁶ Sean Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", *Art and Research.org*, (2007), <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁴⁷ Zeiss International, *The Carl Zeiss Archives*, Carl Zeiss International, 2016, http://www.zeiss.com/corporate/en_de/history/archives.html (Visited 12.11.16).

There are multiple short historical narratives in Snyder's project text. These pieces of history connect the space between past events and the present - not through narratives that centers on human subjects, but rather through a thematic focus on optical image technologies. Here optical instruments are repeatedly placed in military historical contexts. In fact, they seem to travel through history from one military group to another. The military context and the manner in which optical technologies are centered within it can be seen in the following example:

*The same fast-focus telephoto Zeiss lens, which was developed under National Socialism to document the 1936 Berlin Olympics, was later used by Soviet photojournalists to record the invasion of Afghanistan.*⁴⁸

Here a lens that was developed and used for propaganda purposes by Nazi Germany preceding the Second World War,⁴⁹ later serves as a utility for Soviet during the invasion of Afghanistan.⁵⁰ In this example, time has passed and the concept of the enemy at the historical stage has recast. Indeed, the historical context surrounding the Zeiss lens has changed. The Zeiss lens, on the other hand, has remained the same. In its travel through different military historical contexts, the optical instrument is therefore conceptualized as both static and mobile. *Static* because it is provided with a fixed identity, the name of an optical instrument enclosing the identity of all the individual instruments that have the same affordances (fast-focus telephoto lens) and the same producer (Zeiss). *Mobile* because this identity easily allows this (these) optical instrument(s) to be identified throughout history and therefore, as can be seen in the narrative above, to move through different historical contexts. As the

⁴⁸ Sean Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", *Art and Research.org*, (2007), <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁴⁹ The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany was used for propaganda purposes. With this year's Olympics, the Nazis promoted an image of a strong Germany, all the while hiding its anti-Semitic agenda, its growing militarism and its plans for territorial expansion. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *The Nazi Olympics Berlin 1936*, 2016, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005680> (Visited 22.11.16).).

⁵⁰ Troops from the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in late December 1979. The Soviet intervention was in support of the Afghan communist government in its conflict with anticommunist Muslim guerillas, in what is called the Afghan War (1978-92). (*Encyclopedia Britannica*. © 2015. "Soviet invasion of Afghanistan". <http://global.britannica.com/event/Soviet-invasion-of-Afghanistan> (Visited 18.10.16.). The war gave rise to religious groups that later formed Al Qaeda. See Steve Coll interviewed by Amy Goodman, *Ghost Wars: How Reagan Armed the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan*, Democracy Now, 10.06.04 https://www.democracynow.org/2004/6/10/ghost_wars_how_reagan_armed_the (Visited 22.11.16).

optical technology is assigned a static quality that allows it a recognizable and thus mobile position at the historical stage, the military history is attributed with a transitory quality. The mobility of the technology and the impermanence of the outside historical world can be considered with the German media theorist Wolfgang Ernst's take on media archeology. In *Digital Memory and the Archive*, edited by Finnish media theorist Jussi Parikka, Ernst promotes media archeology as an analytical tool and method for analyzing aspects of media that, according to him, would otherwise escape the discourse of cultural history.⁵¹ The example from the text in discussion here maps onto one of the main interests of Ernst's media archeology, namely the interest in how there's no historical difference in the functioning of the technological infrastructure of the apparatus, and that it's only the historical context surrounding the apparatus that has changed.⁵² In Snyder's text, such as in the example above, optical devices remain operative throughout a shifting history of war. To repeat my argument, the aspects of static and mobility can be seen in the example above when the text insists that *the same* lens was used in Berlin and then later in Afghanistan. The way that the optical lens remains the steady and operative agent while the outside context changes thus mirror what Ernst describes as an "epistemological shift from a focus on the cultural lifespan of a medium towards its operational lifespan."⁵³ In addition to how the above quoted example arguably draws attention to the "operativity" of the optical technology, it may also exemplify the critical position optical technologies holds in Snyder's project as a whole.⁵⁴ The phrase conceptualizes the technology as the steady element in the narrative, a rhetoric that centers it

⁵¹Media archeology can generally be thought of as a field that is increasingly interested in what technologies do and are-in and of themselves-as opposed to a more traditional humanist interest in what technologies do and are for humans. With his take on media archeology, Ernst promotes an epistemological shift from a focus on the cultural lifespan of a medium towards its operational lifespan. Ernst locates this difference between the more traditional history of media and media archeology. As an example of the difference, Ernst explains how a radio built in Germany during the National Socialist regime still receives radio programs when operated today, because the stable technological infrastructure of broadcasting media is still in operation. (See Wolfgang Ernst, "Media archeography: Method and man versus the history and narrative of media ", In *Digital Memory and the Archive*, edited by Jussi Parikka, (2013): 55-73, Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 56, 57). Media archeology has therefore a structural interest in media, as opposed to a historiographical interest, and as opposed to an interest in the output semantic meaning that a media technology may convey. (See Ernst, "Media archeography", 64).

⁵² Wolfgang Ernst, "Let there be irony: cultural history and media archeology in parallel lines", In *Digital Memory and the Archive*, edited by Jussi Parikka, (2013): 37-54, Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, and Ernst, "Media archeography".

⁵³ See: Ernst, "Media archeography", 57, 70.

⁵⁴ The shift towards media archeology implies an emphasis on how media technologies function and on their processes, what Ernst refers to as their "operativity." (Ibid. 57, 70).

as the main actor. This, I argue, prepare the ground for several artworks in the project that circle around optical instruments, on their operativity and on the extensive role that they play in collaboration with other actors.

The emphasis on the transitory quality of human history and the centering of optical image technologies is also evident in the following excerpt of Snyder's project text. But what is more, it conceptualizes optical technologies as powerful assets that human actors wish to form alliances with. Positioned in the intersection between military antagonists, the instruments are conceptualized as favorable objects that potentially allow nations and military groups to get the upper hand. As beneficial objects, they must be thoroughly protected and withheld from the enemy, and this is a concern that is apparent in the following narrative. Here, in context of the final days of the Second World War, a rescue operation is set forward by the American forces in order to prevent the Zeiss factory from falling into Soviet jurisdiction:

*Acknowledging the future importance of the factory's production, the Zeiss factory in Jena was partly saved from strategic Allied bombardment in the final days of the Second World War. Following the Yalta agreement and the partitioning of Germany, the American forces quickly removed many of the instruments, as the factory would fall within Soviet jurisdiction. Company employees were relocated and undamaged optical devices were transported to West Germany and to the Soviet Union.*⁵⁵

The Carl Zeiss factory and the optical instruments that it represents are here referred to as strategic targets of a military operation. In this example optical instruments are not just situated in the intersection between antagonists of war, but literally in the middle of bombardment. After an Allied attack of Jena, American forces played out what was for them a rescue operation of optical instruments from the Zeiss factory, because the instruments were supposed to fall within Soviet jurisdiction due to the Yalta agreement.⁵⁶ Again we see a transitory historical context, not the least knowing how Soviet at the time, from an American

⁵⁵ Lisson Gallery, *Sean Snyder: Optics. Compression. Propaganda.*, 2016, <http://www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/sean-snyder-optics-compression-propaganda> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁵⁶ The Yalta agreement, named after a conference in Yalta, Crimea February 4-11 1945, was an agreement between the governments of the US, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the organization of Europe after World War II. See for example *Encyclopedia Britannica*. © 2015. "Yalta conference". <https://global.britannica.com/event/Yalta-Conference> (Visited 27.11.16).

point of view, quickly went from being an ally to becoming an antagonist.⁵⁷ Historical events, in this excerpt, are something that passes and turns over. In the middle of these shifting events, optical technologies are viewed as valuable assets and vehicles to obtain superiority.

As the above quoted paragraph describes, the undamaged optical devices that were saved from Allied bombardment were transported to West Germany and to the Soviet Union. This was documented by means of photographs that were archived by Carl Zeiss. Two of these images were included in the 2007 exhibition at Lisson Gallery (see images 2 and 3). Again, Snyder's text provides information and commentary about the archive material that adds a conceptual dimension to the topic of optical technologies. The paragraph concerning the two documentary images sets out with an informative description:

Two images under the rubric 'Demontage' evidence the series of events. One image (BI 16547) dated July 1945, shows transport crates ready to be sent to the Western sector of a soon to be divided Germany. A second image (BI 16547) dated 1946 shows the dismantling of the Zeiss factory and large boxes marked with Cyrillic tags to be sent to the Soviet Union.⁵⁸

The quoted paragraph explains that one of the documentary images depicts the boxes that were to go to the West of Germany, and that the other depicts the boxes that were off to the Soviet Union. Together the two images represent a geopolitical split where optical Zeiss-instruments stand as powerful assets in the middle of it all.

⁵⁷ Soviets position in the Second World War can in itself stand as an example of the ephemerality of the historical course. For example, two days after a discussed alliance between France, the British and Soviet failed, the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact, called the *Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact*, with Nazi Germany on August 23, 1939. In October and November 1940, the Soviet Union was even considered as a fourth Axis Power in collaboration with Japan, Germany and Italy. However, with the German invasion of Soviet territories during the operation called Operation Barbarossa, Hitler broke the non-aggression pact with Soviet 22 of June 1941. Following the invasion and Germany's violation of the non-aggression pact, Soviet joined forces with the United States and Great Britain in an alliance against Germany and the Axis, an alliance that is often referred to as "the Allies of World War II", or "the Grand Alliance". However, after their brief alliance during World War II, the Soviet Union and the US went from allies to antagonists with the Cold War (1945-91). (Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War: 1939-1953*, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006.) Soviet's shifts of alliances during and in the aftermath of World War II may thus stand exemplary of the ever-shifting course of history.

⁵⁸ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).



(2) Untitled material. "One image (BI 16547) dated July 1945, shows transport crates ready to be sent to the Western sector of a soon to be divided Germany."⁵⁹ (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).



(3) Untitled material. "A second image (BI 16547) (sic) dated 1946 shows the dismantling of the Zeiss factory and large boxes marked with Cyrillic tags to be sent to the Soviet Union."⁶⁰ (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

⁵⁹ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

In these photographs, the information that is of interest to us is stored in boxes and out of sight. However, the storage function of the boxes is here only temporary, Snyder's commentary insinuates that the optical technologies within was unleashed from their containment and potentially used on both sides of the ideological split of the Cold War. After the informative passage quoted above, the paragraph's last sentence dramatizes what happened next to the boxed optical Zeiss-instruments: "One can only speculate on the contents of the crates and their subsequent use during the Cold War on both sides of the ideological divide."⁶¹ Stating that "one can only speculate" on the contents of these boxes and on how the content might have been used during the Cold War, the narrative is enticed with the tension of the unknown. My claim is that, because the example Snyder chose to describe here invites to speculate, the fact that optical technologies are filled with a potential that extends our knowledge and intentions is emphasized. As such, the comment and images thus give a futural dimension to optical technologies. The images of the boxes may stand both as metaphors for the virtual potential they have, and for how this potential can be (and has been) taken advantage of by military actors on both sides of a conflict.

The type of optical technologies that are investigated more specifically in Snyder's project, the "Propaganda"-chapter identifies, are cameras. And cameras are indeed defined by potentiality. Whether digital or analog, as a piece of hardware, a camera is a physical box that facilitates the production of images. As it houses components like chemically light sensitive films or CCD-chips and software, it's a space that can accommodate an infinite number of new productions. This aspect of the camera is shown to be precisely what makes them desirable for power seeking actors that wish to inscribe the memory of human beings. With this in mind, the last sentence of Snyder's quote touches upon why optical technologies are associated with power, namely because they are forces that have the potential to contribute in causing social, political, scientific and historical change. In insinuating that the optical technologies have been put to use on both sides of the ideological divide of the Cold War, the phrase invites to further speculation on what images of the world the optical instruments have contributed to produce. Ultimately, these possible images might have caused changes in the

⁶¹ Ibid.

collective memory of populations of human beings, and possibly altered the course of history.⁶²

Conceptually, linking optical instruments (/cameras) with military operations inflicts the former with ideas of power and dominance. Snyder's project demonstrates that this isn't simply because they are objects of desire for those in power, but also because of the potential to act that they embody in themselves.

Capitalism

My analysis has till now demonstrated how Snyder's project associates optical technologies with military and governmental organizations. The relationship between these forces, I argue, is further complicated by yet another that is equally vital in the project, namely information and consumer capitalism. To introduce the matter, I make one of the connections between it and the other two visible by means of yet another of Snyder's comments from the project text.

With the comment in question, Snyder puts forward an observation on what type of camera is shown in English film director Alfred Hitchcock's (1899-1980) film *Rear Window*. Released in 1954, the film is placed within the historical context of the Cold War (1947-1991). This was a time where propagandist rhetoric was not only communicated through political speeches or articles in different broadcasting media; both sides of the conflict aimed to also communicate their message through artistic productions such as fiction films. On the American and Western side, this was dominated by McCarthyism and the so called Second Red Scare, which involved a fear of anything communist.⁶³ Released in the middle of this context, Hitchcock's film includes an element that Snyder identifies as an alien body:

⁶² I understand collective, or social, memory here as it has been defined by Maurice Halbwachs. Explained by Ina Blom social memory was defined by Halbwachs as: "a function of how minds work together in society. The persistence of memory is related precisely to how a society's languages, institutions, monuments, habits, and rituals manage to keep the past alive in everyday practice". Ina Blom, *The Autobiography of video: the life and times of a memory technology*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 205.

⁶³ The term the second Red Scare refers to the American fear of communism during the period of the late 1940s through the 1950s. The fear-atmosphere and the political measures that were taken in relation to the second Red Scare is popularly known as McCarthyism, after the Senator who claimed that many Communists had infiltrated the U.S. Department, Joseph McCarthy. However, the second Red Scare lasted longer and exceeded the influence of McCarthy. Landon R. Y. Storrs. 2015. "McCarthyism and the Second

In Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 film Rear Window, the logo on the camera James Stewart's character uses to spy on his neighbors is curiously taped over. The camera in the film can be identified as a Contax VX. Produced in the communist GDR, it was fetishized by Western European and American photographers for its advanced technology. This evidence of optical technology bypassing ideology is also a seemingly awkward instance of capitalism's recognition of a better product.⁶⁴

The fact that a camera that was produced in the communist GDR was used in Hitchcock's 1954 film can, according to Snyder's comment, be considered an evidence of capitalism's recognition of a better product. With a tape that covers its identity, the contradictory position of the camera in this context is emphasized. Snyder's comment highlights capitalism as a force by addressing a situation where the ideological concerns of the U.S., that in this context would generally reject affiliation with Soviet products, were overruled in favor of following capitalist logic.

Here, one of the principles of capitalism overrules other precarious ideological concerns. This may stand exemplary and introductory of what I identify as a display of close working relationships between information and consumer capitalism, media technologies and military or governmental organizations in the project.

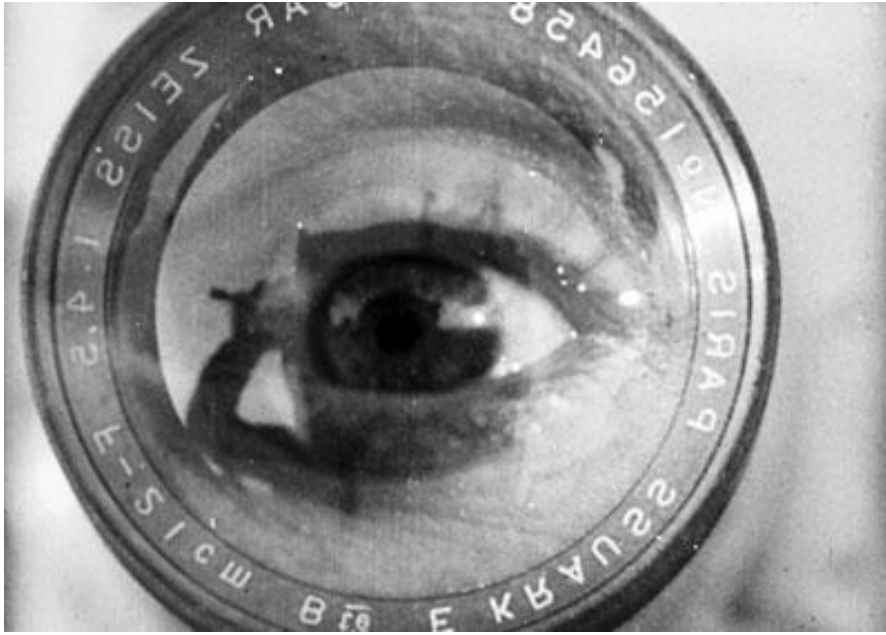
2.2 Media Technologies and Perception

When OCP was exhibited at Lisson Gallery, an image where a human eye is superimposed with a Zeiss-lens was part of the exhibited material (see image 4). The image is a widely known still from the avant-garde documentary film *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) by Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov (1896-1954). In the image, an eye appears to be situated within or behind a Zeiss camera lens. Reflected in the glass of the lens is what appears to be an arm holding a camera that is pointed towards the eye and lens. The three optical systems thus mimic each other: The eye and Zeiss-lens actively produces an image of the reflected camera, while at the same time being produced as image by it. The grey-scale still thus appears to display a phantasmagoria of optical elements that stand in a feedback loop

Red Scare". Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Oxford University Press.

<http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.6> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁶⁴ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).



(4) Still image from Dziga Vertov's film *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929). The image was part of the archive material that Snyder used in his exhibition of OCP at London Lisson Gallery in 2007. Note that the camera lens is from Carl Zeiss AG. (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

relationship. What interests me the most, however, is the relationship between the Zeiss-lens and the human eye. In the following paragraphs, I suggest three different readings of this relationship – all of which are relevant for what's at stake in OCP.

For one thing the Vertov-still serves as a reminder of the similarities between the optical systems of the eye and of the camera.⁶⁵ For example, the iris and pupil of the eye functions much like the aperture of the camera lens, in that it adjusts the amount of light that enters the optical systems by increasing or decreasing in size. Further the crystalline lens of the eye, which is situated right behind the pupil, helps focus the light rays in the same manner as a camera lens is structured to steer light rays towards the light sensitive surface of the camera.⁶⁶ But at a glance, the Zeiss lens that encircles the eye may appear as binoculars. The lens can be seen as an artifact that is placed in front of the eye, instrumentally aiding it in seeing. This recalls the argument of Canadian philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) that media functions as extensions of the human senses and faculties.⁶⁷ This resonates with Vertov's belief that the camera presented human beings with new perceptual

⁶⁵ See for example Hugh Davson, *Physiology of the Eye*, fourth edition, (New York: Academic Press, 1980).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

possibilities. One of Vertov's principal interests as a filmmaker was precisely in how technologies allow humans to perceive the world differently. Uttering the belief that optical technologies – and in particular the eye of the camera – produces images that would otherwise not be perceptible to the human being, he is known to have said: *"I am an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it."*⁶⁸ The perceptual possibilities of the camera is a main interest for Snyder as well. In the project text, Snyder draws a line between Carl Zeiss and Vertov, stating that the Carl Zeiss company has maintained *"on industrial level what the Soviet filmmaker (...) outlined in his enthusiastic manifestos on the perceptual possibilities of the technological image."*⁶⁹

Considered in this first way, as binoculars encircling the eye, the camera lens functions as an artificially added extension that is there to amplify the visual sense of the human being. Conversely, the eye can appear almost as a hostage within the industrial cage of the camera lens. This second reading thus discloses a different relationship between the eye and the camera. Here, the camera lens becomes an artifact that limits the eye, attesting to the idea that as media technologies can aid human perception, they can simultaneously steer it from perceiving other aspects, or even function as controlling apparatuses, in Foucault and Kittler's sense of the word. Both these readings of the image are aligned with what Vertov communicated through his ideas, and maps onto themes that I argue are highly present in OCP. However, in the context of this art project, the image can also attest to a condition that had not yet seen the light of day in Vertov's time.

In an art project where the networked nature of the digital camera is in focus, the analogy can be taken one step further. This can be seen after I have visited another aspect of the image discussed at the outset of this chapter (see image one), as well as further similarities in the optical systems of cameras and eyes.

⁶⁸ The quote derives from Vertov's Kinok Manifestos from 1923. Jay Ruby, *Picturing culture: explorations of film and anthropology*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 197.

⁶⁹ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

In image one we saw epistemology as a concern in that it attests to how we obtain knowledge through the use of optical instruments, and through the visible sense. But OCP is also negotiating what is invisible to us. More specifically, it's dealing with how information today, and in extension of information; human knowledge, to a large extent is produced through processes that are invisible to us, and that a consequence of their invisibility is that our knowledge of these processes is limited. An observant viewer of image one will see that underneath every image there is a code with a mix of alphabetic letters and numbers. This is what the file name and file extension of digital images look like to the human being. The file name can help both the human being and the computer in locating files in computer databases, and the file extension refers to the standard that has structured the image: In the cases above, JPEG. Without the file extension the computer would not know how to handle the data. For example, it would not know if it were to represent data as images or text. In short, the file name and file extension organizes streams of binary digits: They provide addressability and a standard for representation to digital files.⁷⁰ Snyder's project, this thesis argues, shows that invisible digital processes must be taken into account in the exploration of perceptually accessible digital images. Arguably, the explicit reference to the digital files under these images stand in tension to the depicted motif that displays human's visual access to the world. By hinting towards the techno-material processes that have produced these images, the invisible processes that the digital realm encompasses are emphasized.

In the eye, the light sensitive surface called the retina captures light rays and transforms them into light impulses. The light impulses are then sent through nerve fibers to what is called the optic nerve (also known as cranial nerve II), which is a huge network of over one million nerve fibers that transmits visual information from the retina to the brain.⁷¹ After having travelled through the nerve fibers, the brain then interprets the signals that it receives as an image.⁷² In cameras that are digital and electronic, (which, as we'll see, is the case for the camera that is explored thoroughly in this project), this can be compared to the light sensitive

⁷⁰ Information on these basic facts on how the digital works can be found in any general introduction to information technology. See for example: Bård Kjos, Magnus Vørness and Per Arne Godejord, *Innføring i informasjonsteknologi*, 5th edition, (Trondheim: Tapir akademiske forlag, 2007), 1-37.

⁷¹ See for example Davson, *Physiology of the Eye*.

⁷² Ibid.

CCD chip, where the photoactive capacitor array is charged electrically, producing a sequence of voltages that are sampled, digitized and stored in memory.⁷³

With the references to the invisible digital processes, and the optical systems of the eye and camera in mind, I want to suggest that the motif of the Vertov movie-still can be thought to convey just the surface of optical systems that are fundamentally intertwined. The Zeiss-lens and the human eye, I argue, should be viewed as integrated elements of the same system. Rather than being disparate systems that are external to each other, the eye and the camera are fundamentally connected.

Keeping the networked nature of the digital camera and the human optical system in mind, the logical extension of the motif of this image would then be that the eye and camera share a neuronal network, or a network of electronic circuits, leading to a shared brain or chip. In today's world of global telecommunication, this brain or chip can easily and quite possibly connect to the even greater network of the Internet. Following their intertwined system may then lead to oscillating motions that first moves with small waves inwards to the infrastructure of the human brain and camera before expanding into large waves following the vast global telecommunication networks, and further the cultural, economical and political contexts they both condition and are conditioned by.

In the context of Snyder's art project, the superimposition of eye and camera can then be interpreted to point to today's interconnected relationship between the human communication system of neurons and the technological telecommunication system of the Internet. The image attests to the media ecology of today where humans and things (cameras) have a strong interconnected relationship. In today's context the still from *Man With a Movie Camera* can indeed lead to thinking about what cultural theorist John Johnston, in a text of the same name, describes as "machinic vision." With the concept Johnston appropriates and extends the term "machinic" which was coined by French philosopher Gilles Deleuzes (1925-1995).

⁷³ For thorough information on the light and signal conversions of electronic photography, see Marcus Weise and Diana Weynand, *How Video Works: From Analog to High Definition*, second edition, (Amsterdam: Focal Press, 2007), 1-37.

As Johnston explains, the term machinic denotes a “working relationship among the heterogeneous elements and relations defined by an assemblage,” where the assemblage is defined by it encompassing both mechanical machines and organic bodies.⁷⁴ The still image, I argue, serves as introductory to the idea that human organs of perception are networked with media technologies. For Johnston, the concept machinic vision describes an “extended condition of visibility” where perception must traverse through machinic circuits.⁷⁵ According to Johnston, this stands as a new perceptual regime where information is no longer selected primarily by the human being, instead its “articulation occurs by means of another logic: the incessant coding and recoding of information and its viral dissemination.”⁷⁶ In the following chapter we’ll investigate an experiment conducted by Snyder where these aspects are explored.

2.3 Summary

This chapter has introduced the critical role that the concept and phenomena of optics play in OCP. With analyses of excerpts from Snyder’s project text and found images from the Carl Zeiss Archive, the first section argued that optical technologies are conceptualized as the steady element in shifting military-historical contexts. There we saw narratives where military and governmental organizations went to great lengths to obtain optical instruments, and to keep them away from the enemy. The section argued that this conceptualization of the technologies inflicts them with ideas of power and potentiality, and that this is linked to the fact that their ability to produce images makes them actors that, in collaboration with others, have the potential to inscribe social memory – and cause political, scientific and historical change. The section also identified (information- and consumer-) capitalism as a vital force that optical technologies are affiliated with in the project. The following chapters will further deepen the question of their collaboration in the production of images and control over human bodies.

⁷⁴ John Johnston, “Machinic Vision”, in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 26 No 1, (Autumn 1999): 27-48. <http://web.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/WritingScience/JohnstonMachinicVision99.pdf> 28. (Visited 22.11.16).

⁷⁵ Ibid. 45.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 46.

The second part of the chapter used the found still image from Vertov's film *Man With a Movie Camera* as an analogy to introduce the relationship between human perception and image producing technologies as a critical concern of OCP. Three analogical readings of the image were presented. The first and second pointed to the fact that technologies can both aid and control human perception. The third reading pointed to the networked relationship between the digital and human perception in the contemporary media scape. This leads us to the next chapter, where this aspect of Snyder's project is explored with special attention on how the digital works.

3 Compression

The first section of this chapter introduces some aspects of how the digital works that are relevant for the analysis of Snyder's project.

To introduce what role compression plays in this project, in both senses of the word as will be described below, the second section of the chapter presents an analysis of what Snyder refers to as *Experiment One*.

3.1 The Digital and Digital Compression

In computers, signs that are meaningful to human beings on the computer screen, such as images, are represented in sets of binary digits that represent one of two states; 0 or 1. These sets of zeroes and ones make up digital files always have a standard according to which they are organized, and that is integral to their being. Without a standard to open the file with the computer would not be able to read it. The computer translates the data according to this standard into depictions on computer screens, where the information can be read by human beings. However, within the computer, the information is structured around mathematical quantity, not semantic quality, as described in mathematician Claude E. Shannons article *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1948).⁷⁷

In digital transmission, the bits that make up a cohesive representation on the screen are sent as electromagnetic waves.⁷⁸ The electromagnetic waves travel through physical channels such as copper wires or fiber optic cables, or they travel through the air wirelessly such as with Bluetooth technology. Because it facilitates the process, the integrity of the file is not kept throughout the transmission. Instead, the bits, or electromagnetic waves, may be sent in different directions through the network. This is called packet switching and is done so that the transmission can be as fast and efficient as possible.⁷⁹ The bits are then reassembled at the receiving point. The integrity of the file is also often interfered with even within a single

⁷⁷ Claude E. Shannon, "A Mathematical Theory of Communication", *Wiley Online Library*, [1948] (2016), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/j.1538-7305.1948.tb01338.x/abstract> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁷⁸ Information on these basic facts on how the digital works can be found in any general introduction to information technology. See for example: Kjos et al, *Innføring i informasjonsteknologi*, 1-37.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

computer. When a file is stored in the memory of a computer, it is rarely stored as an integral file at one place. Rather the code is stored partially in several different places. This is done because it facilitates the storing process. With this purpose, the file is split into as many pieces necessary according to wherever there is space on the computer.

Also for the purposes of efficiency, data compression is about accommodating signals to infrastructures.⁸⁰ When a file is compressed a subtractive movement happens to the binary code; in this process some bits in the binary code are dispensed with. Data compression accommodates signals by “removing redundant data from source material“.⁸¹ This is a recoding of data done to decrease the size of a file in order to facilitate and speed up its transfer and processing time and to economize how much space it occupies in storage.

Because of the numerical structure of digital files, and all the measures of efficiency such as compression and packet switching described above, the advent of the digital has led to radical changes in information processing because it allows for a vast amount of data to be reduced in size and to be transferred and stored efficiently. As is clear, the mode of operation of the digital is highly efficient, and malleable. In addition to how it can easily be compressed, the numerical organization of digital files means that they can easily be translated and copied into different image standards. Considering the way the digital file disassembles and reassembles, or transfers from one image standard to another, as described above, the digital is truthfully the sphere where, as described by Artie Vierkant on the image object post Internet:

Nothing is in a fixed state, i.e., everything is anything else, whether because any object is capable of becoming another type of object or because an object already exists in flux between multiple instantiations.⁸²

However, this efficiency and malleability also come with limits, and the transferal of images from one file standard to another, or the file reduction that happens through compression,

⁸⁰ Sterne, "Compression: A loose history", unpaginated Kindle Edition.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Artie Vierkant, *The Image Object Post-Internet*, Jstchillin, http://jstchillin.org/artie/pdf/The_Image_Object_Post-Internet_us.pdf 2. (Visited 18.11.16).

changes the mathematical setup of the image, as well as the aesthetical appearance of the visual surface.

Compression can be either *lossy* or *lossless*. In lossless compression the bits of a file are reduced without causing a loss of information. This is possible because it is programmed to identify and remove statistically redundant bits. In lossy compression on the other hand, some information is lost. The bits that are eliminated in lossy compression are considered to be so-called “nonessential information.” What is considered to be non-essential information is information that can be removed without causing too much psycho-visual disturbance for the human being. In other words, what is considered “essential information“ is that which makes the file semantically understandable for the human being. Although engineers aim to limit the amount of psycho-visual disturbance that the data compression causes, it still often affects the aesthetical surface of the information.

3.2 Experiment One

The short introduction to the digital above allows us to consider the technological and conceptual layers of *Experiment One*. In short, we’ll see that the experiment includes the steps of having an analog image digitized, to use the digital image as a base for new image standards, and finally to have those images printed. With these steps, I argue, the project negotiates some of the effects the digital and compression has on images and information. It shows that the digital is a sphere where it is possible to create an extensive amount of images, and that different technological image standards cause different visual surfaces. As such, both in my presentation of the project, and in the project, the experiment functions as a way to sensitize the viewer to these mechanisms, before we see them at play in a specific case study in the Propaganda-chapter.

In section 3.2.1, I discuss how the conceptual choices that were made in the selection of the image steers the viewer onto the right mindset to understand the experiment. In section 3.2.2, I discuss how the digitization of the image involves a technological and ontological switch from its analog existence. The digitization gives a digital file that is defined by its potential and malleability, which can for example be used to create several new image productions, as

this experiment attests to. In the exploration of the four different image standards that Snyder attempted to produce, we see in section 3.2.4 that the compressed image standard JPEG in different ways stands out in contrast to, or in continuation of, the other standards. In this exploration we also see that this experiment by no means attests to a general history of verisimilitude. Instead we see how the experiment underlines the specific material limits of different image standards where the value of noise is explicitly negotiated. In section 3.2.5, I discuss how the printed versions of the images that were hung on the Lisson Gallery wall conceptually functions as a gesture to slow down. As a contrast this invites reflection on the speed, invisibility and ephemerality of the digital, at the same time as it functions as a response to how these factors of the digital and compression technology accommodates the extensive amounts of images that we see in the media landscape of today.

Before we begin discussing the steps that were taken in the experiment, I'll comment on the character of the work. The experiment brings up critical questions concerning the concepts of remediation and rematerialization. This we'll see it does especially concerning the material and ontological differences of print and the digital, and in extension - concerning artworks. Indeed, with its processual nature one might ask what, how and when this artwork is. With these questions I refer to art historian Hanna Hölling's *Revisions: Zen For Film* (2015).⁸³ In the book, Hölling discusses precisely these questions with particular emphasis on Nam June Paik's widely known first cinematographic work *Zen for Film* (1962-64). When asked what the work *Zen for Film* is in 2014, Hölling found that she couldn't really give any absolute answer to the question. Is it the 20 minutes projected screening of the 16mm unexposed strip of film? What then, about the projector that is used in the screening? The projector is an apparatus that determines the screening, and that might conceal or emphasize scratches and dust. So what then, about the multiple remediations of Paik's work where different apparatuses have been used? Or is the work the physical roll of film, as an artefact? These questions are of central concern when it comes to the conservation and curation of artworks that are so-called "ephemeral" or that are presented in so-called "unstable media", be they performances, processual art, video screenings or the like. In discussing these questions, Hölling argues that we should overcome the dichotomy of the permanent versus the

⁸³ Hanna Hölling, *Revisions: Zen for film*, (New York and Chicago: Bard Graduate Center / University of Chicago Press, 2015).

impermanent, and rather acknowledge that nothing is permanent. Instead Hölling suggests that we may “think of artworks of all kinds as ever-changing and evolving entities that continually undergo physical alteration and transition.”⁸⁴ In addition to exploring critical aspects of the digital, the experiment we are about to discuss negotiates the ontology of artworks through operations that emphasize precisely change and material differences.

3.2.1 A Broken Piece of Raw Optical Glass

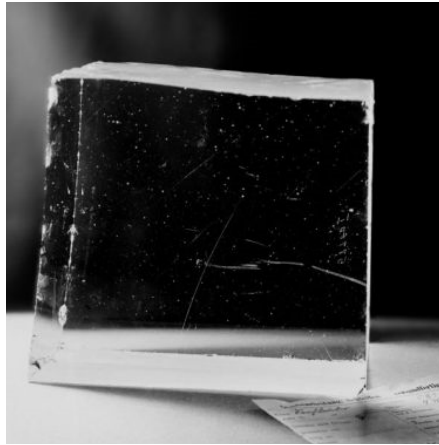
The first step that was taken in this experiment was that Snyder requested to have an analog image from the Carl Zeiss Archive digitized in a high-resolution file. The image that Snyder requested to have digitized steers the viewer on to the right mindset to consider the experiment in two ways. The first is by steering the viewer’s attention from what an image represents in terms of motif over to its technological processes and techno-materiality. In his description of the experiment, Snyder opens with stating that he selected an undated black and white image from the Carl Zeiss Archive (see image 5):

Example 1: I selected from the Zeiss Archive an undated (presumably from the 1920s) black and white image of a ‘broken piece of raw optical glass’ (archive number BII 03423). Stalled in production and documented for some unknown reason, the flawed piece of unprocessed material in the image represents essentially nothing.⁸⁵

Depicted on this image is a scratched and roughly shaped square glass standing on a white surface. Obviously the motif of the optical glass is reflexive of the concept and phenomena of optics. The image self reflexively refers back to itself as a product and symbol of optical forces. But beyond this aspect, which clearly feeds into and sprouts out from the overall arrangement of the project, Snyder states that the image “represents essentially nothing.” The text therefore does not provide any explicit value of interest to the depicted glass. Quite the contrary, as it is referred to as a glass that was “documented for some unknown reason,” the reason for its existence is questioned. This image then, seems to have been chosen as significant partly because it in itself is considered to not represent. Chosen as significant for

⁸⁴ Ibid. 24.

⁸⁵ Snyder, “Optics. Compression. Propaganda”, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).



(5) *A broken piece of raw optical glass from the Carl Zeiss Archive, (2007).*
(Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

not signifying and therefore signifying non-representation, the image is assigned a position that attempts to neutralize its function as a bearer of meaning. Within this strategically chosen space it is possible to look beyond the function of images to represent the outside world -as if they were transparent windows- and rather consider their material and technical properties-as well as the larger systems of production, distribution and consumption of images as such.

Secondly, the image steers the viewers' attention in the right direction by standing in conceptual tension to the significant aspect of processuality in the digital that the experiment attests to. The tension is created by a contrasting sense of stasis in the image. In particular three aspects give it a sense of stasis. First we can consider the fact that the image is taken from a traditional archive. At the point when a traditional archive has been opened to the audience of the public it is generally thought of as something that is no longer in a process. The sense of stasis that the traditional archive gives is echoed in the media of photography itself, known as it is for freezing the flux of time. And third, the sense of stasis is echoed in the depicted piece of glass, a glass that because it was broken has been retired from its potential to produce images, itself objectified in image instead. As such, the archive image comes close to be considered a stable entity in this experiment. However, Snyder took the archive image out of its imagined stable position. By digitizing the image, thus allowing it into a sphere is defined precisely by its fluidity, the image became a catalyst for processes that were to articulate new images. Together the conceptual choices of this particular image invite to explore the visually accessible images that resulted in the experiment as positive

facts of the practices that have taken place. The perspective that is invited here thus aligns with what Jonathan Sterne calls a general history of compression. As he describes, partly quoting Gilbert Simondon “(to) consider representation from the standpoint of compression rather than from verisimilitude means to consider it “in its entelechy, and not in its inactivity or static state.”⁸⁶

3.2.2 Digitization: Technological and Ontological Switch

After having selected the image, Snyder requested the Carl Zeiss archive to scan the negative of the image at the highest resolution they offer.⁸⁷ This is what allowed the depiction of the image of the broken piece of glass to travel from the analog negative to the realm of the digital. In the digitization process, a scanner translated and made a duplication of the analog photographic negative. However, the digital duplication has a very different ‘identity’ than the analog negative. Instead of being a physical surface of tonal values, the structure of the digital file is one of numbers. To be precise, the scanner reads and measures the level of grey on the surface of the photograph, and translates every measured area of the image into a binary code.⁸⁸ In this way the scanner functions much like a digital camera, photographing the image, or maybe rather *photocounting* the image, reading, translating and numbering it in order to make a duplication of the photographic negative. The numbers in the binary code are the building blocks that, to use an organic analogy, functions as a sort of DNA, which is the only accepted or even possible ‘identity’ within the system in which it will operate. It allows the file entrance to and a life within the realm of the digital.

As described in the introduction of this chapter, the digital file has a fluidity and fundamentally instable mode of existence that has accommodated significant changes in the media landscape. In the following we see an example of how its malleability and efficiency allows it to easily be used to create new copies or transfer to different image standards.

⁸⁶ Sterne, "Compression: A loose history", unpaginated Kindle Edition. Sterne is partly quoting the french philosopher Gilbert Simondon.

⁸⁷ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁸⁸ The Free Encyclopedia of Print. "Scanning". <http://printwiki.org/Scanning> (Visited 18.11.16).

3.2.3 Four Image Standards

After having acquired the digital image file, Snyder used the file to create four copies with different image standards:

I placed the image through a number of technical permutations approximating a series of four imaging processes and resolutions: that of a digital photographic proof (photograph), colour halftone (magazine), black and white halftone (newspaper), and a JPEG (computer screen).⁸⁹

The image standards that Snyder attempted to approximate were black and white halftone, color halftone, photographic proof and JPEG. As detailed in parentheses in Snyder's explanation of the experiment, these standards are commonly used in respectively; newspapers, magazines, photographs and on computer screens. I argue that the function of the three first image standards is to emphasize their similarities or differences to the compressed digital image, that is represented by the lossy compression image standard JPEG. JPEG is one of the most commonly used image standards on the Internet.

Halftone printing is a technique where multiple tiny dots that vary in size and shape simulate a continuous tone, a technique that is called screen frequency. The eyes of the viewer then blur the dots and make it appear as a continuous image. This way halftone follows the same principle as digital compressed images where efficiency is rated higher than verisimilitude. By following the logic where communication is materially efficacious rather than following a principle of verisimilitude, the halftone technique precedes digital compression.⁹⁰ Halftone printing has an economical advantage because this printing method required less ink in the production of images. Because halftones were cheaper to produce, they are what allowed for photographs to increase rapidly in number in late-nineteenth-century print media.⁹¹ As described by Sterne, "Halftone printing epitomizes some of the advantages of compression printing and formed the material basis of an emerging nineteenth-century visual culture."⁹² Thanks to this print technique, images could, as described by Sterne, "compete with words

⁸⁹ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁹⁰ Sterne, "Compression: A loose history", unpaginated Kindle Edition.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

for priority on the printed page.”⁹³ Technological changes, based on economic considerations, thus gave images a greater place in the culture. Halftones thus stand as one significant reason for and predecessor to, the strong visual culture we see today.

The way halftone prints allowed images a greater place in culture is similar to how compression has allowed an increase in all types of information, not the least images. But a significant difference between the two standards is the speed with which the images can be spread. Since JPEG operates on the Internet it has the ability to travel to every corner of the world faster than images have been disseminated in any earlier media. Where the printed images in newspapers and magazines travel by ship, plane, bike and foot, and accordingly with the relatively slow speed of their transportation, the digital image travels by the speed of electromagnetic signals.

In the exhibition catalogue, the compressed digital image is placed side by side with the high-resolution photographic proof. Contrasting the two draws attention to two of their main differences that are negotiated in the project: namely their image resolution and the speed with which they can travel on the Internet. In the essay, “In Defence of the Poor Image”, the German artist and writer Hito Steyerl contrasts the two by referring to poor images (compressed digital images such as the JPEG) and rich images (high-resolution images).⁹⁴ As described by Steyerl, in the traditional hierarchy of images high resolution is a quality that has been fetishized in consumer culture. Poor images, however, follow the logic of the Internet. Steyerl notes that: “they are heavily compressed and travel quickly. They lose matter and gain speed.”⁹⁵ As explained in the introduction of this chapter, the logic of the digital is that the smaller a digital file is – the faster it can be distributed. With the advent of the digital the quality of images is thus closely connected with the speed with which they may be propagated. Because the logic of the Internet allows low-resolution images to travel faster than high-resolution images, Steyerl suggests a redefinition of the value of the image, going from favoring high resolution to instead appreciate “velocity, intensity, and spread.”⁹⁶ In the

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Hito Steyerl, *In Defense of the Poor Image*, e-flux, November 2009, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/> (Visited 17.11.16).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

“Propaganda”-chapter we see an exploration of high- and low-resolution imagery that aligns with this idea.

3.2.4 Perceptual Surface

For Snyder, the process of making different productions of the archive image was an attempt to see the aesthetic results of technological processes:

*Taking this particular image through the standard registers through which most images are disseminated, I attempted to outline the perceptual dissolving of its content.*⁹⁷

When OCP was exhibited at Lisson Gallery, the four different images were printed, framed and hung next to each other on the wall (see image 6). Judging from the Lisson Gallery installation view image, the resulting images do not look very different from each other. Here it appears as if four identical images were framed and hung next to each other, tediously repeating the depiction of *a Broken Piece of Raw Optical Glass from the Carl Zeiss Archive*. However, the exhibition catalogue tells us otherwise. In it there are extreme close-ups of the four images (see images 7 and 8). Where the archive image was already selected for this experiment due to its propensity to signify non-representation, these close-ups takes the image even further away from its aptitude to depict an external world to instead depict traces that has resulted from the events within the machine. Knowing that the images are close-ups of the broken piece of glass, one can recognize the shattered surface of the broken glass, and in particular a long splinter on the left side. This allows the viewer to familiarize an image that is almost decontextualized due to its extreme close depiction of a fragment of the frame.

As professor Wendy Chun points out, in the digital most communication processes are invisible to the user, and we can't know exactly what happens at any given moment.⁹⁸ However, in these close-ups, the outcome of some of the technical permutations that the images have been through appears on the visual surface retrospectively in their materialization. The stasis that the image in several ways connotes, I argue, is here manifestly contrasted with the liveliness of the machine agency. The slight differences between the

⁹⁷ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

⁹⁸ Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and freedom: Power and paranoia in the age of fiber optics*, (Cambridge Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2006).



(6) A Broken Piece of Raw Optical Glass from the Carl Zeiss Archive, (2007).
Installation view, Lisson Gallery. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

images attests to the creative artistry of the machine. The term media archeography is appropriate here. With the term, the German media theorist Wolfgang Ernst describes modes of writing that are not human products but rather expressions of the machines themselves and functions of their own mediatic logic.⁹⁹ Ernst explains media archeography with the fact that photography registers physical reality in a way that is not performed by the painterly hand, and with how technologies such as photography can register and process not just semiotic signs, but physically real signals.¹⁰⁰ In line with this thought, the four close-ups reveal that technological processes have their own expression, or in other words that they materialize in different ways.

Halftones

As detailed in the exhibition catalogue, the color halftone and black and white halftone images were printed with a value of 60 dots per inch, which is a value that is informative of the spatial distribution of ink. In these close-ups the screen frequency of the halftone

⁹⁹ Ernst, "Media archeography", 58.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 58.



(7) Close-ups photographed from the exhibition catalogue. Left: Black and white halftone. Right: Color halftone. (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

technique is clearly visible to the human eye. Where the motif of the image appears like a dark background with a random shattering of lighter specs and stripes, the halftone technique appears as structured and evenly distributed dots that seem to lay on top of the motif. They appear disciplined towards the random scatters of bruises to the glass surface that has been acquired over analog time. The original motif is here clearly enmeshed with the dots that make up its appearance, dots that simultaneously dissolves the original motif and assembles a new one of its materiality. The halftone dots from the line screen thus function somewhat like a touch of realism that draws attention to the printing method of the image, displaying its techno-material reality.

The fact that images are not verisimilar copies of an original image, but rather four independent productions becomes especially apparent when examining the close-up of the color halftone. This has a CMYK color profile, which is a standard where the colors of cyan, magenta, yellow and black are used and mixed to create all other colors. Due to the close view of the image, every tiny little dot of cyan, magenta and yellow are revealed. As the “original” archive image was black and white, these added dots of color clearly reveals that a “reproduction” of an “original” is never really a copy, it is always new information and new material in the world. The concern for originality, most notably found in Walter Benjamin’s



(8) Close-ups photographed from the exhibition catalogue. Left: JPEG. Right: Photographic proof. (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,¹⁰¹ is here exchanged with a concern for material differences. As opposed to the idea where a reproduction is a lesser version of an original, what is demonstrated is that every new production is an individual with its own materiality and that different image standards afford different visual surfaces.

In an art historical context the halftone dots may of course resemble the Ben-day dots that the American artist Robert Lichtenstein used in many of his pop art paintings and sculptures that can most commonly be seen in his interpretations of comic books and magazine images.¹⁰² Lichtenstein's emphasis on methods of mechanical reproduction, with the use of Ben Day-dots that were exaggerated in size and obtained by applying paint slowly and carefully by hand to the canvas, was converged with familiar motifs from popular culture. Where Lichtenstein's art invites to articulate concerns about the role of art (high and low) and of the artist in the age of mechanical reproduction, Snyder's approach on the other hand, is about a withdrawal of the artist from the material production, and about a production that is

¹⁰¹ Walter Benjamin, "Kunstverket i reproduksjonsalderen", *Kunstverket i reproduksjonsalderen*, translated by Torodd Karlsten, (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1991), 35-64.

¹⁰² See for example Hal Foster, "1960c", in *Art since 1900: Modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*, edited by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and David Joselit, second edition. (2011): 483-87. London: Thames and Hudson.

mechanical but also importantly; digital. The battles that had to be fought with the pop art in the 60's concerning questions specifically centered around art production and industries, of high art and popular culture, artists and their relations to industrial machines, are here replaced with a respect and interest for the unpredicted material changes caused by the agency of digital technology.

Photographic Proof and JPEG

The close-up of the image that resembles a photograph is the one out of the four that has the densest depiction of the image (see the right side of image 8). With its 200 dots per inch it is the one out of the four that has the highest print resolution. This shows in terms of appearance. The ink appears evenly distributed, as if it was a continuous surface. With its high resolution, the digital photographic proof does not necessarily call for contemplation on the technological processes it has been through. Except for the odd motif of the image that does not seem to have any immediately recognizable semantic value, its relatively high resolution makes the technology invisible, navigating the attention away from itself as material object over to the question of what it represents outside itself. Comparatively, with its 72 dots per inch the JPEG looks hazy, as if there was a thin cloudy layer on top of the motif, slightly blurring it (see the left side of image 8). JPEG being a lossy compression format, this close-up clearly shows that lossy compression protocols do not just change the mathematical coding of images, but also how they appear visually.

Scratches and Fingerprints

Snyder's description of *Experiment One* touches upon an aspect that is particularly interesting concerning the JPEG image. This is the only example the project text describes of what this process resulted in visually, and it is remarkable and surprising:

The different reproductions of the same image took on variable and unexpected characteristics. For example, the scratches and fingerprints on the surface of the glass appear to be more defined in the JPEG image than in the photographic proof despite the low resolution of the image data.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

As Snyder notes, the JPEG image gave a more defined depiction of the scratches and fingerprints on the depicted glass than the photographic proof. This is counterintuitive to our general expectancy that high-resolution images render the depicted reality in photographs more closely than low-resolution images. That it is precisely scratches and fingerprints that come across more clearly in the JPEG image is interesting and requires a brief commentary. Fingerprints being one of the main icons and symbols of indexicality, both in Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic sign system as well as in popular culture and the legal system, it calls to mind the discourse in the 1990's where the possibility of indexicality in the digital was questioned.¹⁰⁴ Without any presumptions of a full identity between original and copy, traces of the photographed reality here appears within the noise. The visible traces of fingerprints in the JPEG could invite reflection around the long assumed presupposition of a loss of indexicality in the digital. However, this project is not about indexicality. As we see in propaganda, the project concerns itself more with how different resolutions in digital images cause different affects in human beings. Marshall McLuhan's point that definition is about affectivity and not about reality, as identified by Sterne, is significant here.¹⁰⁵ According to McLuhan's theory, low-resolution imagery can be considered so called "cool media", where coolness is an aesthetic where the low definition gives so little and unclear information that the viewer has to fill in the missing pieces. According to McLuhan, the limited definition therefore causes an intense experience. In the following chapter, we see how this has a function in Al Qaeda's propaganda.

3.2.5 Slowing Down

After having provided the analog negative with a digital existence and obtaining the four different image standards, the images were printed and given physical presence in the gallery

¹⁰⁴ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958-60). American professor Laura U. Marks is one of the media theorists that challenge the idea that the digital comes with a loss of indexicality. As opposed to the idea that digital image files are numerical constructions with no relation to the outside depicted reality, with reference to how electronic particles travel on lightwaves, and with the idea that they are interconnected and that they "remember" their paths, Marks argue that: "digital images are existentially connected to the processes that they image." Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous theory and multisensory media*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2002), 161. Marks' argument is based on subatomic physics, and specifically the fact that the digital, even though it does have an algorithmic element that has led some people to assume that the digital is immaterial, is also material. Marks, *Touch*, 161-176.

¹⁰⁵ Sterne, "Compression: A loose history", unpaginated Kindle Edition. McLuhans points are elaborated in McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

room. The gesture to digitize an analog image and then create printed versions invites reflections on how print and the digital represent significantly different technologies – that here has the function to emphasize the critical aspects of the digital in this project. As described in the introduction of this chapter, the digital is defined by it being malleable. In representing a conceptual slowness, caused by prints being more engaging and memorable to human beings,¹⁰⁶ the tangible prints here contrast with the very ontology of the digital. The gallery room has a similar effect in being a space for contemplation. As the American artist Trevor Paglen has noted, the "space for paying slow attention," such as the gallery room here, becomes more relevant as "imaging and viewing increasingly speed up."¹⁰⁷ The stillness of both the gallery and the prints insists on slowed down reflection on the productive forces behind the images that we explored in this chapter, and as contrast to the extensive amount of images that can be seen in the contemporary world because of precisely the efficiency of the digital and compression.

Steyerl notes an interesting tension in what she calls the poor image (the compressed digital image) as of what position it has in today's capitalist information economy. On the one hand she argues that the poor image operates against the fetish value that high resolution has got in the hierarchy of images. As such one can think of the poor image as an image that goes against the established system - that pushes its limits and possibly subverts it. However, as Steyerl notes, information capitalism thrives on "compressed attention spans and transforms contemplation into distraction,"¹⁰⁸ which is what the poor image affords. The low resolution of the JPEG is precisely what allows the infrastructure of the digital to squeeze out as much information as possible. The poor image thus functions both as a resistance to and in agreement with capitalism. In its alliance with the digital technology, and in particular compression, information industries decrease our attention spans. By means of contrast, the

¹⁰⁶ In a recent neuromarketing study done for the U.S. Post Office, researchers found that paper engages viewers for a longer time, and that information that is presented in the print medium is more memorable to viewers than digital information. Expert in digital marketing Roger Dooley notes on a find in the study that "A week later, subjects showed greater emotional response and memory for physical media ads". Roger Dooley, *Print vs. Digital: Another emotional win for paper*, Neuro Science Marketing, 08.07.15, <http://www.neurosciencemarketing.com/blog/articles/print-vs-digital.htm> (Visited 22.11.16).

¹⁰⁷ Julian Stallabras, "Negative Dialectics in the Google Era: A conversation with Trevor Paglen", in *October* No. 138, (Fall 2011): 3-14. MIT Press Journals. http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/OCTO_a_00063 (Visited 18.11.16).

¹⁰⁸ Steyerl, *In Defense of the Poor Image*, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/> (Visited 17.11.16).

gesture to slow down therefore also function as an invitation to see how compressed images, in working with information industries, increases the control over human bodies.¹⁰⁹ This functions as a testimony to what Marshall McLuhan realized, not just that technologies are extensions of human nervous systems, but that their extensions also attaches human bodies to corporations.¹¹⁰

Contrasting the digital with print and a room for slowed down contemplation here draws attention to compressed attention spans and decreased memorability as significant aspects of today's digital information economy. The gesture can therefore be considered a reaction to the information saturation and following sensory overload that comes with the media landscape of today. As a constant source of information and entertainment, the Internet holds a mesmerizing control over its users. What could release us from this control regime? The slowing down gesture that draws our attention to the problem aspires to mindfulness, however more dramatic responses such as amputation come to mind. As McLuhan points out: "Perhaps the most obvious closure or psychic consequence of any new technology is just the demand for it. Nobody wants a motorcar till there are motorcars, and nobody is interested in TV until there are TV programs."¹¹¹ As an available new extension of our sensory apparatus most of us simply have to use these new devices, we can't make ourselves shut off. In the words of McLuhan:

(...) the need to use the senses that are available is as insistent as breathing – a fact that makes sense of the urge to keep radio and TV going more or less continuously. The urge to continuous use is quite independent of the content of public programs or of the private sense life, being testimony to the fact that technology is part of our bodies.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ On a similar note, in "Mnemonic Control", Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman argue that precisely information saturation and sensory overload are the norm in what they call a "mnemonic ecology". In what resonates with McLuhan's idea of technologies as extensions of humans, Parisi and Goodman states that: "By stringing together distributed digital storage devices across the planet, designers have created a network of technical machines that have become receptacles for human memory." (Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman, "Mnemonic Control", In *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*, edited by Patricia Ticineto Patterson Clough and Craig Wilse, (2011): 163-76. Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 166) Further they argue that this shows how capitalism extracts "the surplus value of bodily potentials." (Ibid). In this ecology the digital memory storage machines can be considered "(e)xtensions of the human nervous system", according to Parisi and Goodman, and in relieving the human mind from holding on to memories and thus increase human capacity for consumption, the memory storage machines serve the need of capitalism. (Ibid).

¹¹⁰ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 125.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 125.

¹¹² Ibid. 125.

3.3 Summary

As an exercise in sensitizing us to the important role and participation of technologies in the production of images, this experiment manifested a will to disregard the concept of representation, a gesture that made the content of representation shift from being about something external to the image, to its inside-ness. A result of this experiment is that the eyes and minds of the viewer learn to readjust from considering the image as a representation of an object in the external world, which is the expected function of images, to consider the visual surface of the image as a result of the materialities and processes it is produced through. The experiment has thus shown that the image is not just a transportable visual appearance, but also the material through which it appears and the process through which it has been effected.

The numerical existence of the digital file, we have seen, gives it malleability and potential. It is what allows the binary code to easily be used to initiate an infinite number of new productions (copies), or even transfer to new image standards from the base of one file, as this experiment attests to. However, its efficiency is also a reason why there are massive amounts of images and information today that affects human bodies at a large scale.

Finally we saw how the project, with the gesture of slowing down, responded to how these mechanisms of the media landscape today disturb the human capabilities for attention and memory. The technologies' ability to squeeze out as much information as possible aided by compression, therefore function as a facilitator for the progress of capitalism in the information economy. By means of contrast, the gesture to have the four images that resulted from the experiment printed and hung in the exhibition room functioned as an invitation to reflect on the productive forces behind them, both the technological processes and the force of information capitalism, and how they work together. In other words, the project responds to a specific control society where human bodies and minds are controlled and capitalized on. Similarly to how the force of capitalism is allied with media technologies on this path, in the following chapter we see that the project demonstrates how governmental and military organizations must collaborate with media technologies to produce propaganda, in the path to increase also *their* power over human bodies and minds.

4 Propaganda

Within a conceptually neutral context, the previous chapter was a display of technological agency, and a hint of technologies as contributing forces in constellations of control (in alliance with information capitalism). This chapter, however, explores how the project unveils technologies as powerful actors also within contexts that are explicitly loaded with notions of power and control. This context includes close working relationships between the media, capitalism and military governmental organizations all of which are powerful distributed networks in the real world. In Snyder's project, however, I argue that these distributed forces are nominalized and unified. They have a presence in the project, but they are faceless. What analogically is given a face, on the other hand, and which in line with this is explored more thoroughly, is a particular video camera. Standing out in a context filled with powerful actors, its agency is unveiled.

The first section of the chapter outlines the powerful context described above that make up the background of Snyder's exploration of the camera's agency. In exploring the propaganda of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, Snyder's project deals with the contemporary context post 9/11. One of the things that define this context is that it is a time where the military and political power in society becomes increasingly stronger. In this section I trace how this aspect sows the historical military context that was discussed in "Optics", with the contemporary one represented by Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense. In continuation of this, I identify how the context is materialized in two of the propaganda images by the Department of Defense that Snyder found to metaphorically display the motivation for the Iraq War.

The second section of the chapter discusses how the particular video camera described above comes forward as the leading actor and most potent actor in the visual war of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense. Here I identify how the project negotiates the role of the camera in different pieces of material from the project. The camera is centered in the project in several more or less explicit ways. The function of its centered position, I argue, is to make its agency apparent in a politically loaded context where the agency of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense would generally be more apparent. Having identified the camera as

an actor, it becomes apparent that the camera is networked. The force of the camera, and of the images that it can produce, is shown as something that emerges in its collaboration with (among others) the powerful actors that the project associates it with, namely compression, Al Qaeda and the Internet.

4.1 What Unites the Historical and Contemporary

Contexts

In the chapter titled “Optics” I identified that Snyder’s project text has several references to global conflicts of power. For example in section one, I discussed two archive photographs that show boxes (filled with optical instruments) that were to be sent off to respectively West Germany and the Soviet Union. Together, the images conjoin the historical events of the Second World War and the Cold War. I argue that what these events call to the fore in the project, beyond them being set in association with optical technologies, is that they have led to increased control in the society. This is something they have in common with the contemporary context of post 9/11.

In the article “World War II and the Origins of American Unease”, George Friedman presents a geopolitical analysis of how the Second World War, in different manners, started with shock events for the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom.¹¹³ This shock, he argues, redefined their view of the world. Friedman has identified that because Pearl Harbor intersected with the Great Depression, which was another shock for the American culture, the optimism of Americans was exchanged for a fear that everything could suddenly go wrong. As identified by Friedman, these two events created a dark sense of foreboding that also were to define the Cold War. This, he argues, has led to the situation that to act early and decisively remains the foundation of US foreign policy. Because of these events that gave the notion that catastrophe might come at any moment, Friedman argues, the U.S. defense policy is shaped around the concept that the enemy might be identified; but that where and when it might strike is unknown. Fear undergirds American society to this very

¹¹³ George Friedman, *World War II and the Origins of American Unease*, Stratfor, 12.05.15, <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/world-war-ii-and-origins-american-unease> (Visited 13.11.16).

day, Friedman points out, and according to him, 9/11 was the present generations' Pearl Harbor.

Here we begin to see what is common for the historical and the contemporary contexts that are brought up in the project. The morning of September 11 2001, the shock event of major attacks on U.S. territory, conducted by Al Qaeda, struck the world and the American population. The sublime spectacle of two airplanes that deliberately flew into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, and the following collapse of the buildings, were shocking events that attracted the attention of the world. The imagery of the events caused breathtaking horror, and the scale and inventiveness of this new type of attack clearly surpassed the human scale of understanding. This resonates with what Canadian social theorist Brian Massumi, in his identification of the affective turn of today's media-saturated global culture, describe as a "shocking event." As identified by Massumi, today the media landscape functions as a vehicle that, in alternating between shock and foreboding, causes a fear that can be used for political legitimation and increased control.¹¹⁴ Although no sensational, shocking images take part in the project material, these events undoubtedly underpin our collective memory of the relationship between Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense. The relationship between Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense also connote the War on Terror, which preceded the shock of 9/11, and which may be said to epitomize the

¹¹⁴ In the article "the Half Life of Disaster", Brian Massumi identifies how the media-saturated global culture has brought with it an affective turn, and where what he calls "the worlds media-driven nerves" reside in a climate of fear. Massumi argues that we in the media today see a circuit that constantly moves back and forth from shocking events to following states of foreboding. He defines the shock as "the first affective strike of the event" that brings "a hole of horror into the fabric of the everyday". The shock is breathtaking, and it is hard to make sense out of because it surpasses the human scale of understanding. The foreboding comes in the aftermath of the shock. What is particular for the foreboding phase is that it is more like a bodily bracing in anticipation of the next unforeseen shock, like a habitual posture, than an emotion. The foreboding then becomes the medium of everyday life where the population is in a continuous threat environment. This low-level fear endures as an anticipation of the next shock, which when it comes, will again turn the attention of the world. Importantly, Massumi notes that shock events appear as uncontrollable forces of nature because they appear unforeseen and out-of-scale. This, he argues, applies also to events that are caused by humans, such as terrorist attacks. This leads to an "association between natural disaster and national security" that blurs the boundaries between civil society and the military sphere. According to Massumi, the uniting trait of the natural occurring is precisely that it strikes in such a breathtaking, senseless manner that it surpasses the human scale of understanding to the extent that it appears as an uncontrollable force of nature. Brian Massumi, *The Half-life of disaster*, The Guardian, 15.5.11, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/apr/15/half-life-of-disaster> (Visited 22.11.16).

state of foreboding that Massumi describes, where there is a continuous threat environment.¹¹⁵

What unites the geopolitical contexts that are brought up in the project, with the Second World War, the Cold War, 9/11 and the War on Terror is therefore events that has led to fear, and following that, to more hostile world politics and increased levels of control in the society. In describing today's context, Massumi has identified that a result of the continuous threat environment is that the state security apparatus grows.¹¹⁶ In this environment the state of exception is the norm (and can be made permanent), and measures suspending civil and political rights are extended, multiplied, and increasingly applied preemptively.¹¹⁷ As Massumi notes, "This blurring of the boundaries between war and peace (...) is legitimated affectively, through the media-driven affective conversion circuit" of shock and foreboding.¹¹⁸

Also 9/11 contributed in shaping the US defense policy around the concept that the enemy is evasive, which the idea of the War on Terror testifies to. Indeed, Brzezinski notes that the phrase war on terror is meaningless precisely because it doesn't define the enemies. The idea of the War on Terror therefore gives a "sense of the unknown but lurking danger that is said to increasingly threaten the lives of all Americans."¹¹⁹ Where 9/11 can be seen as an instance of a terrorist group causing fear to increase their strength, the use of the notion War on Terror can be seen as a calling upon fear where the fear is taken to advantage of the governmental organization that supposedly protects its population against threat. Indeed, Brzezinski notes that the vagueness of the phrase War on Terror "was calculated by its sponsors."¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Several people have written and discussed how the War on Terror caused a threat environment in the U.S. and in the world. See for example writer and former national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski's article *Terrorized by 'War on Terror'*, Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Terrorized by 'War on Terror'*, The Washington Post Company, 25.03.15, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/23/AR2007032301613.html> (Visited 14.11.16).

¹¹⁶ Massumi, *The Half-life of disaster*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/apr/15/half-life-of-disaster>

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Brzezinski also notes that the Bush administrations use of the notion war on terror as a national mantra has had destructive impact on American democracy, Americas psyche, and its relationship with the world.

¹²⁰ Ibid.



(9) "The caption of an image released on the DoD website in high resolution (17.2 MB / 3008 x 2000 pixels) describes former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld receiving a briefing at the Kabul Military Training Center in Afghanistan on 1 May 2003. Once reframed and blown up, details of the image show battle plans simulated using matchboxes and plastic bottle caps."¹²¹ (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

According to him, the culture of fear made it easier "for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue."¹²² For example, the psychological linkage between the shock of 9/11 and the postulated existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction made it possible go to war in Iraq.¹²³

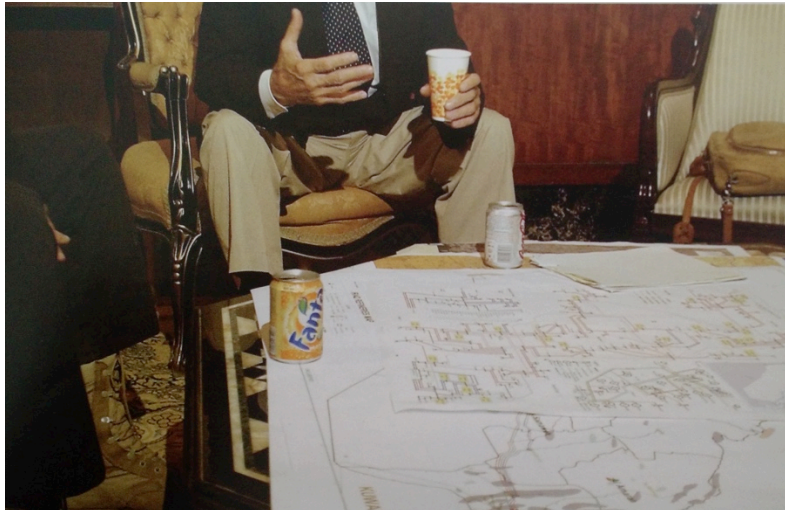
Some of the imagery from the Department of Defense that Snyder included in the exhibition catalogue can be said to be revelatory of one of the true motivations for the Iraq War. Simultaneously, the images attest to the close relationship between consumer capitalism and governmental organizations in the project. Two of the images in question show a model that appears to represent a rural landscape with a few streets, grass fields and buildings (see image 9). In the background there are two men that are only partly visible. Snyder's project text explains what can be seen in the images. It details that the image caption, provided by the Department of Defense, describes that Donald Rumsfeld, the former U.S. Secretary of Defense, is receiving a briefing at the Kabul Military Training Center in Afghanistan on 1 May 2003.¹²⁴ Snyder then reframed and zoomed in on the image to emphasize that details of the image show simulated battle plans. On top of the map that supposedly represents the Iraqi territory, soon to become battle field, matchboxes and plastic bottle caps are used to

¹²¹ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).



(10) “A second image with the caption: ‘Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld is briefed by Ambassador Paul Bremer in Iraq on Sept. 4, 2003’ shows the two seated before a table, with a Diet Coke and a Fanta. The two cans are placed on top of large sheets of paper, which in the details of the digital data (16.9 MB / 3008 x 1960 pixels) clearly read ‘Iraq Reference Map’. Although by no means scandalous in their content, the metaphoric value found in such details could be read nearly as unintentional parody.”¹²⁵ (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

strategically simulate warfare. In this context the matchboxes and plastic bottle caps appear to show the pawns in an imperialistic game of power.

The second image has the caption ‘Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld is briefed by Ambassador Paul Bremer in Iraq on Sept. 4, 2003’ (see image 10). In the project text, Snyder details that the image shows Rumsfeld and Bremer seated before a table. Had he not detailed this it would not be possible for the viewer to know it, since Snyder has cut their faces out of the image and again zoomed onto what he finds interesting with the image, namely the cans of Diet Coke and Fanta that are placed on top of large sheets of paper. Thanks to the high resolution of the digital images (in the project text Snyder specifies that they are 16.9 MB / 3008 x 1960 pixels), Snyder has been able to zoom into the image to find that the papers read ‘Iraq Reference Map’. As a shared comment on the two images (9 and 10), Snyder notes: “Although by no means scandalous in their content, the metaphoric value found in such details could be read nearly as unintentional parody.”¹²⁶ And indeed, the images may be said to show the strategic influx of US capital interests in Iraq. Just like the matchboxes and

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

plastic bottle caps appear as pawns in a game of war in image 9, the cans of Fanta and Coke (that were likely there simply to quench the thirst of Rumsfeld and Bremer), appear as pawns in a strategic play.

Familiarity with one aspect of the Iraq War, which has been identified by among others Naomi Klein, allows us to see what metaphoric value Snyder finds in the image. In the book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007), Klein argues that some national crises, such as the Iraq War, are deliberately being exploited and even undertaken, with the motivation of making unpopular policies in the aftermath. In her description of how she came up with the notion of disaster capitalism, Klein mentions what she saw in Iraq when she went there one year into the occupation by the US. She describes how she was looking into "the shock and awe invasion" that was supposed to function as a "psychological groundwork" to prepare for Paul Bremer's makeover of the country.¹²⁷ According to Klein, several "neoliberal free market policies (...) have risen to prominence in some developed countries because of a deliberate strategy of shock therapy."¹²⁸ In Iraq, Klein explains, shock therapy was used to do "huge layoffs in the public sector," to dismantle the army and to open "the country to unrestricted free trade."¹²⁹

In their research, Parisi and Goodman note that a reaction of the stress and anxiety that follows from high intensity fear is that bodies are immobilized.¹³⁰ This has led them to note that the irony of systems of high terror alert, is that the attempt "to provoke readiness in the populace can lead to the side effect that bodies are less prepared to deal with the introduction of alien agents into the population."¹³¹ Following this thought, the cans of Fanta and Coke can here be seen as alien agents that are introduced into a population that has, by means of shock therapy, been immobilized from reacting to the situation. Seen together, the two images display the strategic influx of US capital interests in Iraq, both the strategic planning of the war, and unintentionally, the true motivations behind it.

¹²⁷ Katie Rooney, *Naomi Klein on 'Disaster Capitalism'*, Time, 27.9.2007, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1666221-1,00.html> (Visited 13.11.16)

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Luciana Parisi and Steve Goodman, "The Affect of Nanoterror", In *Culture Machine*, Vol 7, (2005). <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/rt/prINTERfriendly/29/36> (Visited 22.11.16).

¹³¹ Ibid.

4.2 The Faced and the Faceless

What conjoins the historical and contemporary contexts that are brought up in Snyder's project, we have seen, is an atmosphere where political and military organizations, in collaboration with information industries, increasingly gain power over populations by means of making fictional narratives. The images above metaphorically display how a government works to gain, maintain and increase its level of control and capital interests. However, the way Rumsfeld's head is cut off from the images above (see images 9 and 10), I argue, can be seen in analogy to the position of the Department of Defense in the project. In the analysis of Video 1 that follows, we see a similar analogy for Al Qaeda. The facelessness of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, I argue, functions in two ways in OCP. In one way it symbolically mirrors how these two powers, and in extension of their conflict, how world politics at large – are characterized by secrecy. Images 9 and 10 above represent one aspect of this secrecy, where false narratives are created to obscure true intentions. In a second manner, where facelessness, in the case of the War on Terror, is about rendering the enemy as frightening, in Snyder's project it has the effect of making Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense fall in the background for another more important actor. Where they in reality are complex networks that are made up by several entities, Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense are here namedropped as unified forces that don't require further analysis. What however does have a face in the project is a specific video camera.

Sony DCR-PC120E

A photograph of the camera, titled *Apparatus*, fills the cover of the Lisson Gallery exhibition catalogue, confronting the viewer head on with what can be seen as the protagonist of OCP (see image 11).¹³² Considered with the apparatus-theories of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, the title of the photograph establishes the camera as part of a system of power, and as a powerful actor in itself. Where Foucault considered the term apparatus to signify the

¹³² The term protagonist fits well because what we see is that the camera is fronted by means of making it the star of the works *Video 1* and *Apparatus*. But the notion can also be considered in its resemblance to the term actor used in ANT. As explained by Bruno Latour, the term actor, "comes from the stage" and indicates that "it's never clear who and what is acting when we act since an actor on stage is never alone in acting." (Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46) For Latour, the term actor therefore implies a multiplicity of relational elements that cause an uncertainty concerning the source of action. (Ibid). In relation to the Sony-camera, the stage-vocabulary that I use demonstrate how the camera holds the leading role of OCP, all the while keeping the connotations described by Latour on the term actor.



(11) *Apparatus (Sony DCR-PC120E) (2007)* (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

system of relations between different elements (see explanation of theoretical framework in the introduction of this thesis), Agamben speaks of specific elements, in and of themselves, as apparatuses. With this Agamben further investigated the concept and proposed a more specified definition. Agamben calls an apparatus: "anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings".¹³³ Beyond moving the definition of the notion apparatus from the system of relations to rather signify the specific elements within such a system, Agamben provides an expanded list of apparatuses. According to Agamben, his list includes elements that are not as obviously connected to power as those elements listed by Foucault:

Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, discipline, judicial measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones (...)¹³⁴

¹³³ Giorgio Agamben, *What is an apparatus? And other essays*, translated by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella, (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14.

¹³⁴ Agamben, *What is an apparatus?* 14.

As this detailed list of apparatuses makes the concept all the more concrete, it also makes it apparent that a video camera per this definition is an apparatus, and that the portrayed Sony camera is not just a physical piece of machinery, but also an element that has "the capacity to capture (...) the (...) gestures, behaviors, opinions and discourses of living beings."¹³⁵

As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, to most people a video camera is a black boxed device that users maneuver without technical knowledge of its internal workings. Considered as a verb, we saw that Latour has noted that "blackboxing" is the social process that goes on when a machine runs efficiently without any other interference from the user than regular input and output, making the knowledge of the internal complexity of an object obsolete for the human user. Also, the introduction outlined that Samer Faraj and Bijan Azad argue that technologies status as black boxes enforces them being looked upon as market categories, with the unfortunate consequence that technologies that have complex internal workings and differences between them are reduced and considered under general categories that devoid them of their differences.¹³⁶

The photograph *Apparatus* opposes this view of the camera. Against a grey background, the frontal body of the camera confronts the viewer with a direct eye-to-lens relationship. Considering how it has been photographed with the use of a narrow depth of field where the focus is centered on the eye (lens) of the camera and gradually fading backwards, this is not simply a commercial pack shot image, but rather a portrait. The portrait style of the photograph could hint towards a personification of an object, in keeping with the genre where the eyes of a person are thought to be windows to their soul. In Snyder's project, I argue that this strategically functions as a way to draw attention to the agency and internal workings of the camera, challenging the idea that the camera is simply an obeying instrument for human users. This way to see the camera is supported by a cut that draws attention to its internal workings. The body of the camera has been opened, a doing that simultaneously hinders the camera from operating its normal image-making function, and exposes its technological inside. This is not a display of a polished brand identity that appeals to a designer intended

¹³⁵ Ibid. 14.

¹³⁶ Faraj and Azad. "The Materiality of Technology: An Affordance Perspective", 237-258.

use. The displacement of the camera's identity that happens as it is portrayed like this - from an expected object position to a subject position – and consequently from a simple tool that serves human needs to a complex actor in its own right can be found also in the video where the camera first caught Snyder's interest.

Video 1

The Sony camera model first caught Snyder's interest in an Al Qaeda video that was published online. To find out what model the camera was, Snyder then slowed the clip down, and further enlarged and printed a series of images from the video where the camera is displayed.¹³⁷ After having compared it with different cameras, he was able to identify it as the Sony DCR PC-120E.¹³⁸ The process of identifying the camera resulted in a video and still images that Snyder made from the appropriated Al Qaeda footage.¹³⁹ First I discuss how the video demonstrates the significant role of the camera by centering it as motif in the imagery. Also, as in the "Compression"-chapter we see that the techno-materiality of the imagery stands out to present itself as such. In this video, I argue, it has the effect of emphasizing the centered position of the camera and the facelessness of Al Qaeda.

The video consists of footage from two main scenes that I refer to as scene one and scene two.

Scene One

00:00-01:13 In a short scene that is to repeat itself four times, increasingly slowed down, a meeting takes place. It begins with a man that is entering the doorway of a clay building. As soon as he is on the inside of the doorway, we can see him embracing another man. During the embrace and for the seconds after it becomes apparent that there are at least two other men inside the building, all of them wearing dark, heavily folded clothes. The heavy fabric of the men's clothes absorbs light and gives a density to the image. Both the darkness of the scene and the blurriness of the video make it difficult to interpret exactly what is going on.

¹³⁷Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹Snyder, Sean. "Video 1". (2007) Ubuweb, 3,35 minutes. http://ubu.com/film/snyder_compression1.html (Visited 22.11.16).



(12) Untitled still images from the first scene of Video 1. (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

What *is* steadily recognizable within the frame, however, is the video camera that sits in one of the men's hands. Positioned against a background of the wavy, soft looking textiles of the men's clothes, it stands out as a solid, machinic, shape.¹⁴⁰ In contrast to the light-absorbing clothes, the metal of the upper frame of the camera is highly reflective of light. Because it comes across as the lightest point in the image, it is also literally – or rather photographically – the most exposed. Technically, this means that when the video was shot, the camera was the object that cast the greatest amount of light towards the camera lens, exposing the sensor enough to leave a bright spot in an otherwise dark image. This is an emphasis of the centered position of the Sony camera that happens by means of the images', and the camera's own operating logic. By means of the fuel on which it thrives – light – the camera calls attention to itself.

The identity of the man that is embraced is censored in the film; whenever exposed to the eye of the filming camera, censoring pixels dance upon his face. This I consider an analogy for how Al Qaeda is made faceless in Snyder's project. The facelessness of Al Qaeda in this image is here contrasted with the camera that does have a face. The technique that has been

¹⁴⁰ I use the term machinic here to refer to the physical shape of a machine, and not to the Deleuzian term machinic which signifies an assemblage consisting of both human and nonhuman parts.

used here is pixilation, a technique where an image, or part of an image, is blurred by a lowering of image resolution. The act of censoring can in general be considered a suppression of information that is utilized by social actors such as Al Qaeda here. However, the attempt at suppressing some information in this image provides added information and a reminder of the technical units that the image is built up by. The effect of the censoring method pixilation here point to the ability of technologies to suppress or promote; indeed to their capability to shape information. The topic of information that is hidden from our view, and the question of what we see and what we do not see are thus yet again inscribed in the project. In addition to analogically rendering Al Qaeda faceless, the pixilation then simultaneously displays four important themes of OCP. Notably, the theme of *information that is hidden from our view* is communicated by means of *the building blocks that the digital image is made up by*. This doing attests to the *agency of digital images* – and specifically so in relation to how they *steer human perception*. Through the components of pixels, the first scene thus shows the camera as centered, and it also demonstrates the capability of digital techno-materiality to emphasize or conceal information. In the second scene, we see how the camera is centered when the motif of the video explicitly negotiates it as an actor.

Scene Two

01:17-03:35

In the first shot that is shown for five seconds we see a man walking away from the camera. His steps are fast following the curb of what appears to be a road in the wild. The clip is then abruptly changed for a new one, apparently set in the same rural site as the previous one. In the scene, an unidentified man, of whom we can see only the hands and the backside of the head, holds the recorded camera. Or maybe it is rather fair to say, that the recorded camera sits in the hands of an unidentified man. The linguistic shift that I demonstrate here, from an active human and a passive camera – to a camera that takes the subject position – reflects a similar shift in the video. At first the scene is most intuitively interpreted as a display of an active human being with a camera at his service. In film theoretical terms, it may appear as an "over the shoulder point of view shot" where the viewer sees what the character of the video (i.e. the man) is seeing. Over his shoulder we can see that he operates the camera by pushing buttons on the side of its body. However, the shift of view happens when camera one (our



(13) Still images from the second scene of Video 1. (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

eyes) zooms in on the recorded camera until it fills the image. This gesture turns the focus from a camera that is shown as an object - and an instrument for human use – to instead emphasize its own agency. Triggered by having its buttons pushed, the recorded camera zooms and begins to record. From the back of the recorded camera, we now see what *it* sees, displayed on its LCD-screen. As this happens, suddenly, the clip is changed for a new one. In this clip we see the men walking away in the distance without the mediating layer of the LCD-screen. Apparently, we now see the scene in front of the camera, directly through its eye.

In his apparatus theory, the French theorist Jean-Louis Baudry (1930-2015) places emphasis on how the techno-material setup behind an image production (he refers specifically to cinema) is often hidden from view, leading to a concealment of the ideological bias that it conveys.¹⁴¹ As the portrait *Apparatus* discussed previously can be said to connote this theory with its title, the ideas of Baudry are relevant also for the work *Video 1*, where Snyder has slowed down video clips taken from Al Qaeda productions. Baudry questions whether the technical instruments behind a cinematic production produce ideological effects, and whether

¹⁴¹ Jean-Louis Baudry and Alan Williams, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus", *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 1974-1975), pp. 39-47.



(14) *Group V*. Installation View Image, Lisson Gallery 2007.

The negotiation of the role of the camera that happens in this video is emphasized by two of the still images from the video that were juxtaposed at the Lisson Gallery exhibition. In what is titled *Group V*, four out of five frames were filled with printed still images from *Video 1*. In the two that were hung one above the other, a close up of the camera from respectively scene one and scene two fills the frames. The camera from the first scene is shown as an enclosed object to our eyes through an objective shot. The camera in the second scene, on the other hand, is shown as an operative agent. In this scene we are positioned behind the depicted camera, exposed to the process of a video being made.

Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

these effects might be determined by the dominant ideology.¹⁴² He argues that a concealment of the technical base would bring an ideological effect – and that adversely, a manifestation of it would produce a knowledge effect that would lead to both a denunciation of ideology and a critique of idealism.¹⁴³ In *Video 1*, one of the things that are displayed as motif is the production of a video. Also, the materiality of the video comes explicitly forward in the way Snyder has slowed down and edited the clips. Both these instances can be said to bring the technical base out of its concealment.

Press Release - The Affordances of the Sony DCR PC-120E

A press release for the Sony camera is included as found material in OCP. (see image 15). Above the computer typed press release, a handwritten headline informs the reader that this press release derives from Sony.com, and that it was published Sept 4, 2001. Beyond this

¹⁴² Ibid. 288.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 288.

being a camera that caught Snyder's interest because he saw it in an Al Qaeda video, the press release thus places the Sony historically within the context of 9/11. The press release further brings forward the critical position the Sony camera holds in the project. In the following analysis, I argue that the press release is key to see the affordances that interested Snyder.

The general tone of the press release is that of commercial marketing. The emphasis is on how the potential buyer can connect the camera to the Internet:

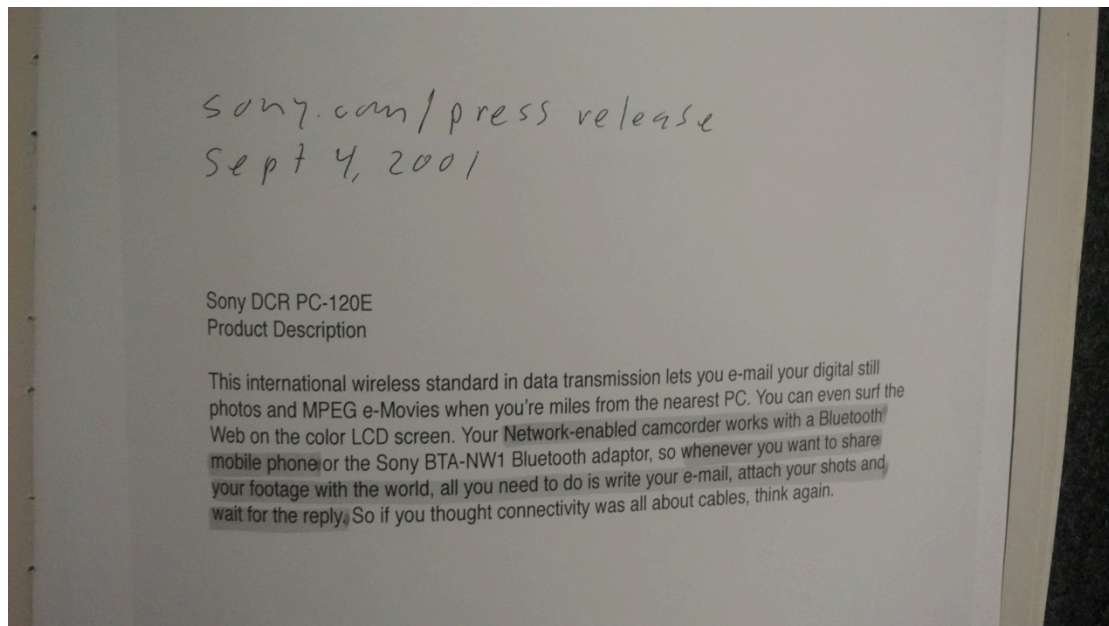
Sony DCR PC-120E
Product Description

This international wireless standard in data transmission lets you e-mail your digital still photos and MPEG e-Movies when you're miles from the nearest PC. You can even surf the Web on the color LCD screen. Your Network-enabled camcorder works with a Bluetooth mobile phone or the Sony BTA-NW1 Bluetooth adaptor, so whenever you want to share your footage with the world, all you need to do is write your e-mail, attach your shots and wait for the reply. So if you thought connectivity was all about cables, think again.

What stands out here is an emphasis on the *connectivity* and *sharing* possibilities of the camera. Over the course of four sentences, the text stresses the possibility that comes with the camera to upload and share digital photos and videos. The possibility to connect with the Internet is even emphasized as an action in and of itself, beyond the regular image producing and sharing capability of the camera, when it is stated that "You can even surf the Web on the LCD screen."

The highlighted passages marks what Snyder noted as interesting also in his introduction of the camera in the project text, namely the newfound possibility that came with this camera to connect to the Internet by means of Bluetooth.¹⁴⁴ Bluetooth is a technology that allows for a wireless connection to the Internet by making a personal area network (PAN), which can be

¹⁴⁴ Bluetooth is a wireless standard for exchanging data that was invented by the multinational telecommunication company Ericsson. Svenolof Karlsson and Anders Lugn, *the history of Bluetooth*, Centre for Business History, Stockholm and Telefonaktiebolaget LM Ericsson, <http://www.ericssonhistory.com/changing-the-world/Anecdotes/The-history-of-Bluetooth-/> (Visited 27.11.16).



(15) The press release of Sony DCR PC-120E was included as found material in Snyder's project. (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

done through both mobile and stationary devices.¹⁴⁵ What is emphasized as important in this text, however, is its capacity for mobility. The highlighted passage explicitly emphasizes that the camera can gain Internet connection with a Bluetooth mobile phone, which allows the user to share footage with the world. Further it supports the acquisition by explicitly attributing the camera with the affordances of *accessibility* and *instantaneity* in relation to the Internet. It is accessible: Apparently, it should be possible to connect also in remote places, when the user is "miles from the nearest PC." And the connection and sharing possibilities are markedly instantaneous: Apparently, "whenever (the user) wants to share (...) footage with the world" all that is needed is to write an e-mail, attach the shots and wait for the reply.

In the press release, there is a focus on how the user can connect and share imagery with the camera. The text repeatedly addresses the potential buyer. However, one can also think of the camera itself as a connected and relational actor.

Through the press release, the Sony camera is located as a nexus within the Mobile Web. Aided by for example Bluetooth, the Mobile Web stands for a significant change in global,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

networked, audiovisual telecommunication. It couples connectivity with mobility, allowing the nodes of the Internet-network to be in motion, at the same time as it gives users the sense that the network is everywhere, constantly and instantly accessible.¹⁴⁶ This press release then, attests to the relatively newfound condition of telecommunication in the contemporary context that the camera (and the art project) is situated within. It attests to the Mobile Web, and to an attention and sharing economy where user generated information plays a crucial role.

The Legacy of Sony in Art History – Sony Portapak

A reader with knowledge of art history and especially video art history, has already by now made a connection between the camera that Snyder focuses on in this project, and the Sony Portapak that was released in 1968. Now is a good time to bring it up, since also the Portapak was interesting for artists and consumers because of its novel technology and the uses its affordances welcomed. The Sony Portapak was the first portable video recorder that was available commercially.¹⁴⁷ It was a two-piece set that consisted of a video camera and a separate recorder that could be carried on the shoulder. Although it was fairly heavy, especially compared to today's video cameras such as the Sony DCR PC-120E, to many artists it rather represented the lightness and potentiality that follow with the introduction of a new medium that is not weighted down by the fixed expectations that come with tradition.¹⁴⁸ Considered through today's standards, with its cathode-ray-tube technology, the Sony Portapak must indeed be considered heavy to the extent of being undesirable to carry around. However, in its contemporary context the Portapak provided an accessibility that made it appealing to artists and consumers. Beyond being a new experimental medium, the Sony Portapak gave the opportunity for video artists to bypass the official broadcasting industry of Television.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ The mobile web refers to having access to the Internet through mobile devices, such as mobile phones and cameras. The Mobile Web has also been called Web 3.0. Elyssa Kroski, *On the move with the mobile web: libraries and mobile technologies*, American Library Association, 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Chris Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art: The Development of Form and Function*, (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 17.

¹⁴⁸ To name only a few, Nam June Paik, who is often accredited to be the father of video art, and his wife Shigeko Kubota used the Portapak as a new experimental medium for the arts. See Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*.

¹⁴⁹ For many video artists this was considered one of the main virtues of the Sony Portapak. This is the case for example for Nam June Paik, the Japanese artist who is often accredited to be the founding father of video art, a reputation that he in fact obtained partly because of his early experimentation with the

Both the Sony Portapak and the Sony DCR PC-120E stand for a possible democratization of information. However, the Sony DCR PC-120E extends the possibilities that came with the Sony Portapak. Where the Sony Portapak gave the opportunity for video artists (and consumers) to produce their own videos and bypass the official broadcasting industry of Television when it comes to the production of content, the Sony DCR PC-120E, with its possibility to connect to the Internet, additionally gives the possibility to broadcast consumer productions onto a platform. In addition to allowing consumers (and video artists) to produce their own videos, this new video camera thus allow them to easily distribute and share their productions, extending the possibilities that came with the Portapak.

4.3 Propaganda Strategies

Having introduced and explored the position of the Sony camera, this section discusses how the Sony camera does something for Al Qaeda that the Department of Defense, in their propaganda strategy, fails to do.

That the Sony camera can connect to the Internet is shown as a reason why the camera is such a potent actor here. This is how it can allow other actors such as Al Qaeda to easily distribute their imagery online. Its easy access to the Internet is accommodated by its use of low-resolution compressed image files. Beyond the efficiency purposes of this distribution, the project demonstrates that the different techno-material circumstances, here specifically digital compression, the mobile web and portable digi-optical equipment like the Sony video camera, affords different visual results in images – and that the different visual surfaces in their turn afford different affects in viewers. In the chapter “Compression” we saw this concerning an image that was selected for how it related conceptually to this art project in connoting optics and a stasis that stood in tension to the processuality of the digital, at the same time as its function as meaning bearer was neutralized from its lack of further signification. As opposed to the neutrality of the image discussed in the compression chapter, the propaganda imagery of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense are infected with a

Portapak. Nam June Paik actually bought and launched experimental video works produced with a Portapak as early as 1965, two years before it was officially launched for the consumer market. See Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*, 17.

social context that goes beyond the mere politics of images' materiality. However, as manifested in this project, much of their cultural power – or lacks thereof – lies precisely in their techno-materiality and techno-logic, and how this works for or against the agenda of human users. This is most explicitly dealt with concerning how the Department of Defense and Al Qaeda, in their propaganda strategies, use either high- or low-resolution images, and of how and where their images are distributed.

Both the mode of distribution and the image resolution play significant roles in how Al Qaeda's propaganda imagery is received by viewers. Their use of different image resolutions comes forward from the material we have already explored. The footage from the Al Qaeda video, we saw, was remarkably noisy. The noise was exaggerated through Snyder's appropriation of the material, but it is also part of Al Qaeda's visual propaganda precisely because they use the Sony video camera. The affordances of instantaneity and accessibility of the camera, and it being able to upload imagery efficiently from basically anywhere, (for example the rural site that can be seen in the Al Qaeda footage) comes with the price of noise in the image material. However, that is not a high price to pay. On the contrary, the noise can be considered a virtue that adds the value of authenticity to Al Qaeda's propaganda. First of all the noise gives connotations to democratic image productions that have been facilitated by precisely equipment like the Sony video camera that allows any random person to produce and share their imagery, almost instantly, with the whole world.

Images that are powerful to the viewer precisely because of their low definition can also be described with the term "bootleg aesthetics." The term was coined by media scholar Lucas Hilderbrand to describe the grainy analog video images that opened up for some of the file-sharing practices in the United States.¹⁵⁰ As identified by Hilderbrand and described by Sterne, blurry and low definition images can therefore be associated with a videos illicit circulation that potentially adds a thrill or identification with countercultural circulation.¹⁵¹ Similarly, noise and media distortions have for a long time been used for aesthetic purposes in art.¹⁵² This is thought of as an expression of authenticity that lacks in slick and perfectly

¹⁵⁰ Sterne, "Compression: A loose history", unpaginated Kindle Edition.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Sterne mentions the writer Greg Hainges, but several art practices should come to mind, such as that of John Cage.

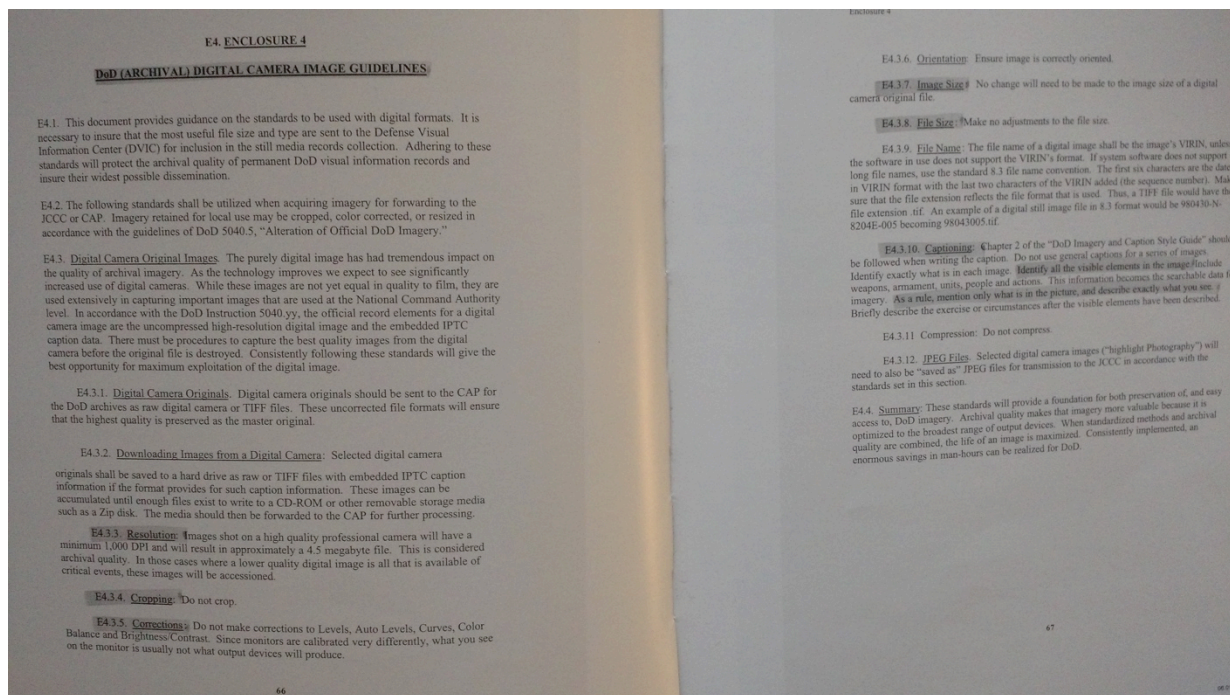
produced material, the latter more commonly associated with commercial productions. As pointed out by Sterne, to work with noise like some artists do, means that they negotiate with limits and consider these as something that produces- as opposed to interferes with- representation.¹⁵³ And this is what can be said of Al Qaeda's noisy imagery in this project as well. By following some of the principles of efficiency from contemporary media culture, Al Qaeda is here shown to gain the added value of countercultural identity, and further their images are vested with ideas of authenticity. Here we see how the limits of the technological infrastructure, and the compression artefacts that derives from using infrastructures in the most efficient way as something that produces representation. Compression artefacts here connote authenticity and are inscribed into the power structure of language. What we see here is that the mathematical aspects of communication, has turned into semantics – quantity becomes quality.

On how their method of distribution differs, the project text remarks that where Al Qaeda's materials are "anonymously posted and disseminated via electronic bulletin boards," "the official images of the DoD are archived on elaborate websites."¹⁵⁴ I have already discussed how Al Qaeda's images, by means of the Sony camera, wind up on the Internet with instantaneity. Conversely, the process for the Department of Defense's images to wind up on their websites, the project shows, is just as elaborate as their websites.

The propaganda manuals of the Department of Defense give an outline of their image strategy that includes their distribution method and image quality. Under the headline DoD (ARCHIVAL) DIGITAL CAMERA IMAGE GUIDELINES, the technical measures that are to be taken in their production, classification and storage of digital imagery are detailed (see image 16). What comes forward in this document is that the Department of Defense has strict rules for how to technologically deal with digital images. In the text it comes forward that the Department of Defense aims for high resolution imagery with what they refer to as "archival quality," a quality that the guideline details as "images shot on a high quality professional camera" with "minimum 1,000 DPI" (dots per inch). According to the manual, adhering to the standards that are outlined in the guide "will protect the archival quality of permanent

¹⁵³ Sterne, "Compression: A loose history", unpaginated Kindle Edition.

¹⁵⁴ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).



(16). DoD (ARCHIVAL) DIGITAL CAMERA IMAGE GUIDELINES. (Facsimile. Detail from the exhibition catalogue).

DoD visual information records and insure their widest possible dissemination.¹⁵⁵ However, as Snyder points out in his text, “the extensive materials produced by the Department of Defense rarely make it into the press.”¹⁵⁶ The bureaucratic process of the production and archiving of the imagery, as well as the use of high-resolution images obviously goes against the principles of efficiency, immediacy and democracy that the Internet is structured around. The project here shows that the Department of Defense is reactionary and failing in following the new methods of distribution. As stated in Lisson Gallery’s description of the project, Donald Rumsfeld has acknowledged “the failure and unreliability of the American government’s high-tech imaging politics.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the chapter argued that the high-tech politics of the Department of Defense makes their propaganda inefficient, and that it is actually lack of noise that disturbs their message.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Lisson Gallery, *Sean Snyder: Optics. Compression. Propaganda.*, 2016, <http://www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/sean-snyder-optics-compression-propaganda> (Visited 22.11.16).

¹⁵⁷ Snyder, “Optics. Compression. Propaganda”, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

4.4 Summary

This chapter set out with an analysis of what conjoins the historical and contemporary contexts that are brought up in OCP. It argued that the unifying traits between the Second World War and the Cold War discussed in the Optics-chapter, and the War on Terror and the Iraq War that Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense connotes, are times where critical events have created a sense of fear in populations of human beings. Also, this fear can be used to increase the measures of control in society, and to pursue unpopular politics such as to go to war, and as seen in Iraq; to open countries to free trade. The chapter discussed how this aspect of the Iraq War materializes in two of the Department of Defense's propaganda images.

The second part of the chapter argued that the Sony DCR-PC120E video camera is the protagonist of OCP. It argued that the camera comes forward as a faced actor, and that it does so in contrast to Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense that both come about as faceless. This, it argued, can be considered a strategic move that emphasizes the camera's critical role in the production of Al Qaeda's propaganda imagery. This proposition was further detailed with analyses of works concerning the camera that identified how the camera stands out in different material. After an analysis of the press release, that identified connectivity and instantaneity as crucial affordances of the camera, the chapter argued that it's precisely these affordances that forefronts the camera as a powerful actor in the project. The chapter argued that Al Qaeda's propaganda imagery is negotiated as affectively more powerful and more accessible than that of the Department of Defense precisely because the production and distribution of Al Qaeda's imagery, thanks to the Sony camera, is done in agreement with the Internet's logic of efficiency, and with low-resolution images that are compressed in order to travel with instantaneity.

5 Optics. Compression. Propaganda.

This chapter will bring the thesis to a conclusion. The first section will provide an analysis of the character of the entire work of OCP. This first section briefly argues that OCP's assembly of fragmented pieces of information and the dichotomies it plays with, as well as Snyder's method of sampling information, can be considered a response to specific conditions in the contemporary society. To be precise, it will argue that it responds to the context of war that is brought up in the project, and to some of the changes that the digital and the Internet has brought along in the production and distribution of information.

To conclude the thesis, the final section discusses how one of the works in OCP epitomize the project.

The Character of OCP: Fragmentation and Dichotomies

The introduction of this thesis briefly described that Snyder's project is an assembly of fragmentary pieces of information. In OCP, I argue that the fragmentary form of Snyder's practice can be seen as a subversive opposition to the binary narratives that are imposed on the world by governmental organizations and the media. This is a context that we have seen is implicitly dealt with in the project. In exploring the propaganda strategies of Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, the project deals with the world post 9/11, the War on Terror and the Iraq War. The contemporary political context that is brought up in the project is one where there is secrecy and diminishing transparency. It is a context where multifaceted realities are reduced to binary categories in politically constructed narratives. In these narratives the world is presented as consisting of friends or foes by means of an extensive use of fear-rhetoric that goes along the lines of the famous "either you're with us, or you're against us." It is a time where opposing voices are gagged,¹⁵⁸ and where increased measures of control and exercises of power are legitimized, as discussed in the previous chapter. This hostile atmosphere, we have seen, is a recurring theme in the project that binds references to the Second World War and the Cold War, with the contemporary Iraq War and War on Terror. The fragmentary form of Snyder's project can be seen as a response to the context of war, where there is little room for dissent or ambiguity. In the contemporary world post 9/11, a top-down level of political secrecy comes along with increased surveillance of citizens,

¹⁵⁸ Consider for example how whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden are sanctioned.

who are thereby, contrary to political organizations, not allowed to have secrets, but rather controlled in several ways.¹⁵⁹

By playing with the dichotomy of the secret and the revelatory, the project investigates the technological means through which information and opinion is produced and disseminated. And by doing so within a project that is fragmentary and contradictory, the idea of simplistic binary narratives is obscured.

In continuation of this, the fragmentary form can also be seen in relation to how the telecommunication platform of the Internet, in one way, has challenged precisely these types of one-sided narratives. Because of the democratic potential of the Internet, where any person with Internet-connection can contribute to an ever-expansive accumulation of information, the modern idea that prompts one coherent worldview is dissolved.¹⁶⁰ This contrasts with the coherence and control that is associated with traditional, bureaucratic archives. As explained by Wolfgang Ernst:

The archival infrastructure in the case of the Internet is only ever temporary, in response to its permanent dynamic rewriting. Ultimate knowledge (the old encyclopedia model) gives way to the principle of permanent rewriting or addition (Wikipedia).¹⁶¹

This argument by Ernst, which describes the lack of stability of the infrastructure of the Internet, is also describing of the democratic potential of the Internet. The Internet has brought about new politics of accessibility and production of information. By, on the one hand exploring how Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense use the Internet, and on the other hand appropriating their information, the project draws attention to a dialectic of the Internet: namely that it constitutes new democratic possibilities, at the same time as it performs in new constellations of control. The democratic potential of the Internet is demonstrated when Snyder appropriates propaganda imagery from Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, an act that fragments or displaces their narratives. The project's

¹⁵⁹ The hidden realities of how both the Guantanamo prison and the NSA, and the threat towards whistleblowers may stand as cases in point.

¹⁶⁰ The Internet has also brought along the opposite effect, in that it allows for a rapid propagation of opinions and attitudes, often referred to as virality.

¹⁶¹ Wolfgang Ernst, " Underway to the dual system: classical archives and digital memory ", In *Digital Memory and the Archive*, edited by Jussi Parikka, (2013):81-94, Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 85.

fragmentary organization and lack of narrative coherency mirrors a contemporary media-scape where electronic appropriation and re-working of information is displacing centralized broadcasting of coherent narratives. Snyder's experimentation can be seen as both a display of, and a rebellion against the contemporary forms of control enacted by media technologies, information industries and political rhetoric. Snyder's appropriations of the material attest to how the Internet is a sphere where information is made available for anyone to read, and where information is available for anyone to copy and appropriate for new productions. This is a sphere where information, no matter who made it, can be taken by any random user and put into new contexts. It attests to the age of sampling where, as described by Parisi and Goodman, "Electronic memories are plucked out of history, stored in machine banks, to be mutated, to be rhythmically reassembled in any combination digitally."¹⁶²

Snyder's fragmentary practice that counteracts notions of coherence through fragmentation and investigations of the archive can be seen in light of several 20th and 21st century art practices. In *The Big Archive, Art From Bureaucracy*, Sven Spieker discusses the way in which the bureaucratic archive formed art practices in the twentieth century. He claims that:

(...) the use of archives in late twentieth-century art reacts in a variety of ways to the assault by the early-twentieth-century-avant-gardes on the nineteenth-century objectification (and fetishization) of linear time and historical process."¹⁶³

According to Beniger, as described by Spieker: "the control revolution became a reality (...) by means, first, of the rationalizing modern bureaucracy and, second, of communications technologies developed at the same time."¹⁶⁴ This, Spieker identifies, was countered by artistic practices such as Dadaist montages, that responded to the ideas of coherence and

¹⁶² Parisi and Goodman, "Mnemonic Control", 173.

¹⁶³ Spieker draws on Allan Sekula's essay "The Body and the Archive" (1986) to say that the archive is often viewed as a cipher for the modern dream of control (Sven Spieker, *The big archive: Art from bureaucracy*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT press, 2008), 1). Further he refers to the control revolution, a term coined by American sociologist and historian James Beniger (1946-2010). Following Beniger, the term describes the increased bureaucratization that came as a reaction to the loss of economic and political control in the period of 1880-1930. (Spieker, *The big archive*, 5.) Hal Foster has noted a similar response, also in relation to notions of the archive, where the loss of control in the political sphere was met with overly coherent narratives in modern art historical accounts. In "Archives of Modern Art", Foster implies that art historians Heinrich Wölfflin and Aby Warburg might have projected unity, order and continuity in their art historical accounts as a response to being faced by the world war and fascism. See Hal Foster, "Archives of modern art", *October* No. 99, (2002): 81-95. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press Journals, 86-88.

¹⁶⁴ Spieker, *The big archive*, 5.

linearity by means of fragmentation. A paradox that Spieker, following Beniger identifies however is that the technologies that were used in the process to regain control, came with new losses of control. Machines of reproduction, for example the typewriter, that responded to what Spieker describes as a “storage crisis” allowed for an increased amount of information, and caused a “giant paper jam.”¹⁶⁵ OCP resonates with both these elements. Firstly, it resonates with fragmentation as a response to modes of control, where we can replace nineteenth century objectification of linear time and historical process with contemporary ideas of ordered binary narratives. Secondly, it resonates with the paradox of a communication technology meant to regain control that instead came with losses of control (remember that the Internet was made as a response to the threat of the Soviet Union, and thus to regain control, as described in the introduction). Snyder’s project, I argue, simultaneously counteracts the ordered binary narratives that are evoked in the thematized context, and mirrors the nonlinearity and incoherence of the thematized communication platform of the Internet.

Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed Snyder’s project by investigating how it relates to the elements that are referred to in the project title; *Optics. Compression. Propaganda*. These interrelated phenomena have been analyzed in an accumulative order. The thesis set out with the chapter “Optics”, which allowed drawing conclusions that were useful for understanding the subsequent chapter “Compression”. Further, the topics discussed in “Optics” and “Compression” specified how propaganda is to be understood in the project, as outlined in the “Propaganda”-chapter.

After a short reminder of some of the arguments found in the three chapters, this thesis will conclude with an analysis of a work that I will argue epitomize OCP.

The first chapter – “Optics” – was dedicated to an analysis of the way in which the concept and phenomena of optics informs the project. In analyzing excerpts from the project text where optical technologies come forward as the steady element in shifting geopolitical contexts, the chapter argued that optical technologies are conceptualized as the centered

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 5.

elements in the narratives. The chapter also argued that the narratives demonstrate that military organizations go to great lengths to possess optical instruments. With reference to two images from the Carl Zeiss Archive that display boxes with optical technologies, both of which were to be sent to uncertain futures during the Cold War, the chapter argued that optical technologies are conceptualized as entities that are defined by their potentiality. This, it argued, is because the technologies have the potential to produce images, and thus to cause changes in the collective memory of populations of human beings, and consequently to cause political, scientific and historic change. The second part of the chapter used the found still image from Vertov's film *Man With a Movie Camera* as an analogy to further introduce the relationship between human perception and image producing technologies as a critical concern of OCP. It argued that the project explores how technologies can both aid and limit human perception. Further, the chapter argued that the concept of optical instruments connotes what is visible to human beings, and that they in this aspect are contrasted with the invisibility of digital operations. With a discussion of the similarities between human eyes and cameras, the chapter argued that optical instruments, be they cameras or human eyes, and the digital systems of distribution are displayed as fundamentally connected.

The second chapter – “Compression” – set out with an introduction to how information in the digital is structured around mathematical quantity, and not semantic quality. The chapter functioned as a way to sensitize the viewer to critical aspects and mechanisms of the digital and digital compression, in order to see them at play in a specific case study in the Propaganda chapter. The chapter argued that the project exposes how digital compression techniques, that reduce the size of digital files, are examples of digital malleability that allows not just for an explosive production of images, but, even more significantly, for the fastest distribution of information that the world of telecommunication has ever seen. Also, it argued that the project exposes that the explosive amount of images that the digital infrastructure affords, affects humans' ability for information processing. In the project, this is emphasized by means of contrast when Snyder chose to print and exhibit the images that resulted from *Experiment One*. The chapter argued that the printed versions of the images that were hung on the Lisson Gallery wall conceptually functions as a gesture to slow down. As a contrast, this invites reflections on the speed, invisibility and ephemerality of the digital, at the same time as it functions as a response to the fact that these factors of the digital and

compression technology accommodates the extensive amounts of images that we see in the media landscape of today. This gesture that exposes and contrasts with the information saturation that comes with the digital and digital compression, it argued, can therefore invite reflections to the fact that these technologies, in working with information industries, increase the control over human bodies. Together they affect human capacities for memory and information processing. In making it possible to squeeze out vast amounts of information, compression technologies play a significant role in today's capitalist information economy, at the same time as the compressed images work against the traditional image hierarchy where high-resolution images are fetishized, as discussed with Hito Steyerl. Also, the chapter argued that Snyder's *Experiment One* draws attention to the fact that adjustments in the standard of digital images make them materialize in different ways, and that this might affect their visual surfaces. With this, the chapter argued, the experiment exposes that an image is not just a transportable visual appearance, but also the material through which it appears and the process through which it has been effected. Notably, we saw that the low-resolution JPEG image counter intuitively rendered the details of the image more clearly than the high-resolution image. The chapter argued that the experiment in this manner invites what Jonathan Sterne calls "a general history of compression", where representation is considered through its limits, and not through the idea of verisimilitude. Also, it argued that the low-resolution imagery should be considered with McLuhan's idea of "cool media", where coolness is an aesthetic where the low definition gives so little and unclear information that the viewer has to fill in the missing pieces. Following McLuhan's notion, it argued that the low-definition in this project is about affectivity and not about reality. The chapter also argued that the experiment was a manifestation and exploration of machine agency.

The third chapter – "Propaganda" – argued that the political contexts that are brought up in the project are times of war where increased measures of control are legitimized by fear-rhetoric. Further, the chapter argued that the contemporary representatives for this war context, namely Al Qaeda and the Department of Defense, are rendered faceless in order to emphasize the Sony DCR PC-120E as the projects' protagonist. For the Department of Defense, this came forward in some of their propaganda images, where Snyder had cut Donald Rumsfeld's face off to instead emphasize the economic interests of the U.S. in relation to the Iraq War. Similarly, the chapter argued that Al Qaeda came forward as faceless

in *Video 1*, where the censoring method of “pixilation” obscured the face of a man in the video. The chapter also argued that the pixilated appearance of Al Qaeda’s propaganda imagery, and especially the method of pixilation seen in *Video 1*, gives a reminder of the technical units that the image is built up by. It argued that the censoring method used here points to the ability of technologies to suppress or promote information, indeed their capability to shape it.

Where “Optics” argued that optical technologies are presented as desirable for military organizations, “Propaganda” argued that the Sony DCR PC-120E is displayed as remarkably powerful because it can connect to the Internet. The camera therefore combines the affordances of being able to produce an infinite number of images, with that of distributing the images fast and widely onto a communication platform. The chapter further discussed how Al Qaeda, in using this camera, follows the principles of efficiency and instantaneity of the digital infrastructure and Internet platform. In continuation of this, we saw that the low-resolution imagery produced by the camera gives the surplus value of authenticity to Al Qaeda’s imagery. What the project exposes here, the chapter argued, is that compression artefacts are inscribed into the power structure of language, and that the mathematical aspects of communication in this manner has turned into semantics. In this manner, it argued, quantity has turned into quality. Conversely, because of their use of high-resolution imagery and a bureaucratic system of distribution, the project exposes the propaganda strategy of the Department of Defense as retrograde in comparison to that of Al Qaeda. Indeed, the chapter argued that the high-tech politics of the Department of Defense makes their propaganda inefficient, and that it is actually a lack of noise that disturbs their message.

With this, I agree, Snyder’s project suggests that the Sony DCR-PC120E camera, in a contemporary world driven by affect and visual spectacle, can be considered a powerful weapon. With data as ammunition, data that can go viral and spread as efficiently as a virus, the camera can be considered a weapon of networked distribution. Acknowledging the vigor of the Sony camera in this context, Snyder attempted to “‘defuse’ the mechanics of the camera.”¹⁶⁶ This can be seen in the video work *Sony DCR-PC120E Disassembled*¹⁶⁷ that

¹⁶⁶ Snyder, “Optics. Compression. Propaganda”, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html>

¹⁶⁷ Snyder, Sean, “Sony DCR-PC120E. Disassembled” (2007) Ubuweb, 1,7 minutes,

concludes this thesis. Simultaneously, the work both disassembles and displays the circuit of dependencies between the elements that this thesis had to separate for heuristic purposes. As such, the work also reflects the method and structure of the thesis – and more broadly, the relationship between language and complex relational realities.

Sony DCR-PC120E Disassembled

Having identified the affordances of the Sony camera, Snyder bought one for himself and started to experiment with it. In the project text he explains that he planned to use the basic functions of the camera, such as to access the Internet and to transfer data.¹⁶⁸ In the preparation phase of *Sony DCR-PC120E Disassembled*, Snyder used the camera as the Sony engineers intended. However, in this process he also made a video that displays an unconventional use of the camera. Here we see Snyder taking the components of the camera hardware apart, piece-by-piece, until it stops working. This process, I'll now argue, demonstrates that the agency of the Sony DCR PC-120E is distributed, and that its power emerges in its collaboration with other actors, among others Al Qaeda.

Black Box Depunctualized

The one-minute video work *Sony DCR-PC120E Disassembled* was displayed on a Sony monitor in the Lisson Gallery exhibition (see image 17). In the first seconds of the video we see a still image of the complete, untouched Sony video camera, placed in Snyder's hands. With Kittler, one can say that the complete camera in the first seconds of the video here functions as a display of "the external façade that the electronics industry consciously displays".¹⁶⁹ Technological equipment like the Sony camera generally comes with instructions that permit it to be opened only by experts. Further, with Actor-Network Theory (ANT), I argue that what we see here is a so-called "punctualized object." The notion refers to how components are brought "together into a single complex system that can serve as a

http://ubu.com/film/snyder_sony.html (Visited 22.11.16).

¹⁶⁸ Snyder, "Optics. Compression. Propaganda", <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/snyder.html> (Visited 22.11.16).

¹⁶⁹ Friedrich Kittler, *Optical media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, translated by Anthony Enns, (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2010), 31.



(17). Installation view image of Sony DCR-PC120E Disassembled, Lisson Gallery 2007. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

single object.”¹⁷⁰ The punctualized object is therefore a blackbox. However, what Snyder does by deconstructing the camera can be described as what ANT refers to as “depunctualization.” The concept refers to the act of disassembling what appears as a single object, in order to see its “circuit of dependencies and infrastructures.”¹⁷¹ Here we see a physical manifestation of the technological inside of the camera, as a display of the components that are normally not visible to us, but that are vital in its workings.

What happens at last, when Snyder takes the camera apart, is that its operativity ends – and its function as a producer of images is taken away. In one way this demonstrates how the camera as technology is an autonomous actor that has become so advanced that the regular user can only relate to its input and output information. Because a black box is a system that

¹⁷⁰ Jussi Parikka and Hertz Garnet, “Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archeology into an Art Method”, In *Leonardo*, Vol. 45, No. 5, (2012): 424-430. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press Journals, 428.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 428.

is generally not understood by users beyond their input and output function, they are often, as Finnish media theorist Jussi Parikka points out, “completely unusable when they become obsolete or broken.”¹⁷² However, even if the act of disassembly here does defuse this particular camera, what it simultaneously does is to demonstrate that the power of the camera derives from a distributed assembly of material and social components. To be precise, when the hardware is taken apart, the connection with the network is broken. Indeed, the defusing of one camera here demonstrates that it is only one node in a greater network. By showing materiality as materiality and by breaking what was seamless connections between different elements - the work reveals the complex relationality between material components and its greater technical infrastructures.

In disassembling the camera, the complex network of relations that together form the potency of the camera is unraveled. The ones that are explored in OCP, we have seen, are optical technologies, electronic networks and image compression techniques. The gesture to disassemble the camera thus simultaneously defused the force of this specific camera – and displays that this force emerges in a network of relations. Keeping in mind the analogy of the still image from Dziga Vertov’s movie *Man With a Movie Camera* discussed in the Optics chapter, and specifically how human bodies and perceptual systems are particularly connected with technological infrastructures today, in addition to demonstrating the technological infrastructure that makes the camera so vital, the disassembly of the camera should lead to also consider the greater network of human and technological collaboration where the position of the camera is negotiated. The project has demonstrated that the power of images emerges in technological and cultural relations. Human users here participate in a greater network in that their use and reception of its imagery attribute the camera a position, for example as a weapon or a subversive force. *Sony DCR-PC120E Disassembled* is an embodiment of how OCP negotiates the fact that images – in the material sense or in the sense of propaganda – emerge in complex technological and cultural relations. Together, an assembly of cooperating agencies, be they visible or invisible, accounted for or unaccounted for by human beings – produce materials, meaning and affect.

¹⁷² Ibid. 428.

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