BRINGING THE WAR HOME:
ETHICS AND JUSTICE
IN A (POST) FEMINIST DEPICTION OF ABU GHRAIB

Preface. Ethics and justice in Martha Rosler's art: a (post) feminist perspective.

In this dissertation, my ambition is to consider ethics and justice in relation to six anti war photomontages by the American artist Martha Rosler from her 2004 series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, new series* (fig. 1-6), which is a reprise of a previous set of re-photographed collage by her of the same title that circulated during the war in Vietnam.

The structure of my work is influenced by Judith Butler's recent engagement with ethics and justice, which stems from her interest in contemporary politics, and in particular that of US administration after the events of September 9/11. The Twin Towers attack, needless to say, has been considered from many quarters as the triggering event of a new geopolitical era and of the following wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and has led to a closure to any form of dialogue, which took the form of nationalist militarist discourses, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspension of constitutional rights and civil liberties in the name of security, violations of international conventions such as the Geneva Convention, and development of forms of explicit and implicit censorship. Along the line of Emmanual Levinas' conception of an ethics founded on the precariousness of the life of the Other and of Hannah Arendt's reflections on uniqueness, exposure and natality, Butler proposes to rethink the meaning of politics and ethics, and the notion of human condition, under the ontological categories of vulnerability and precariousness, putting forward an ethics of non-violence and an ontology of the "human" founded on the concepts of relationship, linkage and interdependency that Butler wishes to apply to both national states and individuals.[1]

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[1] Butler, J. *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning* (London, New York: Verso, 2004); Butler, J. *Frames of War, When Is Life Grievable?* (London, New York: Verso, 2010).

The US military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, far from being justified by ideological and "humanitarian" rationales but also by the "blood for oil" and the project of market penetration, must be inserted into a politics of *permanent war* whose origin can be traced in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and that is grounded on the role of the US as unilateral force.[2] But according to Butler, the experience of vulnerability and loss that the US had to bear in September 2001 has revealed that the US too are affected by a shared condition of interdependency and precarity, and for this reason, "radical forms of self-sufficiency" and "unbridled sovereignty" cannot be a viable way of carrying on political discourses anymore. In the contemporary world, which is largely affected, and disrupted, by global processes, to respond to violence with violence might seem "justified" but finally it is not a responsible solution as no violent act of sovereignty is able to rid the subject of the shared condition of interdependency.[3] This of course does not mean to excuse the individuals who committed the attack at World Trade Centre or any other form of violence, but "to take a different sort of responsibility for the global conditions of justice". Here Butler, aptly quoting the lesson of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, aims to criticize the logic of revenge in the name of justice and grounds political and ethical responsibility on this shared condition of dependency.[4]

The condition of vulnerability experienced by the US would have had to lead it to think also over the condition of vulnerability and insecurities that affect *other* populations, and thus over another form of injustice: indeed, differential forms of allocation and distribution of injury make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others, and thus more vulnerable. This reflection leads Butler, in dialogue with the Italian feminist writer Adriana Cavarero, to formulate a new ontology of the "human" grounded on notions of exposure, vulnerability and dependency, and to rethink the conditions that currently divide persons who are worthy of protection from members of other communities who can be killed and destroyed without perceiving that "human lives" have been lost.[5] According to Butler, the US has

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[2] Retort (Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, Michael Watts), "Afflicted Powers", *New Left Review*, June 2004, reprinted in *Afflicted Powers. Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London, New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 16 ss., pp. 78 ss.

[3] Butler, J. *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning*, cit., XIII, and p. 7 for the discussion of American unilateralism.

[4] Butler, J. *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning*, cit., p. 4 where she underlines that "it is one matter to suffer violence and quite another to use that fact to ground a framework in which one's injury authorizes limitless aggression against targets that may or may not be related to the sources of one's own suffering"; pp. 16-17.

[5] Regarding the feminist ontology of the human, see Butler, J. *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning*, cit., p. 20 where she claims that "loss and vulnerability seem to follow

missed the chance also for a reshaping of the conditions of this form of injustice.

Butler's vibrant pages reveal her increasing concern about the ongoing visual and narrative reiteration, performed by the media and by the system of power, of this apparently irreconcilable divide between lives that count and lives that do not count. As made explicit in her last book *Frames of War*, it is indeed through an analysis of the limits and the margins of this visual and narrative frames that it is possible "to call the frame into question [and] to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognizable. The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, and apprehend. Something exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things".[6]

Inserting into a long tradition of subversion of political and social orders, Martha Rosler's photomontages call into question the stability of this social and political frame at an affective and aesthetic level. The juxtaposition of images of mutilated bodies and of torture, even if Rosler's art always avoids depicting the *horrorism* of contemporary violence,[7] solicit us to apprehend affectively our shared condition of vulnerability and disrupt any previous

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from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure"; 28-31, 40-41; Butler, J. *Frames of War*, in part., xxii, xxv-xxvi, xxix, pp. 33 ss. where she claims that "precariousness is not simply an existential condition of individuals, but rather a social condition from which certain clear political demands and principles emerge. Under political conditions in which the denial of the colonizer's precariousness in the name of invulnerable self-defence seeks to deny the condition in which human animals are each exposed to the other, and where precariousness is a generalized condition of living beings"; Cavarero, A. *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (London, New York: Routledge, 2000; first published in Italian as *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997); Cavarero A., *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, Trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; first published in Italian as *Orrorismo, ovvero della violenza sull'inerme* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007), where the Italian philosopher gathers different forms of contemporary violence under the neologism "horrorism"; Butler, J and Cavarero, A. *Condizione umana contro "natura"*, in Bernini, L. and Guaraldo O. (curr.), *Differenza e relazione. L'ontologia dell'umano nel pensiero di Judith Butler e Adriana Cavarero* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2009). About a notion of vulnerability, see also Retort, *Afflicted Powers*, cit., pp. 1 ss.; "Feminist Time: A Conversation", *Grey Room* 31, Spring 2008, pp. 32–67, p. 52-53.

[6] Butler, *Frames of War*, cit., p. 9.

[7] See Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", *Art Monthly*, issue 314, 2008, p. 3. *"Horrorism"*, as mentioned above, is a neologism invented by Cavarero to name "the peculiarly repugnant character of so many scenes of contemporary violence": see Cavarero A., *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, cit., p. 29.

certainty about our identity. These images being inserted into the apparently detached sphere of domesticity, the photomontages call also for our active involvement in assuming collective responsibility for what goes on not "over there" but in our homes. Rosler's photomontages, establishing a dialogue between a "we" and a "you" and putting into question what these two terms refer to, can also be read in the light of a relational aesthetic that reworks the notion of "community", in this way deserving to be considered as fulfilling democratic concerns.[8]

This new ethics of responsibility with a concern over global justice intimates also that the feminist "the personal is political" slogan of the 70s is assuming a new meaning: the feminist struggle to live in a "better" world is now less concerned in a notion of *social* justice, a justice among sexes that is founded on notion of sexual difference. The domesticity of Rosler's photomontages, the space of representation usually associated with women and that used to symbolize the battlefield of the struggle between sexes, must be reread from a prospective that I call (post)feminist because requires a profound rethinking of gendered roles and ceases to locate oppression in male persons. Rosler's photomontages, together with part of the milieu usually associated with feminism, overcome the particularization and personalization typical of the 90s and its emphasis on gender, in favor of an opening towards geopolitics and questions of global justice, which also implies a rethinking of the notion of universality.[9]

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[8] See Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", *Art Monthly*, issue 314, 2008, p. 3 and 7 (transcript of the interview held at Tate Modern on September 29, 2007 as part of the *Art Monthly*/Tate Modem Talking Art series, available at http://channel.tate.org.uk); "Martha Rosler: art activist", Mary Paterson interviews Martha Rosler, *n.paradoxa*, 23, 2009, special issue on Art Activism, pp. 87-91; Arendt, H. "Collective Responsibility" (1968), in James William Bernauer (ed.), *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987), also published in Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), pp. 147-158, p. 43-50. On relational aesthetics, see N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, 2002 as reworked by Bishop, C. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October*, 110, 2004, pp. 51-79. See also Rosler, M. "Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?", in *Decoys and Disruptions*, Martha Rosler Selected Writings, 1975-2001 (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts, London, England: 2004), pp. 208-209.

[9] For a discussion of the term "postfeminism" and for a contradistinction between ethics of care and ethics of justice, see Kavka, M. "Feminism, Ethics, and History, or What Is the "Post" in Postfeminism?", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring, 2002), pp. 29-44, in part. pp. 33-34, p. 36, and p. 39. For the aspiration "to move us to a better place than this one", see also Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", cit., p. 7, where she also acknowledges that she, along with artists in general,

The selection of six photomontages out of fifteen of the entire series is primarily justified by the presence in these photomontages of images that directly refer to the perpetration of torture in the Abu Ghraib camp or to the city of its perpetration, Baghdad, which is also the symbol of the military occupation of Iraq. The reason for the only exception to this rule, the insertion into the discussion of the photomontage entitled *Amputee*, will appear clear in the light of the discussion of the new ontology of the human proposed here.

"may have a messianic propensity, we may suffer from utopianism". See also Deutsche, R. "Feminist Time: A Conversation", *cit.*, pp. 32–67, p. 35 where she claims that one of the aim of feminism today is to construct "less violent ways of encountering others"; see also pp. 45 and 60.

1. Introduction. Bringing the War Home: drawing a parallel between Vietnam and Iraq Era

In 2004 the American artist Martha Rosler made public a series of photomontages entitled *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, new series*. This is a reprise of a previous set of re-photographed collage (fig. 17-19) by her of the same title that circulated during the crucial years of the war in Vietnam (1967-1972) and were originally disseminated in underground newspapers and on flyers in the context of anti-war activism. In the first series Rosler juxtaposed images of Vietnam war, taken from the pages of *Life* magazine (fig. 20), with images of domestic interiors taken from magazines such as *House Beautiful*, while in the 2004 version Rosler made use of images from the war in Iraq.[10]

The use of montage as a means to arouse political awareness has its root in the Dadaist and Surrealist practices, as well as in Situationism, the Expanded Cinema and Bertolt Brecht's "Alienation Effect", and reconnects to the aesthetic tactics of irregularity and disturbance which explicate in the use of alienation, parody and irony as a form of subversion and resistance to "conventional" or "dominant" aesthetic and political.[11] This tradition merges into feminist challenge to subvert identity and into the artistic practices informed by Judith Butler's theorization of parody (in particular, of the practice of drag) as a way to make apparent the performativity of gender.[12] Martha Rosler herself has explicitly acknowledged that her series of

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[10] For a discussion of the "archive" of images used by Rosler in the new series, see next paragraph.

[11] Following the definition of "political action" by Ernesto Laclau, avant-garde artists and political groups constituted themselves as collective beings to call structural principles of society into question or to propose a different type of regime: as George Grosz has famously stated, the Dadaist tactics were those that engage in "frightening the unaccustomed eye through the setting of a new sense." See on this topic, recently Schoder A., "Irony, Montage, Alienation: Political Tactics And The Invention Of An Avant-Garde Tradition", two-part essay, part one, *Afterimage*, 37.3, 2009, pp. 24-29; part two, 37.4, 2009, 15-19.

[12] See in particular Butler, J. *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), which has led the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum to call her "The Professor of Parody": see Nussbaum, M. "The Professor of Parody", *The New Republic*, 1999-02-22.

photomontages *Bringing the War Home* is a direct outgrowth of Dadaist and Surrealist collages.[13]

Rosler's first series was informed by at that moment rising feminism and by a critique of the American consumer society, and the title of the series was itself also a comment on the fact that the war America waged in Vietnam was the first to be witnessed day after day by television cameras and by photojournalism, and that "introduced the home front to new tele-intimacy with death and destruction".[14] The images of luxury apartments and war photographs were taken from magazines where war photographs were very often adjacent to advertising images depicting luxury and wealth, and the juxtaposition in the photomontages was meant to criticize this apparent divide between peaceful domestic environments, the space of representation usually associated with women and where lives kept on being conducted in the same consumerist way as in time of peace, and the violence of a war supposedly waged "elsewhere", first of all by men. The home and the sphere of domesticity, Rosler's art showed, were not disconnected from politics, and in particular foreign policy, and not only the "polish surface of beauty and comfort" and the maintenance of this quality of life were indeed possible also because of the "violence occurring elsewhere"[15] but also they took part in the same management of politics that also confined women into rigid roles. Indeed, the same violence that America was perpetrating "over there" was actually perpetrated every day in "our homes", as "the personal is political" slogan was meant to show accosting social structures and claiming for the emancipation of women. In this way, Rosler's interest in feminism and radical politics merged into the central theme of "space", the meeting point of private vs. the public space and of the "here" and "there" of foreign policy. Along the line of other artists of the 70s, her way to address the public with a political message was through unconventional channels, to wit through underground

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[13] About Rosler, see Buchloh, B. *A Conversation with Martha Rosler*, in Rosler, M. *Positions in the life world*, ed. by Catherine de Zegher, published by Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, Generali Foundation, Vienna (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: 1999), p. 25; Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", cit., p. 314. Rosler acknowledges also that Pop Art was a source of inspiration for her photomontages.

[14] Sontag, S., *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Penguin Books, 2003), p. 18.

[15] De Zegher, C. "*Passionate Signals:* Martha Rosler's Flowers in the Field of Vision", in Rosler, M. *Positions in the life world*, cit., p. 266-283 (the quotation is from page 269).

newspaper, avoiding in this way going through institutions, museums and art magazines.[16]

In 2004, Rosler decided to make a new version of this work juxtaposing images of domestic interiors with images of the Iraq war. Her photomontages insert into the context of contemporary American anti-war movement which, from many quarters, has been read as spontaneous gesture of outcry of the "multitude", a Spinozist term used by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their books *Empire* and *Multitude*.[17] However, her decision has been criticized for repeating an old form and for having lost the vitality of the original series. As it is made clear in a recent interview at Tate Modern, Rosler had predicted this criticism, and notwithstanding that, she deliberately chose to use the same form of her previous work, the photomontage, which was a means that she had not used any more since the 70s.[18]

This choice reveals that Rosler wanted to insert the 2004 version in the context of the discussion about the parallel between the Vietnam War Era and the current political situation in Iraq, a polemic sprung up just after the beginning of the occupation of Iraq and still ongoing today. This parallel in particular pivots on, besides the shared epithet of "imperialist war", the use of bombarding against civilians and other nonmilitary targets (like ambulance), and on the perpetration of torture by the US forces against detainees, which, as well as in Vietnam, is fuelled by racism and by the belief, common among soldiers, of a supposed "superiority" of the American culture.[19]

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[16] See Buchloh, B. *A Conversation with Martha Rosler*, cit., p. 47; Alberro, A. "The Dialectics of Everyday Life: Martha Rosler and the Strategy of the Decoy", in Rosler, M. *Positions in the life world*, cit., p. 73-113; Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", *cit.*, where Rosler also comments about the choice of photography in this case; "Martha Rosler: art activist", Mary Paterson interviews Martha Rosler, *cit.*, pp. 87-91; Stallabrass, J. "Not in Our Name", *Art Monthly*, issue 293, 2006, p. 1. See also Didi-Huberman, G. *Images in Spite of All, Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) about the political power of cinema montage in comparison to the juxtaposition proposed by advertisements and by propaganda images.

[17] About the contemporary anti-war movement, see Retort (Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, Michael Watts), "Afflicted Powers", *Afflicted Powers. Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, (London, New York: Verso, 2005), pp. 1 ss.. At pages 94 ss., however, the authors ask the antiwar movement to "recognize the full dynamics of US militarism", otherwise "massive mobilizations at the approach of full-dress military campaigns [will] inevitably be followed by demoralization and bewilderment". The references to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's books are *Empire* (Cambridge, MA, London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000) and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

[18] Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", cit.

[19] See in particular, "Feminist Time: A Conversation", *cit.*, pp. 32–67, pp. 51-52; Frascina, F. "1965-1975 Redux", *Art Monthly*, issue 335, 2010, who has in particular claimed that the Abu Ghraib images are Iraq invasion equivalents to photographs of Vietnamese bodies burnt by napalm or abused and massacred at My Lai; Stallabrass, J. "Not in Our

Indeed, as well known, the late 60s and the 70s represents an hectic period in contemporary history, also for feminism: 1968 is the year *par excellence* of the explosion of activism in the civil rights movement and of antiwar protest, and is one of the triggers of the feminist movement. During that period, in particular in New York and Los Angeles, artists reflected upon issues related to social changes and the war, and were engaged actively in political activism with the aim to agitate or mobilize the crowd against the war, most of the time under the philosophical assumption, drawn from Althusser's and Debord writings, that art does not only reflect society but also and more importantly contributes to produce it. As the recent book by Julia Bryan-Wilson shows, in the 70s politics became an important source of inspiration for artist such as Robert Morris and for other artistic practices, often neglected by art critics and historians, and there was a rising interest in the concept of "collectivity".[20] An activist artwork that was also the fruit of the work of a collective of antiwar artists, was the Artists' Tower of Protest, also known as the Peace Tower (fig. 25), which was erected in Los Angeles in 1966 and was explicitly designed to protest against the war in Vietnam.

In occasion of the 2006 Whitney Biennial, the 1966 *Peace Tower* was reenacted (fig. 26), which confirms the ongoing discussion on the parallel between the war in Vietnam and the current war in Iraq. However, from many quarters, Rosler included, this gesture has been interpreted as empty of any groundbreaking energy:[21] indeed, contrary to the previous *Tower*, which

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Name", *cit.*. The latter in particular reflects upon the meaning of the remembrance of photographs of the Vietnam War in the present. Interestingly, Stallabrass makes a comment of the "image management" carried out by the US military during the War in Vietnam and now in Iraq, but stresses also the fact that the attitude towards western journalism by the insurgency in Iraq is very different from those who opposed the US in Vietnam. About the claim of "superiority" of the American culture within the US military, see in particular Butler, J. *Frames of War, cit.*; Sontag, S. "Regarding the Torture of Others", originally appeared in the New York Times, May 23rd 2004, now available at http://southerncrossreview.org/35/sontag.htm; and Fusco, C., *A Field Guide for female interrogators* (New York, London, Melbourne, Toronto: Seven Stories Press, 2008). See also Eisenman, S.F. *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd), 2007. The 70s has been seen as the origin of the so called *neo-liberalism* and the Vietnam war as part of the strategy of *permanent war*: see Retort, *Afflicted Powers. Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, cit., p. 73, 89, 93 ss. The authors stress also that despite the Vietnam war had ceased making any strategic sense, the American leaders kept on carrying it out because they were haunted by "the prospect of defeat, coupled with mutinous barracks and a riotous home front, becoming a worldwide televised *image* of failure. As it now haunts them again, from the back streets of Fallujah, Najaf, and Baghdad".

[20] Bryan-Wilson, J. *Art Workers. Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009). See also Frascina, F. *Art, Politics and Dissent. Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

[21] Rosler, M. "The 2006 Whitney Biennial", *Artforum*, May 2006, 283-285.

hovered in the air to suggest the wings of the peace, the 2006 *Tower* was placed in an infelicitous position, in a "moat" of the museum Rosler said,[22] that has stifled it. The 2006 *Tower* was almost invisible for the Biennial participants and, given the aim of a truly activist artwork of galvanizing the people against the war, the *Tower* completely failed its goal, remaining just as a melancholic commemoration of an unpopular, but at the same time intense, past.

As we shall see in the next paragraphs, the reenactment of this particular historical period is just one, and not even the most important, of the aims of Rosler's photomontages. Contrary to the 2006 *Peace Tower*, Rosler's photomontages are not a melancholic commemoration of the past and does not look at the 70s with a nostalgic attitude. We will be seeing that the parallel between the Iraq and the Vietnam war is drawn to shed light on crucial aspects of the current political situation and to solicit our active involvement within it, and helps reflecting on the differences between the society of the 70s and the contemporary one.

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[22] *Ibidem*. See also Frascina, F. "1965-1975 Redux", *cit.,* p. 7.

2.   Representing Iraq: the visual "archive" of Rosler's work

In the 2004 version, released just after the breaking out of the war in Iraq, Rosler juxtaposes domestic interiors with images of war in Iraq. Contrary to the previous version (fig. 17-21), where the western female figures were depicted or as mothers or as housewives, and the male figures are or combatant soldiers or fathers, the range of images of the newer series considered here is far more complex and runs from female and male western soldiers (fig. 1 and 2), the latter, in one case, clearly mutilated (fig. 3), to female fashion models (fig. 4-5) or again housewives (fig. 6).

Some of the images are taken from non "mainstream" sources, and this is the case of the photograph of the American soldier amputee at the height of the leg (fig. 3). This is a kind of "signature wounds"[23] of the current war in Iraq because these injuries are caused by the improvised explosive devices that the opposition uses. This is the kind of photograph that the rigid control that the US administration has pursued on the visuality of the war, which has led to forms of embedded reporting and visual censorship, would stifle because it is an images that shows the vulnerability of the US army. As Butler underlines, the photographs of US soldiers dead and decapitated in Iraq are of a different species of the images of the bodies executed by the Hussein regime: only the latter ones provoke an outrage over their deaths that motivates and supports the war effort, while the former could cause criticism to the management of the war.[24] We can find an example of embedded reporting in another of Rosler's photomontages, *Gladiators* (fig. 2): here the photographs of US soldiers with guns in hand is a typical depiction of the heroism and courage of US military.

But most of the time, the images of the new series of photomontages comes from the media and in particular from the Internet, or had been widely publicized on the web: using these images in her work, Rosler reacts to the media "bombardment about everything from banalities to world events" and to the spectacularization of the war that has characterized the visual management of the war from the 9/11 attack on: indeed, the defeat itself that US had to bear in 2001 was spectacular, which has led Retort group to claim that even the so-called Terror "followed the logic of the spectacle". The

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[23] Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", cit., p. 3.

[24] On the phenomenon of embedded reporting, see Stallabrass, J. "The Power and Impotence of Images", in Brighton Photo Biennial 2008, special issue of *Photoworks* on *Memory of Fire: The War of Images and Images of War*, p. 5; Sontag, S. *Regarding the Pain of Others*, cit., p. 65; Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., pp. 64-65, 72. On censorship, see Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit., pp. 1 ss. e p. 37.

instrumentalization of the visual aesthetics as part of a war strategy is indeed a form of "aesthetization of politics" which, as Benjamin reminds us, is typical of fascist system. During the Iraq war there have been a significant circulation of videos and photographs taken both by journalists as well as by soldiers themselves from the perspective established by the military and governmental authority with cheap technology (such as cell phones), which often were immediately publicized on the Internet. This represents a new phenomenon in comparison to the Vietnam War, where the photographs were taken only by professionals who meant to criticizes what they were reporting, and Rosler has taken account of this in creating her photomontages (see fig. 5).[25]

The main source of the photomontages we are discussing here is the infamous images taken by soldiers in the act of perpetrating torture in the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad (fig. 7-15 in relation to fig. 1, 2, 4), which, since their first broadcast in the Spring of 2004, have been reproduced in newspapers and magazines all over the world, and seen by nearly everyone with access to television and the Internet. The release of these photographs is actually a breakdown in the usual US administration of the media, which, as said, as far as possible avoids the production and the circulation images that could cause a criticism of the war but, as we will be seeing below, even these images, at least at the moment when they were taken, can be regarded as a form of "embedded reporting". One of the most infamous and publicized in the Abu Ghraib scandal, is the one depicting the US army reservist Lynndie England with a prisoner on a leash in the Abu Ghraib camp (fig. 7): this image, which is one of the few that are still today in the imaginary of the general public, at the time of the release of Abu Ghraib images was one of those that most *brought* the Iraq *war* in our homes. This photograph has also raised many questions within the feminist milieu, as the latter is accustomed to conceiving of women solely as victims of violence, not as agents. With regards in particular to Rosler's work, it

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[25] The quotation of Rosler's word is from "Tarzan&Jane", an encounter between Thomas Hirschhorn and Martha Rosler, *Domus*, July-August 2006, 96-101. About the war as a "spectacle" see in particular Retort, *Afflicted Powers. Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, cit., p. 190-191, who explicitly connects to the writing of Guy Debord, and in particular: Debord, G. *The Society of the Spectacle* [1967], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (New York: 1994); Debord, G. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* [1988], trans. Malcolm Imrie, (London: 1998). See also Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit., p. 148 and Butler, *Frames of War*, cit., p. 29. The reference to Benjamin is his famous 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". See on this point, Schoder A., "Irony, Montage, Alienation: Political Tactics And The Invention Of An Avant-Garde Tradition", two-part essay, part one, *Afterimage*, 37.3, 2009, pp. 24-29, in part. p. 28. See Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit.

has been underlined by Siona Wilson that in the 2004 version female figures thus represent both American domesticity and American aggression.[26]

The Abu Ghraib photographs have become the signal images of the worldwide condemnation of the war in Iraq but art historians and cultural theorists have underlined that these images have solid roots in the tradition of art history and cultural history, recalling photographs of lynching[27] as well as ancient Greek and Roman sculptures of winning combatants in the act of humiliating the losers, and other artworks belonging to the history of art.[28] Slavoj Žižek has famously stated that when he saw the photo of a naked prisoner with a blank hood covering his head, electric cables attached to his limbs, standing on a chair in a ridiculous theatrical pose (fig. 8), his first reaction was that this was a shot from the latest performance-art show in Lower Manhattan; according to the theorist, the theatricality of the photographs of Abu Ghraib has a direct link to the initiatory rituals of torture and humiliation one has to undergo to be accepted into a closed community, like in an Army base or high school campus.[29]

What connects all these visual phenomena is the will to humiliate and dehumanize the people depicted and not surprisingly, the images taken by the soldiers in Abu Ghraib were most of the time staged photographs. Of course, as the authors take care to underline, in the case of Abu Ghraib the recall of a visual tradition is only unconscious and is the product of a visual "heritage stored in the memory",[30] but as said above, these images take part of the phenomenon of "embedded reporting" where the images conform to an established social and political frame.[31] On the contrary, a conscious restaging

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[26] The feminist contribution on issues of war and violence runs, to name only a few, from Woolf, V., "Three Guineas", in Woolf, V. *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf* (Ware: Wordsworth Ed., 2005), 781- 924) to Rose, J. *Why War?* (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1993). About the role of female soldiers as aggressors in Rosler's work see Wilson S., "'Girls say yes to boys who say no': Four Artists Refigure the Sex War on Terror", *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2009, 121–142. See also Butler, J. *Precarious Lives*, cit., p. 42; *Frames of War*, p. 83 for the claim that the Abu Ghraib images take part of the phenomenon of embedded reporting.

[27] Apel, D. "Torture Culture: Lynching Photographs and the Images of Abu Ghraib", *Art Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Summer, 2005), 88-100; in *The Uncertain States of America Reader* (London: Sternberg Press, 2006), 173-186).

[28] See in particular Eisenman, S.F. *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2007), who put the Abu Ghraib images into a long tradition of artworks. See also Frascina, F. "1965-1975 Redux", *cit.*, p. 7.

[29] Žižek, S., *Violence, Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008), p. 146.

[30] See Eisenman, S.F. *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, in part. p. 17 where he quotes the words by Aby Warburg.

[31] See Butler, J., *Frames of War*, cit., pp. 78 ss., in part. p. 83. This phenomenon, as we shall discuss in more details later, has been reconnected to the aestheticizing of politics, which,

of an artwork, in particular Charlton Heston's movie *Ben Hur*, occurred at a Marine military base outside of the city of Fallujah, on November 6th, 2004, when U.S. Marines of the 1st Division in Iraq dressed up as gladiators and staged a chariot race: this mise-en-scène was meant to keep soldiers' spirits up before leading an expected attack on insurgent-held Fallujah, a battle that killed 300,000 civilians, and to draw a parallel between insurgents and barbarians. The photograph taken to celebrate the occasion (fig. 17) is used by Rosler in her photomontage aptly entitled *Gladiators* (fig. 2).[32]

The analysis of the visual archive of Rosler's photomontages suggests to think over *how* war is usually brought to our home and how it is represented by the media, and thus on the epistemological problem of how the war is presented to us: TV channels such as CNN, which are supposed to provide an impartial journalism, actually export the perspective of the US and, as Butler underlines, they both normalize the war and make it appear "just" through the iteration of the idea, which becomes the norm, that there are lives that count less than others. The visual and narrative frames operate to mark a divide between lives that must be mourned when they are lost and lives that must be ignored and not represented, to wit, in Butler's vocabulary, between "grievable" and "non grievable" lives. In other words, the specific way in which the war is brought to our knowledge directly affects the ontology of the subject, which is an ontology that depends on the reiteration of social norms of recognition that allocate recognition differently among populations and lives.

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as well known, was first theorized by Walter Benjamin in his famous 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and presented as an outcome of fascism. See on this point, Schoder A., "Irony, Montage, Alienation: Political Tactics And The Invention Of An Avant-Garde Tradition", two-part essay, part one, *Afterimage*, 37.3, 2009, pp. 24-29, in part. p. 28. For the link between images from Abu Ghraib and pornography, see Bourke, J. "Torture as Pornography", *Guardian*, May 7, 2004. For a discussion of the Abu Ghraib images from a feminist point of view, see Sontag, S. "Regarding the Torture of Others", *cit.*; Cavarero A., *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, cit. For the Iraq war as a "spectacle" and for a recalling of the category of the sublime, see Mirzoeff, N. *Watching Babylon, The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 12; Frascina, F. "1965-1975 Redux", *cit.*, p. 335; Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit.; James, S. "Making an Ugly World Beautiful? Morality and Aesthetics in the Aftermath", in Brighton Photo Biennial 2008, *cit.*, p. 15. Finally, it is worth remembering that in 2008 the University of Brighton Gallery hosted an exhibition entitled *Iraq through the lens of Vietnam* where it was suggested a comparison between the images produced during the Vietnam war and the war in Iraq. See Brighton Photo Biennial 2008, cit., preface, p. 3. See also Stallabrass, J. "Not in Our Name", *cit.*. See also, by the same author, "The Power and Impotence of Images", in Brighton Photo Biennial 2008, *cit.*, pp. 4-9; Retort, *Afflicted Powers. Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, p. 191.
[32] See http://www.relentlesslyoptimistic.com/2004/11/who_thought_thi.html ; http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/1107-02.htm

The social nature of the norms of recognition entails that this is an historically contingent ontology and not a deterministic one: this means, as we shall be seeing below, primarily that this "frame" of recognition is not fixed, but, as it happened with the social notion of gender, can be disrupted and challenged.[33]

The retrieval of the images from the Internet, makes Rosler's photomontages consistent with the definition of "archivist art" as explored by Hal Foster in his 2004 article[34] where the latter, tracking down an "archival impulse" in many contemporary artworks, stresses the fact that in this practices, images are chosen because they are familiar and drawn from the archives of mass culture, and in particular from the "mega-archive" of the Internet, to ensure a legibility that can then be "disturbed" by the artist. Indeed, regarding some of Rosler's works exhibited in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2007, Mignon Nixon has recently underlined "the logic of the archive" in her work, stressing that this logic sees archival artworks as works that face present concerns.[35] Foster, discussing in particular the work of Thomas Hirschhorn, who, as we shall see below, shares some other characteristics with Rosler's work, emphasizes that the heterogeneity of the material and the thematic chosen stands as the foundation of his methodology which, as well known, aims at "doing art politically": Hirschhorn uses found images, texts, advertisements, and photocopies which are, in a similar way of Rosler's photomontages, juxtaposed to contextualize consumer banality with political and military atrocities. Hirschhorn's aims, as he himself has remarked, is "to connect what cannot be connected", a reference to the Deleuzian notion of the

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[33] Butler, J. *Precarious Lives*, cit., p.149. Of course, the first statement is linked to her commentary of what is considered a "grievable" life and what is not, which is something that strictly affects also the production of images in the media. This idea is developed in *Frames of War*, p. xiii-xvix, 1 ss., pp. 64 ss., 74 – 77, 165-170, and in part. 3 where she also suggests that the "frame" in which images are produced and publicized "does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality"; p. 12 and 24 regarding the iterable structure of the frame; p. 29 where she argues that "the materiality of the war [cannot be separated] from those representational regimes through which it operates and which rationalize its own operation". The frame into which the notion of "life" is construed is indeed an operation of power and affects also the ontological definition of what constitutes a "life". See also Rosler, M. "Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?", *cit.*, p. 209 where she discusses "the social power and epistemological understandings (as opposed to the aesthetic qualities alone) of certain forms of photography", such as documentary, journalistic, and news photography.

[34] Foster, H., "An Archival Impulse", *October*, Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 3-22.

[35] Nixon, M, in "Feminist Time: A Conversation", p. 64. See also Bishop, C. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October*, 110, 2004, pp. 51-79, in part. 75.

rhizome;[36] this feature, according to Foster, is what distinguishes Hirschhorn's work, as well as the work of other archival artists, from those affected by the "allegorical impulse" as explored by Craig Owens. Hirschhorn's "kiosk" and "altars", as Foster underlines, are drawn up to the assemblages by Kurt Schwitters and to the collages by the Independent Group, confirming a *fil rouge* between Dada and Surrealism, Pop art and archivist art under the umbrella of an art fuelled by political concerns.[37]

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[36] See the first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaux*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004).

[37] Note that Martha Rosler has claimed that Pop art, being "about the nature of world, and the social world that's its subject", hardly "refrain from being political": see Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", cit., p. 314. On the notion of the archive, another key reference is of course Derrida, J., "Archive fever: a Freudian impression", trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 9-63, p. 19, 20, where the author argues that "the archive should call into question the coming of the future" and that a spectral "messianicity" is always at work in the concept of the archive. A distinction between messianism and messianicity is put forward by Derrida in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf, (London: Routledge, 1994). On a notion of archive that is "established to make sense of the now" see "Feminist Time: A Conversation", p. 63. The intertwined relationship between past, present and future is typical of feminist way of narrating history: As Elizabeth Grosz has recently reminded us reconnecting to the work of Luce Irigaray, the task of feminist historian, and of feminist artists, is not simply to acknowledge that the reconstruction of the past illuminates the present, but also to forge future relations between sexes or among members of each sex: feminist historians and artist must write a history of the past from the point of view of the future, to wit in the *future anterior* tense. See Grosz, E., "Histories of a Feminist Future", Sings, Vol. 25, n. 4, Feminisms at a Millennium (Summer, 2000), pp. 1017-1021; Irigaray, L., *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. C. Porter and C. Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Irigaray, L., *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. G. Gill and C. Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Kavka, M. "Feminism, Ethics, and History, or What Is the "Post" in Postfeminism?", *cit.*, pp. 29-44, in part. p. 33. See also Kristeva, J. "Women's Time", trans. Alice Jardine, Harry Blake, *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 13-35. On the future anterior, the key reference is of course Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), p. 86.

3.   Performativity in Rosler's archive

The insistent presence in Rosler's archive of images of wounded or tortured bodies, which is something that differentiates the newer version from the previous one, suggests that the ground that Rosler plays on is the shared condition of vulnerability that Butler claims to be the foundation of our human condition. This ontology of the human has been developed by Butler over the last years in dialogue with the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero along the line of Hannah Arendt 's reflections on uniqueness, exposure and natality and Levinas' conception of an ethics that stems from the apprehension of the precariousness of life through the encounter with the face of the Other. This view, which pays fundamental attention to notion such as relation and dependency, entails a rejection of the autonomous sovereign subject of the Western philosophical and political tradition, which, by contrast, is defined as closed and self-sufficient.[38]

The human condition is characterized by the fact that from its very beginning a life is exposed and vulnerable, to wit consigned to the *vulnus*, to the alternative between the wound that the other can inflict and the care that the other can provide, and it is unwilling proximate to the others and to circumstances beyond one's control.[39] Precariousness thus configures a condition in which it is the relation to the other that counts: the "body" is not closed but rather open and exposed, bound to the other in precariousness, and for this reason the body "is a social phenomenon". Our first relationship is with our mother, but the condition of vulnerability and exposure is something that characterizes all our life and exposes it to a condition of dependency on

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[38] Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit., p. xi ss., p. 48, where Butler comments Cavarero's work; Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., p. xxvi-xxx., 2 ss., pp. 13-15, pp. 33 ss., 43, 48 where she claims for a "recognition of precariousness as a shared condition of human life" and p. 19, 31, 140, 147, 165 ss. regarding a notion of "social" ontology; for the critique of individualism, see Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., p. 20, 33. Adriana Cavarero is a feminist political philosopher, Professor at the University of Verona and Visiting Professor at New York University, and also one of the most preeminent scholars of Hannah Arendt: see Cavarero, A. *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, cit.; Cavarero A., *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, cit.. See also: Butler, J and Cavarero, A. *Condizione umana contro "natura"*, cit..

[39] For the discussion of the alternative between wound and care, see in particular Cavarero A., *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, cit., pp. 30-35 of the Italian edition (hereafter, I'll refer to this edition). For the notion of "unwilled proximity", see Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., p. 26.

anonymous others, to wit on persons "we cannot name and do not know, and who may or may not bear traits of familiarity".[40]

Reflecting on the global condition of violence and war after the 9/11 attack, Butler underlines that some lives are more precarious than others, more subject to violence and less protected. The US visual and discursive normalization of the war frames some populations "as targets of destruction", in this way performing, through the iteration of social norms, a dehumanization of certain populations, and at the same time defining itself as invulnerable to any attack. This divide is revealed by the difference in social "grievability" of the lives lost during the war: the deaths of the US soldiers are nationally recognized and amplified by public representations of the names, images, and narratives of the persons who were killed, whereas other losses, belonging to non-US nationals and who the US has killed, are completely ignored and unnamed. This different allocation of "grievability" involves a different ontological status of the subject: only if a loss is grieved, to wit, if the life is a "grievable life", it can be said to be recognised as such, otherwise the living being cannot be counted as a "livable life" and can be destroyed without having the perception of eradicate an "human life". The grievability of the life, thus, matters not only when life is already ended, but "is a condition of a life's emergence and sustenance" and affects the actual ontology of a life from its very beginning. The differential allocation of grievability decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, "operating to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human". In parallel with the operation of gender performativity, the normative production of the subject is an iterable process and this is a *normative* ontology, not a deterministic one, depending on reiteration of social norms that are historically and socially contingent, and for this reason can be disrupted and challenged.[41]

Indeed, the divide between "grievable" and "non grievable" lives performed by US is grounded primarily on a sense of belonging to a national and religious community, that of the United States. On the contrary, according to Butler, the awareness of the shared condition of precariousness and dependency on anonymous others disrupts any established notion of the "we"

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[40] See Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., p. 61; Cavarero A., *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, pp. 30 ss. See also Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., pp. 13-15 where she underlines that so a "future anterior is installed as the condition of [our lives]". See also p. 97.

[41] Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit., *passim*; Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., pp. 13-15, 22, where she underlines that so a "future anterior is installed as the condition of [our lives]", p. 19, 31 and 45 regarding a notion of "social" ontology, and p. 38 where she recalls the tragedy of Antigone; 168 about gender performativity.

and establishes a new sense of who "we" are, which establishes the basis of the assumption of responsibility of the global condition of injustice. The condition of dependency and proximity to the world first of all "animates responsiveness to that world", and this primary responsiveness may include different affects like pleasure, rage, suffering, hope as well as grief or coldness when someone dies; but, as said, our primary response, for example our coldness in front of the death of a "non grievable" life, is a consequence of "a certain field of intelligibility" that frames the impinging world and divides between "grievable" and "non grievable" lives. The reflection on the shared precariousness and dependency challenges this field of intelligibility because the body is regarded for its socially *ecstatic* structure, meaning "ec-static ..., literally, to be outside oneself": its persistence depends on what is *outside* itself, this outside being an anonymous other, or someone who is not "like me". In other words, the recognition that there is someone who is not "like me" but anyway is "proximate" to me implies to take account of him or her under the umbrella of a shared condition of vulnerability and dependency. As Butler claims, in a passage that might represent a point of difference with Cavarero's philosophy, "if I can still address a "we", or include myself within its terms, I am speaking of those of us who are living in certain ways *besides ourselves*, whether in sexual passion, or emotional grief, or political rage", to wit besides the normative frame imposed by regimes of power, but also besides ourselves because of the recognition of the condition of dependency on anonymous others. Responsibility, in Butler's reasoning, is a *collective* responsibility, not an individual one, a responsibility grounded on being part of a community, a "we", but a community that is not founded on nation, territory, language or culture but on this shared condition of vulnerability and dependency; and it is a *global* responsibility whose first obligation is to minimize precariousness and its unequal distribution across the globe because "if I destroy the other, then I destroy the one on whom I depend in order to survive, and so I threaten my own survival with my destructive act".[42]

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[42] Regarding the definition of "ecstacy", "ec-static" and "socially ecstatic body", see Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit., p. 25; Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., p. 33, p. 49, pp. 52-53 where she says that "The subject is always outside itself, other than itself, since its relation to the other is essential to what it is (here, clearly, I remain, perversely, Hegelian). But as Butler concludes, the ties that bound me to the other implies that also who "I" am depends on the other and thus I have not to kill the other also because "If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you? When we lose some the these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do" See also Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit., p. 22. See also Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., p. 44, where she adds: "If I survive, it is only because my life is nothing without the life that exceeds me, that refers to some indexical you, without whom I cannot be". For the dialogue between Butler

As Butler underlines along the line of the cultural transposition of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, the precarity of the lives of the Others and their ontological exposure to violence can be apprehended first of all from images of violence, and of war in particular, and this apprehension is the first step to the full recognition of precariousness and dependency as a shared condition of humanity. Levinas' theorization on the "face" suggests to disrupt dominant forms of representation, and, according to Butler, if we are able to read the *limit* of the frame or to grasp the presence of deaths that are only partially "eclipsed" from the mainstream images of war, which are meant to recruit us to the waging of war, it is possible to apprehend "the precarity of any and all living beings, implying a principle of equal vulnerability that governs all living beings"; and "since we are also living, the apprehension of another's precarity is implicitly an apprehension of our own". In other words, in a very postmodern vein and along the line of the disruption of the normativity of gender, it is necessary to focus on the limit, the margins, the partial eclipse of the representational frame to be able to grasp the instability of the frame itself, which is the first step to a subversion of it: the frame itself, thus, is affected by a sort of vulnerability that makes it exposed to "reversal [and] subversion".[43]

As Butler underlines about the Abu Ghraib images, which at first were not meant to circulate on the Internet, their release made possible to break with the context and the frame in which they were produced, and consequently

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and Cavarero on the notion of the "we", see in particular Butler, J. *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 30-40, in part. 33, where she also explore the notion of personal responsibility (see in part. pp. 83-136). On collective responsibility, see the next paragraph and in particular Arendt, H. "Collective Responsibility" (1968), cit..

[43] See Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, cit., pp. 128 ss.; p. 149; Butler, J. *Frames of War*, pp. xiii-xvix, pp. xxvi, p. 9-10, where she discusses the "vulnerability" of the frame; pp. 52-53 about the comparison between gender normativity and the norms that frames the precariousness of life; pp. 64 ss., pp. 74 – 77, where she claims that "for alternative frames to exist and permit another kind of content would perhaps communicate a suffering that might lead to an alteration of our political assessment of the current wars"; pp. 94-96, 98, where she asks, about the Abu Ghraib images, that even if, for privacy reasons, most of the time the photographs that we can view depict victims faceless and unnamed, "can we nevertheless say that the obscured face and the absent name function as the visual trace – even if it is a lacuna within the visible field – of the very mark of humanity?" and later replies: "the humans who were tortured do not readily conform to a visual, corporeal, or socially recognizable identity; their occlusion and erasure become the continuing sign of their suffering and their humanity"; pp. 165-173, for the relationship between social norms and violence. For the relationship between the notion of "frame" and that of "intelligibility" and "reproducibility", see pp. 7 and 9-10. See also Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., pp. 9-12, where Butler plays also on Benjamin notion of "reproducibility" as explored in the 1936 essay already quoted "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Butler underlines that it not only a question of producing "new frames", which is indeed part of the general project of alternative media, and that it is important not to miss "a critical dimension" of the entire project.

allowed the apprehension of a new meaning of what a "life" is and thus of a new ontology of the subject, providing the conditions for "breaking out of the quotidian acceptance of war and for a more generalized horror and outrage that will support and impel calls for justice and an end to violence".[44]

This "breaking out" of the context is enabled in a more permanent way if the photographs are inserted into a photomontage, where the juxtaposition with the new frame of intelligibility is made explicit and where the affect involved is not just a visceral outcry against the war. In *Gladiators* (fig. 2), for example, the image of torture (cfr. fig. 2 and 15) is adjacent to other images belonging to the margins of the dominant representational field of appearance: to the photograph of US soldier standing in front of the couch, whose legs resemble the one depicted in *Amputee* (fig. 3); and to the image showing people acting as gladiators, which, as already said, is a real photograph of the U.S. Marines (cfr. fig. 17) and, more than suggesting the parallel between insurgents and barbarians, intimates that the very barbarians are the US soldiers. Besides, all these photographs are physically "brought" into our homes, suggesting that these images are actually speaking "about us".

It is worth noticing that in *Gladiators*, the image of torture is far more smaller in size compared to the others, and it is placed in secondary position with respect to the general balance of the photomontage. This choice is pondered and reiterated throughout the entire series of photomontages: in *Election. Lynndie* (fig. 1), the detail of prisoner's face and body, smaller in size compared with the impressive figure of Lynndie England in the middle of the kitchen, is inserted into one of the appliances (cfr. fig. 1 and 7), together with other images taken from the Abu Ghraib camp that are disseminated throughout the kitchen and, most of the time, function as cover of cookbooks or magazines (fig. 7-15). In *Hooded captives* (fig. 3) the orange of the background and the curled up position of the figures in black and white recall the images of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, who used to wear an orange uniform, but the torture is not shown, and Abu Ghraib is just alluded in the book in front of the sofa (cfr. fig. 8). The torture is even more elusive in *Photo-Op* (fig. 5) where the faces of prisoners are on the screen of the cell phones in the fashion models' hands.

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[44] Butler, J., *Frames of War*, cit., p. 11. See also Rosler, M. "Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?", cit., pp. 208-209, where Rosler discusses the power of documentary photography to "lessen social stigma". Rosler argues that still images alone are less effective than moving images – film and television – in "reducing social stereotyping". I here suggest that the insertion of images that were not meant to document anything, like the photographs taken in the Abu Ghraib camp, into a photomontage enables this lessening of "social stigma".

This of course is a tribute to the graveness of the acts perpetrated in the camps: as Butler underlines, "to expose the victim further would be to reiterate the crime".[45] But it is also a choice dictated by artistic reasons, and Rosler's photomontages differ significantly from other recent representations of the Iraq war. Thomas Hirshhorn, for example, in occasion of the 2008 Brighton Photo Biennial, presented an 18-mentre long banner, aptly entitled *The Incommensurable Banner* (fig. 23), where he juxtaposed, in a straightforward way, pictures of bodies torn apart by munitions used during the war in Iraq (fig. 24). It can be argued that with this work, the Swiss artist depicted what Cavarero has called the *horrorism* of contemporary violence, to wit "the peculiarly repugnant character of so many scenes of contemporary violence".[46] The neologism, according to Cavarero, is justified by the inadequacy of the traditional political categories, such as "war" and "terrorism", in naming episodes that run from suicide bombers to torture and "mistake" such as the American bombing of a wedding feast in Iraq in May 2004. These episodes are examples of unilateral violence addressed towards "defenceless persons", such as civilians or prisoners (and often the "defenceless" is the very target of the violence), and they are a kind of violence that mainly attacks the integrity and uniqueness of the human body. According to Cavarero, it is indeed from the point of view of the defenceless, and not that of the warrior, that it is possible to name and describe these phenomena and to construct an ontology of vulnerability.[47]

Rosler represents the violence inflicted to the helpless *par excellence* in *Photo-Op* (fig. 5), where, lying on a armchairs, there two died children. But as Rosler herself acknowledges, "horror is not my genre"[48] and *Bringing the War Home* is not a representation of the repugnancy of contemporary violence. Rosler's art, along the line of Butler in particular, challenges the assumption of normativity of the divide between "grievable" and "non grievable" lives and subverts the stability of the frame that divide who counts and who does not count as human life. Her photomontages affirm "precarity" as category of identity that exceeds and traverses the traditional ones and indicates

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[45] Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., p. 95.

[46] See Cavarero A., *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, cit., p. 29, 15.

[47] Note that the original title in Italian reads *Orrorismo, ovvero della violenza sull'inerme* (Horrorism: on the violence against the defenceless).

[48] Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", p. 3.

precariousness and dependency as shared conditions of the "human", at the same time urging us to think about the unequal allocation of this precarity within the world.

4.   Taking collective responsibility: democracy in Rosler's archive

In the first series, Rosler wanted to suggest that the natural consequence of claiming that the spheres of domesticity and politics were not disconnected, was that everybody had to be held responsible for what went on within the world: responsibility means first of all to *respond* and thus Rosler's art invoked a response not only to the violence perpetrated during the war, which had not to be considered as confined "over there" but as nearby, but also to the fact that our culture used to propagate a picture of the world where women were relegated into the sphere of domesticity, and it was, thus, perpetrating violence not only abroad, but also every day in our homes, confining women into rigid roles.[49]

With "responsibility", Rosler intended to refer to a *political* responsibility and not to an individual (moral or juridical) one, to wit a responsibility that Hannah Arendt would define *collective* because it stems from our belonging to a group, a collective, and regards acts of one or more members of the community.[50] The concept "community" is something deeply embedded in several works by Rosler but as she herself remarks, there are multiple and intersecting communities, and actually the concept of community is "a discontinuous one, separated in space if not in time, and organized around principle of shared identification and shared goals, at least within a range of characteristics".[51] The fact that the first series was publicized into unconventional channels makes evident that by that time Rosler wanted to bypass the agency of art institutions and magazines and to address the public directly, which was of course a shared goal of political and activist artists in the 70s. Indeed, Rosler addressed the public as members of a national community, that of US, for the violence perpetrated in its name: this is a kind of community that no voluntary act can dissolve, unless, as Arendt put it, one

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[49] See in particular Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", *cit.*, p. 3 and 7.

[50] Arendt, H. "Collective Responsibility" (1968), in James William Bernauer (ed.), *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987), also published in Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), pp. 147-158, p. 43-50. We saw in the previous paragraph that the notion of "collective responsibility" is central also in Butler's theory.

[51] "Martha Rosler: art activist", Mary Paterson interviews Martha Rosler, *n.paradoxa*, 23, 2009, special issue on Art Activism, pp. 87-91, p. 87.

leaves the national community, but this would simply mean to exchange one community for another, since no one can live without belonging to some community.[52]

The newer series reconnects to this appeal, drawing, as said, a parallel between Vietnam and Iraq war, but dealing with a war that is claimed to be a response to a terroristic attack, inserts also in the debate of what can be considered justified in the name of self-defense and by a supposedly "noble cause", namely the rooting out of terrorism. Actually, also after the 9/11 attack, Rosler confirmed her commitment with anti-war protest and in 2002 she was a founding member of the interventionist collective Artists Against the War;[53] indeed, she shares with Butler an ethics of non-violence that tries to "find non-violent solutions to rageful demands" as a response to the precariousness of the other, as well as to our shared condition of reciprocal dependency which raises the ethical necessity not to kill, because killing the other means killing ourselves. In the 2004 version, the ethical demand is strictly correlated to a question of justice, to wit to the different allocation of "grievability", to use Butler's terminology: indeed, ethical relations arise only between two persons who recognize each other.[54]

In parallel with the previous series, the anti-war appeal for non-violence in Martha Rosler's 2004 series is addressed not to the individual but to the community, and thus is a call for a collective responsibility. But contrary to the late 60s series, in 2004 Rosler wanted and relied on the fact that her work would have been immediately publicized in magazines and art journals, and thus her audience was primarily the artistic community, meaning the term "art world", as Rosler herself has stated, "the large and amorphously bounded group of people who have some understanding of the frames, or universes of discourse, with which to view and understand works of art, including the capacity to understand irony and a certain degree of either overstatement or understatement and still know how to "place" their meaning within the

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[52] See Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", *cit.*, p. 3 and 7; see also the interview at Stanford University http://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/martha-rosler-2008 .

[53] See also Rosler, M. *Positions in the life world*, cit., foreword.

[54] Butler, J. *Precarious Life*, pp. 6, 128 ss.; Butler, J. *Frames of War*, pp. 33 ss. regarding the relation between justice and the notion of survivability and sustainability of conditions of life; pp. 172-173, 177-178, 180-181 where she claims that "The ethical question of whether or not to do violence emerges only in relation to the "you" who figures as the potential object of my injury. But if there is no "you" or the "you" cannot be heard or seen, then there is no ethical relation".

broader on-going conversations about meaning".[55] This suggests that the 2004 *Bringing the War Home* is not, or at least not only, an *activist* work of art: this work does not aim only to politicking, agitation or mobilization of the crowd and Rosler makes use of "the art world and its assumption as a base", and in particular its previous knowledge about the first *Bringing the war Home* series, in this way showing an intrinsic theatricality.[56]

Regarding the appeal of taking responsibility for the ongoing war in Iraq, this could be of surprise since the art world community is traditionally against wars, and the war in Iraq in particular. Yet, as again Hannah Arendt has clearly stated in the 1968 essay about those who refused to be drafted into the war in Vietnam, the political resistance of a group of people does not cancel their responsibility for what is done in their names as members of the political community. As said, the political community is a group which no voluntary act of us can dissolve, and thus each one must be held responsible for things he or she did not participate in, and even has opposed, but however were done in her name. According to Arendt, responsibility must not be confused with guilt, or with guilt feelings, which are strictly personal: "it is only in a metaphorical sense that we can say we feel *guilty* for the sins of our fathers or our people or of mankind, in short for deeds we have *not* done"; and an admission of "collective guilt" may even have the effect of a whitewash of those who *had* done something, and is actually a declaration of solidarity with the wrongdoers. Taking responsibility, on the contrary, is never a declaration of solidarity with the wrongdoers, and this appears particularly true with regards to the acts of violence perpetrated against detainees in the Abu Ghraib camp. Granting that (but this claim will be put under discussion in the next paragraph) feminism concerns women's behavior, taking responsibility for torture perpetrated by

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[55] "Martha Rosler: art activist", Mary Paterson interviews Martha Rosler, *cit.*, p. 91.

[56] See Martha Rosler interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, "Taking Responsibility", *cit.*, p. 2-3; "Tarzan&Jane", an encounter between Thomas Hirschhorn and Martha Rosler, *cit.*, 96-101, where she says that "My works [that are] centered on domesticity might fit [the category of political/activist art], were it not for the fact that feminist discourses provided the thematic framework" and later, about the reprise of *Bringing the War Home* that "I decided to confront the geopolitical scope and desperately immoral character of this murderous governmental enterprise by echoing a body of work whose political force had waned in the interim"; "Martha Rosler: art activist", *cit.*, p. 90 where Rosler states that "I think that it is an achievement to be known as an artist and an activist … I do not feel it necessary to choose between these selves or roles, and I would certainly say that the bulk of my work is art. Activism does not consist in making images. That some of my images can be useful for activism is terrific, and some of the more agitational or pointed works have been made to that end. But many are not. Furthermore, not even all these works are directly translatable to audiences outsides the art world".

female soldiers means to recognize that violence was committed by a member of the same community which until now were supposedly only victim of violence, not agent, and not to consider this phenomenon as an outcome of "few bad apples".[57]

Rosler's 2004 series of photomontages, thus, requires the participation of the viewer and speculates on the presence of the beholder as an intrinsic part of the work, and in this sense reconnects to the long tradition of activated spectatorship that dates back to the experimental German theater of the 1920s, Minimalist sculpture and post-Minimalist installation art in the 1970s, Beuys's social sculpture and socially engaged performance art, up to, more recently, the artworks recollected under the umbrella concept of "Relational Art" and explored in Nicolas Bourriaud's 2002 book "Relational Aesthetics". Indeed, during an interview with Benjamin Buchloh, Rosler has stated that in the late 60s she "was very interested in the idea of presentness, sharing an actual physical space with your audience, and how that smashes the modernist paradigm", and mentioned Michael Fried famous essay "Art and Objecthood" where the latter explores the idea of "theatricality" as the key to understand the experience of Minimal Art. The sensibility of Minimal Art, as Fried puts it, is theatrical first because it is concerned with "*the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist [i.e. minimal] work*" and secondly because it *depends* on the participation of the beholder. Robert Morris himself – who, not surprisingly, is the author of several performances in the 60s and we have seen in the introduction that in the 70s was committed with activism - emphasizes the minimal artists' interest in controlling "the entire situation" (object, light, space, body), which includes, as Fried underlines, the *beholder*'s body, in order to extort from the latter a "special complicity".[58]

Recently, the experience of Minimal Art has been evoked as the artistic root of the new practices gathered under the umbrella of Relational Aesthetics.

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[57] Arendt, H. "Collective Responsibility" (1968), cit., pp. 147-158, p. 43-50, 44, 45. See also Arendt, H. *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*, in Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Responsibility and Judgment*, cit. 17-48 (see p. 28 for the sentence quoted). Arendt's paper is a response to another article of the same title: Feinberg, J. "Collective Responsibility", *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 65, No. 21, Sixty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division (Nov. 7, 1968), pp. 674-688. See also Rosler's response to the questionnaire formulated by Benjamin Buchloh for *October* in 2008 (*October*, special issue on artistic responses to Iraq conflict, 123, Winter 2008).

[58] See Rosler, M. *Positions in the life world*, cit., foreword and Buchloh, B. *A Conversation with Martha Rosler*, cit., p. 27.; Fried, M. "Art and Objecthood" in Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: a Critical Anthology*, Dutton, 1968, pp. 125 ss.; Morris' essays "Notes on Sculpture" and "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2", published in *Artforum*, Vol. IV, N. 6, February 1966, and Vol. 5, N. 2, October 1966. See also Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, The Mit Press, 1977, pp. 201, 254, 262, 266 ss.

The latter - informed, as Bourriaud puts it, by a *democratic* concern - calls for an exploration of the relations existing between people and focuses on the sphere of inter-human relations, looking at meetings, encounters, events, etc. as aesthetic objects. The underlying idea of Bourriaud's book is that the more "open to all" the work is, the more it will be "democratic" and thus aesthetically valuable: as Claire Bishop summarizes, "Bourriaud equates aesthetic judgment with an ethicopolitical judgment of the relationships produced by a work of art … all relations that permit "dialogue" are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good".[59]

The connection between democracy and participation is questioned by Bishop in the same article where she suggests not only that "even the most "open-ended" [artwork] determines in advance the depth of participation that the viewer may have with it", and so in this sense any artwork cannot be said to be truly democratic, but, more crucially, that only the artworks that put in question a notion of collective identity, destabilizing (and therefore potentially liberating) any notion of community identity, can be said to be "democratic" and thus "relational".[60]

Taking on the notion of democracy as antagonism from Laclau and Mouffe's as well as Althusser's essays, which, we have seen, are important also for artistic practices of the 70s, Bishop remarks that a truthful notion of "democracy" requires to put into question the coherence and harmony of the members that seek recognition in a supposed group; the unease that the presence of the "Other" implies is indeed a signal of democracy, and at the same time a trigger of the questionability of the notion of (my, our) identity. The relations set up by relational aesthetics described by Bourriaud, Bishop concludes, are not intrinsically democratic since "they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness … there is no inherent friction since the situation is what Bourriaud calls "microtopian": it produces a community whose members identify with each other, because they have something in common".[61]

Bishop gives, as an example of a true relational artist, the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn who is well-known for his assertion of art's autonomy and for drawing a difference, based on J.L. Godard's thinking, between "political

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[59] N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Réel, 2002, pp. 27-28, 52, 57, 59; Bishop, C. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October*, Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 51-79.

[60] Bishop, C. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", cit., p. 78.

[61] *Ibidem*, p. 67.

artist" and artists that "do the artwork politically".[62] In various occasions, Hirschhorn has stated that the thematic core of his recent work, which often deals with issues related to war, is the relationship with the Other (which of course, is a reference to Levinas's thinking) and that his artwork aims to "create the conditions for confrontation or the conditions for a dialogue, directly, from one to one". The political meaning of Art lies in the "agreeing" with the Other which is never an unconditional approval but it is an agreeing "with the reality in order to change it".[63] According to Bishop, Hirschhorn is a truly relational artist because the relationships produced by his art are marked by "sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging, because the work acknowledges the impossibility of a "microtopia" and instead sustains a tension among viewers, participants, and context".[64] Indeed, Hal Foster seems to suggest the same idea when, discussing Hirschhorn as archivist artist, underlines his will "to fashion distracted viewers into engaged discussants" and draws attention to the attitude of his "Monuments" - dedicated to philosophers beloved by Hirschhorn but purposely located at a remove from "official" sites connected to them - to create collision between "the radical status of the philosopher" and "the minor status of the host community" (a clear reference to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the minor).[65] The monuments, Foster suggests, represent an archive that convey antagonisms both at philosophical and political level, as well as at social and economic one, and articulate the differences between the "minor" and "major" communities, disrupting the official and institutional functions of the latter.[66] Along the same line of thought, and explicitly quoting Lacau's essay, Butler underlines that antagonism is not resolved by conceiving a more inclusive framework, first of

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[62] Note that "Doing art politically" is an expression that recalls the subtitle of an Italian renowned biography of Hannah Arendt: see Boella, L. *Hannah Arendt, Agire politicamente, pensare politicamente* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1995), whose subtitle in English reads "Acting politically, thinking politically".

[63] "Tarzan&Jane", an encounter between Thomas Hirschhorn and Martha Rosler, *cit.*, 96-101.

[64] Bishop, C. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", cit., p. 70.

[65] See Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

[66] Foster, H., "An Archival Impulse", cit., p. 6-11, in part. 9.

all because the condition of dependency on anonymous other does not imply the other be "like me".[67]

In addressing her appeal to take collective responsibility first of all to the artistic community, Rosler plays on the knowledge of her previous work to draw the parallel between the Vietnam and Iraq war but also, "bringing" the images of tortured prisoners into our home, disrupts the notion of "national" community and conveys this sense of "unease" that the presence of the "Other" implies. Only when one recognizes the Other as belonging to its own community, a belonging that, as said, is not meant to ignore the differences and antagonisms, one can also recognize that the violence, perpetrated against the Other by a member of the same community, is an act for which one can be held responsible. On the contrary, if the Other is a life that does not "count", there is no loss when violence is perpetrated against him or her, and consequently there is nothing one can be said to be responsible for. This ethics of responsibility is shared in both versions of *Bringing the War Home*, but the 2004 version is fuelled also by concerns with global justice: as Butler would put it, after 9/11 entire populations are more exposed to violence and more vulnerable than others, and the first response to global war is to minimize the different allocation of vulnerability.

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[67] Butler, J. *Frames of War*, cit., p. 148.

5.   Conclusion: rethinking feminism after Abu Ghraib

The previous chapter has ended underlining that the theatricality of Rosler's archive is primarily meant to draw a parallel between the violence perpetrated during the Vietnam and Iraq war on the battlefield. But as said, the late 60s version, accosting social – private and public - structures, pointed also towards the daily violence perpetrated in our homes by the war and consumer driven American society, which confined women into rigid roles. Rosler's 2004 series, on the contrary, shows female Western figures performing very different roles: in *Hooded, Captives* (fig. 4), the female figure represents a world, that of fashion models, where women wish to be objects of the male sexual gaze and where they appear as self-confident and (also financially) independent; but at the same time, Rosler inserts in *Saddam's Palace, Frebreze* (fig. 6) the images of a young woman, taken from an advertisement of the spray "Febreze", who represents the typical "next door girl", apparently happy just to take care of her house; in *Election, Lynndie* (fig. 1) Rosler inserts in the kitchen an emblematic image of woman as aggressor, but, among many others at her disposal (cfr. fig. 12), she has chosen a character that has been read in contrasting way: as dominatrix (a female with a man on a leash) and the counterpart of the heroine of the Iraq war, Jessica Lynch[68]; and as the victim of Army Spc. Charles Graner, her lover and superior officer and one of the most sadistic abusers in the Abu Ghraib scandal, who actually ordered her to pose for the camera (for a photograph depicting Charles Graner, see fig. 9 and 15; note that both images are inserted in the photomontages: cfr. fig. 1 and 2).[69] Dora Apel draws attention to the fact that England looks away from the camera, toward the human being at the end of the leash she holds, which, according to her, is a palpable signal of her discomfort and, possibly, of the fact that "the youthful England is trapped in a descending spiral of victimization produced by the

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68 Cfr. Muñoz, J. E. "Performing the State of Exception, Coco Fusco's *Operation Atropos* and *A Room of One's Own*", *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (T 197) (Spring, 2008), pp. 136 ss., p. 137 who claims that the dichotomy England/Lynch is not dissimilar from the age-old virgin/whore binary that used to structure knowledge about gender and women.

69 Indeed during the trial, it was demonstrated that England, who is actually an administrative person and should not have been in the prison, had a history of mental incapacity and learning disabilities and was ordered by Charles Graner to pose for the camera. He himself shot the picture of her with a prisoner on a leash and wrote its caption, "This is what I make Lynndie do." See Marshall, L. "The Misogynist Implications of Abu Ghraib", in McKelvey, T. (ed.), *One of the Guys*, *Women as Aggressors and Torturers*, (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007), 51-56, p. 53.

pressure to conform to the demands of prison culture exerted by her largely male peers and superiors".[70]

Since 1988, Judith Butler has suggested that "women" as category utilized by feminists in the 70s and pivoting on sexual (material and biological) difference, is not representative of the concrete lives of women and, most importantly in Butler's thought, fails to discern the more pernicious conditions of "oppression which issue from an unexamined reproduction of gender identity which sustain discrete and binary categories of men and women". As well known, in *Bodies that Matters*, she has brilliantly demonstrated that not only gender but even the materiality of sex is a construction and "there is no "prediscursive sex" that acts as the stable point of reference on which, or in relation to which, the cultural construction of gender proceeds". "Sex" is never a bodily given and is already gendered, already constructed, being "material difference" always "marked and formed by discursive practices", a compelled materialization that takes place through time and throught the reiteration of certain social norms (and in this sense is a process). The reiteration of the norm makes it possible its performativity, to wit its ability to produce the effect that it names. But the category of "sex" is also always in itself "normative", and in this sense "sex" functions as a norm, and is a power that *produces* the bodies it governs and, most importantly, is the norm through which the "one" becomes "viable" and that qualifies a body within the domain of cultural intelligibility. In the 1988 essay, Butler concludes that it is politically important to represent woman, but it is necessary to do that "in a way that does not distort and reify the very collectivity the theory is supposed to emancipate". This move, as well known, has been interpreted as a passage from an emphasis on sexual difference, typical of the material feminism of the 70s and 80s, to a focus on gender, typical of poststructuralist feminism of the 80s and 90s.[71]

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[70] Apel, D. "Torture Culture: Lynching Photographs and the Images of Abu Ghraib", cit., p. 91. On this topic, see also Fusco, C., *Operation Atropos*, *Journal of Media Practice*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 92; Fusco, C., *A Field Guide for female interrogators*, p. 60, 76. In 2005 Fusco with other 6 women enrolled in the "Prisoner of War Interrogation Program" run by Team Delta, a company created by ex-army personnel offering "authentic military experience" to civilians who want to learn techniques for extracting information. During the training, in the course of the interaction between her group and the former US military interrogators, their views on gender differences would pop up from time to time, and they were a strange mix of determinist assumptions and liberal concession of equality. They warned Fusco and her group that they might pull out sexist insults from their conceptual toolboxes to irritate them during interrogations. Fusco and her peers were treated to lectures on why men will always rule the world and how women all felt they had to prove something to everyone because of their own professional insecurities.

[71] See Butler, J. "Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in phenomenology and feminist theory" (1988), in Henry Bial (ed.), *The Performance studies reader* (London – New

Judith Butler's writings, along with others gathered into the umbrella of Lesbian and Gay Studies, have been seen as one of the triggers of the so-called "post-feminism" movement that, since the mid-80s, has challenged the foundation of feminism and in particular the cohesiveness of a "we".[72] The case of female soldiers in the act of perpetrating torture in the Abu Ghraib camp, required rethinking of gendered roles, and can be seen as a signal that the normative frame that used to materialize sexes in response to men's positions of social authority has lost part of its significance. In the case of contemporary women there seems to be different sets of "regulatory norms"[73] that govern their bodies and cultural identities, depending on the very environment they are inserted into: this can be the military (fig. 1, and 7, 9, 12); the world of fashion (fig. 4 and 5) or the domesticity (fig. 6) or any other. All this, though, bearing in mind, as Rosler does, that in a postmodern times "we are all equally victims" and thus there are actually no oppressors.[74]

The cohesiveness of the category of "women", thus, has been losing more and more pervasiveness and this also goes along with the multiplicity of meanings that "feminism" boasts today. But also in this respect, Rosler's art is not a melancholic commemoration of a beloved past where "feminists" were supposedly a coherent group and where the concern with justice regarded primarily the relationships between sexes.[75] In other words, the "home" and "the personal" of Rosler's 60s series of photomontages, the space where the

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York: Routledge), p. 158, 163; Butler, J. *Bodies that Matter, On the Discursive Limits of "Sex",* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. x, xi, 1-3, 231-232.

[72] See in particular *The lesbian and gay studies reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993); for the claim that this book, among others of the same period, would date the end of feminism, see Kavka, M. "Feminism, Ethics, and History, or What Is the "Post" in Postfeminism?", *cit.*, pp. 29-44, in part. pp. 30-31, where in particular she claims, quoting Nancy K. Miller, that "For the term "postfeminism" is invested with the memory of a collective project, a time when feminists could say "we" that is now gone". See also "Feminist Time: A Conversation", *cit.*, pp. 32–67.

[73] On the operation of "regulatory norms" on the bodies, see Butler, J. *Bodies that Matter, cit.*, pp. 231-232.

[74] For the claim that in postmodern times "we are all equally victims", see Rosler, M. "Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?", cit., p. 223; see also pp. 221 and 240 for a reflection of the value of documentary photography in relation to justice.

[75] See again Kavka, M. "Feminism, Ethics, and History, or What Is the "Post" in Postfeminism?", *cit.*, pp. 29-44, in part. pp. 30-31, 33 where she, commenting the words by Nancy K. Miller (see note 56), claims that "This is surely no more than a fantasy of retrospection, a way of shaping the past of feminism from the present anxiety about its fracturing, but the loss of this sense of commonality threatens to stymie feminist projects with either paralyzing sensitivity or nostalgia". See also Chapter 2, note 6, about feminist historians and artist's task of writing a history of the past from the point of view of the future, to wit in the *future anterior* tense; "Feminist Time: A Conversation", cit., p. 37. I refer also to the latter conversation for a description of the different "feminisms" of today.

struggle between sexes were primarily fought, becomes the entire western society, while the "political" becomes a global politics: in 2004, thus, "to bring the *war* home" means to reflect on a question of justice in our society, of the different allocation of rights and liberties among persons and on the mechanisms that lead to this different allocation, which are mechanisms that are in action not only at global but also at social level, and that forge also the new roles that women, as well as men, perform: the juxtaposition in *Hooded, Captives* (fig. 4) of a fashion model and two captives suggests that as the prisoners' lives are affected, in a dramatic way, by the frame that divide between grievable and non grievable lives, the model might suffer from a similar kind of cultural oppression; and "to bring the war *home*" means to assume collective responsibility for all kind of oppressions that occur in our society.

Rosler's art, thus, along with the theorization of an ontology of the human drawn by Butler and Cavarero, conveys also the will to overcome the particularization and personification typical of the 90s to ground a notion of "human" on different basis, and where a notion of universality plays a renewed role. This shift of attention from gender to ethics and justice might be a signal of a new era of Western feminism where feminism gives up locating oppression in male persons and recognizes itself in the struggle against *masculinist* attitudes, positions that women can identify with, confirming its role in the struggle to live "in a better world".

Fig. 1 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, new series, 2004, *Election, Lynndie* (Courtesy of the artist)

Fig. 2 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, new series*, 2004, *Gladiators* (Courtesy of the artist)

Fig. 3 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, new series*, 2004,
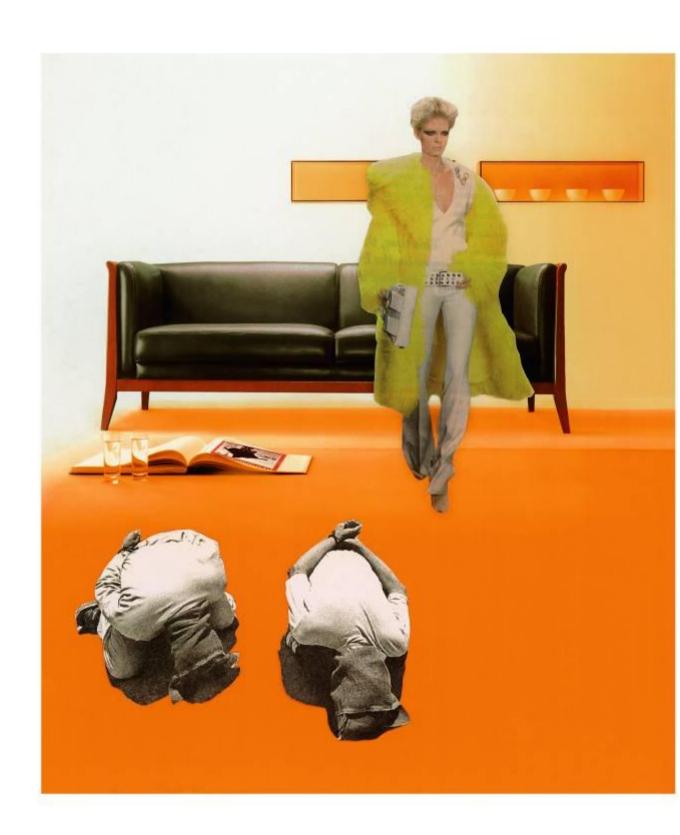*Amputee, Election* (Courtesy of the artist)

Fig. 4 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, new series*, 2004, *Hooded, Captives* (Courtesy of the artist)

Fig. 5 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, new series*, 2004, *Photo Op* (Courtesy of the artist)

Fig. 6 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, new series*, 2004, *Saddam's Palace, Frebreze* (Courtesy of the artist)

Fig. 7 Lynndie England and prisoner on a leash, Abu Ghraib Prison, Baghdad,
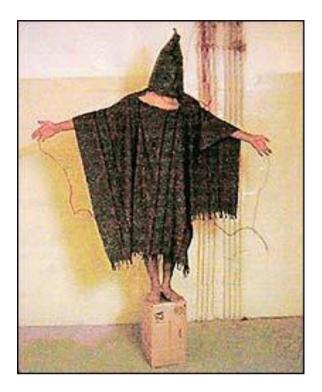October 25, 2003 (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig 8 Torture in Abu Ghraib camp, Baghdad, 2003 (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. Detainees placed into a human pyramid; in background: CPL Charles Graner and PFC Lynndie England posed for the picture, which was taken by SPC Sabrina Harman, Abu Ghraib, digital photograph, 2003 (Photo: Sabrina Harman, Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 10 Torture in Abu Ghraib camp, Baghdad, 2003 (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 11 Torture in Abu Ghraib camp, Baghdad, 2003 (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 12 SPC Sabrina Harman smiling in front of a death prisoner, Abu Ghraib camp, Baghdad, 2003 (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 13 Torture in Abu Ghraib camp, Baghdad, 2003 (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 14 Torture in Abu Ghraib camp, Baghdad, 2003 (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 15 CPL Charles Graner beating a group of prisoners, Abu Ghraib camp, Baghdad, 2003 (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 16 US Marines of the 1st Division dressed as gladiators (AP Photo/Anja
Niedringhaus; Source:
http://www.relentlesslyoptimistic.com/2004/11/who_thought_thi.html)

Fig. 17 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home*, 1967-1972, *Tron (Amputee)*
(Source: Martha Rosler's website)

Fig. 18 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home*, 1967-1972, *Balloons* (Source: Martha Rosler's website)

Fig. 19 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home*, 1967-1972, *Cleaning the Drapes*
(Source: Martha Rosler's website)

Fig. 20 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home*, 1967-1972, *Beauty, Rest* (Source: Martha Rosler's website)

Fig. 21 Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home*, 1967-1972, *Red Stripe Kitchen*
(Source: Martha Rosler's website)

Fig. 22, Life, cover page, 8th November 1968

Fig. 23 Thomas Hirschhorn, *The Incommensurable Banner*, 2008 Brighton Photo
Biennial (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 24 Thomas Hirschhorn, *The Incommensurable Banner*, 2008 Brighton Photo
Biennial (detail) (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 25 Mark di Suvero and al., *PeaceTower*, Los Angeles, 1966, also known as the Artists' Tower against the War in Vietnam (Source: Image in public domain)

Fig. 26, Mark di Suvero and Rirkrit Tiravanija (and invited artists), *Peace Tower*, installation at Whitney Museum, New York, 2006 (Source: Image in public domain)

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