



**Contribution to ‘The Anxiety of Images’, *Aperture*, no. 204, Fall 2011**

Julian Stallabrass

In 2010, Wikileaks released Apache gun-sight video footage showing the killing of over a dozen civilians in Iraq, along with the conversation of the pilots and their controllers. We see here, not for the first time, the moments during which the state commits murder, and not merely the careless manslaughter of ‘collateral damage’ but the deliberate targeting of individuals, and those who come to their aid. In 1903 H.G. Wells imagined individuals in tank-like machines, passionless killers who place their cross-sights on the troops outside, certain of their own safety, and bureaucratically efficient in their slaughter. There is some of that efficiency in this cowardly murder from the air in which imperial powers have long specialised, though there is also outright enjoyment of the killing.

The military has become a profligate producer of digital images, many of which are used as propaganda, and it has become adept at managing the image productions of news organisations to serve its own ends. Here, as at Abu Ghraib, they lost control of the image-making, official and unofficial, made by their personnel. Does the sight of state torture and murder—and not only of the moment of death (as in the killing captured notoriously by Eddie Adams) but of the process by which death is decided upon, change the citizens in whose name such things are done? Do the people in that Baghdad street make a claim on us? It is often said that documentary images alone lack the context and the explicit politics to make such a change. Here, though, the record seems ample, and we know that it is merely one of thousands of such videos. If something holds many people back, it lies far outside the frame: in the lack of the emergence, yet, of a compelling alternative vision of the state and its conduct, of democracy and equality, and of the equal claim above all of people, no matter where they live, not to be arbitrarily butchered.

Julian Stallabrass