

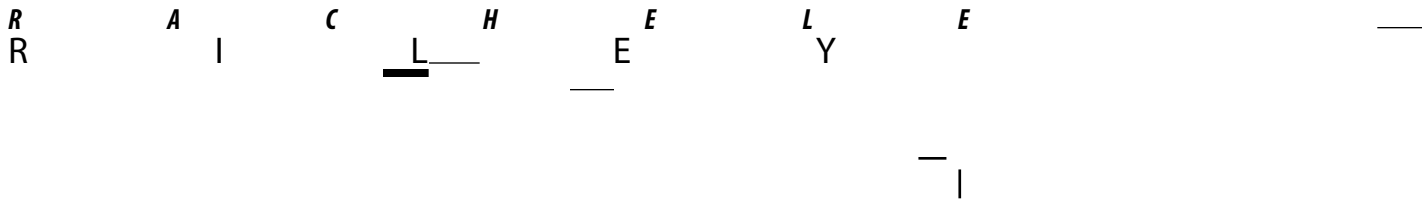
In Sontag's writing, I have learned about the role photography plays in representing war. Her analysis places stress on the pleasure inherent in viewing beautiful images and acknowledges that beauty neutralizes what is distressful. She posits that the relationship of image to reality is such that we do not regard the image as reality, rather we start to see reality as an image. How many times have I myself exclaimed to another: "It was just like in a movie!" In other words, so real it has to be fiction.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag investigates the pleasure in "flinching", at the looking at images of violence. Sontag argues that images have become habitual and banal. We have adapted to horror in life, and in images. In photographs of war, the many soldiers represented, with their numbed faces and their haggard bodies, "remain an aggregate: anonymous victims." Sontag adds, "that the scale of war's murderousness destroys what identifies people as individuals, even as human beings. This, of course, is how war looks when it is seen from afar, as an image." Her attitude strikes at the heart of the matter as I see it: war is represented as a dynamic movement and as a display of force, and the "scale of its murderousness," the degree of its calamity, is so large that we cannot absorb the sense of the individual human being. Our transformations of war into representations like the cemetery and the memorial, are intended for reflection and make an attempt to identify each individual who died. ⁰¹

⁰¹Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 2003

In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Jean Baudrillard describes violence in itself as "banal and i noffensive." It is "symbolic violence" that generates a singularity and it is this image that stays with us. Real is added as a kind of bonus: "not only is it terrifying, but it is real." Baudrillard has criticized the media of television for placing viewers before a simulated world, where the difference between real and fiction has blurred. Television news is all surface: a collage of fragmented images of images, divorced from an original. This representation becomes real to the viewer. ⁰²

⁰²Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 2002



This process is one by which, “consciousness intervenes, adds regulation, selection, and redisposition.” Thus the aesthetic form is one that fascinates and compels, at which we can look. It can turn a “horrific subject into something monumental.”¹³

¹³ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934

Filtering reality to establish a new visual structure is a quality that I admire in the work of Edward Fella. Lorraine Wild describes Fella’s appropriation of typography from everyday situations and his subsequent transformation into new forms of lettering as a “transgressive act that pinpoints what is previously unappreciated and raises it to a new level of significance.” Studying his work, I understand the pleasure of aestheticizing what is encountered in the everyday.¹⁴

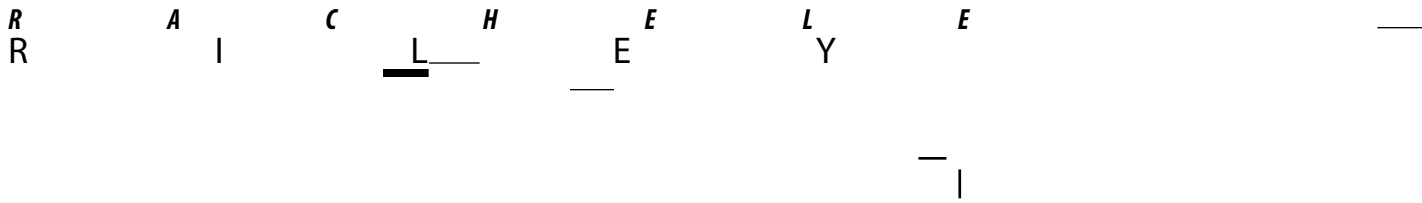
¹⁴ Edward Fella, ed. Lorraine Wild, *Letters on America*, 2000

Fella’s project, *Letters on America*, qualified my study of the everyday arrow. Used as pointers on packaging and guides through our streets, I began to investigate, through drawing, the communicative, emotional, and tactile qualities of the arrow. I am fascinated by its form and presence: an idealized weapon, and of infinite variation and application.

Although drawing is very satisfying, I am also interested in the medium of film and video. There is a magical quality in projection that defies scale and makes a monumental impression. I looked to the work of Stanley Kubick, Lewis Milestone, King Vidor, the Coen Brothers, and Quentin Tarantino to learn the rules of how they formalize violent interaction. In addition, I observe how they present characters, use pacing and sound to heighten tension, and create texture – differentiations between modes of visual representation.

precedents

My visual explorations in the two years of graduate school have been rewarding. A number of projects have been pivotal to the development of my project.



With each project I have wanted to push the boundaries of my visual language to express stylized violence.

In the 2003 Fall semester, our class performed a rigorous exchange of images in *The Visual Conversation* project, in which frustrations over the American invasion of Iraq were visualized.

The next semester, Spring 2004, we worked on individually defined projects that focused on one aspect of change. I created three visual statements about Revelation as a process of change in consciousness.

The *Conflict Flame* videos, made in the Spring 2004 semester, were a leap for me conceptually, formally and technologically. I was propelled into an exploration of the arrow as well as time-based media.

The *Battleground Election Map* project, which charts the 2004 US Presidential Election, became the focal point of Fall 2004 work. It is inspired by war maps and hiking trails, the research process and the dynamics of the fight.

The Virginia State Seal's violent details caught my eye the first time I saw the image in Fairfax, Virginia. Determined to investigate it, I chose to reinvent the seal with the intention of making the little noticed violence and the sexuality more explicit. This project was a breakthrough for me because I explored figural representation as a way to articulate more about what I am trying to develop with abstraction, and arrows in particular. In addition, making the critical layer a referent to pop culture has led me to consider ways in which the soundtrack for my film can be as repetitive and as catchy as a pop song.

The investigation I initiated in my Independent Study in Fall 2004, *The Arrow: A Typographic Narrative*, yielded much insight on which I have built my creative project. I began two drawings that work as one. I was interested in revealing the emotive qualities of the arrow and reflecting on its origins as weapon. I developed a methodology for drawing – every day I made a drawing and

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In March, I had a few very important breakthroughs. Not only was I motivated to focus on the editing and the sound, but I found a way to incorporate the typography and bring in the “pop” visual layer. I had been working on the drawings continuously, but always keeping the arrows separate from other elements. It occurred to me to put all the data in the drawing, to scrawl words and draw letterforms upon letterforms, to build up the layers of numbers in graphite. By this point in time, the number of Iraq War wounded had risen from 10,000 to 11,069.

The drawings came to life again for me. I began to cut out type from another pastel drawing during downtime, time that After Effects needs to render movie files. Ultimately, through the translation into film and with attention to editing, I found a new expression for the typography. I adjusted color channels and built up repeating layers to create an effect that makes a connection to the blitzing in the abstract static movies I had made earlier on and to the ways war is branded on television.

It was important to me that I incorporate into my project information about the current conflict in Iraq. However, I took measures not to refer to it specifically. My research began in newspapers and in books, but my main resource was the Internet. The readings from *The Art of War* that I selected and recited are the sections that resonate most with me and offer a perspective that brings depth to the piece and provokes thought.

My finished piece, *Visualizing the Art of War*, is a video animation about 8 minutes in duration. It has been screened in two locations at Chop Suey Books on March 19, 2005, and at the Anderson Gallery April 22 to May 1, 2005. There are other modalities to my project, some of which I have been able to explore and others, I would like to develop in the future.

The title sequence was created after the screening at Chop Suey Books. Originally, I planned to handle the type as I had in filming the statistics. My experiments one afternoon, filming an InDesign page layout off the screen yielded a clear and effective animation whose simplicity I appreciate.

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