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Photographic Interventions in Post-9/11 Security Policy

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Regardless of its cultural and discursive turn, the field of security studies has not yet paid sufficient attention to visual culture. In particular, approaches that focus on the articulation of security have been quite inattentive to images. With respect to post-9/11 security policy, it is argued here that the images of planes crashing into the World Trade Center have become not only a legitimacy provider for security policy but also part of every person's visual reservoir and pictorial memory, on which the successful articulation of security in part depends. It is therefore suggested to link the study of securitization with the study of both images and pictorial memory. The present article, by discussing three visual projects revolving around 9/11, looks for desecuritizing potential in photography and examines the extent to which photography can offer oppositional interventions in security policy. However, the surplus meaning that images inevitably carry with them, while limiting the securitizing potential of images, also reduces the extent to which opposition can rely on images.

Keywords security studies • articulation of security • desecuritization • pictorial memory • photography

ETYMOLOGICALLY, *THEORIA* refers to visuality, to 'viewing, contemplation, consideration, insight' (Hirsch, 1997: 14). However, the theory of security has as yet largely been unaffected by the pictorial turn in the social sciences and in human culture proclaimed by Thomas Mitchell more than ten years ago. According to Mitchell (1994: 2), we are living 'in a culture dominated by pictures, visual simulations, stereotypes, illusions, copies, reproductions, imitations, and fantasies'. There is no reason to assume that security policy would be unaffected by the world's 'hypermaturat[ion] with images' (Sontag, 2003: 105). The exclusion of visuality from security theory is especially surprising because the theoretical development of security studies includes a discursive turn that, however, is often limited to speech and language and ignores the non-verbal ingredients of discourse



and the relationship between verbal and non-verbal elements. However, discourse analysis is crucially limited by excluding visual forms of representation (Hansen, 2006: 217), and 'the speech-act of securitization is not reducible to a purely verbal act or a linguistic rhetoric' (Williams, 2003: 526). Hence the suggestion that more attention be devoted to securitization through images (Möller, 2002).

Discourse analysis 'works on public texts' in search of 'the rules governing what can be said and what not' (Wæver, 2002: 26, 29). These rules do not necessarily have to be governed by language, and public texts may also consist of visual material. What can and what cannot be done politically cannot be shown by reducing discourse analysis to what can be said and what not, because nowadays 'political communication is increasingly bound with *images*' (Williams, 2003: 524). The articulation of security is not dependent on language, because 'I can make a promise or threaten with a visual sign as eloquently as with an utterance' (Mitchell, 1994: 160). Likewise, strategies of de-escalation and desecuritization do not necessarily need language. While the focus on language reflects the ancient tradition of treating 'man' as the 'speaking animal' (Mitchell, 1994: 24) it ignores that we are '*Homo iconis* by our very nature, sight-driven animals that receive 90 percent of the data we collect and organize about the world through our eyes' (Perlmutter, 1999: 3). Indeed, 'the basic construction of the human subject' is 'a being constituted by both language and imaging' (Mitchell, 1994: 24).

Thus, security studies and the study of securitization and desecuritization can benefit from analyzing both aforementioned pillars that constitute the human subject. This is easier said than done, because, first, 'we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them' (Mitchell, 1994: 13). Accordingly, there is no consensus in visual studies 'with regard to its scope and objectives, definitions, and methods' (Dikovitskaya, 2006: 2). Second, images are intractable and ambiguous, because they carry with them a surplus of meaning, defying generalization and theory-building across time and over space. They challenge the academic claim to objective research in search of cumulative knowledge and generalizable laws. Reflecting these intricacies, this article is conceived as a thought piece, heuristic in character, stretching, perhaps, the boundaries of security studies without offering, at this point, a picture theory of security. Third, it is argued here that images cannot be analyzed independent of the huge reservoir of pictures that each person has stored in their memories. It is therefore suggested combining visual analysis with the analysis of pictorial memory. However, just as security studies has as yet been quite unaware of visual culture, academic memory studies tend to focus on literature, biographical material, art and architecture, thus 'assum[ing] a quaint, anachronistic quality' (Kansteiner, 2002: 191); they also

often focus on elite memory and ignore, to some extent, popular memory save for autobiographical writings (Brabazon, 2005: 65–78). In this article, the analytical triangle of security, visual culture and pictorial memory will be outlined with reference to three photographic projects revolving around the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. It is not implied that what can be said with respect to photography can also be said with regard to other forms of visual culture.

Security and Securitization

The term security abstracts from the differences of the phenomena it rhetorically embraces and makes them disappear behind a formula that represents only their smallest common denominator.¹ The understanding of securitization underlying this piece is derived from the main lines of thought introduced by Ole Wæver (1995) and later adapted by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (1998: 24–27). According to Wæver (1995: 55), security should be thought of as an utterance, 'a *speech act*': 'the word "security" is the *act*; the utterance is the primary reality'. The use of the word security is understood as constructing rather than reflecting reality. By focusing on the word security, the approach implies the analysis of the political consequences of the articulation of security. Security speech-acts claim validity, but, in order for a securitizing move to become full-fledged securitization, the targeted audience has to accept the representation of something or someone as a threat to its survival. The securitization approach understands security as an intersubjective social process encompassing speakers and audiences, and thus gives the audience an unusual degree of co-determination in security policy.

According to Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1998: 29), desecuritization is 'the optimal long-range option', because the non-utterance of the word security means locating issues in 'the ordinary public sphere' rather than using extraordinary means. Securitization is an extreme form of politicization and is welcomed as such by some authors because 'to get an issue onto a state's security agenda is to give it priority' (Booth, 1997: 111); but, in a crucial sense, it is also the opposite of politicization. It reflects the failure to deal with an issue within the political system's regular procedures of checks and balances, and it calls for the decisive treatment of securitized issues by leaders ignorant of control procedures, often under alleged time pressure and appeals to urgency, thus reducing democratic participation (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 29). It is for this reason that Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1998: 29) see

¹ For a similar argument with respect to the concept of identity, see Niethammer (2000: 36).

security as negative, and securitization, while occasionally unavoidable, as less desirable than desecuritization. It is for this reason, too, that this article focuses on processes of desecuritization.

Security communities are examples of desecuritized social relations among and between groups of people, based on the socially constructed knowledge that conflicts will be solved peacefully (Deutsch, 1954: 33–38). Introducing security communities in the context of post-9/11 security policies may seem inappropriate, because these policies are apparently based on the opposite of expectations of peaceful adjustment, but security community-building always involves ‘think[ing] the unthinkable’ (Adler & Barnett, 1998: 3), and at least as a long-term objective it should not be abandoned. In order for a security community to evolve, expectations of peaceful encounters have to replace experiences (and the memories of experiences) of violent encounters as the single most important principle underlying mutual social relations. The non-articulation of security may help create such expectations. Indeed, a period of desecuritization is ‘the ideal condition for a security community’ (Wæver, 1998: 93). It might enhance the sense of community among and between groups of people and, with it, their sense of security. Security community-building requires breaking with institutionalized orders of security production based on fixed notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ (because ‘others’ may easily be represented as ‘threats’), as well as the replacement of notions of ‘security from others’ with ‘security with others’. It requires seeing “‘others’” as having something in common with us’, acknowledging that ‘they too are (complex, fractured, contradictory) *selves* . . . like us’ (Couldry, 2000: 120), and accepting that ‘we’ are ‘others’, too. Security community-building requires partial identification with one another in the sense that, while no one should and can be reduced to that which he or she has in common with others, there is no complete separateness between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Möller, 2003: 318). Security communities, thus, are expressions of desecuritized social relations. They are also expressions of the form of security that is said to be necessitated by ‘the most pressing dangers of late modernity’, namely, a form of security that is ‘based on the appreciation and articulation rather than the normalization or extirpation of difference’ (Der Derian, 1995: 27). Arguably, post-9/11 security policies require, and visual culture can help develop, such a form of security. However, it may also be argued that taking a closer look at images will not bring us much further unless attention is also devoted to pictorial memory.

Securitization and the Evolution of Memory

It is suggested here that security policy reflects and follows a discourse that is to some extent shaped by images. Regarding the notorious Abu Ghraib photographs, for example, it can be said that it was not the treatment of the captives as such but rather the uncontrolled and uncontrollable dissemination of photographic evidence of this treatment that was unacceptable from an official point of view and that required policy change (Sontag, 2004). It can also be said that images help reproduce the state as the seemingly most important unit within the international system, and security policy as a part of the performative reproduction of the state and its underlying principle of sovereignty (see Shapiro, 2004: 105–204). This process cannot be thought of without memory: memory crucially helps us order and assign meaning to incoming information, visual and otherwise, and make sense of the world, by functioning as glue integrating ‘otherwise disconnected points in time into a seemingly single historical whole’ (Zerubavel, 2003: 40). Since we are permanently exposed to images, it appears to be a reasonable assumption that this process is influenced by images and the memory of images: each person carries with them a huge reservoir of images interfering with and influencing the perception and memory of every occurrence (Welzer, 2002: 175). This is not a new phenomenon. Memory, in the ancient and medieval worlds, ‘was treated as a visual rather than a verbal activity, one which focused on images more than words’ (Johnson, 2003: 6). For a long time, ‘photographs have laid down the tracks of how important conflicts are judged and remembered’ (Sontag, 2004); to ‘remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture’ (Sontag, 2003: 89).²

Without the capability to remember, acts of articulation would hardly have any meaning at all and processes of securitization would unfold in a vacuum. Regarding the European integration process after 1945, for example, Wæver (1998: 90) argues that Europe’s own past was securitized. This act of securitization and the changes over time as to the extent to which Europe’s own past could successfully be securitized cannot be thought of without the capability to remember. As Susan Suleiman (2006: 4) has recently argued, ‘as long as a past event continues to be stipulated as important for the present, collective memory of it will persist and evolve the way all memory evolves’. It is in this sense that the term collective memory should be understood here. In this

² A note of warning as to the alleged authenticity of pictorial memory seems in order: pictures often ‘diminish needs for recall’ (Lowenthal, 1985: 257). Increasingly used from the late 18th century onwards, book illustrations and, later, especially photographs were seen by contemporary commentators as replacing rather than promoting memory; they ‘became the norm of faithful representation, obviating needs for detailed recollection’ (Lowenthal, 1985: 257). This attitude reflects the powerful myth of authenticity that can be observed especially with respect to photography. Pictures thus may pave the way to forgetting or to adapting one’s own recollections to those transmitted by images. It is but a small step from looking at photographs as an *aide-mémoire* to looking at them *in lieu* of remembering.

sense, 'World War II and the Holocaust are clearly still with us' (Suleiman, 2006: 4). 9/11, too, is clearly still with us; it is still being stipulated as important for the present, and it is still being referred to so as to give legitimacy to current policies. Verbal and visual reference to 9/11 is a beeline to the use of extraordinary means, intensifying the process of securitization and circumventing the desecuritizing potential inherent in the original approach, not least because 'millions around the world' were witnesses to the attack and the continuous repetition of the attack 'in video footage on television screens' (Shapiro, 2004: 173). However, from this it does not follow that each person has the same recollections of the attack. Rather, it means, in a Halbwachsian sense, that thinking of the events of one's past cannot be separated from discoursing upon them; memories are collective in that they are formed and evolve in communication with other people and their memories (Halbwachs, 1992: 53). Thus, emphasis on the evolution of memory is important: memory is unstable, malleable, and receptive of manipulation and external influences (Levi, 1989: 24). When repeatedly told or shown as a story, memories change; they tend to become stylized representations of the past, mixing, often unbeknown to the narrator, one's own experiences with others' experiences (Welzer, 2002: 174–175). Memory is not primarily concerned with adequate recollections of one's own past but constantly reshaped in the light of present requirements (Olick & Robbins, 1998: 122). However, the idea of the evolution of memory is also problematic (see below).

Securitization can be successful only if it is in accordance with the collective memory of the targeted audience, because securitization requires the audience's acceptance of the securitizing move. From the actors' point of view, the issue is not only one of correspondence between securitizing moves and collective memory but also one of shaping collective memories through, among other things, the practice of securitization so as to produce this correspondence in the first place. However, the evolution and the deliberate shaping of collective memories do not necessarily have to benefit securitization but might also result in the desecuritization of social relations by historicizing past violent encounters (i.e. by emphasizing that they took place then and not now, under circumstances that are different from those prevailing now). This can be done by, for example, not referring to them any longer as the most important guiding principle for present and future policies. Security community-building requires such a rhetorical disconnection of the present from the past, because, in order for a security community to evolve, the memories of experiences of violent encounters must be replaced by expectations of peaceful encounters as the most important principle underlying mutual relations. Thus, the evolution of memory can benefit both securitization and desecuritization.

A Picture Is What It Is, Whatever It Is

Security policy reflects a discourse that is shaped by images and interpretations of images, usually politicized interpretations – that is, interpretations serving a political purpose. Since we do not know exactly what images are, it is suggested here to bracket the image as such and to focus on the meaning assigned to images, the interests underlying specific acts of signification, and the social processes through which a particular interpretation of a given image becomes the dominant one. This is in accordance with Mitchell's (1994: 282) observation that "language" (in some form) usually enters the experience of viewing photography or of viewing anything else', and this seems to support the focus of discourse analysis on language, just like Walter Benjamin's (1963: 64) classical claim that photographs need captions in order for them not to get stuck in the approximate. However, as the public response to the photographs of US soldiers torturing inmates in Abu Ghraib and the ignorance of written accounts of the US military's treatment of prisoners in Iraq (Hersh, 2005: 25) show, photographs occasionally unleash dynamics that language failed to trigger, perhaps because photographs haunt us; it is difficult to get rid of them once they have engraved themselves in a person's memory (Sontag, 2003: 89). It should also be noted that the translation of images in words is limited to that which can be said in a given language, and that every interpretation is the construction of something new (MacDougall, 1998: 246).³

'A picture is what it is', says the photographer William Eggleston. 'It wouldn't make any sense to explain them. Kind of diminishes them' (quoted in O'Hagan, 2004). Images necessarily allow different interpretations. Even such seemingly unambiguous images as the Abu Ghraib photographs have been interpreted in different ways, and different master narratives have been constructed with reference to them (Danner, 2004: 28). Binding interpretation of images ignores the 'excess meaning' (MacDougall, 1998: 68) that images by definition carry with them, diminishes them, deprives them of their inherent ambivalence, and emphasizes the alleged truth value of a given interpretation of a given image. Like every speech act, such interpretations, while 'offer[ing] the possibility of argumentation' (Zierhofer, 2002: 1363), claim validity on the basis of what a given image is alleged to show unmistakably, but no image can be reduced to the meaning assigned to it in a given speech-act, politically motivated or otherwise. Such validity claims aim to narrow the range of possible interpretations of an image until ultimately one specific interpretation becomes a duty, is accepted by a given political community, and has to be accepted by individual members of this community in order not to exclude themselves from the community or be excluded by others.

³ The interpretations of images offered below are no exceptions. The readers are therefore invited to look at the images and make their own judgments.

Although memory evolves over time, it is in a crucial sense rigid:

Memory . . . has no sense of the passage of time; it denies the 'pastness' of its objects and insists on their continuing presence. Typically a collective memory, at least a significant collective memory, is understood to express some eternal or essential truth about the group – usually tragic. A memory, once established, comes to define that eternal truth, and, along with it, an eternal identity, for the members of the group (Novick, 2001: 4).

Once established, collective memories 'will be available as a resource for mobilizing collective action even if they are not believed, in a phenomenological sense, by individuals' (Wendt, 1999: 163). This is why it is problematic to refer to collective memory in terms of evolution; some memories evolve, others do not. In the case of 9/11, the Bush administration has used the attacks 'to dominate political discourse and to discipline potential critics' (van Ham, 2003: 435) by continuously referring to the attacks as acts of terrorism and to the images of the attacks as proof of this interpretation, aiming to embed these claims in collective memory so that the administration's interpretation of the 9/11 attacks will give legitimacy to security policy for a long time. By so doing, the Bush administration aimed to create an 'ahistorical', perhaps even 'anti-historical', collective memory, the main characteristics of which are that it 'simplifies; sees events from a single, committed perspective; is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythic archetypes' (Novick, 2001: 3–4). However, the images of airplanes crashing into the World Trade Center show hardly more than airplanes crashing into buildings that we used to refer to as the World Trade Center. They do not show that this was a terrorist act: it could have been an accident; it could have been a criminal act. That this was a terrorist attack and not a criminal act, that this is what the images show, and that this is what ought to be remembered results from the limitation for political purposes of the images' meanings to one specific interpretation. Indeed, 'pictures alone cannot make for us the discriminations that we might like to make' (Hirsch, 1997: 71). This, however, is the strength of pictures, not a deficiency, deplored only by those who find unbearable or politically undesired 'the tension . . . between the little a photograph reveals and all that it promises to reveal but cannot' (Hirsch, 1997: 119).

Photographs, carrying with them 'many unintended sites of connotation' (MacDougall, 1998: 68), allow multiple and even contradictory interpretations that are equally appropriate. Photographs are by nature insusceptible to simple interpretations. As such, they do not seem to be suitable vehicles with which to securitize something or someone, because securitization requires straightforward threat designations that images – always co-representing similarities and differences, the general and the particular, the central and the marginal – fail to deliver. Contrary to Mitchell's assessment quoted above, then, images seem to be too eloquent to be easily used as tools with which to

make a promise or threaten. In order for pictures to function as securitizing tools, limitation of meaning is required: because excess meaning makes pictures ambivalent, politicized interpretations of pictures have to deny it. They have to diminish pictures by explaining them and by assigning to them one specific meaning, a procedure considered 'ridiculous' by Eggleston (quoted in O'Hagan, 2004). There is, however, no guarantee that the audience will indeed fail to engage with politicized interpretations of images. Such interpretations can marginalize and suppress alternative interpretations, but they cannot altogether erase them. They are fairly weak political tools, inviting disagreement, opposition, resistance and, in the terminology preferred here, desecuritization. Three examples of photographic interventions in post-9/11 security policy shall now be discussed.

Three Photographic Interventions

After September 11: Images from and Memories of Ground Zero

To discuss the photographic exhibition *After September 11: Images from Ground Zero*⁴ in the context of desecuritization might seem odd. After all, the exhibition, launched by US Secretary of State Colin Powell in February 2002, is 'clearly intended to shape and maintain a public memory of the attacks on the World Trade Center and their aftermath' and it aims at 'selling America's story to the world' (Kennedy, 2003: 315). The 27 images by the photographer Joel Meyerowitz⁵ can be seen on a website maintained by the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and are accompanied by quotations from, among others, Colin Powell and Rudolph Giuliani, prescribing to the audience how the images ought to be seen and the event ought to be remembered and linking the exhibition to the subsequent developments in US foreign policy and the internal developments in the name of homeland security, which by so doing they help legitimize. The exhibition retrospectively constructs 9/11 in line with the official interpretation (including its interpretation as an act of war rather than as a crime and its rigid distinction between 'us' and 'them' by, among other things, excluding 'them' from representation) and duplicates the 'moral absolutism' inherent in official US government views on 9/11 (Campbell, 2002: para 9). The exhibition is intended to shape a particular public memory, supporting the official master narrative of the event – a memory that is intransigent, that does not allow alternative readings, and that is characterized as much by that which is to be

⁴ See <http://www.911exhibit.state.gov/index.cfm> (accessed 30 March 2006).

⁵ For the entire project, see Meyerowitz (2006).

remembered (the event and its aftermath, the victims on ground zero)⁶ as by that which is not (for example, that which led to the attacks or the civilians killed in Afghanistan). It makes abundantly clear how the event is to be remembered by those identifying themselves with the US political community, and also makes clear that those who do indeed insist on a different memory can legitimately be excluded from this community.

However, that the exhibition's 'key frame is propagandistic' (Kennedy, 2003: 322) does not automatically mean that the photographs are also propagandistic. On the one hand, 'Meyerowitz assumes (and his photography projects) an ideal of empathic humanism as the natural responsive condition for his imagery. The ideological value of his work to the State Department lies in large part in its strenuous stance beyond ideology' (Kennedy, 2003: 323). Furthermore, by focusing on the attack's aftermath and neglecting the pre-history of the assaults, including the ambiguous US policies towards Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Iraq (Coll, 2004), the photographs help induce amnesia, decontextualize the attacks, and produce a very selective collective memory. Thus, it might be said that the photographs fail to offer an alternative view to the narrative delivered by the statements of US government representatives. On the other hand, the photographs do not unmistakably support the official view, either. This is because of the surplus of meaning that every photograph carries with it, but it is also because Meyerowitz, by focusing on the rescue effort, aims to strengthen the self by appealing to the self's strengths rather than by referring to threats to the self emanating from others. The images do not self-evidently support the official message, so the commentary is needed to establish the connection between the images and the fight against terrorism that the images as such do not convey.

After initial hesitation, the exhibition was sent on an international tour (discussed in Kennedy, 2003: 322–326), 'intended to transmit a universal message that transcends the politics of difference' (Kennedy, 2003: 323). Thus, *After September 11* is targeted at foreign audiences to convey to them, in the words of the Assistant Secretary of State Patricia S. Harrison, as quoted on the exhibition's website, 'the physical and human dimensions of the recovery effort, images that are less known overseas than those of the destruction of September 11':

Joel Meyerowitz captures the resilience and the spirit of Americans and of freedom-loving people everywhere. His images remind the viewer of the true face of terrorism and its threat to humankind – a threat that must be combated. This exhibit – this reminder that terrorists can attack again anywhere, any city around the globe, at anytime – underscores that an investment in educational and cultural exchange, an investment in mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries, is truly an investment in everyone's homeland security.

⁶ Though there is an irritating hierarchy of victims: firefighters and rescue workers are well represented, but members of other prominent groups of victims (delivery personnel, secretaries, janitors, clerks, odd-job workers; see Weinberger, 2002: 10) are not.

Thus, a particular interpretation of the images is prescribed to the (overseas) viewers that helps make the subsequent US security policy appear legitimate, rightful and without alternatives, declaring it to be in everyone's interest and implicitly dissociating those who disagree from 'freedom-loving people everywhere'. Thus, rather than transcending the politics of difference, the exhibition may indeed emphasize difference. Rather than furthering 'mutual understanding', it expects the peoples of countries other than the USA to adopt the US viewpoint. Thus, not 'everyone's homeland security' appears to be at stake but rather support of the view that 'the American homeland', which is to be secured, 'is the planet' (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004: 362), thus justifying US security activities everywhere.

As Harrison acknowledges, however, regardless of US efforts to increase homeland security, terrorism may strike again, anywhere, at anytime. The nexus, established by Harrison, between 'the true face of terrorism' and the obligation to combat it is as understandable as it is naive if intended as a general assessment. It ignores that an image's reception is to a large extent conditional on the circumstances under which it is received (Jessen, 2006). For some viewers, the 'true face of terrorism' may be attractive; its representation may serve as an invitation to support terrorism. In fact, regardless of substantial efforts 'to give the exhibition particular regional resonance and lend it civic and educational connotations' (Kennedy, 2003: 322), some overseas audiences are said to have responded to the images in a manner not intended by the US government, indicating that the exhibition's meaning 'cannot be securely tethered to either the mnemonic functions or the ideological connotations' asserted by official US representatives (Kennedy, 2003: 325): even 'the most conventional of images nevertheless has the capacity to operate on several levels at the same time and to subvert the very structure it so solidly upholds' (Hirsch, 1997: 120–121).

Here Is New York

One of *Here Is New York's* main functions can be said to be the construction of a collective memory respecting the multiformity of memories rather than declaring one way to remember 9/11 superior to others. Rather than representing an elitist view on ground zero – elitist in the sense that Meyerowitz was the only photographer granted access to the site with almost no limitation – *Here Is New York*, which opened in Manhattan's SoHo in late September 2001, wanted to show a democratic and non-discriminatory view on 9/11, 'open to "anybody and everybody"' (Shulan, 2002: 7). In the days following 11 September 2001, the organizers asked for pictures and received in the first weeks more than a thousand slides, negatives, prints and digital files from professional and non-professional photographers. The images, turned into

digital files and printed with inkjet printers, hung from wires without frames in a SoHo storefront in downtown Manhattan. They were presented without the photographer's name being revealed and printed out in exactly the same format. Because the images themselves were seen to matter, no captions were included, thus making it possible for the viewers to negotiate the images in the light of their own memories. The photographs were for sale, all for the same sum of 25 dollars. Proceeds from the sale of the images and the book benefit the Children's Aid Society's WTC Relief Fund.⁷

Here Is New York does not impose on the viewer a specific political reading of 9/11 and its consequences. For example, the book resulting from the exhibition⁸ accepts ambivalence by displaying a picture of people carrying banners declaring that 'OUR GRIEF IS NOT A CRY FOR WAR' (p. 686; see also p. 600 and p. 611) and a picture of a sticker warning that 'the DANGER is INSIDE of US! . . . resist the call to nationalist violence' (p. 517), but also a picture of inscriptions demanding violent retaliation: 'IT'S TIME TO Fight Back' (p. 544). Banners are shown stating that 'ISLAM ARABS AND IMMIGRANTS ARE NOT THE ENEMY' (p. 638), as are stickers proclaiming that 'ISLAM IS NOT THE ENEMY. WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER. LET'S WORK TO END THE CYCLE. PASS IT ON. . .' (p. 610), and banners demanding 'Liberty and Justice for ALL' (p. 642) are juxtaposed with incantations distinguishing between an unspecified 'we' and an equally unspecified 'they': 'THEY MAY TAKE OUR LIVES BUT THEY WILL NEVER TAKE OUR FREEDOM!' (p. 544), 'We will win. God Bless America!' (p. 544), 'We Are Not Afraid.' (p. 543), and 'OUR SPIRIT IS STRONG' (p. 650). In a particularly ambivalent imagetext, instigations to 'KILL BIN LADEN NOW!!' and to 'BOMB EM!' (p. 545) are assigned to a drawn figure conspicuously resembling the comic character Bart Simpson, who is not exactly known for his analytical rigour, thus effectively undermining the message. In a move that engages with the great US mythology and iconography and criticizes President George W. Bush's rhetorical recourse to the form of justice practised 'out West',⁹ a 'GOD BLESS AMERICA' sticker including the US flag pasted on a picture of the actor John Wayne is problematized by a comment declaring that 'THIS IS NO TIME FOR COWBOYS' (p. 615); on another picture, however, Osama bin Laden is said to be 'Wanted DEAD NOT ALIVE' (p. 593). This compilation is highly painful and disturbing, especially for those readers looking for simple answers along Manichean lines of

⁷ See <http://www.hereisnewyork.org> (accessed 6 April 2006). At the time of writing, \$850,000 has been donated to the Children's Aid Society.

⁸ *Here Is New York: A Democracy of Photographs*, conceived and organized by Alice Rose George, Gilles Peress, Michael Shulan & Charles Traub (Zurich, Berlin & New York: Scalo, 2002). The following page references are to this book; spelling and capitalization follow the images.

⁹ Asked if he wanted Osama bin Laden dead, Bush reportedly replied on 17 September 2001, 'I want justice. And there's an old poster out West . . . I recall, that said, "Wanted, Dead or Alive"' (CNN, 2001).

'we'/'they'; 'good'/'bad'; 'true'/'false', and so on.¹⁰ However, it is precisely because it refuses to give simple answers that it is an appropriate response to the complexities and ambiguities inherent in 9/11.

Iraqi Faces and Surfaces

Photographs may help transform others into the (ontological) Other, thus rendering identification impossible, but they may also help turn the Other into 'normal', desecuritized people with whom 'we' have something, albeit not everything, in common; people with whom 'we' are connected through compatible values; people with whom 'we' partially identify. Analyzing photography may promote understanding of how meaning assigned to images of other people contributes to securitizing or desecuritizing them – that is, to representing them as a threat to security or not, requiring specific counter-measures or not, and thus to legitimizing specific policies or not.

Consider Jan Øberg's photographs taken before the beginning of the US-led war against Iraq in March 2003. The project *Iraqi Faces and Surfaces 2002–2003*¹¹ serves as a substitution for that which is supposed to disappear according to Michael Geyer's (1997: 7) poignant remark that photography is 'an act of disappearance anticipated through substitution'. It can also be seen as a reservoir for alternative approaches challenging the representations delivered by the mainstream media and government officials that were focusing attention on selected representatives of the Iraqi state and the ostensible dangers emanating from their actions, including their possible future actions. In Øberg's words:

With these pictures I want you to get a sense of the simple fact that Iraq is not only Saddam Hussein, weapons and wars. Iraq is 24 million fellow human beings. It has been a civilization for some 7,000 years. It has a distinct, rich culture; it has norms, and – above all – it has pride. . . . Iraq has a young population; about half the people are under 16 years old. They are innocent, they have a right to live. . . . I have learned how important it is to go and see, feel, hear, touch and smell a place. Not all of you can go to Iraq but I invite you to travel a bit through the images of its faces and surfaces. Hopefully some of them can say more than I can by just using words.

The people you meet here have suffered unfairly, inside the inner cage of Saddam Hussein and the outer cage of our sanctions. Look at them and ask whether anything can justify that they shall also go through, or die, in a new war.

Øberg's photographic intervention in the process of securitizing Iraq and the Iraqi people is a desecuritizing move. It failed, however, due to the securitizing logic and dynamics of US and others' power politics and supporting media networks. Furthermore, the extent to which opposition can employ

¹⁰ As President Bush notoriously put it, 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists' (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004: 337).

¹¹ See http://www.transnational.org/photoseries/iraq/photo_iraq_index.html (accessed 30 March 2006).

and rely on images should not be exaggerated: the ambivalence of pictures works in both directions. Øberg's photographs and words nevertheless remind the reader that 'the imposition of an interpretation on the ambiguity and contingency of social life always results in an other being marginalized' (Campbell, 1998: 23) or, in the case of the war against Iraq, in an other facing material destruction or even death.

Conclusion: In the Presence of No Towers

The twin towers, materially absent, and the meaning assigned to their destruction, visually represented and incorporated into collective memory, are still very present in US foreign and security policy. Indeed, US military action after 11 September 2001 'has from the beginning had a strong memorial element' (Sherman, 2006: 121). The twin towers will be available as a legitimacy provider for a long time, seemingly narrowing the range of possible foreign policy options. They render difficult – but not impossible – a form of security that articulates and capitalizes on difference. If we agree that post-9/11 security policies require the appreciation of difference; if we also agree that intergroup relations based on expectations of peaceful change are to be favoured before relations based on the absence of such expectations; and if we finally agree that security communities, based on partial identification with one another, are adequate expressions of such intergroup relations, then it may be argued that photographs matter because they may help, among other things, to transform experiences of violent encounters into expectations of peaceful encounters and, by so doing, help develop security communities. However, one should probably not exaggerate the impact that images can have on security policy. The ambivalence that images carry with them, while limiting the securitizing potential of images, also reduces the extent to which opposition can rely on images.

Still, Øberg's photographic series is a counter-narrative to the view on Iraq promoted by the US government and many media networks. By not including in the series photographs of the assaults of 11 September 2001, Øberg challenges the US position that justified the attack on Iraq, among other things, with reference to 9/11 and Iraq's alleged involvement in international terrorism. In Øberg's images, the connection between 9/11 and the war against Iraq is broken, whereas it is precisely this connection that *After September 11* tries to establish. While both projects include explanatory statements by the initiators, Øberg aims to desecuritize Iraq while *After September 11* aims to securitize not only Iraq but everyone and everything allegedly connected with 'international terrorism'. Øberg not only tells a counter-story but also widens the viewers' imagination by focusing on subjects usually

marginalized in or excluded altogether from the official narrative: by showing the faces of men, women, and children he tells a story excluded from the Pentagon's representational strategy of showing people as 'merely extras, figures in the crowd, the collective object of a purportedly humanitarian intervention' (Gregory, 2004: 199). Øberg's story is one of differentiation between an 'official' Iraq, marginalized in his own photographs, and an 'unofficial' Iraq, prioritized in his photographs while being excluded from the mainstream media and political representations. His photographs are an invitation to think of the Iraqi people as people with whom 'we' socially communicate and partially identify.

Øberg's photographic intervention is normative, but, by juxtaposing his position with the position delivered by *After September 11*, every viewer may make their own judgment. Likewise, *Here Is New York* is not neutral, but, by presenting the images pure and simple and by not explaining how they ought to be read, the exhibition assigns to the viewer the task of interpreting the images and negotiating them in the light of their own recollections. As the text advertising the book resulting from the exhibition suggests, 'most of all, the book is a testimony of people speaking directly to each other about their fears, their emotions, and their desire for community. This desire is one of the strongest by-products of the horrible events of September 11, and it distinguishes *Here Is New York* from any and all other books about the event'.¹² Here, the emphasis is on people 'speaking directly to each other' (rather than mediated by official voices) and by so doing reaffirming the community. Direct communication with one another can be a liberating moment in the process of coming to terms, individually and collectively, with the assaults. Engaging with the pictures is distressing and painful, but such an engagement may result in policies based on a collective memory that, although referring to a tragic event, does not simplify; does not see 9/11 from a single perspective; is not impatient with the ambiguities inherent in 9/11; does not reduce the event to a mythic archetype; is a memory that has a sense of the passage of time, neither denying the pastness of its objects nor insisting on their continuing presence. *Here Is New York*, thus, is an important step towards the construction of a culture 'that no longer feels the need to homogenize and is learning how to live pragmatically with real difference' (Huysen, 1995: 28). As *After September 11* shows, and as Andreas Huyssen (1995: 28) has observed in a different context, 'we are far from that'.

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¹² See <http://www.scalo.com/newyork> (accessed 17 February 2007).

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