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Introduction for JWACS 7.2

Varia

Introduction: ambiguities and ambivalences in the representation of war and the work of war and culture studies

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This *varia* issue brings together five articles which each in their own way treat a fundamental concern of the *Journal of War and Culture Studies*: the sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit ambiguities and ambivalences which in themselves constitute an underlying dynamics in the (re)construction and representation of the war experience in varied forms of cultural production as exemplified in the articles which follow in image, drama, and narrative (essay and fiction).

The first article, Matthias Bandtel and Jens Tenscher's 'Front cover imagery and the social reconstruction of the Vietnam War. A case study of *LIFE* magazine's iconology and its impact on visual discourse' provides a link to the previous *JWACS* issue on the theme of 'Communicating War' concerned with the ways in which the causes and consequences of war are portrayed across diverse texts, imagery and media platforms. However, it is to be noted firstly that although the article provides an entry into this *varia* issue which is rich with theoretical and thematic resonance for the studies which follow, the reason for it being published in a later issue is not an intellectual one, as the authors make clear. Copyright restrictions necessitated a reformulation of the article with regard to how the images, the object of analysis here, were 'reproduced' and referred to. As the authors conclude: 'Since historic social artefacts like the magazine

covers analyzed here offer a fruitful insight into relevant contemporary discourses, the question of dealing with copyrighted sources becomes urgent for academic research.’ This is an important point and one worth repeating here. To return to the approach of the article, the authors firstly provide a carefully considered methodological approach using cultural studies and empirical models for the iconographic interpretation of images, finally arriving at what they consider the interpretation of the ‘iconological’ (their preferred term), Panofsky’s ‘third’ level of interpretation, where the intrinsic meaning of an image is uncovered. The focus on photojournalism is an important one since such images reach the contemporary public, penetrate ‘private communication’ and engender forms of proximity between civilians and soldiers (even if this may be illusory). The article ultimately uncovers the competing narratives of the Vietnam War in the images analysed, showing how these narratives accumulate rather than replace each other, in an evocative and persuasive analogy with a musical score, and indeed in a way that reaches beyond the iconography of one specific war to others.

The ambiguities and ambivalences that form one thread in the analysis of the first article are apparent once again, in different ways, in Wei Kao’s ‘Peace and Beyond in the Middle East: Colin Teevan’s War Trilogy’. The contemporary Irish dramatist’s work is taken firstly as an example of recent developments in Irish theatre. The more inward-looking concerns with national politics and society of Teevan’s predecessors have evolved in an era of globalization, perhaps under the rapid transformation of Ireland by global forces and its successes and failures since the 1990s. Taking the playwright’s trilogy *How Many Miles to Basra?*(2004), *The Lion of Kabul* (2009) and *There was a Man, There was no Man* (2011), Wei Kao then analyses the inter-related themes of each

play and their relevance to contemporary attitudes and engagement with recent and current conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. There is also a further evocative highlighting of Teevan's use of the intertext of Xenophon's *Anabasis* throughout his war trilogy, bringing together ancient and modern narratives of war, not least in the archetypes of the 'hero' and the (demonized) 'other'. The ambiguities and ambivalences of the trilogy's characters, their motivations and actions form a powerful representation of the complexities of war in the 'global village'.

In the third article Pepijn Corduwener takes us back to a defining moment of the mid-twentieth century, the Second World War, the Holocaust and the trials of leading Nazis which followed in "Eichmann is my father": Harry Mulisch, the Eichmann trial and the question of guilt'. As well as considering and comparing this distinct work with other reactions to the trial, such as the more widely known writing of Hannah Arendt and her enduring evocation of the 'banality of evil' in the 1960s and David Cesarani's more recent study of Eichmann (2005), the article also presents more general insights into both specific historical attitudes to the Holocaust in the Netherlands and more pan-European post-war struggles with silence and guilt. An analysis is developed of the very particular approach taken by Mulisch to Eichmann and his motivations, with a focus on the perpetrator and the use of empathy by the writer, and of Mulisch's concern with the modern development of what he calls the 'machine man' which allowed the perpetration of the Holocaust. The ambiguities and ambivalences taken as the theme for this issue are prevalent, and in what is essentially the analysis of a narrative, there is an unexpected link back to the power of the image in Mulisch's conclusion that the only way to understand Nazism is by looking at the images, rather than the ideas that led to it.

Katherine Cooper's "“Something must be done to stop the rot”": The City, Civilization and the Threat to Europe in Storm Jameson's *Europe to Let*', takes a further chronological step back to the interwar years and the early years of the Second World War, sharing with the previous article a focus on Europe, notably the threats to and the unease within Europe itself in 'an age of anxiety'. Using a close textual reading of Storm Jameson's 1940 novel, Katherine Cooper focuses particularly on the images of the city in the novel, with the modern metropolis representing both a site of potential solidarity and alienation. Just as what threatens Europe in 1940 is 'part of itself', something at the very heart of modern Europe, so the threat to the cities in the novel comes not only from the external forces of totalitarian states, but from within each city itself, indeed potentially from within 'the modern way of life'. As previously, ambivalences and ambiguities in the construction of these themes are necessarily part of a literary work, but another theme emerges providing a direct thematic link to the earlier article on Eichmann and the emergence of the 'machine man'. This theme is characterized by the threats inherent in the 'modern machine age' and its effects which enable war and conflict, and one of the 'most sympathetic characters' shows a distrust of mechanization. For Storm Jameson, the author concludes, modern and mechanized capitalism and the inequalities it perpetuates engender dehumanization and cruelty and present a persistent threat to European civilization, although in her final analysis the author interprets the novelist as offering possibilities for redemption and renewal.

Finally, Cristina Pividori takes us back one more step chronologically to the First World War, and to a fitting place to close the issue in this centenary year of the war's outbreak, in 'Of Heroes, Ghosts and Witnesses: The Construction of Masculine Identity

in the War Poets' Narratives'. Beginning with the premise that the 'dominant discourse of disillusionment' has not been fully able to contain debates around masculine identity, she looks afresh at narratives that we may feel we know. This is done in the suggestive light of notions of 'haunting' and the trope of the 'ghost' as identified in the work of Avery Gordon which has proved so fruitful not only for the analysis undertaken here, but for memory studies more generally. The figure of the 'ghost' as 'countertype to the hero' and as 'witness' allows a reassessment of the experiences of war and of masculine identity. Additionally, the issue of guilt (here survivor guilt) re-emerges and might be seen as a 'sub-theme' of the ambiguities and ambivalences taken as a thread throughout this issue, since it also runs, in very different ways, through each of the articles here. Above all, the 'soldier-ghost' becomes a 'destabilizer of dominant discourses'. The 'ghostly' allows for a different kind of knowledge to emerge, what Gordon calls a knowledge of 'the things behind the things'. When dealing with the haunting memory of war which lies behind all the cultural forms and representations here, it is also a suggestive description of the work of war and culture studies.