REPRESENTATION AND EXPLOITATION OF WAR AND CONFLICT: PUBLICLY
APPROPRIABLE MEDIA AS LOW HANGING FRUIT

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the phenomenon of War Porn, a term that describes the visual destruction of bodies in conflict to elicit a visceral reaction in viewers for the purposes of titillation and entertainment. I examine the historical trajectory of the concept across mediums, genres, and platforms. I argue that War Porn has gone from niche and discrete collections to a professionalized industry, operating on mainstream social media platforms, and consequently raising new moral and ethical questions about the exploitation of the publicly appropriable archive (or PAM). I contend that War Porn has been exploited in Mondo films, shock videotapes, and shock websites because of its status as one of the low hanging fruits of the visual archive, able to be picked and put to use with little fear of legal recourse by shock entrepreneurs working across several decades, dating back to WWII. In part, this is because of much of the contents status as orphan media, or media with unclear ownership or copyright status. These forms of exploitation have been shaped and defined by a series of government regulations. I argue that a key regulation that has created the ecosystem for War Porn to thrive online is Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which has emboldened shock entrepreneurs to make dividends on large, user-submitted collections of War Porn. I conclude by suggesting that we look to alternative representations of the brutality of war and conflict, providing the model of Dattalion, a network of over 100 Ukrainian women collecting visual evidence of war crimes, as one possible answer.

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This dissertation and the research contained within are dedicated to my dear friend Octavio Lozano who passed away unexpectedly in February, 2021, a veteran of both the Iraq War and War in Afghanistan.

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Introduction: Stumbling Upon Publicly Appropriable Combat Footage

In 2012, I was online, searching for additional archival footage to wrap up a documentary I was completing about my transition to civilian life after combat for my Master's program when I stumbled upon a large collection of Islamic State propaganda videos showing troops being blown up in IED explosions. Having been in two improvised explosive devices (IED) blasts myself as a mounted heavy machine gunner in Iraq from May of 2005 to 2006, this discovery was deeply personal to me. Anyone could find these videos, and anyone could watch them. The more of these videos I saw, the more I wondered if the explosions used to attack my convoy had been video recorded as well. I edited these videos into a vignette near the end of my documentary project and posed some questions. Could my kids see these? Is this how we'd remember the war? Yes. This was once propaganda, but it was now up for grabs in the publicly accessible media sphere. This experience introduced me to a type of media that I came to know as War Porn throughout my academic growth. My rough introduction to it, as described below, is what led me to many questions around the nature, development and ethical implications of the genre which I will explore in this dissertation.

NTFU and the Military: An Introduction

Unbeknownst to me while I was in Iraq from May of 2005 to May of 2006, some members of the U.S. military were sharing graphic photos and videos coming from the ongoing conflict in Iraq. One of the most popular places to share this kind of material was on a website called Nowthatsfuckedup.com (henceforth, NTFU), which started out in 2004 as an amateur pornography website, built by former Florida police officer Chris Wilson. As Wilson recounts, members of the American military deployed to Iraq wanted to join the website but had trouble paying because their credit cards would not work abroad.[1] Chris Wilson's solution was to add a

section to the website allowing troops to post pictures of themselves on deployment for free access. Whereas other sections of the website that contained amateur pornography was closed to non-subscribers, the military sections were free and open to public visitors, a detail which made military members posting on the site an easy target for critics. What started out as basic photos of service members quickly declined into an unfiltered collection of amateur military pornography and grotesque images from the battlefield. At best, this collection called into question whether the American military was treating combatants with dignity, and at worst whether or not a fraction of the over 230 images from the gory section of the website implicated any members of the American military in a war crime. Wilson admitted that he had no way of knowing whether the materials coming from the accounts on the site where actually of U.S. military personnel, but believed that he could tell.[2] Wilson estimated that 45,000 registered users were US military, and that 39,000 of the site's daily 130,000 visitors were also U.S. military visitors of some kind.[3] On at least one occasion, the website was hosting gory unfiltered images of a battle that was simultaneously being covered by national news outlets, which was how the website started to gather attention from the Pentagon and other national authorities.[4] This dissertation will examine the intersection between publicly available archives like NTFU and the concept of War Porn, which I will define below.

As the war themed content became more popular than the amateur pornography of the website, Wilson began to position himself as a zealous advocate of free speech. Wilson insisted that NTFU was a "porn community," and it seemed he was not entirely wrong.[5] As Vanderbilt Professor David Zald commented about the NTFU audience: "For some people, any arousal–it doesn't matter if it is a negative image or a pornographic image–if it takes away the boring humdrum of everyday existence, it's all the better."[6] Wilson began to argue that it was no

coincidence that pornography and War Porn had come together, reconciling the overall scope of the website as the "best in amateur erotic content and uncensored news."[7] Chris Wilson became an evangelist of the collection he had amassed, challenging those that questioned the moral rationale for such an archive: "Some have questioned why we republish explicit, even gruesome, images of wartime violence. One only need look back to World War II when most images of dead soldiers were censored by the government, and no cameras were allowed on the battlefield," a claim which represents both a shift in the tone of the website and a claim that is historically inaccurate, evidenced by Chapter 2 of this dissertation.[8] Wilson's stance was questionable because NTFU was also founded on and steeped in pornography, including amateur pornography of American military members.

It was the understanding that Wilson himself participated in and encouraged the collection that enabled authorities to exploit any legal vulnerabilities that Wilson and his website had. The primary ingredient for the removal of the website from the Internet was knowing that Chris Wilson was a Florida resident, though the website was intentionally placed on a server based in The Netherlands.[9] By early October of 2005, Wilson acknowledge the site's servers were undergoing strain due to an unprecedented amount of attention it was receiving from national media outlets.[10] By the end of October, Wilson was detained by Polk County, Florida Sheriff Grady Judd and put in Jail based on Judd's application of local Florida obscenity law.[11] Before long, the website shared a message that was without its leader, organizers from NTFU started a the website Freechris.org, and began to raise funds for the cause, and the ACLU became involved in the case.[12] As Wilson's attorney noted: "This is a very important case because it deals with the ability of a small county to set standards for the entire Internet."[13] By January of 2006, NTFU was offline, and the URL redirected to the Polk County, Florida sheriff's office.

This is a good example of the importance of having a figurehead in order to hold a site accountable, as the dissertation will explore further.

There was speculation that the local obscenity laws were only part of what brought Wilson down. As Wilson stated: "I've been told that they're blocking the site because it's posting the photos of the soldiers. They don't want their soldiers looking at pornography and all that."[14] As Wilson's lawyer stated: "There are ostensibly a million other adult websites out there that have pictures similar to Chris Wilson's, yet Chris Wilson is the only one in jail. The only thing different about his site is that there are also pictures of the war in Iraq."[15] He believed the Pentagon may have played a role or that George W. Bush had called his brother Jeb, the governor of Florida.[16] Another regulation that might have factored in was Section 230 of the 1996 Communication Decency Act (CDA), twenty-six words that stated: "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."[17] These 26 words were the foundation of regulating decency on the Internet, and separating the roles of creators, producers, and distributors of media into distinct roles. As this dissertation will argue at length in Chapter 2, this same legislation has also provided the rulebook for website operators to essentially be immune from what users post, so long as they do not participate in the process. Members of the American military were implicating themselves in the recording and publication of War Porn, and by extension, American military leadership. Wilson's approach to running the website also clashed with Section 230 of the CDA because of his direct involvement and encouragement of the growth of the War Porn section of his website. Though it was the amateur pornography that provided the legal Achilles heel to remove the website from the Internet.

In the end, the case proved to be an anomaly, quickly resolved due to knowledge of

Wilson's identity. Ultimately, only five misdemeanors stuck from the original charges, but the

website had been taken down, attacked by local obscenity law which stopped Chris Wilson from

operating another website for a few years.[18] 2005 was only the beginning of the Pentagon and

other global leaders to get a handle of what images members of the military presented to public

audiences.

The Pentagon Defines War Porn Without Saying it

Around the time that Chris Wilson was jailed in October of 2005, I remember my

commander calling my platoon into his office to refresh our memories about what not to share on

the Internet. When I was in Iraq, there was a general belief that the free Internet on post was slow

and inconsistent. You also had to go to a computer lab during downtime and wait in line to use a

government computer in 15-minute increments. Back at our bunks, we all had laptops capable of

Internet access. After about 7 months, one platoon bought a private satellite dish, and provided

stable Internet for anyone who bought in. Moves like this weakened the hold of military policies

and procedures regarding external communications and represented a technological moment

where the kind of censorship of handwritten mail remembered from conflicts of the past could

hardly be applied to the Internet. In the middle of a combat zone, connected users could become

instant producers and publishers to people and websites back home. Whereas government

computers and Internet connections easily blocked websites blacklisted by the Pentagon, private

Internet connections circumvented censorship.[19]

The Pentagon's involvement in the NTFU case was not all speculation. In the 1990s,

General Order Number 1 (GO-1) established strict policies for pornography. As Pentagon

spokesperson Maj. Elizabeth Robins described: "If your big brother sent you a Playboy for fun, it would be your responsibility to get rid of it immediately." [20] As video technologies progressed, they found themselves ill-equipped to deal with War Porn in the ranks, a condition possible with evolving camera and Internet technologies. At the center of this story, military regulations had not anticipated that this scenario could be the outcome of new technological shifts. During the Gulf War from 1990-1991, Norman Schwarzkopf Jr., who was then the leader of U.S. Central Command, established General Order Number 1, which outline "prohibited activities for U.S. Department of Defense personnel." The policy was intended to honor local cultures during military occupations by restricting certain activities that would generally be permitted for Western Cultures, prohibiting such items as drugs, alcohol, gambling, and pornography, though the order noted that any content that could be purchased through a retail post exchange was safe.

The federal government had no way to impose a policy that would supersede Section 230 to block this scenario from happening again, but US military updated General Order Number 1 as fast as they could to stop the creation and distribution of the sort of material on the military side. Only three months after the closure of NTFU, the military issued an update to General Order 1 with a lengthy addition regarding the prohibition of "photography or films of detainees or human casualties," directly under the clause prohibiting pornography.[21] The new clause gave many examples, including the photographing of "separated body parts, organs, and biological material," unless taking from copyrighted open media sources.[22] Where Schwarzkopf's policy had outlined a section on: "approved as authorized souvenirs," it had said nothing about what could best be described as digital war trophies, or War Porn, now clearly identified and officially prohibited in the military ranks.[23] Even with such a policy in place, Wilson had learned that: "Military members currently stationed in Iraq are still able to access the site by purchasing

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private, unfiltered Internet connections. Those connections are highly expensive."[24] As the

Department of Defense blog post reminded troops a few years after the policy was implemented,

if you mess around with General Order Number 1, "you're going to get caught."[25] This policy

effectively led to the general disappearance of US military as violent perpetrators in scenes or

collections of War Porn, making it officially punishable by the Uniform Code of Military Justice

(UCMJ). It's important to differentiate that although the Geneva Convention generally condemns

the manipulation of mutilated and dead enemies by war fighters as a war crime, the pictures

contained on NTFU fell outside of the scope of either US policy discussed here. The military

leadership of the United States could not account for the many ways in which bodies of

combatants would be displayed over the course of a few decades.

Scope of the Dissertation and Definition of Terms

When I have mentioned War Porn in academic circles, there is a wide range of questions

regarding the object of study. Is it combat news? Does it involve sex? Is it like snuff video? The

answers are all yes, but possibly in some unexpected ways. By the end of this dissertation, it will

be clear what I am talking about, no matter what I call the object of study. I should add, I also

take issue with legitimizing the term War Porn as a legitimate counterpart to pornography. War

Porn shows brutality, bondage of marginalized people in a way that disregards consent and

humanity — considerations that the pornography industry made early on. War Porn is a disgrace.

War Porn is assault. War Porn is the peeping tom of tragedy.

Contemporary War Porn can be best described as a descendant of exploitation film

masquerading as news. War Porn has been a vernacular term thrown around over the last two

decades to describe the exploitive nature of representations of conflict in certain instances. As

this dissertation will show, there are links between War Porn and conventional pornography, and War Porn has often existed on many of the same video platforms that regular pornography does. I will note here that my intent is not to assess pornography contained alongside War Porn in the spaces where they overlap. However, it is likely that much of it, especially if it's circulating in the public sphere, has ethical concerns of its own.

Reviewing the corpus of exploitation films, videos, and websites explored in this dissertation, it is evident that certain types of visual content are frequently exploited due to the ambiguity of their ownership. These low hanging fruits often include footage from medical and law enforcement contexts, but especially include clips of war porn. I found that these sources are all types of publicly appropriable media (henceforth, PAM). Publicly appropriable media, or PAM, consists of content with no common signifiers of ownership such as titles or watermarks, including, but not limited to, orphan works and content posted by users that can be remixed and reused without fear of legal repercussion. Orphan work is recognized by the United States Copyright Office as: "A term used to describe the situation where the owner of a copyrighted work cannot be identified and located."[26] Like a human orphan, orphan media is without parental guardianship, either because the parent has died or due to some other unsettling separation, including by borders. Similarly, user posted works face similar challenges in maintaining control of content once it's been posted online.

I define War Porn as the exploitation of nonfiction PAM depicting war, conflict, and civil unrest. Often, War Porn presents unidentified deaths for the purposes of titillation, inviting anonymous spectators seeking to consume the content for the purposes of gratification, visually, viscerally, and politically. A key characteristic of War Porn is that it is often separated from its original purpose, frequently as propaganda, and reappropriated for a guilt-free consumption. War

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Porn as a whole, presented in films, videotapes, or on websites, is often media with ambiguous

ownership. More specifically, by editing content down to money shot clips of death and other

forms of violence, materials are usually presented without credits, intertitles, watermarks, or

other markings of their original intention or ownership. In many cases, watermarks may be added

later by those doing the exploiting. It is tempting to see this content as part of the public domain

given its unclear ownership status. However, the term public domain is a legal status that

describes content with clear parameters for permissible use and attribution. Even when War Porn

has a timely deployment to audiences, what looks like breaking news is often edited down from

the full propaganda context it was intended to be presented in. Pieces, clips, images of War Porn

do not disappear with the passing ephemera of warfare itself. Like the trauma that war leaves

behind in the regions it is fought, War Porn lingers. Unlike the regions and humans who spend

years reconciling their experiences, War Porn, depoliticized, spliced out of its context, is

infinitely reproduceable and exploitable by anyone who takes it hostage. Because of the murky

legal use of PAM, War Porn has been appropriated by commercial exploiteers to produce

dividends in perpetuity, like a prisoner of war.

One could argue that War Porn can be both mainstream, as in propaganda produced by

the state and large media outlets, and amateur. However, I would argue that rarely do mainstream

outlets publish questionable material, with a few exceptions where state-produced material has

been reappropriated. Therefore, this dissertation is really a study of amateur War Porn. Like

many amateur recorded videos, this content is also legally vulnerable to exploitation. Mainstream

media, its mega media conglomerates, and its vertically and horizontally integrated divisions

have always ensured that copyright law and technology develop in a way that best protects the

intellectual property of the industry. Though intellectual property of one piece of media may be

credited to one individual filmmaker or a small group, arguably thousands of media workers

ensure that mainstream material continue to produce surplus capital for the mainstream media

industry, including media makers, legislators, attorneys, web developers, software and software

engineers, and a range of other media workers. However, with all of the resources geared to

protecting copyrighted media content, what are the cultural and ethical challenges and

vulnerabilities for leaving amateur-produced copyrighted media to defend itself? The

vulnerability of exploitation by War Pornographers is the sole reason why the War Porn industry

has worked so well. The low-hanging fruit of PAM is content ready to be captured, abused,

imprisoned, with no chance of escape as of the time of this writing.

War Porn as Vernacular and Academic Concept

War Porn is a term that seeks to contend with the way that amateur non-fiction content

depicting war and atrocity media has come to be deployed as porn, and often paired with

traditional pornography in its presentations and distribution to audiences. Though the

Department of Defense did not name War Porn, General Order Number 1 essentially created a

definition. As veteran, attorney, and author Matthew Hefti put in simple terms: "War Porn, in

general, is the colloquial phrase well-known in military circles that encompasses forms of media

depicting the most provocative and extreme depictions of violence, gore, and brutality wrought

by combat."[27] Responding to a video of Marines urinating on dead Taliban fighters that surfaced

in 2012, one veteran writes: "War Porn, like pornography, is traded mostly in secret. It is

consumed mostly in private, and those who possess it may often feel hesitant to share it with

anyone outside of the military or veteran communities. However, during the past decade, the

American people and the world have witnessed several stark examples of War Porn leaking to

the surface."[28] Throughout this dissertation, it will be important to remember War Porn's

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connection to vernacular discourses happening in the military community – discourses of discord that I will examine closely in Chapter 3.

The academic use of the term War Porn can be traced back to Jean Baudrillard who entered the term into academic discourse in 2004 when he observed the coverage of the detainee abuse scandal involving American G.I.s at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Baudrillard believed that while the televised attacks on September 11, 2001 were "exhilarating images of a major event," the images from the Abu Ghraib scandal were "degrading images of something that is the opposite of an event, a non- event of an obscene banality, the degradation, atrocious but banal, not only of the victims, but of the amateur scriptwriters of this parody of violence."[29] This essay was an expansion of Baudrillard's observations watching television coverage of the Gulf War in 1991, where he observed that news coverage of the war from dominant media outlets presented a highly constructed image of warfare that was not true to the actual conflict.[30] The photo leaks from Abu Ghraib are not the full picture of conflict, they are indeed representations. Andreja Zevnik has expanded Baudrillard's observation by discussing the seductive nature of War Porn, examining how these images represent war while having a seductive aura, devoid of any actual information.[31] In this dissertation, my argument is that War Porn is a distinct category that has a specific developmental arc within the media industry and has been defined by the DoD. War Porn has existed at least since the rise of commercially available photography equipment. It was not commercially available but frequently found in shoeboxes under beds or in other discrete private collections.[32] Ultimately, War Porn includes visual representations of the destruction of bodies in warfare, inclusive of photo and video, across formats and genres, that aims to elicit a visceral reaction in viewers for the purposes of titillation and entertainment. The central premise

of this dissertation is that War Porn went from discrete archives to a socially acceptable and

mainstream industry, which raises new moral and ethical questions.

Body Horror and War Porn

Many scholars compare War Porn to the subgenre of body horror, citing it as a real life

counterpart to the fictional horror genre.[33] Often, Linda Williams's writing on body horror in

relation to fictional horror films is a jumping off place for these investigations, a framework that

positions scholars first and foremost as conventional theatrical audiences. Analyzing fiction films

such as *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974, dir. Tobe Hooper), Williams frames body horror as

similar to melodrama and classic pornographic film due to the visceral response it elicits in the

viewer – one that they can feel physically.[34] Body horror films show bodies in destruction,

mutilation, decay, or transformation, presented in grotesque and unsettling ways. Body horror as

a concept does not account for the difference between special effects and reality. It does not

describe the politics that produced War Porn – only the visceral responses shared by viewers.

The corpus of films used to build this definition are mostly fictional works. As such, one could

claim that bodily responses are mostly the result of makeup and special effects. Through the

body horror lens, in other words, the acted human suffering depicted in a fictional horror film

such as *Last House on the Left* (1972, dir. Wes Craven) is equivalent to the real human suffering

depicted in an ISIS beheading video. To that end, scholarship on War Porn should first seek to

understand the audience's political positionality before analyses about how the images make

them feel.[35] This essential difference in mode of production to one where the gore is presented

via non-fiction videos necessarily asks for a rethinking of body horror as an appropriate generic

lens for War Porn.

Shock content distributed on physical media has been presented as an extension of the horror genre due to the similar mise-en-scene and reaction from the audience. However, that comparison misses the historical disconnection between the shock archive and the political moment, possibly by years. The technological shifts in recording and the increasing immediacy of content on social media platforms suggest revisiting the comparison between body horror and War Porn, because War Porn as body horror presupposes that analysis is the work of the audience spectator rather than a diverse set of stakeholders implicated by or trapped in conflict. My experiences as a former combatant change my perception of these materials, experiencing these images in a different way than horror seekers might. This difference in both forms of portrayal and audience reception of this type of gore highlights the inadequacy of the concept of body horror.

War Porn, codified as a concept rather than in the vernacular, could appropriately fill the gap between fictional and real gore. This would provide an analytical acknowledgement that a beheading video may achieve a similar visceral response in the viewer as body-horror film, but the documentary mode and unconsenting subject adds another layer that cannot be ignored. War Porn generally describes a collection of PAM war trophies depicting routine fatalities in warfare for all to view. Baudrillard's 2004 essay on War Porn focuses on the physical and sexual abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib.[36] A key observation is that the images captured the banality of everyday war. In this piece, Baudrillard is not arguing against the iconic nature of these photos. He suggests that had these photos not been revealed to the masses for the war crimes they contain, these photographs would perhaps be part of a personal or shared collection still in the military ranks, or, I would add, amassed in a collection of War Porn on one of the many shock

sites I discuss in this dissertation.[37] It is this difference that this dissertation will, in part, trace out.

Kari Andén-Papadopoulos recognizes the need for developing more nuanced understandings of both the vernacular term War Porn and its connection with body horror.[38] In her analysis of NTFU (hereafter NTFU), she argues that the insular user-base that frequented the website to communicate as a group with shared interests provided an alternative to dominant media narratives of the war, though the material contained on the website was never meant to be known about by a mass audience. NTFU was in a way both media outlet and interactive media channel. While she suggests there may be many audiences of this sort of material to take into account, I would add that there are certain audiences, like myself, who do not consider ourselves traditional viewing audiences of War Porn. While we are implicated in and by many of these images due to our status as combatants, viewing these images, even marginally linked to our experiences, can reinforce trauma. Mark Astley expands the scope of War Porn by suggesting that while rumors of snuff films circulating in the film and videotape eras were largely untrue, websites like Ogrish.com should force us to rethink the term snuff which has traditionally described the act of murdering someone on camera for profit or entertainment.[39] This leads to the question of the political implications of War Porn.

War Porn and Spectators

Examining Ogrish, which I will discuss at length in Chapter 2, Sue Tate suggests the modes of presentation and spectatorship for viewing atrocity content that has been decontextualized from its political context needs a more nuanced understanding than its comparisons to pornography.[40] Ultimately, she suggests that though shock website operators may imply the are performing a public service and users may see themselves as performing a civic

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duty by watching content to be informed about the world, this is a false sense of participation. As Barbie Zelizer notes about this form of spectatorship: "In some cases, viewing images may now stand in for action itself, raising crucial questions about the shape of public response in the contemporary era."[41] Instead, users of the site are bearing witness to their own tolerance of graphic imagery rather than a form of bearing witness that places moral burden on themselves, as the sites may imply.

In 2004, Mikita Brotman recognized that the images of the human devastation on 9/11 kept out of the mainstream media spotlight would inevitably end up in a Mondo film long before being seen elsewhere.[42] Jason Middleton pulls this thread along by comparing websites like Ogrish more directly to Mondo films, a film genre that I will discuss at length in Chapter 1, recognizing also that these websites use the juxtaposition of such scenes with explicitly sexual content, "which has widely expressed anxiety that through sheer repetition, the footage itself could become 'pornographic'—an astonishing spectacle disconnected from the gravity of the actual event it represents." As Middleton adds: "By literally placing side by side pornographic photos and warzone images of death, destruction, and mutilation, this site made explicit the intended consumption of atrocity images for voyeuristic pleasure."[43] All in all, War Porn has a long history with generic linkages to many other genres and forms of media. Many lenses have been applied to War Porn, situating it as a formidable topic of academic discourse. To date, these explorations have examined case studies and provided much insight into the genre, but have generally lacked tracing War Porn across a total trajectory.

Is War Porn Anti-war?

War Porn as a concept brings an important question to light: Can the viewing of violent images make change in the world? In 1924, Friedrich Ernst published a book about the atrocities of WWI call *Krieg dem Kriege*, featuring photographs of mangle corpses of civilians, soldiers, and other combatants.[44] At the beginning of the book, Ernst showed images of young boys playing with toy guns, warning readers to keep their kids away from the weapons of war. Ernst wrote his controversial book simultaneously in four of the most common languages to ensure that many who picked it up could not only be exposed to the images but also with captions to provide context to the text. Examining the book today is sure to disturb anyone who has not previously turned the pages. In its time, it was a controversial and often banned text which, as Ernst describes in the book, put Ernst in prison while he was developing it a total of four times. Ernst ends the book by explaining that he has compiled these images and put them on display in the hopes that there will never be another war.

Krieg dem Kriege is not just a book documenting atrocity captured on still images and published after WWI, but the book provokes a range of questions related to the ethics of the treatment and circulation of violent images. The goal of Ernst's work was to bring attention to the socialization of the weapons of war to young people and to show images of the effects of war so that it will never happen again. While Ernst's book as subsequent anti-war museum has been effective, Susan Sontag's assessment that effects of violent images are inconsistent and unpredictable leaves scholars of violent images to wonder if evidence and argumentation projected in Ernst's book can really make change, or is it exploitation? Essentially, is it possible to have a *Krieg dem Kriege* without the exploitation? After all, Ernst's book is replete with an

image of topless prostitutes in the middle of WWI, using it as an example of the depravity and the destruction of lives.

Susan Sontag, who explored the Ernst text, presents some of the most enduring ideas about the impact of violent images. One is that photos of conflict are imbued with truth, but are open to interpretation, and she cautions the reader against accepting photos as reality and evidence of events.[45] Further, she has brought a nuanced understanding of war photography as journalistic, noting its relationship with commercial enterprise at the time of her writing, that profit ultimately diminishes the power of war photography.[46] Ultimately, Sontag believes that the disconnect between depictions of conflict in photos and the audiences who view them experience "shame as well as shock in looking at the close-up of a real horror." She notes that a possible solution is identifying "only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it—say, the surgeons at the military hospital where the photograph was taken—or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be."[47] Though Sontag's thoughts give clear arguments against the mass distribution of War Porn, the evolution of War Porn since her 2004 writing has only intensified and demanded additional exploration.

Sontag's assessment of violent images also included an extensive analysis of staged photographs, citing the interest of many photographers to create their own realities or embellishment through altering bodies and other elements in the frame. Matthew Brady, a prominent photographer of graphic images during the U.S. Civil War, was known for staging photos of the dead and wounded.[48] These forms of staging realities for audiences often has damning outcomes. One particularly troubling example Sontag gives is the execution of a prisoner by a South Vietnamese general during the Tet Offensive of 1968. As Sontag explains

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the event: "It was staged—by General Loan, who had led the prisoner, hands tied behind his back, out to the street where journalists had gathered; he would not have carried out the summary execution there had they not been available to witness it."[49] Though this example is enlightening about many issues at the heart of images from conflict, it also connects with reenactments, standing in for the real, that were becoming popular in Mondo films during the same period, especially of the ongoing conflicts in Vietnam and elsewhere, which I will discuss more in Chapter 1. Still photography does some of the same work as Mondo film, and the lessons gained from the analysis of it carry through to Mondo and shock film.

Documentary Fakery

Documentary has been imbued with the responsibility of truth-telling since most of the footage used in the documentary mode is direct evidence -- a recording of the thing that happened. This assumption is where documentary starts to fall apart. The assumption relies on truth itself, which is at the discretion and ideological disposition of a given filmmaker. The obsession with staging reality was no different in motion pictures, dating back to Thomas Edison's electrocution of Topsy the elephant for motion picture cameras in 1903. As Barnouw notes, though early documentaries did focus on attempts to capture or reconstruct reality, documentary practice quickly became a space for increased fakery, slipping away from concerns of truth and ethics early on.[50] *Nanook of the North* (1922, dir. Robert Flaherty) is often cited as an early and seminal documentary film. Robert Flaherty's work is as much of the foundation of documentary as it is an example of using the myth of documentary truth to present falsities to audiences. Flaherty staged a lot of the reenactments in his films, including making the Inuit in the film perform hunting and survival practices that they hadn't practiced in years. Additionally,

Flaherty had the Nanook character, played by Allakariallak, doing things like tasting a record, though he had been exposed to recorded music previously.[51] So complete was the disconnect from the documentation of reality in this production that the original footage was lost and Flaherty had to reshoot it, assuming audiences wouldn't know the difference.

Staging reality has been a constant of the documentary mode, one that clashes with documentary's preoccupation with truth telling. As Kristen Whissel notes, early documentary practice regularly involved reenactments, and this form of historical storytelling was a widely-accepted practice by historians and other experts.[52] These stories reflected the dominant political turns of the day. In addition to staging truth, these early documentary practices also involved casting white actors as people of color, pushing these documentary films into even murkier territories of truth.[53] When documentary goes beyond an informative historical account, when the outcome is not informative or reflexive, documentary dips into the realm of propaganda where it can be used as a form of ideological control. It can be used to exploit cultural tensions, often targeting marginalized groups in society as the source of a given societal problem. The range of examples given in this section point to one thing: the presumption of truth in the documentary mode can be exploited. War Porn is a media source primed for this type of exploitation.

Censorship and Exploitation Tendencies

The interest in censoring films began almost as soon as film was invented. In fact, in the days of the nickelodeon theater, the cinema was seen as a space for moral depravity and the working class – and was even described as a school of crime.[54] This notion of a school of crime meant that, though film could be used to educate children about what not to do, film's ability to

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expose theatergoers to acts of deviance tuned them into the existence and performance of deviant acts as much as it told them what not to do. Hence, cinema needed to be policed.

Richard Maltby describes that the goal of the MPPA, the dominant studio system authority, was to regulate itself, and multiple state boards that were often run by police to administer local censorship.[55] These forms of censorship led to the mainstream industry abiding by the rules and the exploitation market finding ways to break the rules to get around censorship. As Eric Schaefer notes, the success of exploitation films, and something the producers admit, relies on lurid stories and unsavory scenes, contrary to the power of stars that made mainstream films successful.[56]

Documentary has had a long history of exploitation tendencies, dating back to the beginning of film history. The history of classic exploitation filmmaking, as Schaefer describes, had its origins in the sex hygiene films of the 1930's, and the trajectory of classic exploitation film mirrors the existence of the mainstream film industry's Production Code Administration rules for film censorship which reigned over the industry from the 1930s until the 1960's, though the hold of the PCA began to rupture in the 1950s, just after WWII.[57]

The exploitation film industry existed in the shadows of the mainstream market, and often employed subversive tactics to get into theaters. As Schaefer notes, studying these films disrupts the imbalance of academic scholarship to focus on the mainstream industry. Looking at films and cultural representations on the margins like these can be symbolically central to understanding mainstream culture and culture on the margins. Exploitation film offers a view of the margins — it is a cinema of difference.

This necessity of continuing to show unsavory imagery for the success of films led to a few different approaches that I will briefly outline here. First, exploitation filmmakers would

sometimes get a different cut of a film approved by the censorship board than what would be screened in the theater, and sometimes this theatrical cut would involve the shows of a "square-up" real at the end of a film which showed the unsavory imagery to give the audience what they really wanted. Kathleen Karr notes that another use of a square-up was to frame the unsavory content in a film by suggesting its educational merit. This tactic often used a title card at the beginning of the film to prepare the audience with a prefatory moralistic statement of apology for what they were about to see, justifying the imagery by claiming its educational function.[58] As I will argue, the square-up is one of the many ways that Mondo and shock entrepreneurs who exploit War Porn have used to legitimate the circulation and consumption of this content.

Using Schaefer's argument, War Porn also exists on the margins of culture, displayed through discrete movie theater runs, counterculture videotapes, and fringe shock websites, as I will discuss over the course of this dissertation. Though the genre can be difficult to watch and may create or exacerbate emotional distress in the viewer, a full study of these materials, especially one that studies the trajectory of War Porn's commercialization, can provide a deeper understanding of the ownership of War Porn and conflict more broadly. As this dissertation will demonstrate, these tactics for circumventing censorship have continued to be used and developed by motion picture entrepreneurs selling shocking exploitation content while leaning on the nobility of the documentary mode which has been credited as giving the public a more factual representation of real-world events than its fiction counterpart.

The Lens of Mondo on the World

To examine the constructedness of War Porn, it's important to understand the genres and modes of production that it has been deployed through. One of the earliest genres that brought

War Porn to audiences is the Mondo film, a pseudo-documentary form that prioritizes

sensational and often fake content for the titillation of audiences. Nichols expands Tom

Gunning's Cinema of Attractions lens to describe Mondo films as relative to Thomas Edison's

early one-reel silent films from the 1890s that focused on spectacle with examples like *Topsy*

(1903, dir. Edwin S. Porter), *Sandow* (1894, dir. William K.L. Dickson), and *The Kiss* (1896,

dir. William Heise), which showed provocative imagery to audiences of the period. In Nichols's

comparison between cinema of attractions and Mondo:

> "Aspects of this tradition of a "cinema of attractions" linger on just as scientific uses of
> the photographic image remain strong. It is vividly on display in a variety of films that
> peek into the underbelly of everyday life. We find it, for example, in "Mondo" movies,
> beginning with the classic tour of outrageous customs and bizarre practices, *Mondo Cane*
> (1962), with its catalogue of bare-breasted women, the mass slaughter of pigs, and august
> pet cemeteries in different corners of the world."[59]

Likewise, the simplification and editing down of the spectacle around War Porn has become

even more like Edison's films than the many generic pretenses standard in Mondo films.

Mondo's exploitation of the documentary lens, Bill Nichols argues, indicates that Mondo

is devoid of the sorts of ethical considerations for human subjects that documentary prides itself

on.[60] The first Mondo film, *Mondo Cane* (1962, dir. Gualtiero Jacopetti, Paolo Cavara, and

Franco Prosperi)*,* spawned a genre containing a number of films attempting to sensationalize

similar themes related to the exotic, sexual, violent, and taboo. The film was primarily the work

of two journalists, Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi, who had themselves begun their

careers in a post-war environment heavily influenced by propaganda.[61] Mimicking

documentary, these films position themselves as factual, relying on constructing documentary-

style vignettes while exploiting the genre's long-held association with truth.

Using hyper-realistic reenactment was a tactic Mondo film used to confuse viewers about the available historical archive depicting the history of conflict. To use an example of another Mondo film, Mikita Brottman argues: "What is especially fascinating about *Faces of Death* is the way in which the genuine and 'hoax' sequences play off one another to negotiate their own 'authenticity.'"[62] This is why many Mondo films from the late 1970s to through 1990s also used real footage from the Vietnam War: it was to bolster a given film's portrayal of truth and connectedness to the real world.[63] As Mark Goodall states, Mondo film all but dupes audiences in that it: "Will not give us any 'accurate' or 'true' representation, historical time, but they can tell us much about the problems of attempting such sensations in the first place."[64] In this way, Mondo films also exploit notions of truth in storytelling in favor of sensational imagery. This confusion created around the division between archival and staged footage bears real implications going forward.

Nichols critiques expository documentaries that use "voice of god" style of narration, a narrator "that we hear speaking in a voice over but do not see," a common trope in Mondo films where anonymous voices guide audiences through otherwise disconnected and often chaotic scenes, a tactic that would become a staple for shock entrepreneurs in future eras.[65] Mark Goodall takes Nichols's argument further to explain that the voice-from-nowhere technique of narrating many of the films in this genre blocks the potential for true reflexivity or self-awareness of the constructedness of these films, though they are often seen as documentary parodies by today's standards.[66] Trinh T. Minh-ha notes that voice-from-nowhere narration is a sign of the non-location of filmmakers as creators of narratives.[67] Mondo films are no doubt devoid of real narrators with real commitments to subjects beyond sales.

One of the key tactics of myth making on screen is juxtaposition. By comparing the ordinary imagery of Western life with life of geographically and culturally different regions of the world, Mondo creates a number of different myths, including civilized versus savage and domestic versus alien.[68] The same juxtaposition is used today to establish representations of other parts of the world as hopelessly senseless and chaotic. By framing marginalized places in this way, Mondo films work to reinforce myths that delegitimize ways of life in these areas of the world, and often suggest or reinforce notions of subjugation and or intervention in the vulnerable regions they exploit.

Central Questions for the Historical Trajectory of War Porn

The central premise of this dissertation is that War Porn has undergone a fundamental transformation from a presence in celluloid and videotape archives and discrete collections to being the basis for a professionalized and socially acceptable industry online. Carrying on the work of this scholarship, my goal in this dissertation is to chart traces of War Porn across what would otherwise be distinct genres across a range of distinct mediums. A primary objective is to demonstrate the direct interconnectedness between these forms of media. To give a few examples here, Mondo films of the 1960s and 1970s relied on archival atrocity footage recorded during WWII. Before shock video became obsolete on social media, it started to borrow from shock websites which in turn sold shock videotapes, many containing images of War Porn. On the way to professionalizing War Porn, Funker530.com, which I will discuss in Chapter 3, heavily relied on sourcing War Porn from Liveleak.com, which was itself a direct successor of the infamous shock website Ogrish.com.

This dissertation will primarily focus on a range of case studies that explore one or more key aspects of the trajectory of War Porn since World War II. More specifically, from post-war

atrocity films, through the amateur-recorded War Porn that exists on Funker530 today. Along the way, this trajectory will explore controversial Mondo films in the 1960s and 1970s which included glimpses of conflict, war-torn scenes contained in shock videotapes of the 1990s, and the genre as it developed on shock websites during the 2000s and 2010s.

To fully address the many complexities and nuances of this history, I will answer the following question: What social, technological, and regulatory conditions have allowed for War Porn to transform from a presence in public archive and discrete collections to more public visibility and acceptability on mainstream social media platforms? To do this I will look at how the film genre of Mondo and videotape genre of shock video served as a vehicle for delivering War Porn to audiences. I will examine some of the ways sourcing practices developed over time from physical media to the Internet, and the impact of regulations on these practices. I will ask what additional tactics have been leveraged to professionalize War Porn for mass audiences, and what the implications are of all of these findings for the future of exploitation of the perpetual PAM archive. Ultimately, this may help identify and problematize War Porn in its historical and contemporary contexts.

Methodological Discussion

Through an examination of films, videos, and online spaces, this dissertation yields humble findings about how regulations have shaped the content and historical trajectory of War Porn, including the ways in which it has been exploited through a range of mediums. Bordwell suggests that film scholars concern themselves less about "grand theories" and focus on how mid-level research programs that emphasize how film documents and remnant discourses about them can yield smaller conclusions that lead to mid-level industry insight.[69] Though the materials

available here do not support grand theories, the small conclusions that can be drawn bear significance.

The only way to answer these questions is to take a qualitative historical approach. According to Lindlof and Taylor, there are some key principles which carry across the whole of qualitative methods.[70] Namely, qualitative researchers acknowledge that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed, the social world is distinctively and profoundly different from the natural world because of the reflective capabilities of humans, human action is purposive, human action is a meaning making activity, and researchers embrace the subjective world of participants in search of webs of meaning. Most importantly, the researcher is both instrument and expert, and researchers use their subjectivity to make meanings out of the data that they collect and interpret. My seven years of experience as an infantry soldier in the Illinois Army National Guard and my Deployment to Iraq have made me more attuned to seeing webs of meaning for much of the material I analyze in this dissertation. In many ways, I have used my emic perspective as a member of the veteran community to identify and unpack dynamics in case studies, one example being knowing where to look for and how to interpret the Department of Defense's General Order Number 1.

As researcher and documentary filmmaker, I believe that historical work should be reflexive, especially in terms of approaching the marginalized topic of War Porn and the sensitive subjects contained within. Catherine Russell, speaking specifically about the colonial history of ethnographic filmmaking and the death of experimental film, suggests that new tools can help us reappropriate these text for other readings and forms of critique that disrupt prescriptive ways of reading historical texts.[71] Such can be the case with rereading examples of War Porn discussed in this dissertation.

Overall, this dissertation employs critical historical methodology, fitting in with the tradition of using historical artifacts to critique power structures and social, cultural, and economic factors controlled by institutions. Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier assert that history is not written until it is written by historians. Until then, there are only documents, usually not meant for an audience outside of their original intent.[72] As a critical historian, Karl Marx used a range of documents, such as worker shift logs, to substantiate larger critiques of power structures.[73] Continuing the tradition of critical history, Michel Foucault developed a means of using archival documents as data to problematize the present.[74] Friedrich Kittler, Bernard Harcourt, and Simone Browne have adopted Foucauldian genealogy, mapping webs of meaning through diagrams, maps, laws, and other unconventional historical documents to problematize the present.[75] For example, Bernard Harcourt has argues that algorithms that tell police departments what neighborhoods and communities need to be policed are flawed in that they reinforce the policing of black neighborhoods due to historical data input.[76] The same logic used in actuarial science creates conditions for systemic racism to persist. It's my hope that this dissertation presents a trajectory that also problematizes the present – that regulations have created an environment that supports the perpetual exploitation of War Porn, unequally emanating from the global south.

Archival Records and Appropriation: Tracing the Connection

Documents have political contexts, and the data that is recorded may have political leanings, especially in the cases of primary archives that have been shaped by institutions like the church and state. John Scott as well as John Tosh and Sean Lang stress the importance of always returning to primary sources when writing histories.[77] I would add, history captured on social media is not only shaped by policy and the platforms themselves, but that the historical materials

created and housed in these spaces are increasingly ephemeral, and accessing them has limitations due to the proprietary nature of the platform. Studying this genre of violent video is difficult because it is not an accessible archive of films and industry documents cannot be easily found and reviewed by media historians. The meticulous archives of films and industrial relics like the ones collected for the Hollywood studio system have not been created for this genre. Further, while university libraries, the National Archives, and non-profits do collect films on the margins of culture that are deemed culturally and socially relevant, this is not the case for War Porn, which has been intentionally obscured from the public sphere.

Broadly speaking, War Porn is part of no protected and curated library collection. This lack of a formal archive presents a dilemma. Schaefer argues that because exploitation films, their documents, and histories are poorly preserved, it is the job of the film historian to make connections in what he calls a critical mess, which he describes as casting a broad net to avoid predetermined conclusions about what the research will yield. Schafer notes that because his object of study does not exist in a traditional archive, it is the job of the historian to cobble together their own archive through acquisition of content in the private marketplace.[78] In the case of War Porn, the archives and collections I have examined are especially ephemeral, leading to more challenges to connect individual case studies and how they fit together. Finding and using pieces of evidence to corroborate parts of this history was often the result of luck.

Expanding on Schaefer's idea of a critical mess, Peter Alilunas offers an approach for studying the ephemerality of adult film history by seeking evidence in historical remnants in a process he has called trace historiography. As Alilunas explains: "[Trace historiography] is a method seeking to locate evidence where it seemingly no longer exists. By searching for traces, often peripheral and, on first examination, unrelated, the echoes and footprints of the past can

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reveal what might have once been there but has since been lost."[79] Both Schaefer and Alilunas have gone so far as to interview family members and other associates of the individuals behind exploitation productions as the most accessible accounts of exploitation film history that still exist. My work borrows from this insight, using robust Internet searching tools, tracking names, and finding interviews to make connections between seemingly desperate information. Throughout this research, I sent many social media messages to figures central to the case studies, journalists, and other academics to guide me along. In one case, I connected with the wife of John Alan Schwartz, the creator and director of *Faces of Death* (1978), soon before his death in 2019.

Cases as Context

Over five years of closely examining War Porn, these historical methods have provided the best approach for solving my central research questions. Answers were obtained through case studies, textual analysis, comparative analysis, archival research, and several interviews with experts who shared clues to guide me to answers. The individual cases for this dissertation emerged from the preliminary research into the popularity, politics, and publicity around different shock genres through secondary academic sources embedded in the following chapters as well as external media coverage. Overall, my research included a spectrum of scholarly and primary sources. I spent hours in newspaper archives looking for small details and clues, but I leaned on scholarly allies for answers when possible. In one case, Mark Astley's finding that Ogrish developed a means of culling material pushed me to dig deeper into the sourcing practices of shock websites.[80]

Each case study is supported by a range of documents, films, online videos, user comments on websites, discourses contained in the popular press (in many cases the best

evidence was found in local newspapers), and the close reading of many laws and regulations which have governed the shape and deployment of War Porn. No detail was too small. Linking details of these histories often came down to linking businesses to other activities by tracing details such as the names of owners which could often be identify by state and province-level articles of business incorporation, and sometimes by other means. Often the answers lay in examining the details of legal disputes to determine how a regulatory policy shaped the outcome of a court case.

I leaned heavily on Archive.org's Wayback Machine. After identifying key touch-points in the events surrounding this data, I examined small details and changes to webpages, often on a page-by-page and day-to-day basis to better understand how national discourses about a given case study differed from conversations being had through other communication channels, often gaining extra insight through comparison. The Wayback Machine allowed me to reclaim many of the websites related to case studies, mostly as they were, with minimal technical issues.

The film and shock videos that I analyzed are mostly available in locatable digital archives. Many can be found on Archive.org, sometimes uploaded by their original creator. Even for these films, I leaned on secondary literature descriptions when possible, because I find the majority of them personally upsetting. At times, viewing films or reviewing parts of this topic was overwhelming, so I spent more time scrubbing through scenes than watching the full film or video. As most of the analysis works through comparing material to study sourcing practices, watching the films as intended by the director was not necessary.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter one, I examine the technological and business practices of Mondo film and the genre's later progression to shock videotapes. I will argue that these productions have relied on

the low hanging fruit of the PAM archive, sourcing medical and law enforcement content, as well as footage of regions of conflict and civil unrest across the globe. By the end of the physical media era, video producers worked a slow progression from atrocity and Mondo films of the 1960s and 70s, which touted narrative elements, but did away with all narrative pretenses by the early 1990s. Atrocity footage was now edited down to deaths scored by death metal and pop punk, creating an experience for fans to consume the grotesque imagery without the politics.

In Chapter two, I look at the evolution of shock websites on the Internet. Shock websites have had their share of legal challenges, but a core set of tactics from testing the waters has demonstrated key best practices for being a successful shock website. I argue that key regulations of the Internet such as Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act created an echo system for shock sites to flourish online, and that there is no legal precedent to protect the murky legal status of PAM material exploited by shock entrepreneurs. These practices for success have included zeroing in on the growing amount of footage coming out of the War on Terror, cooperating with regulators, finding unique sourcing channels, and keeping figureheads out of the spotlight while providing a plethora of content shocking enough to entice gore fans and curious visitors.

For Chapter three, I examine Funker530, a popular social media brand and website described in the popular press as hosting War Porn. The company identifies as a news organization and veteran community, often using publicly appropriable combat footage to attract users and advertisers alike. I trace the trajectory of Funker530's development from a personal YouTube channel into a full-scale media company and lifestyle brand. I examine how Funker530 uses a series of tactics to remain in operation on mainstream social media platforms, reframing its content as professional rather than problematic. Like previous case studies, Funker530's

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sourcing and presentation practices necessitate further investigation, as company staffers gather videos from the Telegram channels of enemies of the United States.

The conclusion will bring the dissertation full circle, moving beyond establishing War Porn as a genre and posing the question of whether much of the conflict-related material discussed in this dissertation can truly be antiwar or morally neutral. I argue that the many case studies examined in this dissertation suggest that footage of conflict in marginalized regions of the world will always be susceptible to exploitation by shock video entrepreneurs across platforms and technologies, and that is because the policies which could hinder this form of exploitation have been designed to protect the copyright status of corporate media when even more vulnerable non-copyrighted War Porn has no protections. As a model for a solution, I focus on Dattallion, an organization that started out as a network of Ukrainian women, documenting Russian war crimes in their communities. This work evolved into a coordinated database of visual evidence of war crimes with a website to communicate updates and provides a model that is a counterpoint to Funker530. The implications for Dattalion's practices deserve closer examination, especially in a world where non-copyrighted materials can be commodified for entertainment purposes.

In the following chapter, I will pick up the conversation about how Mondo films worked to bring vignettes of atrocity from WWII-focused documentary films to new audiences, examining the cultural and political conditions that fueled Mondo content. I will argue that players in the genre perfected the craft of lifting footage of conflict, effectively codifying it as one of a few types of low hanging shock content of the publicly appropriable media archive, along with medical and law enforcement content. The practice of collecting this content for its

trouble-free legal status would become a business model for shock entrepreneurs working in the

decades to come.

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Chapter 1: "Scenes of Death & Violence Packaged for Home Viewing:" How Film and Video Entrepreneurs Commodified Archives of Tragedy for Entertainment[81]

The beginning of War Porn's public history on screen is most readily visible in the atrocity film genre that came about after World War II. Atrocity films became a popular genre of exploitation film that used newsreel and other footage to tell harrowing stories about the cost of war, often in an ideologically conservative and authoritarian voice. The availability of this material for later exploitation purposes was largely thanks to the propaganda that had been created during the war. Many of the films in this genre relied on exploiting footage from Nazi Germany and often contained other titillating exploitation elements, no doubt because they were produced by exploitation veterans like Dwain Esper and Kroger Bab who already had a long list of provocative credits to their names before trying their hands at atrocity films.[82] *The Love Life of Adolph Hitler* (1948, dir Dwain Esper) was one such film that juxtaposed Adolf Hitler and his bikini-clad love interest Eva Braun with footage from concentration camps. Similarly, *Half-way to Hell* (1953, dir. Robert Snyder), produced by Bab, presented footage from World War II and concentration camps as righteous consumption via intertitles leading into the film.[83] In the 1950s and 1960s, a number of documentary films about WWII and the Holocaust leveraged archival footage from newsreels and other propaganda films released by the Allies and Axis forces during the war.

In some cases, atrocity films intersected with the colonial ethnography documentary genre referred to as the exotics. Such was the case with the film *Mau Mau* (1955, dir. Elwood Price), which added sensational violence and sexual scenes with paid actors to bolster what would otherwise be an ethnographic documentary about the Kikuyu uprising against British Colonial rule in Kenya, a conflict that began in 1952.[84] The decisions to supplement the real

footage with staged material was a marketing decision. As Eric Shaefer describes, atrocity films, together with elements of the exotics, which focused on sexualizing other cultures around the globe, formed the essential building blocks for what would later become mondo films in the 1960s.[85] As Schaefer notes: "If the exotic was meant to arouse feelings of sexual desire or disgust, the purpose of the atrocity film was primarily to repulse with images of violence, carnage, or bloody ritual."[86] Bab, cited above as a key producer in the field of exploitation more broadly, was responsible for the exotic film *Karamoja* (1954, dir. Willilam B. Treutle). Though the film exploited similar themes to *Mau Mau*, it was set in Uganda and focused more on embellished tribal spectacle than conflict.[87]

This and many other examples in this chapter demonstrate two key arguments about the development of War Porn. First, War Porn, filmed on location in the global south, taken from various archives, or recreated, proved to be a reliable low hanging fruit of the PAM archive that could be exploited without legal recourse. Second, this chapter will expand Alilunas's observation about traditional pornography's availability on VHS, that: "What was once removed, at a distance, ensconced in public spaces, with all manner of accompanying mechanisms preventing or controlling availability and ease of use, was now much more accessible."[88] Home video technology such as VHS moved the consumption of the content discussed in this chapter from public space prone to scrutiny to more anonymous viewing experiences and videotapes that could be ordered through the mail, leading to the pretenses of story surrounding War Porn, and Mondo films in general, being thrown out. These moves have further worked to separate the vignettes contained in these films from their historical origins. Aside from VHS, satellite news trucks, which had been invented in 1984, captured and relayed news from around the globe, which culminated in a central archive of video that could be licensed by the mid-1990s.[89] This

equipment bolstered the availability of content for shock websites and reality television alike.

This chapter will detail the historical background of shock footage, focusing on the ways in which exploiting the archive of atrocity has provided a plethora of footage from producers of Mondo films and shock videos from the 1970s into the early 2000s. I will divide the analysis into individual case studies deployed through various physical mediums, and will occasionally use the term shockumentary to refer to this genre broadly. This use of shocking footage became the prototype that ultimately led to shock video on the Internet. In this chapter, the historical development of shock video will be discussed. Starting with the origin of the genre, I examine the ways in which the presentation of archival footage and the framing of it shifted. Below, I will highlight an example of how archival footage can be used to create compelling anti-war documentaries, and the ways in which these tactics were later reappropriated with a slightly different intent.

Exploitation and Documentary as Cultural Memory

It wasn't only exploitation film-connected producers like Bab and Esper who were using footage from the war to craft public memory on celluloid. When Alain Resnais made the documentary *Night and Fog* (1954, dir. Alain Resnais), he made a conscious decision to have holocaust survivors working in the motion picture industry write the voiceover clips to narrate the film.[90] Resnais juxtaposed archival footage from propaganda materials with contemporaneous footage of sterile concentration camp buildings surrounded by green vibrant landscapes, allowing the camera to focus on the gas chamber fixtures in the showers to allow viewers to connect the banal scenery with the horrifying past contained in the same walls. Each of these decisions injected nuance and reflexivity that were largely absent in atrocity films.

Night and Fog had powerfully presented archival material, including footage of French

police officers handing prisoners over to Nazi guards, but it was met with protest from national

authorities of Germany and France, and it was banned from the Cannes Film Festival.[91] A

number of Holocaust survivors insisted they would stage an event to occupy the festival if the

film was not shown, a protest so powerful that the film has since become a critical tool for

teaching the French public about the Holocaust.[92] A difference between Resnais's assemblage of

scenes and exploitation-leaning atrocity films is that he increasingly intercut archival footage

with present day footage, choosing Eastman Kodak color stock to get closer to the aesthetics of

the archival stock footage.[93] As Andrew Hebard has argued, the tactics of juxtaposition between

past and present are framed in such a way that viewers cannot be sure whether they are watching

scenes from the past or present, implicating the viewers in the historical politics of the film.[94]

This utilization of a blurred line between non-copyrighted archival footage and the construction

of matching or corresponding contemporary footage is not novel, but this is a key example of

how it can be done to make an affective anti-war film.

After WWII, there was a plan by the Allies to create an atrocity documentary that was

never made. A film that was shown to audiences in 1945 was comprised of mostly footage

recorded by the Allies during the liberation of the camps as well as captured Nazi footage.[95]

Unofficial cuts were shown to a mixed German audience, and some were shown a cut of the film

on more than one occasion. The scenes being shown looked more real in the beginning, but some

accounts suggest bodies looked fake, like rag dolls by the end of the film.[96] While the goal of

these productions was to shock Germany into never committing atrocities again, the effects were

quite inconsistent, including some audience members suggesting the images of holocaust

detainees were sexually exciting.[97] An official film was not released until 1985 as *Memory of the*

Camps, albeit discretely through PBS Frontline, 40 years after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.[98]

As a counterpoint to Resnais, Swedish filmmaker Tore Sjöberg created two documentaries that were first released in Sweden before being translated for American audiences. These films used the same footage but avoided implicating the Allies in any wrongdoing, focusing on the war crimes of the Nazi party. In this way, the less controversial nature of Sjoberg's films meant that they were more widely distributed. These films also received theatrical distribution in the United States, including *Mein Kampf* (1960, dir. Tore Sjoberg) and *Secrets of the Nazi Criminals* (1962, dir. Tore Sjoberg). These films were marketed exclusively alongside fiction films such as French thriller melodramas *Passion of Slow Fire* (1961, dir. Édouard Molinaro)*, Ophelia* (1963, dir. Claude Chabrol)*,* and the b-horror film *Horror Hotel* (1961, dir. John Llewellyn Moxey), which had been release in the UK as *The City of the Dead* the previous year.[99] These holocaust documentaries were marketed with fiction films because they were meant to be consumed as entertainment with little reflexive commitment for audiences. One critic of the film was pleased that the film had not gone further with the gore presented in the film, citing:

> Few of us could endure a prolonged look at these bestial excesses in sadism, producer Tore Sjoberg wisely halts his photographic expose just short of its reaching unbearable and morbid proportions. Nonetheless, a strong stomach is required for the film, which seems to be a horror story so exaggerated that it is nothing to watch and its impact is like a grotesque and unbelievable nightmare.[100]

This language focuses on the generic expectations rather than the political impact, looking akin to a review of a horror film. Likewise, *Mein Kampf* (1960, dir. Tore Sjoberg), a second film completed with archival footage by Sjöberg portrays the events as inevitable and the fault of government leaders, failing to take the reflexive step of implicating viewers and calling on them

to intervene in the future. [101] Scenes from these documentaries have been found in later shock videos, such as *Traces of Death IV* (1996, Darrin Ramage), highlighting the ease of reappropriating this kind of material for vicarious visual consumption. [102]

Not all atrocity documentaries are the same. The films Resnais produced were challenged because they were reflexive in practice, self-aware of their own constructedness, and mindful of the world in which they were situated. They implicated contemporary audiences and world leaders alike. Alternatively, Sjöberg's films were little more than post-war propaganda, not reflexive and portrayed the narrative as the inevitable outcome of the rise of evil with Adolf Hitler and his associates. It's worth noting that Resnais also made *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959, Dir. Alain Resnais), a complicated romantic tale about a Japanese survivor of the bomb that the United States dropped on Hiroshima, Japan at the end of the war. The film intercut the fictional romantic story with atrocity footage from after the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, implicating Americans in what happened. [103] It's also worth noting that Sjöberg's films were Swedish-produced, though they were recreated in English and adapted to American movie theaters. [104] The United States made fiction films related to the Holocaust like *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961, dir. Stanley Kramer), about the trails of Nazi leaders, but the United States had few atrocity documentaries of their own that contained archival atrocity footage, possibly seeing it would not be a good look given the bombs that were dropped on Japan.

This chapter will map how atrocity footage and snippets of War Porn, low hanging fruit of the PAM archive, has been commodified – gathered and packaged by film and video entrepreneurs for home viewing. As this chapter will detail, Mondo films that were shown in theaters maintained certain documentary pretenses such as narration, context, story, and occasionally rationale for their existence. With the introduction to VHS and the relocation of the

viewer to private at home video spaces, these pretenses were slowly stripped away, revealing the possibility for shock videos that edited clips down to the most graphic and compelling moments for horror fans. Across this transformation, I identify that War Porn and other footage from regions of civil unrest have become reliable sources for filling tapes due to their prevalence and unclear copyright status.

Mondo as Conflict Journalism

The first Mondo film, *Mondo Cane* (1962, dir. Gualtiero Jacopetti, Paolo Cavara, and Franco Prosperi), established a genre and a prototype of films that would follow. Remembering from the introduction, a common trope of Mondo films was to juxtapose representations of savage and chaotic corners of the world with the civilized and care free Western World. These highly constructed scenes relied on audiences buying into the overall myths of other regions of the world presented in the films. *Africa Addio* (1966, dir. Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi) was made by the same filmmakers with the intent of juxtaposing civil unrest and war in several African countries to vignettes of Westerners having fun. The film was a very controversial project that surpassed their earlier work. The filmmakers actively went on site to conflicts happening in Africa, including documentation of military clashes in Zanzibar and Kenya. Though the narrative is bogged down by voice of god-style-narration in a rhythmic and poetic format that supports the frequent juxtapositions the film makes, the film contains glimpses of actual conflict, underserved by the Mondo form. In Kenya, the catalyst for conflict being documented was tail end and fallout of the Kikuyu uprising against British colonialism, which span from 1952-1960. Notably, this was the same conflict that the film *Mau Mau* (1955, dir. Elwood Price) had focused on 12 years earlier. Notably, the Kikuyu were the "poorest and most exploited group under British rule."[105] Kenya did not gain independence until 1967, several years

after this film was completed. The Zanzibar Revolution in 1964 was primarily driven by socio-political grievances, ethnic tensions, and a desire for independence by majority-black African citizens from Arab-dominated rule, resulting in the overthrow of the Arab-controlled government. The filmmakers, no doubt, saw these already happening moments as opportunities for exploitation. The film was later release as *Africa: Blood and Guts* in 1967 for an American audience.

Like other Mondo films, *Africa Addio* juxtaposed highly constructed images of a carefree and fun Western lifestyle with representations of savage and chaotic places. In one juxtaposition, Westerners in bathing suits are shown directly before a staged shot of a military-style jeep running over the skeletal remains of a Kenyan military corpse. The juxtapositions used in *Africa Addio* framed the mass deaths happening in these regions as the result of foolish people who believed in magic. The film suggests power struggles dating back decades in Africa, while avoiding any condemnation of the Western mercenaries who increased the turmoil in the country or the larger question of Western colonization and its after-effects. Further still, given the marginal status of these places and the Eurocentric-framing the filmmakers use, *Africa Addio* cast a colonialist gaze on its subjects, reinforcing the subjectification of combatants in the film.

Concerns about the ethics of the filmmaker's emerged during the filming of *Africa Addio* that these former news journalists not only did not intervene where they could, but they engaged in the prolonging of these moments. In one particularly troubling story, when an army planned to execute several young soldiers from the opposition, the filmmakers asked the army to delay the execution until the filmmakers could set up their cameras.[106] *Africa Addio* was ultimately the first and last time such a film could be captured by the filmmakers, because the world was now in the know about how the producers operated. Around 1981, they looked into producing another film

based in South Africa, with titles such as "Wild Beasts" and "Fangs," an "ultra-violent bloodshed

shocker" to be shot in Zimbabwe and West Berlin.[107] The proposal was shot down, citing the

level of "violence, cruelty, and the exploitation of children and animals."[108] It seemed in order

for Mondo films to focus on conflict, directing the action in the heart of conflict was not an

option. For the larger industry around Mondo films to flourish, careful steps needed to be taken

to distance producers and directors from accusations of producing or enabling atrocities

themselves. Instead, future films made on the vein of *Africa Addio* would need to either source

the footage from premade sources like news or propaganda, or fake these scenes through

reenactment.

Faces of Death, Reenactments, and the Challenge to Historians

    Faces of Death (1978, dir. John Alan Schwartz) dropped the juxtaposition pretenses of

month to focus exclusively on scenes of death. *Faces of Death,* which was originally shot by

Americans for Japanese producers and a Japanese audience, was released in limited US theaters

in 1978, but no one knew about the film outside of limited theatrical runs in the US until it was

released on VHS in the 1980s, initially presenting an aura of mystery, developing the marketing

slogan for the VHS packaging "banned in 46 countries."[109] As the creator John Alan Schwartz

noted in an interview two decades after the film was released on VHS, he knew the film had hit

the height of its promotional potential when Dan Rather came on the CBS evening news to

describe *Faces of Death* as a film which should have never been made. One radio host proposed

that the media stop giving it attention of any kind only made the film more appealing, leading to

a debate on it and films like it's banned in video rental stores.[110] *Faces of Death* and other films

that generated panic once they were released on VHS after their initial celluloid run generated a

lot of controversy because, although they were no longer being screened in mass theaters open to

the public, Mondo films were now available to be rented by teenagers in many major video rental stores.

Mark Goodall suggests that *Faces of Death* was not a Mondo film because it dropped many of the Mondo tropes, like the extreme juxtaposition of cultures.[111] For Goodall, *Faces of Death* was all about death, too campy and obviously fake. Though this is a fair assessment, I wish to push the understanding of the *Faces of Death* series a bit farther to complicate the matter of identifying the source of Mondo footage and the complexities of verifying the source with the limited historical records left by Mondo producers broadly, remembering similar challenges with unpacking the history of exploitation film from the introduction.

One reason to further unpack *Faces of Death* in the history of shockumentary is that it was first shown in exploitation movie houses before creating controversy in the home video market. As Alilunas has pointed out, VHS technology created new opportunities for viewers to consume pornography from the privacy of their homes. Likewise, a new generation of shockumentary films no longer had to be shown in theaters or even rented from video stores — they could be ordered directly through the mail and consumed privately in the home.[112] This included fiction films with the same level of gratuitous gore, like *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980, dir. Ruggero Deodato) which generated equal concern about whether the murders depicted in the film were real.[113] This move from the movie theater to private viewing spaces also meant discrete viewings of videotapes that might otherwise create a sense of shame in viewers watching them in public spaces like movie theaters. Mail-order distribution channels for distributing materials on tape created the conditions of possibility for the near-anonymous consumption of increasingly prurient material. The usual regulatory policing of content that stymied the growth

and pervasiveness of exploitation film during the celluloid era did not affect home viewership of the same content.

Examining *Faces of Death* as a model for looking at shockumentary sourcing is a difficult task for a media historian because most the production staff working in shockumentary, with *Faces of Death* being no exception to this rule, have maintained their anonymity by lying about their identity. To this day several exposés on *Faces of Death* have surfaced, but none of them seem complete. Through the late 1970s until 1999, most of the discourses about the authenticity of the film were based on speculation. Audiences that had seen it assumed that some of the scenes were faked, but there was no evidence one way or another. Since 1999, there are four substantive and verifiable stories about *Faces of Death* that can provide insight into how the franchise sourced its content. This provides a metric for how maintaining anonymity has been a business tactic employed over the course of the shockumentary genre.

Broadly, these confessionals have all sought to answer fact versus fiction and how fake footage was achieved through various feats in special effects. More importantly, perhaps, they are not details derived through the work or research of investigation. Instead, they are confessions at the discretion of producers, and it is no wonder that they are incomplete. To this day very few answers have been directed at what was real, where did it come from, and how did it end up in the possession of the filmmakers? The answers to these questions have purposely been obscured by the filmmaker, and each incomplete telling obfuscates ever knowing a complete history, much in the vein of the Mondo genre itself, bringing to mind Mikita Brottman's observation that what may seem like truth in Mondo films is only a highly constructed ruse.[114]

A search for any of the production crew beyond Schwartz Is mostly fruitless. If Schwartz

had changed his name to protect his identity, then why would other crew members offer their

names? In 1999, a group of self-selected production staff from the original film was interviewed

for the documentary *Faces of Death: Fact or Fiction* (1999, dir. John Alan Schwartz), created by

Gorgon Video. Schwartz appeared in costume completely obscuring his identity and voice, still

maintaining his Conan LeClaire persona. In the early 2000s, Schwartz revealed his real identity

when it was evident the coast was clear, giving interviews to small newspapers and eventually

sitting for national interviews on NPR's *Fresh Air* and an article for *Deadspin* in 2012.[115]

Schwartz also produced a written memoir, *My Faces of Death: A Deadly Memoir* in 2014, before

his quick health decline and eventual death in 2019 from a serious form of dementia.[116] The

memoir, still seemingly too over the top to be considered an honest confession, is Schwartz's

most detailed confession, discussing the special effects in certain scenes of his film as well as

how capturing a real drowning on a beach one morning gave him the idea for the film and how

the footage of the 1978 crash of Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA) Flight 182 in San Diego fell

into his hands through his personal industry network.[117]

Though Schwartz certainly managed the creative components of the project and admitted

to cold-calling TV stations for material and putting out ads to collect content from video

stringers, lawsuits related to the film's producers and distributors, mixed with some of

Schwartz's admissions, paint a clearer picture about *Faces of Death* as a franchise that relied on

sourcing through a cultivated network of industry contributors.[118] Though the first film was

bankrolled and distributed worldwide by Telecas out of Japan, traces of lawsuits reveal that

Faces of Death Productions (FOD), which was the moniker used to produce the franchise in the

United States, was a subsidiary of Bill Burrud Productions, managed by Burrud's son John. After

Faces of Death came out on video in the United States in 1983, Burrud and his distributor, MPI Home Video briefly entertained a series of interviews in the mid to early 1980s before faking to the press that they had withdrawn from the production and distribution of future *Faces of Death* films.[119]

Before his press departure, Burrud admitted that many of the scenes involving animals, including the scene where men are shown clubbing seals in *Faces of Death II* (1981, dir. John Alan Schwartz), were outtakes from Burrud's children's Disney animal discovery program *Bill Burrud's Animal World*, popular in the 1970s. However, Burrud's inclusion of the animal maiming is what made the film effective in the absence of real human death. The juxtaposition of fake human suffering with real animal suffering was a visceral tactic employed in Mondo films since the beginning.[120] Real animal suffering made the human suffering seem more real, even when it was not. Burrud believed that the presentation of the footage was misunderstood in that he didn't mean to sensationalize death. Regardless, the shame Burrud experience forced him into the shadows as a producer. Starting in 1983, MPI began selling tapes of the original film for $59.95 each and $69.95 for its sequels, selling 100,000 units by 1986.[121] Burrud and MPI wanted to continue to make money from *Faces of Death* without the negative press.[122] In order to continue to reap the rewards of the film while staying out of the spotlight, Burrud and MPI conceived the shadow company Gorgon Video, initially for the soul purpose of distributing the *Faces of Death* series.[123]

Faces of Death wasn't only controversial because of the kind of content it included, but how the film's producers obtained it. They were often sued for including footage they did not rightfully license or obtain, including footage from slaughterhouses, events gone wrong, and even the bizarre story of Christine Johnson, who discovered she was in *Faces of Death II* in 1985

and sued Burrud and MPI in 1987.[124] The film included footage of Johnson crying at the site of a car wreck that killed a friend of hers, an event captured by KMSP-TV, Minneapolis photographer John C. Burch and sold to Bill Burrud Productions. It was then used as a reaction to an unrelated motorcycle crash. It's likely that part of the success of this venture relied on the discrete audience market as well as the statute of limitations to risk murky legal territory for media releases and consent.

As hokey as *Faces of Death* may seem, it contained early glimpses of what War Porn would later become. While many of the scenes in *Faces of Death* are faked, it's the manipulation of truth and the legacy in this early shockumentary that's worth a deeper examination. In the first film, Dr. Grosse, among the usual shocking Mondo scenes, includes a clip of what he says is a beheading in the Middle East, captured by a Canadian tourist. The multiple camera angles provide more than enough proof that this is one of the films many staged scenes involving heavy special effects. While it pretends to be a factual portrayal, it is patently false.

However, analysis of the inclusion of footage of conflict beyond the first film becomes more complicated. The second film ends with a very convincing sequence claiming to depict the execution of former Liberian leader William Tolbert.[125] Here, Dr. Grosse suggests that Liberians who had staged the coup against Tolbert were more than happy to allow the camera crew to film the event, implying the footage was shot by Schwartz's team. While one should no doubt expect this to be a staged scene as a *Faces of Death* production, there remain conflicting accounts of how Tolbert was executed. Some claim Tolbert was killed in his sleep, other accounts suggest somewhere in his personal quarters.[126] His wife recounts him being stabbed by a white man, bringing rise to the suspicion of CIA involvement during the coup, not to mention the fact the coup leader was trained by US special forces and the US military was looking to Liberia as a

strategic asset during the Cold War and Tolbert was trying to focus inwardly on Liberia problems.[127] All accounts place his death on April 12th, 1980.

The issue that became obvious to me while researching this story is that the execution of Tolbert that John Allen Schwartz and his team had staged for *Faces of Death II* had become an actual theory for Tolbert's assassination. With a team of multiple camera operators, Schwartz films a mass execution of Tolbert's several cabinet members in front of a military firing squad. The individuals are tied to logs with the backdrop of a sea behind them. While members of Tolbert's administration met their fate this way by all accounts, Schwartz places Tolbert in the scenes. There are a number of still photos separate from the film that depict these events floating around on the Internet. Are they production stills? If the production is real, the man that the camera situates the action on is likely Tolbert's foreign affairs minister Cecil Dennis, based on a comparison of photos of the event to the film. Even the official Liberian history accounts aren't quite sure what happened on that day in 1980, but mixed responses from the Internet audience suggest some still believe Schwartz had recorded the actual Tolbert execution. Tolbert's assassin, Samuel K. Doe was also brutally executed by an opposing army in 1990, which was also captured on video and can be licensed via Getty Images at the time of this writing along with many stills of his torture beforehand. The easy availability of the Doe execution provides just one example of how this form of exploitation of the historical archive of War Porn lives on in plain sight, possibly ready for the next entrepreneur to grab. Unlike Tolbert's execution, the Doe content is undeniably the real thing, photographed by Patrick Robert, a photographer connected to a company called War Photo Limited.[128]

This conflicted narrative of Tolbert's execution provokes questions about the historical interplay between fiction and nonfiction and even what kinds of evidence one can still find to

corroborate what actors participated in Schwartz's reenactment. Was it the same site? Was Tolbert's cabinet really assassinated in front of the cameras of a Western exploitation filmmaker like Schwartz? Schwartz didn't emerge for credit for his films until the early 2000s. What makes this story more frustrating is Schwartz's final installment in the genre, *Faces of Death: Fact or Fiction?* (1999, dir. John Alan Schwartz). Like other producers in this series, he laid low for fear of retaliation. Though, *Faces of Death: Fact or Fiction?* Was supposed to be a confession of what was real and what was fake in the films, Schwartz presented another farce, giving out small tidbits to build credibility like the fact that the monkey brains eating scene and the satanic ritual scene relied on acting and special effects. The execution of Tolbert, as Schwartz declared, still in his Conon LeClaire persona, was absolutely real.

One additional clue comes from Mondo historians David Kerekes and David Slater, who discovered that in *Faces of Death II* (1981, dir. John Alan Schwartz), the scene depicting the self-immolation of Buddhist monk Quang Duc was a reenactment of an event that really happened but was never recorded by a motion picture camera.[129] Schwartz likely reconstructed the scene with the well-known iconic photograph of Quang Duc who had self-immolated in protest against the South Vietnamese government's persecution of Buddhists and their demands for religious equality. With this knowledge, it becomes easier to speculate that the Tolbert execution was also a staged reenactment, but these reenactments still focused on the exploitation of many black actors and possibly fake accounts of Liberian history to recreate the story. The embellishment and falsification of politically and culturally significant histories of Africa in exploitation films has a long history, dating at least back to atrocity films like *Mau Mau* (1954, dir. Elwood Price) which was discussed in the opening of this chapter. Africa as a target of mythmaking and exploitation for These conflict reenactments demonstrated an appetite for the

real equivalent of this material, a potential that was just around the corner thanks to a number of new technologies that would make sourcing and distributing the real much easier.

Traces of Death Cuts the Pretenses of Narrative

The VCR had a big impact on the shockumentary genre in the 1980s and 90s, shedding the Mondo pretenses of story and elements of fakery for raw reality. The VCR was a device for the private exhibition of content. It was also a tool for producing home-made features, especially pirating copyrighted and PAM material. More so, the ability to heist material from prior productions, especially from unknown origins, revitalized the genre and shrouded in mystery, both in the degraded aesthetic quality and in the unknown origins of the footage. What bordered on the lines of legality with the earlier Mondo genre was redefined as the standard for more informal homemade productions, and, effectively, homemade distribution networks were formed on the backs of underground magazines. As Johnny Walker has discovered through his archival research, Mondo films were often marketed as and alongside fictional cult horror films in horror magazines such as *Fangoria*, marketed as entertainment for extreme horror fans.[130]

Generally, these tapes focused less and less on the political, cultural, and social narrative surrounding scenes in the films. One such film was *Traces of Death* (1993, dir. Damon Fox), which was produced inexpensively by simply copying most of the footage from already available lowkey productions like a military autopsy training film and older shock compilations.[131] *Traces of Death* was a groundbreaking five-part franchise that claimed to be a compilation of all real deaths for the first time in motion picture history.[132] The films were initially credited only to the pseudonyms Damon Foxx and Brain Damage, later revealed to be Darrin Ramage and an associate who dropped off after the first two films.[133] The films contained advertisements for additional merchandise, including an extended catalog of murder memorabilia that supposedly

included real human skulls, all operating out of his Temple, Arizona condo.[134] Unlike *Faces of Death*, where much of the footage of fatalities was highly orchestrated using archives, special effects, and other audience manipulation, *Traces of Death* was mostly comprised of real footage of death from previously released films.

Ramage knew that *Traces* could never be advertised on television by means available to feature films. He was able to sell 5,000 copies of the initial film to mom and pop-type video rental stores, but he wanted to push his sales higher.[135] He devised a plan to try to attract bad press by mailing copies of his film to daytime television shows and posing as concerned mothers who had come home to find their children watching the films, including hand-written letters. He was looking for the same kind of attention that *Faces of Death* received on CBS News and understood the tactical approach well.[136]

Ramage grew up watching all of the Mondo films he could get his hands on, but he disliked the reenactments that many of the Mondo films used to depict death scenes, and he also disliked the style of building a narrative around the films.[137] Ramage cut death scenes down to specific frames. Where the *Faces of Death* series would have included an ambulance driving to the hospital, Ramage's focus on death allowed for upwards of 100 scenes per film instead of the much more limited number in classic Mondo films.

Once Ramage's partner Damon Fox dropped off after the first couple films, Ramage replaced the campy voiceover with intense soundtracks to drop the last of the narrative pretenses the series shared with Mondo films.[138] While the first *Traces* film used a cheap synth soundtrack, subsequent releases in the series had soundtracks that were a collaboration between *Traces* producers and the metal record label Relapse Records.[139] This practice can be best described as a collage of decontextualized death videos, allowing audiences to experience the gore without the

political context. As Walker has pointed out, Ramage presented these real scenes in such a way to appeal to extreme horror fans.[140]

Ramage used these initial films to create a distribution empire. He has diversified his business over the years to include several companies involved in production facilities, distribution, and marketing, building an entire media empire in Arizona on the back of the original *Traces* z-movies.[141] This allows Ramage to wear several different faces in the media world, from Brain Damage Films distribution, to Sun Studios, ACORT International Distribution, Midnight Releasing, Nocturnal Features, and M3-Maxim Media Marketing, all currently active according to his LinkedIn page.[142] Along the way, Ramage has collected a number of films similar to the *Traces* series for distribution, including Nomo Ichi's 6-part series *Banned! In America* (1998-2003) and the *Executions* series, which is just what it sounds like.[143] Often, these videos padded original found footage while borrowing from other films. For instance, the primary difference between the format of the *Traces* and *Banned! In America* is the choice to have a metal soundtrack instead of an electronic soundtrack. This empire was mostly built on the back of the PAM archive, including the low hanging fruit of War Porn from regions of conflict and civil unrest.

The number of politically-motivated executions from around the world in the *Traces of Death* series was unprecedented up until this point. The original film contained mostly stunts gone wrong and other US domestic mishaps, and the only scene of international importance was the Iranian Embassy Siege. However, the second film and beyond were loaded with scenes of civil war and genocide in the global south, politically motivated assassinations and executions, footage of children and other civilians caught in the middle of conflict, with other bits of chaos from the Western world sprinkled in. Among the countries represented in the *Traces of Death*

series were Iran, Iraq, Peru, Algiers, South Africa, El Salvador, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Yugoslavia (Serbia). Some of the scenes included in these compilations are the 1981 assassination of the President of Egypt Anwar Sadat; the attack by Bosnian Serb forces on the Markle Market in Bosnia in 1994; footage coming out of the Algerian Civil war in the 1990s; and the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Beirut in 1982.[144] Other footage is likely of the killing fields from the Cambodian Genocide and the Burundian genocide of 1993. Some of the spontaneous Western accidents that were juxtaposed with representations of the global south were usually captured by local TV stations, easy to license from television archives which had sprung up in the mid-1990s. This films also included captures by chance on live TV such as the 1984 murder of Jeff Doucet by Gary Plauche and the 1993 murder of Maritza Martin by her ex-husband Emilio Nunez.

When an interviewer asked Ramage if he had ever feared he would get into legal trouble for his compilations, he denied it, reinforcing the logic that the low hanging fruit of the archive made little trouble for shock video entrepreneurs.[145] Though much of the footage for *Traces* came from live TV and tape recordings, just as much was also taken from previous entries into the genre. The continual recycling of archival and shock footage became a Mondo standard that carried forward throughout shock video. Clips from the Highway Safety Foundation's drivers' education films from the 1960s and 70s, sometimes called hamburger movies because of their real-life display of traffic fatalities, were later used in the shockumentary series *Traces of Death*.[146] Similarly, the Mondo film *Shocking Asia* (1974, dir. Rolf Olsen) included a scene about the Nanjing Massacre. *Faces of Death* utilized footage of cadavers in the aftermath of the holocaust. The opening scene of a live pig being blowtorched with a flamethrower was taken from *True Gore* from 1987 (dir. M. Dixon Causey), which predominately focused on the torture

and mutilation of animals. *Traces of Death IV* (1996, dir. Darrin Ramage) included a scene likely taken from *Secrets of the Nazi Criminals* (1962, dir. Tore Sjoberg), about Ilse Koch.[147] Medical footage was taken from *Basic Autopsy Procedure,* produced by the US Army for training purposes in 1962.[148] Copying scenes in this way seemed as much of a core subcultural practice as a way to pad the films' running times.

Todd Tjersland sourced a large chunk of the content he used in the *Faces of Gore* series in the late 1990s and early 2000s from a "company in Asia" in what he's referred to as, "a sweetheart deal."[149] Tjresland claims the footage to be police and medical footage from Japan, but the full context is muddled.[150] This series, however, goes another step further with Tjersland's voice-over work as the assumed character of Dr. Vincent van Gore. One notable moment in the first film involves Tjersland referring to a pregnant mother who died in a train derailment as a whore, which is upsetting on multiple accounts. Because Tjersland sourced the footage outside of the United States, legal matters such as navigating complex licensing requirements or being involved with a lawsuit from video subjects could be avoided. Tjersland has received criticism from both veteran producers in the shock genre and other critics for laughing and generally making fun of the death and mutilation in *Faces of Gore* via voiceover.[151] This critique from within the industry highlights a parameter that is drawn in order to legitimate the sharing of gore and shock. Intentionally and clearly mocking the traumatic moment, much like the gore-journalists in early Mondo pausing an execution for a better camera view, crossed the line with no plausible deniability.

What's enlightening about the shock video era overall is that these sorts of acquisitions of footage, either bootlegs from television or large acquisitions of atrocity footage, end up in many of the same anthologies, but they don't come from the same places. In the Western world,

tragedies were the result of accidents captured on live TV. Alternatively, footage obtained outside of the legal bounds of the United States deserves more unpacking. It's not by chance that footage of real conflict and unrest often comes from less developed countries, because citizens of those countries have no legal recourse against U.S. filmmakers.

In many cases, the sourcing and distribution of this kind of content presents interesting insight into how these unique business practices work. In many cases, before this footage is obtained, it has a first life as propaganda, stemming from global conflict and civil unrest. In many cases, perhaps the pretense-free *Traces* series being an exception, this footage is presented in such a way that Western audiences feel as though they are participating in the politics through their spectatorship, constructing a myth that ongoing Western influence, military occupation, intervention, and other forms of cultural supremacy are warranted in these global regions. Beyond the myth-making that these images have, another important factor that separated these representations from material realities is their separation by perspective, space, and time, even misrepresentation in many cases. In other words, these representations have several degrees of separation from the initial recording audiences of material on videotape.

Shock Video Becomes Obsolete

In 2005, Ryen McPherson created a shock DVD that purported to show a glimpse of the ongoing conflict in Iraq, dropping even more pretenses of the Mondo genre to appeal to viewer's sense of timeliness. Early in 2002, McPherson had created the controversial, direct-to-tape *Bum Fights Vol. 1: A Cause for Concern* along with his associates, which was largely distributed through their website, Bumfights.com. The homeless men in *Bum Fights* were paid small amounts of cash to perform stunts, including self-harm, for the camera. The primary participates in the series took McPherson to court for promoting illegal fighting, which resulted in a

misdemeanor, community service, and a hefty fine of $300,000.[152] Two years later, when he was

found to have violated community service terms of his probation agreement, McPherson went to

prison, serving three months of his 180-day sentence. As a counterpoint to the taking of

representations from the global south, the *Bum Fights* case proved to be a prime example of the

complexities of staging violence for the camera in the continental United States.

Perhaps through this experience, McPherson conceptualized and edited a new film called

Terrorists, Killers, and Middle East Wackos (2005) (hereafter *TKMEW*), using a variety of

shocking conflict video that did not have the same legal liability he had dealt with in creating

Bumfights. The vignettes were from many years earlier, including grainy and black-and-white

footage. The 54-minute video was sold on Bumfights.com with many other films in the

Bumfights catalog.[153] McPherson marketed the video as containing footage "smuggled from

Iraq," implying it was intercepted footage coming from the Iraq War, which had begun in 2003.

However, *TKMEW* contained no contemporary footage from the ongoing War on Terror in Iraq

and Afghanistan. In fact, the cover photo for the video compilation, which depicted an execution

of a blindfolded man with a placard around his neck containing Arabic language, was the same

cover photo used for the 1999 release of Nomo Ichi's *Banned in America IV*.[154] Instead of current

conflict and atrocity scenes coming from the War on Terror, McPherson copied conflict and

atrocity materials from decades earlier, edited this time to pop punk music, including the band

Happy Campers. *TKMEW*'s implied connection to the current political moment of 2005 was a

tactic to market the film as part of the contemporaneous global conflict without having any

actual footage to show. Already, by the early 2000s, the work of collecting shocking material

coming out of conflict zones in the Middle East would become the work of shock website

operators

Conclusion: The End of an Era

As this chapter has outlined, post-war atrocity documentaries, Mondo films, and shockumentary video tapes have relied on the low hanging fruit of the PAM video archive and footage from regions of conflict and civil unrest, filling in with staged reenactments were there were gaps. Taking these scenes from PAM collections has been a practice honed by shock video entrepreneurs over time, and knowing what and where to look has been a key business tactic. Though the low hanging fruit of PAM archives has often included television, medical, and law enforcement footage, the use of War Porn has remained an enduring staple of the genre with larger political implications that need to be unpacked with a historical lens.

As these case studies have demonstrated, as technologies such as VHS and the availability of global television archives starting in the mid-1990s made it easier to produce shock video and consume it at home, the pretenses of moral tone became obsolete from these productions, and the more footage was recycled. The shift to private viewership has stymied critiques of the ongoing use of atrocity footage and War Porn for entertainment purposes. War Porn's deployment as entertainment for Western audiences, trapped inside shock tapes and videos discussed in this chapter, is all about a video extension of colonialism. In 1966, Mondo filmmakers went straight to the conflict, employing a Western colonial lens. By the end of the shock videotape era in 2005 with *TKMEW*, War Porn continued to be used in familiar, unsettling ways, increasingly separated from historical contexts.

Towards the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, the shockumentary genre as it existed on VHS began to fade. One tell-tale sign is that many of the most successful gore-shock franchises on video began to source videos from the Internet, leaving the website watermarks intact. Essentially, what was once exclusive to physical media formats could now be found on the

internet for free. In many ways the Internet changed the model of the shockumentary genre that carried through a long lineage of feature films dating from the 1960s. The Internet brought with it new possibilities for community collaboration and anonymity. The Internet also became a default repository where curators could collect all previous content in this new online space. As I will demonstrate in the next two chapters, this move to the vast landscape and storage of the Internet meant that past shock troves could be used for profits in perpetuity, as long as the websites were not shut down.

In the next chapter, I will explore the histories of earlier pirate-exploiteers in this genre, the webmasters working in Internet based photo and video platforms instead of videotape, who pushed the limits and redefined content licensing in the Internet era. Whereas video entrepreneurs may have licensed the footage for features after they were completed, pirates on the Internet digitized and housed clips on webpages that acted as a new form of a boundless archive, often claiming to house footage rather than create it. This gave this new generation of entrepreneurs the ability to claim that they had nothing to do with the preparation of footage, which was often prepared by the members of the website communities, allowing webmasters to dodge blame at times when user content became legally questionable. VHS and later DVD had always been technologies useful to video pirates, but the Internet was on the rise by the early 2000s. It was still a fairly anonymous Internet with less sophisticated tracking technologies and a wide range of chat rooms, discussion boards, and file exchange services, many which did not require any formal registration. With some caveats, the Internet had even more to offer those trading videotapes in the underground.

As shockumentaries began to appear on Internet platforms such as YouTube, they were freed from the myths imparted by their original contexts, but this also meant that they were

further separated from their initial political context. This shift to the Internet also signaled the end of the mail-order videotape era, and entrepreneurs who wanted to continue the shockumentary tradition in the Internet would have to adapt. As the next chapter will discuss, though shock video's use of images from the Internet may have signaled the genre's demise on videotape, these videos have also made it on to the Internet through website sales. Shock websites carried on these traditions by selling collections to fans, including *TKMEW* (2005), the *Faces of Death* series, the *Traces of Death* series, and many more. Whereas the inclusion of footage from previous films served as an homage to the genre, the Internet would prove to be a snowballing collection of both material from the past and the steady flow of incoming content from the Global War on Terror. This link between War Porn on physical media of the past and what would come out of the internet era demonstrated that although the format and technologies for presenting War Porn had changed, the business tendencies, audiences, subcultures that supported it shared many similarities.

Notes

[81] Beale, Lewis. "Scenes of Death & Violence Packaged for Home Viewing." *Philadelphia Daily News*. December 11, 1986.

[82] Notably, Esper produced *Reefer Madness,* the 1936 anti-drug film that has become a cult classic. Bab produced the infamous exploitation film *Mom and Dad* in 1945, which featured footage of human births.

[83] Schaefer, Eric. 1999. *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*. 1st edition. Durham: Duke University Press Books.

[84] IBID

[85] IBID

[86] IBID. 215.

[87] IBID

[88] Alilunas, Peter. 2016. *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video*. Univ of California Press.

[89] This knowledge was obtained from a phone interview of a sales worker who has worked from the archive since the early days. CONUS was just one of many examples of a new technology source for footage that developed alongside VHS.

[90] *Shoah* (1985) employs similar tactics by the documentary filmmaker to ground the film and true archival and participators approach's, opting not to recreate any of the narrative through reenactment.

[91] Hebard, Andrew. 1997. "Disruptive Histories: Toward a Radical Politics of Remembrance in Alain Resnais's Night and Fog." *New German Critique, NGC*, no. 71: 87–113.

[92] IBID.

[93] IBID.

[94] IBID.

[95] Carruthers, Susan L. "Compulsory Viewing: Concentration Camp Film and German Re-Education." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (December 2001): 733–59. https://doi.org/10/d3xwzg.

[96] IBID

[97] IBID

[98] Moughty, Sarah. 1970. "Memory of the Camps." FRONTLINE | PBS. January 1, 1970. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/memory-of-the-camps/.

[99] Jay Emanuel Publications, Inc. 1962. "Motion Picture Exhibitor." *The Exhibitor*, November 7, 1962. https://lantern.mediahist.org/catalog/motionpictureexh68jaye_0_0289.

[100] Miller, Jeanne. 1963. "Painful, Gripping Hitler Documentary," October 11, 1963. https://uoregon.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/october-11-1963-page-27-64/docview/2163792139/se-2.

[101] Aitken, Ian. 2013. *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*. Routledge. 624-626.

[101] IBID.

[102] Walker, Johnny. 2016. "Traces of Snuff: Black Markets, Fan Subcultures and Underground Horror in the 90s." In *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, edited by Neil Jackson, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker, and Thomas Joseph Watson, 137–52. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

[103] Rees, Stephen. 2002. *French Cinema: From Its Beginnings to the Present*. Vol. 127. France, United States, New York: MSI Information Services. 73-74.

[104] "Display Ad 109 -- No Title." 1962, October 12, 1962. https://www.proquest.com/docview/116082822/fulltextPDF/914CC80247D74374PQ/12?accountid=14698.

[105] Blakeley, Ruth. 2009. *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism: The North in the South*. Routledge. 81.

[106] Goodall, Mark D. 2006. "Shockumentary Evidence: The Perverse Politics of the Mondo Film." In *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film*, edited by Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim. Wallflower Press.

[107] "Pictures: Prosperi Script Ends Cooperation Of South Africa." 1981, December 16, 1981.

[108] IBID.

[109] *The Guardian*. 2018. "'Banned in 46 Countries' – Is Faces of Death the Most Shocking Film Ever?," October 1, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/oct/01/banned-in-46-countries-is-faces-of-death-the-most-shocking-film-ever.

[110] Schnaufer, Jeff, and Steve Ryfle. 1995. "Valley Newswatch." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Los Angeles, Calif.*, February 11, 1995.

[111] IBID

[112] Alilunas, Peter. *Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016.

[113] Kerekes, David, and David Slater. 2016. *Killing for Culture: From Edison to ISIS: A New History of Death on Film*. SCB Distributors.

[114] Brottman, Mikita. 2004. "Mondo Horror: Carnivalizing the Taboo." *The Horror Film*, 167–88.

[115] NPR.org. "Death and Dying." Accessed February 27, 2020. https://www.npr.org/tags/207365184/death-and-dying.

[116] This is from personal correspondence with his wife who remarked that though he was alive, his life had faded years before.

[117] Schwartz, John Alan. *My Faces of Death*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014.

[118] IBID

[119] McCullaugh, J. I. M. "HomeVideo: MPI's 'Faces Of Death' Meets Early Demise Because Of Bad Press." *Billboard (Archive: 1963-2000); Cincinnati*, September 19, 1987.

"MPI Homevid Pulls 'Death' Tape Series; Too Much Attention." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000); Los Angeles*, July 22, 1987.

[120] Brottman, Mikita. 2004. "Mondo Horror: Carnivalizing the Taboo." *The Horror Film*, 167–88.

[121] Beale, Lewis. "Scenes of Death & Violence Packaged for Home Viewing." *Philadelphia Daily News*. December 11, 1986.

[122] Confirming this fact, the online MPI and Gorgon video stores now both sell the entire *Faces of Death* catalog.

[123] Connecting MPI and Gorgon was easy since they share an address. Ali, the owner of MPI claims MPI would stop carrying the tapes because they wanted to end the constant calls from local newspapers. *Faces of Death* is mainly historicized by fans who want to love the series without stirring trouble. Instead of naming the Burrud, discourses often make references to a child travel TV star who didn't want to be named. A lawsuit against Burrud provided a clue.

[124] Associated Press. "Hog Slaughterhouse Sues Over Death Documentary." *Pensacola News Journal*. September 9, 1992; Zack, Margaret. "Part of Suit Over Filming Can Proceed." *Star Tribune*. May 5, 1989.

[125] It's worth nothing here that Liberia has historically been a place of civil unrest because many freed slaves, in the decades leading up to the abolishment of slavery in the United States, were relocated to Liberia based on an agreement between West African leaders and white US negotiators. This effort essentially led to civil unrest between indigenous Africans and freed slaves, eventually taking the form of two civil wars between 1989 and 2003.

[126] Cooper, Helene. "In Liberia, an Executive Mansion Fit for a President — and Ghosts, Too." *The New York Times*, October 29, 2017, sec. World.

[127] Alloycious, David. "CIA Agents Executed 1980 Coup." *The News Newspaper, Liberia Media & Marketing Services, Inc.*, November 27, 2020. https://web.archive.org/web/20081010215622/http://thenews.com.lr/story.php?record_id=3722&sub=News.

[128] "AFRICA by Patrick Robert Aug 12th - 30th Oct 2006." n.d. Accessed May 8, 2023. https://www.warphotoltd.com/exhibitions/africa10.

[129] Kerekes, David, and David Slater. 2016. "See! See!! A Man Actually Eaten Alive! Mondo & the Burgeoning Death Scene." In *Killing for Culture: From Edison to ISIS: A New History of Death on Film*. SCB Distributors.

[130] Walker, Johnny. 2016. "Traces of Snuff: Black Markets, Fan Subcultures and Underground Horror in the 90s." In *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, edited by Neil Jackson, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker, and Thomas Joseph Watson, 137–52. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

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[131] Uneasy Terrain Explorers Club Podcast. 2020. "Ep 10: Discussing Traces of Death with Darrin Ramage." YouTube. November 6, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rk5xPvpIy64.

[132] Based on the introductory intertitles of the film.

[133] These are claims made by Ramage in interviews.

[134] This advertisement and references can be seen at the end of the first *Traces of Death* film.

[135] Webb, Dewey. 1994. "America's Goriest home Video: Morbid Moviemakers Give New Meaning to the Word 'Deathwatch.'" *Phoenix New Times*, February 9, 1994. https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/americas-goriest-home-videomorbid-moviemakers-give-new-meaning-to-the-word-deathwatch-6425625.

[136] Uneasy Terrain Explorers Club Podcast. 2020. "Ep 10: Discussing Traces of Death with Darrin Ramage." Youtube. November 6, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rk5xPvpIy64.

[137] IBID.

[138] IBID.

[139] As Kerekes has pointed out, the extreme imagery juxtaposed with extreme metal quench the thirst of extreme metal fans and allowed *Traces of Death* to be advertised in metal magazines. See Kerekes, David. *Killing for Culture: From Edison to ISIS: A New History of Death on Film*. SCB Distributors, 2016. Also, see: Walker's extensive research into the advertising of these films in underground fanzines such as *Deep Red* and the series' association with metal subcultures. Walker, Johnny. "Traces of Snuff: Black Markets, Fan Subcultures and Underground Horror in the 1990s," 2016.

[140] Walker, Johnny. "Traces of Snuff: Black Markets, Fan Subcultures and Underground Horror in the 1990s," 2016. https://doi.org/10/gf3935.

[141] Though Ramage has stayed out of the spotlight for the last few years, he made headlines in 1999 when it was revealed that he'd signed a contract with several Arizona minors to produce several backyard wrestling tapes based on a submission of scenes that involved one teen jumping off a roof onto another teen and one opponent taking a cheese grater to his foe. Future installments planned from the use of barbed wire and broken glass, according to mixed newspaper accounts despite Ramage's non-compliance.

[142] It seems likely that he put a wrap on Dead Alive productions, a moniker that he answered to from 1993 to 2000 to put distance between himself and the controversy generated from the *Traces* films.

[143] *Banned!* Includes the infamous R. Budd Dwyer suicide, a common clip spliced into tapes in this genre.

[144] The Markle Market bombing was the first of two attacks over an 18-month period captured on video, and leaving 68 people killed and 144 wounded. The Sabra and Shailta Massacre was a horrific genocide event involving the deaths of Palestinians and Lebaonese Shiites by allies of Israel. The deaths had been indiscriminately carried out by a Christian faction at an Israeli refugee camp as a reaction to the assassination of Christian President-elect, Bashir Gemayel. The event results in thousands of killing of men, women, and children. See: "1982: Refugees Massacred in Beirut Camps," September 17, 1982. http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/17/newsid_2519000/2519637.stm .

[145] Uneasy Terrain Explorers Club Podcast. 2020. "Ep 10: Discussing Traces of Death with Darrin Ramage." Youtube. November 6, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rk5xPvpIy64.

[146] The Highway Safety Soundation's history includes screening films at theaters along with horror movies with ambulances waiting in the auditorium for fainting audience members. See: *"Santa Monicans to See 'Horrorama' Program: Ambulance, Hearses, Films to Make Up Unusual Exhibit at Civic Auditorium,"* *Los Angeles Times,* August 19, 1962.

[147] Johnny walker has noted that this may also be an elaborate reenactment.

[148] An anarchist bookstore named AMOK advertised Basic Autopsy Procedure in their store collection. See: "Running AMOK - Los Angeles Times." Accessed February 4, 2020. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-07-21-bk-79-story.html.

[149] Guns, Guts & Glory. "I was a media whore" – Confessions of Todd Tjersland," February 26, 2017.

[150] Police uniforms display a Thailand flag

[151] "'I Was a Media Whore' – Confessions of Todd Tjersland." 2017. February 26, 2017. https://loveamanwithmoustache.wordpress.com/2017/02/26/i-was-a-media-whore-confessions-of-todd-tjersland/.

[152] Stahl, Michael, and Michael Stahl. 2018. "Subversion Gone Wrong: Inside 'Bumfights.'" *Rolling Stone* (blog). October 2, 2018. https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/bumfights-homeless-men-fight-activists-730393/.

[153] McPherson often uses the moniker InDecline as the brand after purportedly selling the rights of the *Bumfights* series to investors. For more of the full *Bumfights* story, see: https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/bumfights-homeless-men-fight-activists-730393/

[154] This is based on my own research, comparing the films.

Chapter 2: "We want to be the CNN of gore sites:" Shock Websites Become Experts of Internet Censorship[155]

"War is no longer something read in dispatches, it comes straight into the living room. Take a website like LiveLeak, which has become popular with soldiers from both sides of the divide in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Operational documentary material, from their mobile phones or laptops, is posted on the site in real time."

- British Prime Minister Tony Blair speaking on Jan. 12 2007.[156]

By the start of the United States' declaration of the War on Terror in 2001, shock video had gone from a perverse niche video subculture to a matter of national security with the Pentagon keeping an eye on an ever-increasing collection of amateur-recorded War Porn being uploaded to websites and shared by soldiers and terrorist networks alike.[157] When the beheading video of Daniel Pearl was first uploaded to the Internet on February 21st, 2002, it created an instant controversy. The video became very popular overnight on Ogrish.com where it nearly crashed web servers.[158] The FBI called the owner of Ogrish and threatened to sue, though other websites likely received a similar call.[159] The fringe message board that allowed subscribers to post and comment on shocking media content had the attention of the world. Though Pearl, Pearl's Family, and even the terrorist network that perpetrated the act was certainly on everyone's mind, it was the video itself that was poised to gather the most attention – a video that was being hosted on an American shock website.

As Susan Sontag has asserted about the Pearl execution, what was produced by the terrorist network was a much lengthier propaganda film that included other content and demands. What appeared on Ogrish was largely edited down to the execution itself.[160] This choice in

brevity was more fitting for a shock audience. Largely attributed to the War on Terror more broadly, Pearl was beheaded by a Pakistani terrorist group, using him as a pawn for their interests in manipulating the Pakistani government to meet their demands. He was a journalist who had been captured on his way to conduct an interview. Pearl was one of many Western detainees to be executed in front of cameras to make propaganda, messaging to promote terrorist networks. Terrorist network-made propaganda combined combat footage showing victories, destruction, and carnage from both sides. Even Osama Bin Laden bootlegged the destruction of the Twin Towers from 9/11 and worked it into future propaganda.[161] These productions were meant to recruit new members while reviling other spectators, but shock website visitors represented a third constituency these propagandists would come to work with.[162]

At the dawn of the new millennium, a mixture of advances in technology and the political climate of global conflict stemming from the Middle East led to significant changes in the shock video genre and the elevation of shocking photographs and videos coming from the battlefield. This body of content can best be described as the burgeoning genre of War Porn online, defined in the introduction as amateur-recorded video of a shocking nature coming from the global battlefield. As this chapter will demonstrate, War Porn is often presented in tandem with or alongside sexually-explicit amateur-recorded pornography, consistent with shock and Mondo video practices from previous eras.

The changes in shock video depended on the technological affordances of the interactivity of the Internet and increasingly mobile camera systems hitting the marketplace.[163] Suddenly, new videos were recorded and circulated within days, often anonymously. By the mid-2000s, body-worn video cameras could be worn by American military members on deployments, with HD video arriving by 2009. As one product reviewer put it: "What's this, another tiny, high-

definition camera to strap onto your person before doing something wild and crazy? Yes."[164] It wasn't just video cameras. Cellphones could record and send videos, and standard laptops had become powerful enough to edit and finalize professional looking videos. As I can attest from my 2005 deployment to Iraq, cameras, laptops, and phones were sold on posts in combat zones, and they could also be sent in by mail.[165] Anyone could be a camera operator or video producer, and shocked website owners sought to benefit from PAM content with unclear copyright statuses.

One criticism of shock websites is that they have given terrorist organizations consistent access to global distribution of their messaging. Using the Internet and video platforms are just as much of a strategy for winning conflicts as any actual fighting.[166] As one article noted, LiveLeak.com was known as: "The Islamic State's favorite site for beheading videos."[167] Since the beginning of the War on Terror, a number of shock video websites have had success building membership bases and attracting advertisers from their snowballing collections of war videos and other miscellaneous violent content, especially the documentation of beheadings, combat firefights, and other realities caught on camera. In this chapter, I examine the trajectory of shock websites as they tested the waters of early Internet censorship and entertained a range of thrill seekers before letting go of old habits in the name of becoming profitable, if still fringe, news organizations.

The Dual Life of War and Conflict Videos

This chapter examines the dual life of shock videos of war and conflict, from their intention as propaganda to their appropriation as entertainment for global audiences, albeit typically white and Western. It will explore the evolution of business and content sourcing practices across the trajectory of this niche genre. I will argue that these companies developed

ways of utilizing PAM content focused on war and atrocity to make profitable and lasting archives.

While there have been many shock websites in the last several decades, I will focus on three for this chapter that are the most exemplary of the trajectory of War Porn as it moved beyond the technological conditions from the video tape era and made its debut online. Rotten.com, Ogrish.com (later LiveLeak.com), and TheYNC.com are the three websites that were either popular or demonstrate a key point about the evolution of the shock video genre from the early Internet days to what the online genre looks like in the 2020s. Throughout the chapter, I will focus on answering a few key questions to identify the changes in aesthetics, format, and business practices as shock video transitioned from videotape to the Internet. What were the origins of online shock video? What were the sourcing and business practices involved in early shock sites? Lastly, with the closing of LiveLeak.com, Ogrish's predecessor, in August of 2021, what led to the decline of these websites, and what is their legacy?

A Broad Historical Overview of Shock Websites and Legal Responses

A 2001 survey concluded that 45% of the youth in Canada had visited a shock website, usually finding out about them through word of mouth.[168] This is especially notable given the average youth's access to Internet was generally through a share household computer. As one article stated: "The footage was too graphic for the six o'clock news, but not for the Internet."[169] As one user remembered the landscape of the Internet at the time: "The Internet was sort of like a Ouija board. And, before long, I was looking at decapitation photos."[170] The old practices of censorship intervention were thwarted. It was clear that moral authorities had their work cut out for them. Shock video was already inside the home and could not be cut off at the movie theater or video rental store.

Like its Mondo film predecessors, the goal of the shock website was to titillate audiences with cheap thrills and shocking material of a violent, sexual, or otherwise controversial nature. While scenes from films were meticulously collected and often licensed for commercial purposes, the nature of the material shock websites collected from anonymous user submissions led to increasingly prurient material being uploaded and steady legal advances by authorities.[171] Unlike shock videotapes, these websites rarely had to rely on bootlegged or copyrighted media because users uploaded so much raw reality video from every corner of the globe.

Whereas the old way of selling shock depended on packaging content and distributing it on physical media, shockumentary peddlers in the Internet age found a new way of doing business. First, the web shifted from a typical mass medium where information was disseminated from a single node to one where information could be shared democratically. Second, the Internet changed notions of traditional media content ownership, especially ambiguously owned content such as the material that shock producers once harvested from loose celluloid and television archives where the ownership status of material was often unclear, like the case studies discussed in Chapter one. The perpetuation of these representations of conflict produced an endless amount of video content which translated to profit for webmasters who had effectively taken the place of Mondo film and shockumentary video producers of the past.

Though the War on Terror provided much fresh content for shock website operators, it should be noted that the old shockumentary practice of bootlegging older content and adding it to collections remained a standard practice – at least at first.[172] The consumer accessibility to the Internet was new, though much of the content was not, as it was recycled from the videotapes of the past. For instance, Shockumentary.com was a website owned and operated by Rotten.com, and sold shock video tapes from the *Faces of Death* (1978) series to *Terrorists, Killers, and*

Middle East Wackos, remembering from Chapter one that *TKMEW* was produced by the creator

of the *Bum Fights* franchise from the early 2000s.[173] An additional detail that established the

connectedness between the videotape era and shock websites is that shock videotapes produced

in the late 1990s and early 2000s increasingly began to use content downloaded from websites,

often leaving the watermarks intact.[174]

Within the popularity of peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing services, a number of "faces of

death"-labeled videos began to appear on servers and could be downloaded and shared with

friends. These weren't necessarily from the *Faces of Death* films but "faces of death" was used

as a term to organize the searchability of the genre. Abbreviations and shortened references such

as this to parts of shock videos allowed for the location of these segments across distributed

sharing services. For instance, a particularly notorious scene from *Banned from Television*

(1998), in which a woman is hit by a train, circulated simply as "Traingirl."[175] Like the mediums

before them, these websites depended on the trusty streams of incoming content as well as a

reliance on user familiarity with and interest in contributing to collections. Content was being

shared by users across a range of interactive communication tools at a rapid rate.

The complex interactive nature that reconfigured the relationships between producers,

distributors, and exhibitors of content made the Internet much tougher to regulate than past mass

mediums. Unlike previous mass communication mediums where content producers were

primarily organizations accountable to local regulations, markets, and oversight by regulatory

bodies like the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Internet began as somewhat

of a blank slate.[176] A given website could be accessed from across the world, virtual private

networks (VPN) could offer anonymity, and government oversight about what citizens accessed

was under development. This was a change from physical mediums that had to be delivered

through the postal service or pass through customs when being transported internationally.

Shock websites have received a steady stream of attacks by legal authorities. Though

Bestgore.com and NTFU, which I used to open the dissertation, will not be discussed at length in

this chapter, they demonstrate that federal and global authorities have little control over what

gets posted on the Internet, what websites are censored, and what websites get blocked if the

contents they contain are legal. A website cannot be brought to court without a clearly

identifiable owner. Local jurisdictions have found ways to utilize obscenity laws to police this

matter to some degree, but that has become more difficult. This is why, as I described in the

introduction, Chris Wilson, the NTFU creator, along with Bestgore operator Mark Marek, went

to jail. Bestgore.com was taken down by the Quebec police department, and Marek was jailed

based on the application of local obscenity laws in the jurisdiction where he lived.[177]

When it was brought to the attention of Polk County Florida Sheriff Grady Judd that

Wilson was living in his jurisdiction, Wilson was jailed and the domain name redirected to the

Polk County Sheriff's office, and Wilson faced 301 counts of indecency and jail time.[178] Though

Wilson's website contained jarring and graphic amateur War Porn archives, it was the

pornographic content shared on the website that Judd cited as the reason for jailing Wilson and

shuttering the website.[179] Ultimately, one count stuck, and Wilson was forced to refrain from

running a website for three years, after which he quickly dropped ties to pornography with the all

reality-based Documentingreality.com.

Cases like these are rare – anomalies, possible because of one small detail or clue that

gave the identities of Wilson and Marek away to local authorities. These local authorities

succeeded in shuttering NTFU and Bestgore.com because both brands had a clear figurehead,

authorities were alerted that these figureheads lived in their jurisdictions, and the sites had posted content that these authorities deemed indecent within the legal definition's bounds. What happened to Wilson was likely also a result of the evolving atmosphere regarding Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. More successful shock websites, which I will discuss in this chapter, learned to play within the framework of evolving Internet regulations, learning valuable lessons from other sites that made a critical mistake or failed to adapt along the way.

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1996 created an ecosystem for shock websites to flourish on the Internet by protecting websites and social media platforms from legal liability based on what their users shared.[180] Section 230 shaped the modern Internet, shielding websites from lawsuits when users uploaded copyrighted or illegal material. This regulation has also supported websites that act in good faith to remove illegal content without fear of repercussions, a portion of the regulation that has emboldened shock site operators to police users rather than the site itself.

In cases where it can be proven that a website was complicit in illegal activity, website operators have been prosecuted.[181] In the court proceedings regarding NTFU and Bestgore.com, prosecutors made a case that the website operators played an active role in encouraging and curating illegal content. This short regulation has shaped most of the modern Internet, encouraging the growth of social media platforms and forum websites which both rely almost exclusively on user-submitted content.[182] Scholars have argued that these same conditions that have led to the growth of many social spaces on the Internet have also led to an environment that supports hate speech and misinformation, conditions that foster conspiracy and propaganda – shock websites being part of those same concerns.[183]

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 reinforced many aspects of Section 230, including protections for website operators who acted to promptly remove content from their websites that violated copyright under Safe Harbor provisions. This focus on intellectual property sought to better balance the power between copyright holders and platforms, standardizing the process for removing content. This regulation also pushed websites to comply with Section 230 and DMCA in order to avoid losing Safe Harbor protections which protected websites from lawsuits over what its users uploaded. Website owners that lose Safe Harbor protections could be brought to court over the actions of its users. This pushed websites to conform to strict adherence to complying with the DMCA, pushing the nihilist and anarchist attitudes remembered from mail-order shock tapes in the shock video era towards a genre that complied with regulations and acted within the rules.

The same regulations that have protected copyright content have not provided equivalent content for non-copyrighted material. General legal protections against invasion of privacy can protect United States citizens from their likenesses being shared on websites without their consent, but the process for getting content taken down has more steps and is less standardized, leaving the onus of proof of privacy violations up to the video subjects. One of the most prominent discourses regarding non-copyrighted material is in regard to non-consensual pornography, commonly known as revenge porn. Users that have uploaded non-consensual pornography have been subject to fines, felony charges, and hefty lawsuits based on the victim's right to privacy.[184] While amateur pornography has these kinds of protections, amateur War Porn, especially when video subjects are not US citizens, are much less likely to be disputed. Sourcing videos from marginalized parts of the globe, especially videos containing dead subjects, guarantees website operators have less instances of harboring content that could be

jeopardized by US law. This outcome is reminiscent of Todd Tjersland's admission that he

sourced medical and law enforcement footage from Southeast Asia and mocked the dead

depicted in these videos to make his *Faces of Gore* shock video series in the late 1990s and early

2000s.[185] There was no precedent for legal recourse for subjects represented in Tjersland's films,

a key business tactic that other shock entrepreneurs have employed. As the following case

studies will demonstrate, shock websites have been emboldened by copyright and decency

regulations, which have allowed these sites to exploit material not protected by these regulations.

Rotten as An Encyclopedia and Newswire Aggregate

The earliest and most infamous of the shock sites was Rotten.com, founded in 1995,

pitching itself as a bastion of free speech on the Internet, one that showed legal gruesome images

such as death and autopsy photos. From its beginning, the website was curated by owner Thomas

E. Dell, a former software engineer at Apple and Netscape, and likely a dedicated set of trusted

users that updated the website regularly with fresh content.[186] Much like the tabloid news of

print journalism, it relied on paying close attention to newswire photos and other gruesome

content available to the public.[187]

By April of 1997, the website caught the attention of radio host Howard Stern who was

impressed by the collection and discussed it on his show.[188] As Rotten boasted, the mention

raised the traffic on the website from 4,500 people a day to 50,000.[189] By 2001, the basic HTML

format with black text, white backdrops, and descriptors along with the macabre content drew

200,000 visitors a day.[190] This is notable as the Internet was not as widely accessed as today,

with only 18% of U.S. home having a computer connected to the Internet.[191]

From the beginning, Rotten gathered attention from harsh critics and new fans alike from

its very inception, appealing to audiences as varied as teenagers on their school computers to

curious adults. One of the characteristics that made Rotten exhilarating is that it never framed any of the content beyond a short and ambiguous title, often leaving users with a more shocking outcome from each click, using content descriptions such as "Cab Driver," "Bad Face," "Don't Gawk," and "Pumpkin."[192] Dell intentionally positioned the name Rotten as synonymous with free speech and routinely defended the merits of such a website. He argued:

> To censor this site, it is necessary to censor medical texts, history texts, evidence rooms, courtrooms, art museums, libraries, and other sources of information vital to functioning of free society… If you watch the Discovery Channel or the Learning Channel, you see pictures of dead bodies, cadavers of famous people.[193]

By appealing to the historical record in this way, Dell echoed the earliest aspirations of the Internet, a repository for humankind. By 2001, Rotten and other shock websites had already gained fame by releasing content that wasn't available in traditional media outlets such as collections of people jumping from the Twin Towers on 9/11 or the autopsy photos of Saddam Hussein's sons Qusay and Uday.[194] Even the U.S. Army was cited as complicit in the availability of the Hussein autopsy photos.[195] These segments were, as Dell claimed, historical in nature. But whether hosting them in this manner was appropriate was up for debate.

Rotten was public about its legal battles, even listing them on its website. While many came from established corporations who took issue with their brand being on the website, more telling is the flippant tone Dell took when families contested content based on invasion of privacy. When one family contested a photo of their nephew's decapitation by a train, Dell denied the connection between the photograph and the family, suggesting it was sourced from Mexico, all but stating it would therefore not be prone to such legal challenges.[196] When a woman used lawyers to have her face removed from the Fuck of the Month page, the content was removed after the second request, but not without Rotten suggesting the woman depicted was

merely a lookalike.[197] Because of these legal battles, Rotten was the first to deal with censorship threats and often had trouble keeping the website live on a server. As a result, Dell created his own server and then began to support other websites that were in jeopardy of being booted from the Internet.[198] This included webpages like the infamous Bonsaikitten.com, a hoax website that gave instructions for growing a kitten in a jar. Rotten's owner saw each of these as a fight for free speech.[199] This effort to circumvent the kind of regulatory pressure that Dell was dealing with all but predicted the need for shock websites to use tools like Cloudflare which will be discussed later in this chapter.

During its time online between 1996 and 2017, Rotten demonstrated that a shock website could successfully defend against legal attacks if it played within the rules of Section 230 and DMCA. It was never shut down, though many critics challenged it until it stopped being updated in 2012 and eventually completely went offline around October of 2017, a relic of the early Internet that had long been surpassed by its pupils.[200] One such pupil was Ogrish, which was on the rise by 2001, a formidable competitor to Rotten that was also posting content such as bodies falling from the Twin Towers in New York City on 9/11 and Qusay and Uday Hussein's autopsy photos.[201]

Ogrish: Decentralizing Sourcing and Distribution

An ABC News article from 2006 claimed that if you wanted to see terrorist propaganda videos, they were only a few clicks away at websites like YouTube, Ogrish, or Google Video.[202] Through these popular video hosting services, people could often find themselves wanting to choose a side based on the propaganda that was coming directly to their Internet-connected computers.[203] Though mainstream platforms like YouTube were susceptible to having content uploaded by terrorist networks due to limited content policing practices, Ogrish was arguably in

the business of hosting such content exclusively. Though videos like Daniel Pearl's beheading were certainly shared on non-English language websites and likely by other means, it was Ogrish that brought them front and center to the American public.[204] Ogrish searched for terrorist propaganda and turned it into viral content for Western onlookers.

In 2000, Ogrish started as a forum website, and Daniel Klinker was identified as the website's creator and spokesperson.[205] Ogrish specialized in shock and gore at large and provided a range of subgenres. Content was posted by core admins and users, and users participated in conversations about a range of content, from accidental deaths to medical photographs – all the typical elements of an average shock collection from the video era. It was basically the interactive web 2.0 companion to shock videotapes.

In 2002, the Daniel Pearl beheading video put Ogrish on the map. The FBI called the website and asked that the video be removed to avoid a lawsuit, but the threat proved uncredible.[206] It was later revealed that the FBI had fabricated the threat as a scare tactic, and the ACLU helped Ogrish, and others repost the video.[207] The incident between the FBI and Ogrish was reminiscent of the FBI inquiries into a number of documentary-style horror movies from the 1980s such as *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), looking for evidence that portions of these films depicted snuff, only Pearl was the real deal.[208] Many people may have read about the Pearl video in the newspaper, or heard about it on TV, particularly after CBS news aired less violent parts of the video, with anchor Dan Rather suggesting it was necessary to show public audiences just how far terrorists would go to make Americans notice their work.[209] This drove traffic to Ogrish, and also led to harsh criticism from the Bush White House.[210] The story also recalls one related to shock video and Rather in the 1980s, his first marketing service to shock video. As described in the previous chapter, when Rather first found out about the availability of *Faces of Death*

(1978) on videotape in the early 1980s, he took to the airwaves to condemn the film and warn others against it, an act which surely boosted video rentals.[211]

The terrorist group uploading the Pearl video in 2002 proved that such material could go viral and force a response from American politicians.[212] Distribution was also free for the terrorist organizations, as the material generated income for its new hosts. Ogrish had perfected the art of culling the Internet and heisting terrorist propaganda videos from non-English websites.[213] This approach of collecting content and reappropriating it from propaganda to shock was the start of a symbiotic relationship between terrorist networks and the shock websites that would peddle their content at no cost. Videos coming from the Islamic State were increasingly highly edited with high production value, making them even more appealing and sought after. For example, ISIS worked to make the James Foley beheading video specifically for an English-speaking audience. Where previous beheading videos were produced in Arabic, the James Foley video employed professional editing with English subtitles.[214] Klinker stated that during big events such as the uploading of a beheading video, the servers were maxed out with 50,000 to 60,000 views an hour, predominantly users in the United States.[215]

In 2005, Ogrish was censored by the German government and was subsequently blocked in an additional five countries citing that the site had violated age verification regulations.[216] In response Ogrish added a terms of use agreement before users could access the page, stating: "Ogrish is a website featuring uncensored events including: beheading videos, execution images, accident pictures, gruesome scenes from Iraq etc. We are legally represented by FirstAmendment.com" – putting their justification front and center.[217] In 2006, Ogrish added Rotten to the list of Ogrish sponsors, along with many adult themed pornography websites, at the least signaling admiration for the work of the up-and-comer by the pioneer, Rotten.[218] It is not

clear whether this sponsorship was financial or content-related, but it demonstrated an ongoing connection between the two sites.

Klinker claimed that Ogrish primarily sourced content from a global network of 50 key contributors working in fields like law enforcement and medicine.[219] They also claimed to have purchased content from camera operators who just happened to capture it, not dissimilar to entrepreneurs from the shock video era.[220] Curating this content from selected curators produced royalty and hassle-free gore met the needs of the website was a move to ensure it was less likely for subjects or copyright owners to sue. The more global the reach, the less likely a lawsuit would show up in Western courtrooms, either because the video subjects were dead or separated by borders. This kind of tactic was good for business, especially when terrorist propaganda began to pour in. The Islamic State had little interest in copyright claims – they just needed channels to carry their message.

A few years into the War on Terror, Ogrish admins may have noticed conflict-related content was drawing a large portion of their audience, no doubt amplified by the threats the site received from the FBI. Over time, Ogrish developed a following of soldiers who had access to raw battlefield footage.[221] Simultaneously, each ISIS-produced beheading video had reportedly been downloaded several million times, with the Berg video topping the list at 15 million views.[222] While the content in the Ogrish archive broadly focused on the same sort of shocking imagery that was seen in the shock video era like accidents and suicides, an increasing amount was made up of execution and other videos coming from the Middle East. Some were from many years earlier. As Mark Asley put it:

> The archival (for which read "database") nature of websites allowed death sites like Ogrish to create subgenres that fetishized different forms of real-life body horror and death media, and by October 2005, Ogrish had over forty beheading videos available.[223]

These videos were created for propaganda purposes, but as they ended up in Ogrish's collection, they fueled an increasing appetite for contemporaneous combat videos of a political nature. Essentially, both terrorists and GIs alike were helping Ogrish build its collection.

The Shift to LiveLeak

In 2007, within one year of the FBI's phone call regarding the Daniel Pearl video, Ogrish shut down and rebranded to Liveleak.com, changing its slogan from "Can you handle life?" to "Redefining the media."[224] It quickly made a splash with its new name by releasing the Saddam Hussein execution video.[225] The Ogrish URL redirected traffic to the new website, and many core Ogrish fans were not pleased with this change.[226] The website was again a user forum-style website, but looked more like a modern video platform, akin to YouTube.com, though it still contained the goriest videos on the Internet. From its launch, LiveLeak made adult verification standard, and included content filters for family friendly and graphic content.[227] LiveLeak organized its footage into subgenres of combat video from different regions of the globe rather than some of the classic shock genres. Unlike Ogrish's narrative that it had an established sourcing network, LiveLeak offered a cash prize to the "Top Leaker" for its first two months of operations, rewarding unique content with viral potential.[228] The cash system was converted into a points system which assigned points to users who uploaded, shared, or otherwise engaged with content. Larger point shares were given to featured content which drew additional attention to the website.[229] This documented disinvestment from a specific sourcing network to citizen-leakers established an additional layer of non-accountability for LiveLeak itself.

Hayden Hewitt, a part of the original Ogrish team, branded LiveLeak as a free speech bastion, elevating the political discourse surrounding content to argue the rationale for hosting it.[230] Across its webpages, LiveLeak made a point to highlight how it explicitly complied with

law enforcement on indecent and illegal media posted on the website and any works to address violations of copyright infringement, with a big report button being just below content. LiveLeak reported up to 23 million views a month on their content, mostly users living in the United States.[231] Hewitt noted that another member of the Ogrish team once told him: "We want to be the CNN of gore sites."[232] Given LiveLeak's overall success hosting shocking material too graphic, controversial, and perhaps too political for the mainstream media, LiveLeak got as close to the CNN of gore as it could.

By 2008, LiveLeak and Hewitt were involved in a heated controversy over the anti-Islam documentary *Fitna* (2008) created by a Dutch parliamentarian, one of the many challenges that would shake Hewitt. Hewitt had initially allowed the website to host the film before it was temporarily removed because of death threats he was receiving from Islamic groups. In this case, playing both sides resulted in threats to Hewitt and his family's lives, pushing Hewitt to relocate to an undisclosed location.[233] The film was reposted once Hayden Hewitt was safe from harm.

Liveleak quickly became a well-known war news website, sponsored by Patreon subscriptions and advertisers that were a good fit for the website.[234] One big change, and perhaps the biggest move away from Ogrish's established ad revenue stream, was that LiveLeak's owners dropped all links to conventional pornographic websites. NTFU, which operated from 2004 to 2006 and was somewhat of a competitor for extreme war-themed content, was shut down within a year of operation due to its connections to traditional pornography.[235] Thus LiveLeak moving away from this revenue stream proved a change that eliminated the previous Achilles heel of shock websites that were taken down due to their links to traditional pornography.[236]

YouTube.com first received an upload of the Foley beheading video from ISIS in 2014 before the video was picked up by other shock websites. The video contained information that

suggested ISIS would be following up with more beheadings of Westerners in their captivity.[237] This video was then uploaded to LiveLeak, which continued to host the video once it was removed from YouTube.com because it was drawing so many views and attention to the website.[238] However, due to the backlash Ogrish received over the Foley video, the synergy between LiveLeak and the Islamic State was over. Hosting more ISIS content would unequivocally implicate the brand as a direct component of the ISIS propaganda effort. LiveLeak's owners went further to dissociate themselves from a direct connection to the ISIS propaganda distribution chain, finally establishing a policy to ban ISIS from uploading new content.[239]

These policy changes likely did little to impact the overall trajectory of the already popular Liveleak, which had become one of the 500 most visited websites.[240] Though so much of the initial traffic was because of terrorist content, the site's owners banned ISIS propaganda videos to avoid future claims that they were supporting terrorism by offering terrorists a video platform and therefore a public pulpit and recruiting opportunity.[241]

LiveLeak went offline in 2021. By that time, Hewitt had parlayed his role in starting LiveLeak into another brand called Trigger Warning TV, essentially a video-recorded podcast focusing on freedom of speech. Hewitt stated on *Trigger Warning TV*: "Everything's different now, everything moves on. I don't fucking like it. I liked it much better when it was the Wild West."[242] Hewitt's words were meant to condemn the end of LiveLeak, a move that he saw as a result of the increasing encroachment of censorship of the website by regulators that made it too difficult to carry on as a profitable media enterprise. That ended a 14-year run as an outlaw.

TheYNC and Anonymity

In 2023, there remains a smattering of shock websites, which mostly haven't received public criticism or publicity.[243] TheYNC.com is one such site that has employed graphic imagery that has rivaled, if not surpassed, Ogrish. The site has never made national news, even in connection with another story. However, the website has been operating since 2005, with a more anonymous and less boisterous approach than many of the other websites that have been discussed in this chapter. As a case study, TheYNC provides useful insight into what business approach and tactics it takes to be a shock website, still online in the 2020s. TheYNC has been in operation for 18 years as of the time of this writing, and they have employed tactics to deal with legal disputes as discretely as possible while still being as true to shock traditions as possible. As this section will demonstrate, this is in part due to their expertise related to Section 230 and DMCA.

TheYNC launched in 2005, with the earliest blip registering on Archive.org's Wayback Machine on November 3rd. TheYNC stands for The Young News Channel, typically abbreviated as TheYNC. TheYNC is a shock website as well as a social media presence.[244] Before becoming The Young News Channel, the web presence was hosted under the URL Youngnationalist.com with the tagline: "Declaring war on liberalism."[245] Unlike its counterparts that were fully emersed in the dark aesthetics of gore dating back decades, the website was decorated with stars and stripes. Even with a new name, the website touted a clear ideological commitment to white conservative Christian nationalist politics, going as far as to name George Bush the "Liberal of the Month" for his spending and immigration policies.[246] Early on, TheYNC arguably had more basic HTML than Rotten, which launched ten years earlier, situating its collection of beheading videos alongside nationalist imagery such as clipart of sacred American government scrolls.[247]

By 2007, the content on TheYNC was closer to being divided equally by war-themed and pornographic content, no different than the content shared on Ogrish, with ad banners linking to other pornographic websites listed at the top of each page. Since 2013, the website has added modern graphic design, and traditional pornographic content is listed on its pages right alongside shock content like accidental deaths, torture, terror attacks, cartel executions, and beheading videos. TheYNC has tried many approaches to frame its content such as employing the slogan: "Revealing the darker side of the news," but has since given way to branding itself with banners highlighting sexually-explicit torture from other parts of the globe and mutilation mixed together with copyrighted American pornography, likely through an agreement with the copyright holder.[248] If that assessment is true, this outcome is not dissimilar to Mondo film creators' choices to pair real scenes of shock with staged sexual titillation to heighten the verisimilitude of both.[249] Visual juxtapositions between nationalist clip art, pornography, and beheading videos coming from the Middle East is not far off from the power of juxtaposition depicted in the Mondo films of the 1960s – the comparisons between the civilized white Western world and the imagery of savagery and conflict happening in the global south.[250] Whereas vignettes of sex and violence were placed side by side in Mondo films, TheYNC positions violence and pornography side by side on most of the pages. TheYNC boasts of an exclusive content section for paid premium users in its "Underground" area, citing the exclusivity of the videos in the collection.[251] Examining the underground area, pornography is paired with exclusive atrocity content from around the globe with no probable copyright issues. As of January 2023, the master webpage banner contains the link: "! War Videos here," linking to an unfiltered collection of atrocity content, mostly coming from the war in Ukraine.

One of the keys to TheYNC's success is it consistently applies the tactic of total

anonymity, an alternative approach to the many figureheads from other shock sites that have

made their identities publicly known and made themselves susceptible to personal attacks.

Recalling from Chapter one, Bill Burrud, *Faces of Death's* discrete producer, abruptly bowed out

of the franchise spotlight when he realized it would negatively impact his mainstream reputation

as the beloved host of a children's show.[252] While the methods for uncovering Mondo film's

origins had much to do with looking up reverse street addresses, studying details of the videos,

and finding any and all details in the liner notes to trace back the origins, the Internet has an even

more limited set of ways to track curators like TheYNC's operators. In this way, the anonymity

is more easily maintained by the site, who has never shared any information beyond PO Boxes

and an email address. Tracing Globe Media Corp, the designated DMCA agent listed on the site,

back to the state of Nevada reveals the names of a legal representative Matthew Taylor and

President Daniel E. Salamone in New York. Michael Stevens has also claimed to be a co-owner

on LinkedIn.[253] A deep search of Globe Media Corp turns up no results on search engines. Globe

Media Holdings, a website presence with a slightly different name, describes itself as a parent to

several conservative satire blogs. One entity, *Cinch News*, stirred controversy in April of 2023

for implying the misgendering of a trans mass shooter.[254] Investigations into the satire behind the

story reveal that Globe Media Holding's also maintains its anonymity, with *USA Today* using

quotes from the web copy for their story rather than an interview with a spokesperson. A visit to

Globe Media Holding's website is a red herring, containing such phrases as: "We provide the

wokest and most progressive business consultation services as well as super hip branding…

Forget morality, that's not what is selling right now… Take advantage of the volatile social

climate…"[255] Down the page, the voice adds: "Find out how you can convince your audience

that racism is the #1 problem in America and that you are selling - I mean providing the solution!"[256] The tone is overtly sarcastic and includes a note at the bottom that the page is "powered by journalism." Globe Media Holdings links to two additional websites that feature articles meant to mock progressive ideas, with titles like: "Five budgeting tips so you can donate to both BLM and Ukraine despite the rising cost of living."[257] Evaluating globe media is frustrating, but it's one more indication that Section 230 and DMCA have created conditions for these businesses to thrive. Even what looks like compliance and accountability is no more than a joke. What should be a law firm's website is hardly necessary.

TheYNC has also been emboldened by Cloudflare — a web service that halts tracking and attacks on websites by providing a barrier between websites and users. Cloudflare takes URLs, and provides an image of the website, so that the actual domain isn't right behind the address — it's just a link. Cloudflare's CDN services have been wrapped up in a number of controversies. These services have been accused of protecting the anonymity of terrorist and child abusers alike, further obscuring the identity of users.[258] Over the years, Cloudflare has been the barrier between questionable websites and activist hackers that would like to take them down. Some of Cloudflare's controversial customers over the years have included Documentingreality.com, Goregrish.com, 8chan, 4chan.org, and the *Daily Stormer* as well as Funker530.com, which I will discuss further in the next chapter.[259]

What has made TheYNC unstoppable thus far is that it plays within the law – its inbox being clearly marked as available to request takedown of copyrighted or otherwise illegally housed content. The previous chapter discussed how shock video entrepreneurs of the videotape era heavily relied on the bootlegging of content from earlier films to the point where it was a subcultural trope. Alternatively, TheYNC became a purported copyright advocate as it adjusted

to the regulatory environment of Section 230 and the DMCA. TheYNC includes a detailed guide

for having content removed from their website. Though the operators have maintained their

anonymity since 2005, they are open about working with law enforcement to remove illegal

material, even stating that they may refer users who violate terms of service to law enforcement

themselves.[260]

There are a couple of reasons that TheYNC is still on the Internet. First, there is no

figurehead attached to the brand. Second, it's likely that TheYNC is able to avoid negative

attention, even in its eighteenth year of operation, by never making national news, never being

the best at what it does, and never being the first to post a controversial video. All of that has

been good for business. Even as second best, the website and the video archive that supports it is

a profit-making trove of content comfortably nestled behind Cloudflare CDN services.

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, shock videotapes and shock websites initially shared

some overlap with content from the videotape era on the Internet. As discussed in Chapter one,

shock videotape producers started to source content from the Internet to fill tapes, signaling the

inevitable obsoletion of the format. The landscape of shock video changed significantly, going

from a range of shocking content presented on video tape from the 1980s and 90s to elevating

content from multiple players in the global battlefield from the early 2000s to the 2020s, from

American GIs to the Islamic State terrorist network. Both advancements in the interactive

Internet and the increasing availability of video recording technology made it easier for GIs and

terrorist networks alike to become part of the supply chain for shock websites.

Shock websites have become more cautious about the materials they post and share

because of Section 230 of the 1996 Communication Decency Act and the framework provided

by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. However, TheYNC is an example of a site that's demonstrated how to navigate and exploit those same policies for the success of the business. Though it's not always evident in the extreme and chaotic collections of videos that adorn shock websites, many websites like TheYNC that were still operating in the 2020s have become carefully curated, selecting content that is less susceptible to takedowns or intervention by law enforcement agencies, which has meant sourcing content from the global south and terrorist propaganda created in regions of civil unrest. These common challenges for shock websites were laid bare by the legal actions taken against Mark Marek of Bestgore.com and Chris Wilson of NTFU, who were jailed for encouraging users to upload content as well as the threats that Ogrish.com received from the FBI.

Mechanisms for protecting subjects of videos exist, and sites like TheYNC make it theoretically possible to pursue protection from being portrayed in video. But, this process is confusing and takedown mechanisms are only available to video subjects who are living. Not only do they need to be alive, but they also need to know their likeness is represented on the website and have the means to prove beyond a doubt that they own the material, which is not typically the case for War Porn and other non-fiction atrocity media.[261]

The case studies examined in this chapter demonstrate that anonymity is a key to the long-term success. Shock websites with a figure head that emerged to take credit for the success of their businesses have been susceptible to life-threatening personal attacks as in the case of LiveLeak, or fines and imprisonment as in the case of NTFU and Bestgore.com. Terrorist networks also found the early anonymity of these platforms appealing, though they have been forced to distribute content through other channels with their ousting from LiveLeak.[262] A prime tactic of protecting a site's vulnerability and anonymity is the employment of Cloudflare CDN

services. TheYNC, with its strong anonymity policies, presents a model for how to keep a shock website running within today's legal parameters and anti-censorship best practices.

The cash cow of shock websites is having a steady supply of incoming content that will stay available as long as it's not challenged by DMCA, right to privacy, or a form of clearly inherently illegal media. It was these conditions that made many shock website operators such as LiveLeak narrow their focus from a broad collection of shock down to one that focused on war themed content with less and less connections to pornography. It is clear that sourcing shocking content from the global battlefield had its share of opponents, but the content was technically and legally defensible, given that video subjects were either dead or creators could be implicated in a war crime just by emerging to claim their copyright, principles that are true for all War Porn.

In the next chapter, I will examine Funker530.com, which is operated by a group of American veterans as a military community and lifestyle brand that houses a range of violent conflict-related video from across the globe. Funker530 was somewhat of a protégé of LiveLeak, even borrowing content to supplement its archive of conflict video. I argue that Funker530 uses a range of tactics introduced by shock entrepreneurs of the past while employing some new strategies to rationalize their existence on popular social media platforms, tactics I will argue have worked to professionalize War Porn. Much of the staff are social media influencers who have leveraged the brand to sell an array of merchandise. The brand has positioned itself as an unapologetic veteran and military-themed lifestyle brand that presents the conflict videos in its archive with commentary to appeal to journalistic and educational values, sporting the tagline: "Combat footage and military news for the veteran community," and yet, it remains simply the next incarnation of War Porn.[263]

Notes

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[155] This is a quote taken form: Stryker, Cole. 2014. "Murder, Mayhem and the Evolution of Website LiveLeak." *Newsweek*. September 30, 2014. https://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/10/murder-mayhem-and-evolution-website-liveleak-273963.html.

[156] Cook, James. n.d. "Q&A: The Man Behind LiveLeak, The Islamic State's Favourite Site For Beheading Videos." https://www.businessinsider.com/profile-of-hayden-hewitt-founder-of-liveleak-2014-10. I define shock video in the previous chapter.

[157] Greene, Richard Allen. n.d. "Pentagon Keeps Eye on War Videos." *BBC News*. Accessed April 11, 2023. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/5226254.stm.

[158] Talbot, David. 2005. "Terror's Server." *MIT Technology Review*, February 1, 2005. https://www.technologyreview.com/2005/02/01/274631/terrors-server-2/.

[159] *The New York Times*. 2002. "Web Sites Remove Video of Pearl's Death (Published 2002)," May 25, 2002. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/25/world/web-sites-remove-video-of-pearl-s-death.html.

[160] Sontag, Susan. 2004. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. F First Paperback Edition Used edition. New York, N.Y: Picador.

[161] "Bin Laden's Hard Drive." n.d. https://www.hulu.com/series/bin-ladens-hard-drive-3a9fdc72-0dfa-4cc1-9ac9-c83d40f43bf8.

[162] I saw a lot of this kind of Islamic State propaganda content, traded on thumb drives in Iraq. I never understood why soldiers possessed it, but thumb drives were routinely lost in common areas such as computer stations and claimed by new owners.

[163] For more on these social media and technology have supported social movements, see: Tufekci, Zeynep. 2017. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press.

[164] Stevens, Tim. 2009. "GoPro HD Hero Review and Helmet Cam Face-Off." Engadget. November 16, 2009. https://www.engadget.com/2009-11-16-gopro-hd-hero-review-and-helmet-cam-face-off.html.

[165] Further, while American post exchanges were adherent to American laws, including copyright, Iraqi nationals sold massive collections of movies and software for dirt cheap. One could buy all three *Back to the Future* films on one DVD for a few dollars, or the Adobe Creative Suite including professional grade editing software for $25. That was the price for someone like me.

[166] Conway, Maura, Moign Khawaja, Suraj Lakhani, Jeremy Reffin, Andrew Robertson, and David Weir. "Disrupting Daesh: Measuring Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and Its Impacts." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42, no. 1–2 (February 2019): 141–60. https://doi.org/10/ggqg3t.

[167] Dazed. n.d. "LiveLeak, the Notorious Host of Online Beheading Videos, Is No More." Accessed April 13, 2023. https://www.dazeddigital.com/science-tech/article/52710/1/liveleak-the-notorious-host-of-online-beheading-shock-videos-is-no-more-itemfix.

[168] Laucius, Joanne. 2004. "Websites Make It Easy to Access the Macabre: Survey Finds Boys Most Attracted to Gruesome Footage." *The Ottawa Citizen*, September 22, 2004.

[169] Laucius, Joanne. 2004. "Websites Make It Easy to Access the Macabre: Survey Finds Boys Most Attracted to Gruesome Footage." *The Ottawa Citizen*, September 22, 2004.

[170] Schroeder, Audra. 2014. "The Legacy of Rotten.com." The Kernel. October 26, 2014. https://web.archive.org/web/20191005094145/https://kernelmag.dailydot.com/issue-sections/features-issue-sections/10700/rotten-history-shock-site/.

[171] Ogrish, NTFU, Bestgore.com were just a few high profile websites that saw attempts of law enforcement to intervene in content and website hosting, events detailed in this chapter.

[172] This is derived from reviewing content on these early websites, remembering the culture of P2P platforms such as Kazaa, eMule, Limewire, and also examining shockumetary.com's collection of shock tapes for sale.

[173] "Rotten.com Presents Shockumentary Dot Com." 2006. https://web.archive.org/web/20120506075607/http://www.shockumentary.com/.

[174] This was true for later compilations from Nomo Ichi.

[175] I read this on a discussion forum many years ago. Content shared on P2P networks is difficult to reproduce at this point. I also had a friend who collected *Faces of Death*-style videos from P2P servers.

[176] Testing these websites with the Miller Test, the rubric for evaluating whether content is obscene, would most certainly demonstrate that much of the content on these websites was obscene. However, the Miller test requires that the community the website is operating it in finds it patently offensive. The Internet has been lacking this prong of the Miller Test since its inception.

[177] *CBC News*. 2012. "Best Gore Website Investigated over Magnotta Video," June 5, 2012. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/best-gore-website-investigated-over-magnotta-video-1.1134435.

[178] Billman, Jeffrey C. n.d. "GORE? OK. SEX? NO WAY." https://www.orlandoweekly.com/orlando/gore-ok-sex-no-way/Content?oid=2275396.

[179] "Chris Wilson's War: Publisher of Iraqi War Dead Arrested and Computer Seized: Was It Porn or Politics?" 2008. January 6, 2008. https://jonathanturley.org/2008/01/06/chris-wilsons-war-publisher-of-iraqi-war-dead-arrested-and-computer-seized-was-it-porn-or-politics/.

[180] Johnson, Ashley, and Daniel Castro. 2021. "Overview of Section 230: What It Is, Why It Was Created, and What It Has Achieved." Information Technology & Innovation Foundation. https://itif.org/publications/2021/02/22/overview-section-230-what-it-why-it-was-created-and-what-it-has-achieved/.

[181] Citron, D. K., and B. Wittes. 2017. "The Internet Will Not Break: Denying Bad Samaritans Sec. 230 Immunity." *Fordham Law Review / Edited by Fordham Law Students*. https://heinonline.org/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/flr86&section=19.

[182] Kosseff, Jeff. 2019. *The Twenty-Six Words That Created the Internet*. Cornell University Press.

[183] Citron, Danielle Keats, and Benjamin Wittes. 2018. "The Problem Isn't Just Backpage: Revising Section 230 Immunity." *Georgetown Law Technology Review*. https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3218521; Kosseff, Jeff. 2019. *The Twenty-Six Words That Created the Internet*. Cornell University Press.

[184] "Know Your Rights: Non-Consensual Pornography." 2022. Legal Voice. December 8, 2022. https://legalvoice.org/nonconsensual-pornography/.

[185] Guns, Guts & Glory. "I was a media whore" – Confessions of Todd Tjersland," February 26, 2017.

[186] Wofford, Taylor. n.d. "Rotten.com Is Offline." https://theoutline.com/post/2549/rotten-com-is-offline.

[187] This assessment is based on visits back to Rotten.com using the Internet Wayback Machine.

[188] Hester, Blake. 2023. "How Shock Sites Shaped the Internet." VICE. February 27, 2023. https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxnw7b/shit-death-and-gore-how-shock-sites-shaped-the-Internet.

[189] IBID.

[190] Brown, Janelle. 2001. "The Internet's Public Enema No. 1." Salon.com. March 5, 2001. https://www.salon.com/2001/03/05/rotten_2/.

[191] U.S. Census Bureau. 2001. "Special Studies: Home Computers and Internet Use in the United States: August 2000." U.S. Department of Commerce. https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2001/demo/p23-207.pdf.

[192] "Rotten.com: This Is Rotten Dot Com." n.d. Accessed April 25, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20070502132135/http://rotten.com/.

[193] Brown, Janelle. "The Internet's Public Enema No. 1." *Salon*, March 6, 2001. https://www.salon.com/2001/03/05/rotten_2/.

[194] Junod, Tom. 2003. "The Falling Man: Do You Remember This Photograph? In the United States, People Have Taken Pains to Banish It from the Record of September 11, 2001. The Story behind It, Though, and the Search for the Man Pictured in It, Are Our Most Intimate Connection to the Horror of That Day," September 2003.

[195] "Udai and Qusay Post Mortems." n.d. Accessed April 12, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20030806035630/http://poetry.rotten.com/uday/.

[196] "Cease & Desist Letter #4 - Loser Meets Train." n.d. Accessed April 24, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20170705031752/http://rotten.com/legal/desist-train.html.

[197] "Cease & Desist Letter #11 - FOTM Winner #2." n.d. Accessed April 24, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20170705010703/http://rotten.com/legal/desist-flint.html.

[198] Brown, Janelle. 2001. "The Internet's Public Enema No. 1." Salon.com. March 5, 2001. https://www.salon.com/2001/03/05/rotten_2/.

[199] IBID.

[200] Wofford, Taylor. n.d. "Rotten.com Is Offline." https://theoutline.com/post/2549/rotten-com-is-offline.

[201] Both websites contained this content according to a website comparison. This story lists Rotten.com as the place to see the Twin Towers divers: Junod, Tom. 2016. "The Falling Man." Esquire. September 9, 2016. https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a48031/the-falling-man-tom-junod/. You could read about it in *The New York Times*, and see it on Rotten or Ogrish.

[202] Silverstein, Jonathan. 2006. "Bloody Web Videos Show Horrors of War." ABC News. October 6, 2006. https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=2458896&page=1.

[203] IBID.

[204] Astley, Mark. 2016. "Snuff 2.0: Real Death Goes HD Ready." In *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, edited by Neil Jackson, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker, and Thomas Joseph Watson, 153–70. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

[205] Talbot, David. 2005. "Terror's Server." *MIT Technology Review*, February 1, 2005. https://www.technologyreview.com/2005/02/01/274631/terrors-server-2/.

[206] "Web Sites Remove Video of Pearl's Death (Published 2002)." *The New York Times*, May 25, 2002, sec. World. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/25/world/web-sites-remove-video-of-pearl-s-death.html.

[207] McCullagh, Declan. 2002. "Besieged ISP Restores Pearl Vid." *Wired*, May 28, 2002. https://www.wired.com/2002/05/besieged-isp-restores-pearl-vid/.

²⁰⁸ Kerekes, David. 2016. "A New Kind of Pornographic Film: The End of Snuff." In *Killing for Culture: From Edison to ISIS: A New History of Death on Film*, edited by Kerekes David Slater David. SCB Distributors.

²⁰⁹ Silverstein, Jonathan. 2006. "Bloody Web Videos Show Horrors of War." ABC News. October 6, 2006. https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=2458896&page=1.

²¹⁰ *CNN*. 2002. "White House: CBS Erred Showing Pearl Video," May 15, 2002. https://www.cnn.com/2002/US/05/15/pearl.cbs.tape/?related.

²¹¹ Welch, Michael Patrick. 2005. "Lifting the Mask from "Faces of Death'." *Tampa Bay Times*, September 28, 2005. https://www.tampabay.com/archive/2000/10/26/lifting-the-mask-from-faces-of-death/.

²¹² A viral video is one that is rapidly shared by users on social media platforms.

²¹³Astley, Mark. 2016. "Snuff 2.0: Real Death Goes HD Ready." In *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, edited by Neil Jackson, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker, and Thomas Joseph Watson, 153–70. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

²¹⁴ IBID.

²¹⁵ Talbot, David. 2005. "Terror's Server." *MIT Technology Review*, February 1, 2005. https://www.technologyreview.com/2005/02/01/274631/terrors-server-2/.

²¹⁶ "[OGRISH] Statement von Ogrish Zur Datenunterdrückung Durch Level3.net." n.d. Accessed April 8, 2023. https://www.fitug.de/debate/0508/msg00037.html.

²¹⁷ https://web.archive.org/web/20060601095644/http://www.Ogrish.com/

²¹⁸ Ogrish, PixelKoncept Chicago. 2006. "[No Title]." August 18, 2006. https://web.archive.org/web/20060828112809/http://www.Ogrish.com/index2.html.

²¹⁹ Ogrish, PixelKoncept Chicago. n.d. "FAQ." Accessed February 2, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20060828112809/http://www.Ogrish.com/index2.html.

²²⁰ IBID.

²²¹ Stryker, Cole. 2014. "Murder, Mayhem and the Evolution of Website LiveLeak." Newsweek. September 30, 2014. https://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/10/murder-mayhem-and-evolution-website-liveleak-273963.html.

²²² Talbot, David. 2005. "Terror's Server." *MIT Technology Review*, February 1, 2005. https://www.technologyreview.com/2005/02/01/274631/terrors-server-2/.

²²³ Astley, Mark. 2016. "Snuff 2.0: Real Death Goes HD Ready." In *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, edited by Neil Jackson, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker, and Thomas Joseph Watson, 162. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

224 Astley, Mark. 2019. "NSFW: In Appreciation of Ogrish a 4 Part Retrospective: Part One 'Can You Handle Life?'" *CVLT Nation - The Home of Underground Culture* (blog). CVLT Nation. August 22, 2019. https://cvltnation.com/nsfw-in-appreciation-of-ogrish-a-4-part-retrospective-part-one-can-you-handle-life/.; Vincent, James. 2021. "LiveLeak, the Internet's Font of Gore and Violence, Has Shut down." May 7, 2021. https://www.theverge.com/2021/5/7/22424356/liveleak-shock-site-shuts-down-itemfix.

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226 Astley, Mark. 2016. "Snuff 2.0: Real Death Goes HD Ready." In *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, edited by Neil Jackson, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker, and Thomas Joseph Watson, 153–70. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

227 "LiveLeak.com - Redefining the Media." n.d. Accessed April 12, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20061228200956/http://www.liveleak.com/user?a=top_leakers.

228 IBID.

229 "LiveLeak.com - Redefining the Media." n.d. Accessed April 12, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20140227154314/http://www.liveleak.com/faq.

230 Yarm, Mark. 2021. "LiveLeak Cofounder on Why the Notorious Video Site Shut down." Input. May 20, 2021. https://www.inverse.com/input/features/liveleak-gore-shock-murder-beheading-videos-hayden-hewitt-shutdown-interview.

231 Stryker, Cole. 2014. "Murder, Mayhem and the Evolution of Website LiveLeak." Newsweek. September 30, 2014. https://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/10/murder-mayhem-and-evolution-website-liveleak-273963.html.

232 IBID.

233 Cook, James. n.d. "Q&A: The Man Behind LiveLeak, The Islamic State's Favourite Site For Beheading Videos." https://www.businessinsider.com/profile-of-hayden-hewitt-founder-of-liveleak-2014-10.

234 After Ogrish rebranded to Liveleak, it was met with criticism by users of the old Ogrish forum because content was sold out in the name of profiteering. Interestingly, in 2011, Goregirsh.com opened, a forum in the style of Ogrish has admins with similar names too used on Ogrish. This information is from Wikipedia but lacking a formal citation.

235 I discuss NTFU as the introductory case study to set up this dissertation. What's important to remember is that troops submitted deployment photos for access to free amateur pornography on this website. Many of these photos gory, others all but documented war crimes.

[236] Astley, Mark. 2016. "Snuff 2.0: Real Death Goes HD Ready." *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, 153–70.

[237] Cook, James. 2014. "ISIS Banned From Controversial Video Site LiveLeak After James Foley Execution Video." *Business Insider*, August 22, 2014. https://www.businessinsider.com/isis-banned-from-liveleak-over-james-foley-video-2014-8.

[238] Cook, James. n.d. "Q&A: The Man Behind LiveLeak, The Islamic State's Favourite Site For Beheading Videos." https://www.businessinsider.com/profile-of-hayden-hewitt-founder-of-liveleak-2014-10.

[239] Cook, James. 2014. "ISIS Banned From Controversial Video Site LiveLeak After James Foley Execution Video." *Business Insider*, August 22, 2014. https://www.businessinsider.com/isis-banned-from-liveleak-over-james-foley-video-2014-8.

[240] Stryker, Cole. 2014. "Murder, Mayhem and the Evolution of Website LiveLeak." Newsweek. September 30, 2014. https://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/10/murder-mayhem-and-evolution-website-liveleak-273963.html.

[241] IBID.

[242] Vincent, James. 2021. "LiveLeak, the Internet's Font of Gore and Violence, Has Shut down." May 7, 2021. https://www.theverge.com/2021/5/7/22424356/liveleak-shock-site-shuts-down-itemfix.

[243] Two such sites are Kaotic.com which has been sharing video from the War on Terror since 2007, and Goregrish.com appeared in 2010 - which many believe to be Ogrish's replacement.

[244] There are several accounts that use this name across Twitter and Facebook with no obvious brand consistency. These are likely copycat pages, capitalizing on a brand that cares little to police encroachments on their name.

[245] Youngnationalist.Com, All Rights Reserved. n.d. "Home Page." Accessed April 7, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20050601022758/http://www.youngnationalist.com/.

[246] "Liberal of the Month." n.d. Accessed April 13, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20051216234024/http://theync.com/liberal8.htm.

[247] This is an assessment from browsing the page in its first year of operation.

[248] "Daily Media, Humor, Shocking, News Videos." n.d. Accessed April 26, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20130430061423/http://theync.com/.

[249] Goodall, Mark D. 2006. "Shockumentary Evidence: The Perverse Politics of the Mondo Film." In *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film*, edited by Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim. Wallflower Press, 118–26.

[250] Take your pick of Mondo films, but *Africa Blood and Guts* (1966) is perhaps the most fitting example here.

[251] "Underground Page 1." n.d. Accessed April 7, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20220310023005/https://TheYNC.com/channels/15/underground/page1.html.

[252] Beale, Lewis. "Scenes of Death & Violence Packaged for Home Viewing." *Philadelphia Daily News*. December 11, 1986.

[253] "SilverFlume Nevada's Business Portal to Start/manage Your Business." n.d. Accessed May 3, 2023. https://esos.nv.gov/EntitySearch/BusinessInformation.

[254] Frank, Brieanna J. 2023. "Fact Check: Satirical Headline about Misgendering Nashville Shooter Spreads Online." *USA Today*, April 4, 2023. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2023/04/04/fact-check-satirical-headline-nashville-shooter-goes-viral/11583066002/.

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[257] Mironov, Tina. n.d. "Five Budgeting Tips so You Can Donate to Both BLM and Ukraine despite Rising Cost of Living." Accessed May 3, 2023. https://beezfud.com/2022/11/01/five-budgeting-tips-so-you-can-donate-to-both-blm-and-ukraine-despite-rising-cost-of-living/.

[258] Dellinger, A. J. 2020. "Report Alleges Child Pornography, Hate Speech Hiding Under Cloudflare's Protection." *Forbes Magazine*, January 23, 2020. https://www.forbes.com/sites/ajdellinger/2020/01/23/report-finds-child-pornography-hate-speech-using-cloudflares-protection/.

[259] I believe the reason *The Daily Stormer* was dropped from Cloudflare because the brand directly implicated Cloudflare in their practices. Prince, Matthew. n.d. "Why We Terminated Daily Stormer." Accessed April 7, 2023. https://blog.cloudflare.com/why-we-terminated-daily-stormer/.

[260] "Terms of Use." n.d. Accessed April 8, 2023. https://theync.com/tos.

[261] "Copyright Policy." n.d. Accessed April 8, 2023. https://theync.com/copyright-policy.

[262] Shehabat, Ahmad, and Teodor Mitew. 2018. "Anonymous Sharing Platforms and ISIS Content Distribution Tactics." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12 (1): 81–99.

[263] "Funker530." n.d. Accessed April 7, 2023. https://funker530.com/.

Chapter 3: "Comments here are more sickening than the footage itself:" Funker530

Professionalizes Shock

"Imagine your last moments in life being recorded for the world to shit on you."

hydrogensplit[264]

In the last decade, increasingly portable, body-worn video cameras and other lightweight video recording equipment set new precedents in portability, changing how conflicts are documented. Discrete website hosting tools such as Cloudflare and the expanding capacities of Web 2.0 have also increased pathways for the distribution of conflict video. These new technologies are reshaping the coverage of war, bearing new implications for the censorship of graphic content. In part through a performance of compliance wrapped in a social influencer guise, graphic portrayals of violence and gore have moved closer to mainstream. Funker530 is a social brand dedicated to heavily mainstreamed footage of conflict-related violence, which often aesthetically resemble GoPro first-person shooter video games. These videos typically feature the perspective of subjects being shot to death or blown up, sometimes by the camera operator.

Funker530 is a good example of the ways in which high production value along with the utilization of social influencing practices works to prepare War Porn for a mainstream social media presence. The construction of a socially acceptable style of shock video brand differs strongly from the earlier studies examined in this dissertation. Funker530 is a surprisingly popular and well accepted mainstream channel on all platforms and social networking websites. In this chapter, I will use the Funker530 brand to explore the evolution of this video culture and genre through production and public representation. I argue that the evolution of Funker530 as a media company has helped shock find its permanent home on mainstream social media platforms

by professionalizing shock for commercial gain. This vignette highlights the complex

intersection of shock video and the political sphere.

In 2013, Private First Class Ted Daniels deployed to Afghanistan with the Army's 4th

Infantry division to serve a typical tour of duty as an infantryman. On patrol in the mountains of

Afghanistan one day, his platoon started taking fire. Daniels stepped out in the open to draw fire

towards him while platoon members escaped. Within a few minutes, Daniels was shot multiple

times, which affected his ability to return fire. All of this was recorded on Daniels's personal

body-worn camera before it died and ended the video.[265] Daniels returned home from his

deployment and showed the video to his dad at the kitchen table.[266] He felt proud of the action he

took to draw fire away from his compatriots and had documentary evidence to verify his claim of

bravery. Later, Daniels uploaded the video to his personal YouTube account to share with family

and friends. Before too long, he was contacted by another YouTuber named Scott Funk about

sharing the content. Funk operated a YouTube channel intent on documenting conflicts around

the world which he had started about 6 years earlier. Daniels stated that he had no idea that

Funker530 was a popular page, but Funk claimed he warned Daniels the video would go viral.

Though the story behind the consent to post the video is murky, one thing that is true is that the

video went viral, gaining 23-million hits on YouTube in four months.[267] Because of the video,

Daniels received heat from his chain of command and asked the channel operators to take it

down. They did not. As a result of the initial attention the video received, CBS news contacted

Daniels to do a piece about his experience. This coverage provided a story critical of Funker530

and the issue with consent. The video still stands among Funker530's available YouTube content

today. Ten years later, the video has obtained 46-million views and 81,000 comments.

As this dissertation has detailed, exploited footage of war and conflict has a long history. What's different about Funker530 is that it has emerged on a mainstream social media platform. Although it has had to adjust to the demands of this platform or face censorship, it has achieved this feat well. This chapter will explore how Funker530 has adopted survival practices to combat censorship while still maintaining a long lineage to shock video. Like any genre trying to clean up its act for a more mainstream audience, a primary goal of Funker530 was to separate itself from its predecessors by evolving and setting some boundaries. However, the brand that adorns the current web address shares commonalities with and even borrowed from shock troves of the past. Therefore, this case study will demonstrate how brand operators honed their product on the way to professionalization, ditching as many obvious connections to shock as possible.

Combat Videos in the War on Terror

In the last few decades, there have been several scandals involving amateur produced military-themed amateur pornography, usually involving the sexual exploitation of military personnel on leaked and shared images – usually with women as subjects.[268] Arguably, some of the archives discussed, especially NTFU which I touch on in the introduction and Chapter two, contained both amateur War Porn and amateur military sexual pornography side by side, appealing to both audiences in tandem.[269] Often, I would argue, these images are coming from the same places, either captured recordings of the battlefield or intercepted images of lonely soldiers sending stills and videos to a loved one back home, now on a shared archive. Marita Gronnvoll has argued as well that the Abu Ghraib detainee abuse images also straddle this line between the war crime and sexuality, unpacking the sexualized emasculation of the male detainees in the photos.[270] To be clear, this chapter will not be about amateur military pornography, which has its own set of ethical concerns and politics regarding scandal and sexual

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trauma. Instead, this chapter will talk about amateur-record War Porn, which deals with

grotesque content from the battlefield, or recalling Baudrillard's description of War Porn, the

banality of non-events in everyday warfare.[271] War Porn is not part of any official government

propaganda, though this chapter will describe that it's often accompanied by nationalist framing.

Robert Hariman and John Lucaites have described iconic photographs as photographs

that have the power to spark timely political discourses across cultural and language barriers to

elicit an emotional response and a call to action in viewers.[272] The Abu Ghraib detainee abuse

photos are perhaps the most well-known examples from the War on Terror, implicating the

United States military and its leadership in the scandal. As *Task & Purpose,* an independent

military news outlet run by veterans, writes about iconic imagery of the War on Terror:

> It is usually only when the sacred covenant is broken — when snippets of the nightmare
> are transmitted from those alien battlefields in grainy videos and gruesome photographs
> — that the alarm bells are sounded and questions start being asked. To that end, the cell
> phones and helmet cams that have proliferated on the front lines in recent years have
> served a vital function. Hollywood has neither the incentive nor the wherewithal to
> capture the depth of the tragedy of our current wars (or any wars, for that matter).[273]

Though the horrors of war can be retold by combatants through interviews, memoirs, or

otherwise, though these non-visual stories are not as widely circulated and discussed at the level

of national discourse as the visual appeal of War Porn. Additionally, the largest scandals involve

people, usually US soldiers or terrorists, engaging in acts that violate social contracts, such as

war crimes. As *Task & Purpose* further describes this phenomenon:

> The horrors of war, like human excrement, are extremely unphotogenic. Yet over the past
> 17 years, American service members have diligently chronicled atrocities — theirs and
> others' — in images and videos that eventually found their way onto the Internet. We
> have seen photographs of U.S. Army soldiers torturing and sexually abusing detainees at
> Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq; photographs of soldiers posing with the mutilated bodies of
> unarmed Afghan civilians they killed in Kandahar province in 2010; and a video shot in
> Helmand the following year of Marines urinating on dead Taliban fighters.[274]

These videos, and many others, have compromised the defense department's intent for U.S. military operations to appear under control and clean – an image compromised by the many scandals discussed here. Non-iconic images of conflict which do not implicate the United States military in war crimes have been turned into online shock videos by Funker530 over the past ten years, meaning that most of the combatants doing the killing or being killed in Funker530's content are not U.S.-affiliated.

Funker530 would likely disagree with being labeled as amateur War Porn – that's just not how the company frames itself. It would rather be thought of as an essential veteran-powered journalistic media company – a source of raw truth focused on the domain of global conflict and the expertise to unpack it. In this next section, I use the Internet Archive Wayback Machine and Boolean search to build stronger connections between Funker530 and its shock predecessors.

YouTube as an American-Only Propaganda Platform

In the early days, YouTube, which was founded in 2005, was a bit of a wild west for content, a contested space between users and the media industry where copyright was king, and the monetization of content after YouTube's takeover by Google homogenized much of the content shared on the platform.[275] This focus on monetization has since led to the erosion of violent content on the platform to appease shareholders.[276] However, before YouTube, there were no standardized ways for uploading and sharing videos online, making it the default public repository. War propagandists saw the platform as a new, easy opportunity for communication with the masses. ISIS, for one, saw the opportunity to recruit members while reviling others.[277] Initially, critical responses to this were not political but social. In 2012, group of self-identified patriots calling themselves the YouTube Smackdown worked to scour YouTube for ISIS propaganda and weapons-making videos so that they could be flagged and taken down.[278] In one

case, this Smackdown was responsible for the FBI discovering and arresting Colleen R. LaRose, aka "Fatima LaRose," aka "Jihad Jane," with conspiring to support terrorists using YouTube as a communication channel.[279] LaRose was posting extremist videos on YouTube in order to recruit fighters for the Islamic State.

YouTube presented a new challenge to regulators in that they could not simply take certain content on YouTube down without a dedicated labor force. Victoria Grand, head of policy for YouTube, could not comment specifically on LaRose's alleged videos, but did say YouTube depended on its community to flag inappropriate content. "We have 20 hours of video uploaded to the site every minute, it's a ton of content and we don't prescreen content, it's not possible. We have an innovative community policing mechanism in place," Grand said.[280]There are some major criticisms of relying on the platform to police itself. The larger social media network has provided a home for footage of conflict and recruitment. In 2018, Conway et al. looked at the pervasiveness of ISIS-uploaded content on popular social media platforms, arguing that relaxed efforts to police terrorist content have allowed a safe haven for extremist propaganda. The article also discusses an intentional approach to eradicate ISIS by tagging known ISIS propaganda videos to prevent them from being reloaded to popular social platforms on other accounts, but efforts such as this on the greater online social sphere continue as a work in progress.[281]

YouTube has become the default public repository, even outside of the United States.[282] However, the platform has effectively become the primary place as a hosting platform in the American military propaganda landscape due to its policy stances, albeit unofficially, as these and other examples will illustrate. A policy shift to eradicate terrorist networks from the platform has made significant strides since 2016, stemming from highly publicized challenges from some

of YouTube's largest corporate advertisers.[283] As an AT&T spokesperson put it: "We are deeply concerned that our ads may have appeared alongside YouTube content promoting terrorism and hate."[284] As a result, YouTube acted quickly to clean up its act by revisiting the kinds of content it allowed on the site.[285] Using platforms like YouTube as a space in which to editorialize about global conflicts has increasingly become common for former American military and allies. Funker530 serves as a perfect example of YouTube-supported American propaganda in action. YouTube's move to improve its efforts to police terrorist content from its platform has damaged extremist organizations key strategic assets, their PR and marketing channels. Terrorist content has been pushed further and further underground while Funker530 and other American conflict propaganda has proliferated on mainstream social platforms. This is, as will be demonstrated, in part because of the performance of compliance as well as an underlying thread of nationalism.

The Beginnings of Funker530

In 2007, Scott Funk, a Canadian military veteran of the War in Afghanistan, began to upload content from his deployment to YouTube to share with friends and family. Users began to comment and strike up conversations about what was presented in the videos. Initially, these videos were low quality, likely recorded on still digital cameras of the day with video capturing capabilities.[286] Funk stated that the first 80 or so that were ever on the page were from his personal deployment, but a community of viewers grew quickly. Funk took a proactive approach to collecting and curating content as word continue to get out about the channel.[287]

As of 2012, Funker530 is a fully incorporated media company with a brand presence on most social media platforms, a website, and a robust app in both the iOS and Android stores, all of which feature a range of military, war, and conflict-related videos. Content presented by Funker530 is not limited to any era or part of the world, but many regions have been focused on,

including a section on their website for exclusive Ukraine content. They have previously

included other regions and countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Israel.[288] By the

beginning of 2023, Funker530 was continuing to build its web presence with well over four

million followers on Facebook, hundreds of videos, watermarked PAM and user submitted

content, and an increasing amount of original content, including co-branding with other

companies. Over the years, this content has included a lot of video podcast-like programming

including Funker News Network, Coffee Thursdays, F530 Live Cast, and Combat Ready.[289]

The previous case studies from other eras of shock moved quickly into jarring subject

matter and stayed there, but Funker530 has much more humble beginnings, and maybe even

some good intentions. Additionally, while there was plenty of dissent and contestation regarding

media in previous case studies, the primary debates about Funker530 seem to be from users

themselves, debating the purpose of the website. The central question – even for users - remains:

Is Funker530 a shock website, or is it an amateur war and conflict news outlet? Can it be both, in

the form of amateur War Porn? Detailed below are many examples of attempts by staff to

recontextualize the politics of the content to legitimate its consumption, albeit poorly, as a source

of news.

One external critical opinion of the nature of Funker530 comes from the press. In 2015,

Vice News produced a deep dive on Funker530, using the phrase War Porn to describe the

content, and labeling the site as a pinnacle example.[290] This negative press may have been a

catalyst for the clean-up of content undergone by the brand in the same timeframe, detailed at

length below. The article touched on the history and operators behind the brand, the story behind

the Ted Daniels video, and goes into depth, including interviews with mental health experts, to

analyze Funker530's chief self-proclaimed reason for existence: that watching these videos can

be a form of therapy for veterans continuing to process the trauma of the battlefield. More

specifically, the author writes:

> The easy availability of these videos recalls a leading method for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. In Prolonged Exposure (PE) therapy, patients methodically re-create the source of their trauma in a controlled setting, dismantling over time the association between the experience and an unhealthy stress reaction.[291]

Perhaps a key phrase in the statement above is the best clue to the ultimate nature of Funker530 –

these videos are not being consumed in a controlled setting. The comparison of these videos to

treatment for trauma is a stretch. However, this definition certainly shares similarities to the

process of desensitization to violent media, reaching for the same benefit of dissociation between

viewers and the harm and violence to bodies done on screen, remembering Susan Sontag's

argument that although photographs of war have the potential to inspire compassion and action,

they can also be used to manipulate and desensitize viewers.[292] By desensitizing audiences,

viewers are freed from guilt and allowed to focus on the spectacle.

Each section of the historical analysis seeks to unpack key features of Funker530 as both

a successor to shock and Mondo films and as an example of a company using best practices to

stay profitable while limiting censorship. This is not a claim that Funker530 is a brand drenched

in gore as other shock products of the past have been. However, given the brand's focus on

conflict video, the brand is the best current example of shock at the political intersection of

conflict. This political component and the fact that the brand is popular on mainstream social

media outlets suggests it needs more unpacking to understand why it remains mainstream while

its contemporaries have vanished.

Over the course of a decade, the brand that shed the traits of its shock roots in its way

toward professionalization has ultimately begun to look more like mainstream media and an

unofficial partner of the Pentagon with every passing year. It's had its challenges with censorship and has been forced to adapt. This chapter presents a close look at how the company has adopted to those challenges and forced Funker530 to develop.

Funker530 operates on a gray line, a balance between what is allowable on mainstream platforms and what is extreme enough to gather attention. Remembering from the introduction, the square-up was a key tactic used by exploitation filmmakers to get around censorship, usually from state boards or other authorities who wanted to control final cuts of exploitation films to ensure there was no unsavory imagery in the final cut.[293] The square-up is a moralistically framed apology and a warning shown to audiences about the controversial nature of upcoming content before showing it to them anyway.[294] Funker530 has used this same sentiment, the moralistically stated apology, to frame much of its content on social platforms such as Facebook to validate the presentation and consumption of content in the eyes of these platforms.

The square-up is the ultimate disingenuous wink of audacity, a blatant lie to the censors about the importance of the content that rationalizes and justifies the lurid nature of what comes next. The square-ups that we saw adorning early exploitation films in the 1940s and 50s eventually became self-aware, resulting in the sort of tongue and cheek parody of themselves that we saw in the 1970s with over-the-top sex, race, and drug caricatures – what most people think of when they think of exploitation films. Funker530's content is not self-aware. The audience is in on the act, but the community surrounding this content have no intent on seeing the content through a reflexive, self-aware lens. In this context, the square-up becomes a performative tool rather than the reflexive tactic of earlier eras.

In this chapter, the trajectory of Funker530's professionalization in the context of censorship will be traced. This will include considering sourcing practices as an element of this

process as well as the intentional positioning of Funker530 as a lifestyle brand while situating control and aligning with propaganda. The following sections will help paint a picture of just how Funker530 operators work to square-up its content as wholesome, borrowing tactics from shock predecessors as well as developing their own means to promote their content while avoiding censorship. Funker530 has consistently claimed that the reality depicted in its content serves a journalistic and educational value, warranting its display of vulgar and disturbing imagery, following in the tradition of a long lineage of exploitation filmmakers promoting the idea of the consumption of unsavory imagery while noting it as necessary.

The Path to Professionalization

The last chapter demonstrated how shock websites began to focus on war and conflict because it made sense because of the steady stream of content coming from the battlefield. The fact that graphic content depicting insight in the realities of war was a more defendable position than one that showed a range of medical, criminal, sexual and violent content as early shock websites had done. I explained that one of the larger transformations of a brand to shift from shock towards the burgeoning business of conflict themed content was when Ogrish made the move to become LiveLeak in 2006.

As described in Chapter two, content on shock websites went from being curated by central website administrators, often sourcing newswire photos, to a model that depended on user uploads with moderators governing content.[295] This move decentralized the sourcing of content from webpage staff curating the content to users governed by deputized content admins. This model worked for a while, but there was a response to the critical backlash Ogrish and other decentralized cites received. Thus, Funker530 represents a return to meticulously controlled

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content from one central node: veteran channel operators employed by the company. Users can join the conversation by sending suggested content to admins, but they cannot post directly.

Though Funker530's content seems less objectionable than Ogrish, it still carries material that capitalizes on the viewer's psychosomatic response to images of gore and violence. It's important to remember the narrative thread and connectivity between the many case studies in this dissertation. As I've argued, Mondo films and shock videos set the precedent for and even fed shock websites, selling the *Faces of Death* (1978)*, Terrorists, Killers, and Middle East Wackos* (2005)*,* and other films on Shockumentary.com, a Rotten.com-owned website. Ogrish, which peddled shock content on the web with advertising revenue from fringe pornographic websites, identified Rotten as a sponsor before shifting its business model to Liveleak.com.[296] Funker530, in its infancy, heavily relied on sourcing content through a partnership with Liveleak, even adapting blurbs written to accompany the videos they posted on their own platforms. In this way, the slow lineage tracing from Mondo films to modern War Porn can be seen.

When Funker530 incorporated into a media company in 2012, it leaned on Liveleak for content, becoming more of a protégé than a competitor.[297] Connecting back to Chapter 2, LiveLeak was constantly berated for hosting terrorist propaganda years before Funker530 incorporated, and those lessons were already laid bare for Funker530 to build a sturdier brand. Not only did it source videos directly from LiveLeak at the time when the two websites simultaneously existed, there are hints that Funker530 assumed some of the content once made popular by LiveLeak after the brand's demise. As one user responded to staff commentary that the website came from a personal hard drive: "Sitting on my hard drive my ass, this [was] on LiveLeak many years ago."[298] This example also builds a connection between Funker530's audience based and the audience base of shock sites of the past.

Funker530's audience has familiar characteristics of shock website users, regardless of how the content curators see the brand. Comments sections for many videos mention how the users long for some aspects of classic shock websites. For some users, Funker530 is the answer to fulfilling battlefield fantasies, and for others, it doesn't live up to the job. It's also clear that many of the frequenters of Funker530.com were also users of LiveLeak. As one user puts it: "Some of us want that next LiveLeak, though. Maybe not from Funker, though." Another user replies: "If you want another LiveLeak there are plenty of gore sites still up to choose from. FUNKER530 isn't a gore platform, let's not make it one.[299]" Several users disagree, with comments like: "Another one who hasn't seen the gore on this channel yet. Lol," and: "Guess haven't seen the video where a whole squad of soldiers gets blown to shit by a massive IED. Their lifeless bodies and pieces of them at the end of the video. This site has lots of gore you uncultured swine. The whole damn reason I signed up for this site."[300] Though some users expect more gore from Funker530, the site clearly serves a range of audiences and tastes.

Whether Funker530 is a sufficient replacement for LiveLeak or not, it is evident that the brand continues to adapt to changes in social media technologies. Just as Ogrish and LiveLeak scoured non-English speaking websites for terrorist propaganda to post on their forums in the early 2000s, Funker530's is leveraging similar tactics.[301] Terrorist organizations use Telegram as a primary platform to mass communicate to perspective audiences.[302] Similarly, the Wagner Group, Vladimir Putin's private mercenary force, also operates multiple pages on Telegram to promote their efforts and to get the attention of prospective recruits from around the globe. Funker530 has sourced content directly from these sorts of Telegram accounts. Going directly to the source guarantees one-of-a-kind content that only Funker530 can deliver. It also guarantees, unfortunately, that the brand is sharing propaganda content from enemies of the United States.

For instance, mixed in with all the content that can be found on the Funker530 website, there's a promotional video for the Russian Wagner group, calling anyone interested to join the fight against Ukraine.[303] The top-ranking comment on this page of the website states: "This is actually awesome lol."[304] This inclusion shows little self-awareness or regard for Ukraine, an American ally.

Ronnie Adkins, a star Funker530 staff member with a military intelligence background, explains that most of the photos and videos coming from the war in Ukraine are shared on these channels, essentially a source for War Porn, but also Russian propaganda.[305] Judging by many of the comments across the website and on social media, it is clear that many of the frequenters of the Funker530 content have taught themselves similar tactics for locating content, perhaps learned from watching Funker530. one Russian user describes this skill:

> Do you want to watch them bleeding to death and in agony for couple hours? Suit yourself. If the videos are too short on Funker, there is always Telegram. - But you'll have to dig around quite a bit and preferably able to speak Russian and or Ukrainian, or at least be able to use translator well enough from English to locate them.[306]

In this way, Funker530 is not only a gateway to being exposed to propaganda materials on their own site, but also a connection node to those same propaganda channels on less easily searchable on Telegram. This sort of connectedness is not dissimilar to YouTube as an ISIS recruiting gateway described earlier in the chapter.

Funker530 is a Veteran Lifestyle Brand

There's a colloquial word in the veteran community called vetrepreneur. This is meant to describe using one's own military experience as the foundation for a business concept.[307] Through this means, a number of veterans have taken their identities and knowledge and applied it in a professional setting.[308] This approach of professionalizing one's experience in the civilian

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sector has helped Funker530 professionalize War Porn. No one captures the slogan of the unapologetic veteran lifestyle brand better than Grunt Style LLC, a retail clothing company, known for its meant-to-be offensive quips and slangs plastered on t-shirts with a subdued American flag on the right sleeve with their logo featured on the left. As the company states:

> To us, what you wear is more than just a necessity to be clothed. It's about attitude! We have taken the American fighting spirit and instilled it in everything we do. You don't have to be a Veteran to wear Grunt Style, but you do have to love Freedom, Bacon, and Whiskey. We provide more than apparel, we instill pride.[309]

This kind of sentiment is intended to block out discussions of how unapologetic veteran brands should act, shutting down opposing opinions.

One of the primary ways that Funker530 has taken steps towards professionalization in response to censorship is by developing a lifestyle brand around the unapologetic veteran subculture instead of focusing on the essence of its content as shock sites had done. Veterans of the War on Terror have intentionally formed lifestyle brands around the culture and representations of their military service, more so than prior generations.[310] Funker530 falls into a vast landscape of unapologetic veteran-created retail brands. Funker530 is one of many of these brands supported by a large retail supplier called Bunker Brands.

Since scaling up as a media company in 2012, Funker530 has had several staff in its ranks, most with combat experience, and a few that represent special operations units, the top pedigree from each of the military branches. These backgrounds serve not just as sources of expertise for identifying situations and equipment on screen, but also to solidify Funker530 as a trusted brand with its audience. As one user comments: "This is what sets Funker530 apart from the rest of the Internet. There are actual combat veterans working behind the scenes who care about this community."[311] Reviewing the staff profiles across the website also reveals a trend of

elevating journalism backgrounds as well as other endeavors within the veteran influencer community. The expertise factor of veterans who also have a journalism background is a big key to selling Funker530 as a wholesome brand.

In addition to serving as staff at Funker530, many employees have an exclusive social brand of their own. One of the longest contributors, Josh Brooks, has been a primary contributor to Full30.com, a Second Amendment-focused weapons testing channel as well as an abandoned social presence for BadgeCams, a pro-police social media presence. A more recent contributor named Ronnie Adkins whose military background is in intelligence also owns and operates Ronnie Fit, a fitness-focused channel with merchandise of its own.[312]

One of the more prominent partnerships that Funker530 has is with Black Rifle Coffee Company, founded in 2014 by a former Army Special Forces operator named Evan Hafer.[313] Not only has Hafer been interviewed by Funker530 for a short-lived recurring live social media segment called Coffee Thursdays, one can go Black Rifle Coffee Company's website and buy coffee beans from the "Funker530 Collection."[314] Black Rifle Coffee Company has expanded from retail online sales to opening brick and mortar shops starting in 2019.[315] Though Black Rifle Coffee Company is certainly a unique roaster that fills a previously unfilled niche with its reference to standard military rifles and a broader military appeal, it benefited from early exposure to Funker530's online audience, expanding the web of veteran lifestyle brands and audiences.[316]

Funker530 is a Canadian company, but all of the staff that have represented the brands in live videos have been American. Because of the way the brand has evolved with American figureheads, it better aligns with American nationalism. Because Funker530 is a small private media company, many of the details about the brand's revenue are not possible to obtain. One of

the ways that Funker530 has claimed a more concrete impact on the veteran community has been

by donating a portion of its profits to veterans' charities. Scott Funk has claimed that funds are

often donated to Military Minds, Inc, a Canadian-based mental health organization that was once

the largest PTSD awareness organization in Canada.[317] This may be an indication of

inconsistency or just a lack of clarity.

In 2015, Funker530 began to develop more original content, with staff members

conducting live interview video interviews with community members or reviewing hot content

arriving from the global battlefield, powered by Facebook and YouTube Live features. These

programs have been a way for fans to connect with audience members direct on social platforms,

even doing giveaways of branded merchandise during segments. One such giveaway was the

BRRRT! bundle featuring digital and retail branded goodies, mimicking the sound of an

automatic machine gun.[318] Much of the branded programing involves advertising products,

mostly tactical supplies and other veteran lifestyle merchandise.

Though the brand exists on most popular social media platforms, its website and app are

the core of the business. In 2023, Funker530 adopted simple ad banners, highlighting the current

sponsors who sell retail tactical gear. Dedicated users can upload to a premium account for only

$4.99 a month, with benefits including an ad-free experience as well as commenting privileges.

Users can also support Funker530 through a monthly Patreon donation, tiered between 4 and 46-

dollars a month, with each tier including "Discord benefits" as well as a discount in the retail

store.[319] In these ways, Funker530 falls in line with other lifestyle brands, appealing to audience

members that want a bigger connection to the community, and offering products that will further

legitimate this connection.

Proactive Censorship

Prior to 2016, Funker530 enjoyed a traditional ad revenue model afforded to channels across YouTube.[320] In 2016, YouTube wrote a new policy for content restrictions of violent content, leading to a mass exodus of Funker530 and brands like it, including many pro-Second Amendment channels.[321] During this time, the brand remained on Facebook, which did not have the same restrictive policies, and allowed Funker530 to share and promote benign videos on the platform as a breadcrumb tactic to direct users toward more graphic content shared on the website. Ultimately, the YouTube exodus also led to Funker530 developing its own means of hosting video content on its website at the beginning of 2017. This allowed the brand to have autonomy over the videos it maintained on the site in contrast to relying on imbedded YouTube videos, as it had prior to the shift.[322] Funker530 and YouTube have settled their differences in a way that provides a path forward for both channel and platform. As of 2020, Funker530 is once again posting content on the on YouTube, though much less, perhaps as a breadcrumb tactic.

Lifestyle brands like Funker530 and its Second Amendment-forward allies, including Full30, Iraqvetern8888, and the Military Arms Channel, will always be in jeopardy of being booted from social media platforms given their subject matter. However, employing tactics of self-policing and the act of framing of the brand as a veteran community has been a key tactic for staying on social platforms in the face of increasing adversity.[323] Some basic ways Funker530 has prepared its content for audiences are by labeling extreme content as not safe for work (NSFW), and by being sure to include the phrase "veteran community" in its name on social platforms, as if the phrase gives the brand some sort of immunity, perhaps a sort of square-up signifier for what to expect from a veteran community. Another voluntary act of self-censorship is that there is no profanity allowed in Funker530's comments section on the website or app, a

move that's perhaps the easiest way to avoid critique by partner platforms. As one user quips, "Tell me why I can watch Rambo die, but I can't say the f-word in the chat?"[324] In Chapter two, I discussed how Section 230 of the 1996 Communication Decency Act (CDA) and the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) created an environment for shock websites to flourish if they played by the rules. Funker530 is a descendent of early shock websites that were shaped by these policies, using self-policing practices to meet new requirements imposed by platforms to attract viewers to further explore their content shared on their app and website.[325]

Though Funker530 has employed best practices to appease Section 230 and DMCA, its current threats of censorship can be best understood by remembering Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's Propaganda Model – that a number of powerful corporate influencers ultimately dictate media policies that influence the behaviors of media channels like Funker530.[326] The influence of policy can be seen in the way that Funker530 frames its content policy: "We understand that many members of this community have had to experience the horrors of war firsthand, and many would prefer not to be subjected to it again during their lunch break. Keeping graphic content separated and clearly identified helps keep everyone on the Funker530 forums safe." Further, they note: "Posting footage without contextual or educational information may be considered gratuitous and may be removed from the site."[327] The constant threat of being censored on social platforms has pushed Funker530 to adapt to changing media policies. The merit of appeasing these policies while staying true its audience is not lost on fans. As one states:

> This is a military/war site and we expect to see a little blood & guts from time-to-time. Nobody thinks it's 'pretty' but it's real life. No need to be like the pansy Fakebook and YouBoob and censor real-time violent events. If somebody is shocked or offended, then they don't have to watch it. Let us, your viewers & subscribers decide what we want to observe.[328]

This quote also demonstrates the community awareness that the site's independent video server means more autonomy for the brand, though Funker530 has never pushed the limits the way that sites like Ogrish did.

In order to better position itself as a lifestyle brand, Funker530 has removed controversial content that might make the American military look bad, compromise American military operational security, or might taint the image of its own growing media company. For instance, one article from February 16, 2014, featuring photos of a suicide bombing instructor that blew himself up while teaching class, was pulled from the Reuters newswire for easy quips about the accident.[329] Photos of the dismembered body were juxtaposed with a comic strip depicting the event as a joke.[330] While this kind of content seems like easy pickings for furnishing a site in the heyday of Rotten.com, this was removed at the beginning of 2015 from Funker530.[331] Funk described the essence of this clean up job in one of his few attempts to connect with his audience in August of 2014:

> I'll admit that when I started the channel, I used some very spammy methods to drive views and subscribers. I'm not proud of the over used spammy annotations, and I cringe when I still see a video with that that tacky CGI intro on the front of it, but looking at what we have built, and the community that has been established because of those methods. I wouldn't change a thing.[332]

Unlike other staff members, Funk has stayed out of the spotlight, and this comment has since been deleted, likely from fear of intertangling Funker530 with his personal life.

In a video depicting a Ukrainian soldier murdering several of his comrades in a locker room, some Funker530 users complained that the gaping wounds left on these soldier's bodies should be visible and that they had no business blurring the images, though many also agreed with the decision. As one user commented on the video:

It's shitty because I love watching gore and NSFW videos, though I can understand why the FUNKER530 crew don't want it on considering LiveLeak got 'taken down' for showing certain videos people didn't want to see. I really miss LiveLeak, I think being sensitive to fire is not a good trait to have. RIP LIVELEAK AND FREEDOM TO WATCH WHAT I WANT ON THE INTERNET.[333]

In an official reply to all comments, Funker530 told fans: "The final execution shot, and pool of blood added no additional context or information to the video. This was a murder/execution, which we normally never post, but made an exception due to how relative it was to the current climate."[334] Rare interactions like these show Funker530's interest in balancing self-censoring practices with the user interest in seeing the raw realities of war, unedited. This also highlights the shifting of Funker530 away from shock content alone and into a more professionalized, sanitized, and politically-aware lifestyle brand.

Contested Meaning

There are some clear divisions between members of the Funker530 community. One is that the staff and commentors are mostly white and male, whereas the deceased subjects in the videos are mostly males of color, at least until the war in Ukraine broke out. Funker530's construction of the subcultural in-group is sometimes more apparent than others, but usually employs a triangulation of several of the following characteristics: US military, US allies, Western, White, and Male. Characters with these features are represented favorably in videos, portraying them as noble, just, and heroic, and simplify the political contexts of the realities behind these representations. The social channels around the images, such as comments, help users find shared points of identity with each other. For example, an official advertisement for the US Armed Forces posted by Funker530 is accompanied with the headline: "We Will Destroy Any Enemy Anywhere: US Armed Forces."[335] This video demonstrates how this dichotomy of "us" versus "them" (other) is inherent in the pronouns used by the page.

The humor theme on Funker530's webpage is a telling glimpse at the unapologetic ideology that's been a part of the brand from the beginning. American soldiers and their allies are depicted in the humor section as having fun, typically with no slight to their combat effectiveness. Alternatively, purported enemy combatants and non-Western soldiers are represented on the page as humorous when they are hurt from a combat accident, even in fatal scenarios.

Another attribute inscribed into the "us" versus "them" dichotomy that goes beyond the identity of individuals depicted in Funker530's videos is the video subject's state of being -- do they end up dying by the video's conclusion or do they remain living? Dead western bodies are often missing from the mise-en-scene of Funker530's content, while dead, non-western, non-white bodies are common foci of the othering gaze of the video lens. In a video depicting a French (Western) patrol of infantry soldiers ambushed by Taliban, the French soldiers escape without taking any casualties.[336] Alternatively, In one video of a soldier blowing up a suicide bomber from the turret, shots are fired, and the camera captures an explosion without ever showing the assassin.[337] It's become increasingly true that videos posted on the Funker530 website are not US troops getting killed or doing the killing. Calling back to Chapter two and understanding that destruction of non-Western bodies will not typically result in legal retaliation, these are strategic choices that fulfill the need to have content that appeals to users while avoiding legal retaliation.

The themes present in many conversations across Funker530's website demonstrate that not everyone is on the same page about what Funker530 is or what it represents. Scattered throughout chat logs are conversations that illustrate good-versus-evil and jingoistic ideologies while othering and trivializing the bodies of the dead as the necessary outcome of warfare.

There's no doubt that some users see the content as entertainment, a spectatorial experience, where, like sports, it's okay to critique the technique of the fighters, even the dead. As one user comments on a video of two Russian soldiers being destroyed by a drone airstrike, I assume directed at the Ukraine Army: "You get billions from America and give us a 480p video. Shame on you."[338] Perhaps nothing sums up the discord with audience better than one user who stated: "Comments here are more sickening than the footage itself," in regards to a video of a Kurdish fighter capturing his own death on camera.**[339]** Responding to the same video, another user replied: "After a day on this site, I have to say it's worse than LiveLeak – 99% on here just want to watch people die, not fight censorship.[340] These three examples from different perspectives also illuminate the argument that there are points of discord within the Funker530 community at large.

Making disparaging remarks against the dead, especially perceived enemies, is commonplace on Funker530's pages, often with little discernment for who is killed in a video. One user, with the username Kurdishhunter, responded to a death in one video by writing in Turkish: "Öl orsopu Evladı," which means "Die son of a bitch" in English. A comment left on a video of a dead ISIS fighter is nearly identical to a comment left on a video depicting the death of an Iraqi Army member – an American trained ally. The comments read: "I don't hear no 'Allahu Akbar' now... from either of them,"[341] and **"**After a couple ibuprofen and 2 dozen 'Allah hu Akbar' and he will be ok. Rub some dirt on it Osama," respectively.[342] The staff commentary on the Iraqi Army fighter's death is no less disparaging. The staff commentator suggests he was making content to go viral on TikTok or Snapchat, playing on the vertical orientation of the cellphone used to record the footage. At least as old as 2015, the quip is at the expense of a fighter that the US military helped train – an ally at the least.[343]

Another one of Funker530's rationales for existence is framing War Porn as timely news for its viewers, to inform them about the happenings of global conflict. However, like other troves of War Porn that I've discussed in this dissertation, the growth of this brand depends on an ever-expanding collection of materials, from the present as well as the past. Though a majority of the Funker530's new content comes from the war in Ukraine, much historical content from the early 2000s is included in the collection.[344]

Another common practice that curators use to denigrate fighters of color is the use of derogatory name calling in the language attached to videos. In one such video depicting a wall falling over on a squad of Iraqi Army soldiers, one of the page's moderators comments that the collapse of the wall is the result of "very 'special' forces," which suggests that the soldiers are incompetent.[345] Of this video, the moderator comments that battlefield injuries are a natural part of combat, but that sometimes they are worth a laugh.

In another video, purportedly of rebel fighters in the Syrian Army, a videotaped group celebration of chanting turns awry when one of the celebration participants tries to take a selfie and blows up the entire group with a connected remote demolition detonation. As the moderator states:

> A group of apparent Free Syrian Army rebels gather to make a sweet propaganda video, but become the victims of their own stupidity when one of the clowns attempts to take a selfie with a phone that is rigged to an improvised explosive device. I can't confirm the authenticity of this video, however, I do think this should be the end result whenever an adult human being takes a selfie.[346]

As demonstrated by the commentary of the video, even staff trivialize the video dead, this time referring to them as clowns who deserved harm because of their decision to take a selfie.

Narratives of visceral enjoyment are common in the comments section, and still other users fill the comments areas with references to pleasure derived from this content. When a user

questions other commenters, asking if they really want to watch Ukrainian soldiers murdered in cold blood, one user responds with: "Yes, now STFU and let me masturbate!"[347] Another user named Basicsniper101 chimes in: "My thought's exactly!!! It's really hard to get off with all these self-righteous pansy's being soft as f*** just like my Gore Dick," adding: "YES, that final kill shot is like an entire body wide orgasm.... how is that not normal???!?[348] For these examples, not all viewers are making the claim that the materials on the site are War Porn, but others do. This type of commentary is a far shot from the kind of professional brand that Funker530 has been working toward, but reminiscent of the nihilist language common on shock websites in decades prior.[349]

Some users make more explicit connections to the consumption of content as War Porn with comments like: "This my porn [seeing] commies die."[350] As another user comments:

> Why am I obsessed with seeing people die? I'm almost obsessed with War Porn and cartel porn and accident porn. Watching people die just humbles me so much. (And yes, I do feel emotion, I feel empathy in lots of situations). I guess I'm just a twisted individual.[351]

Another user comments: "Amen. Too many keyboard warriors on this site always gloating for kills for a particular side. War is hell and often fought by the poor working class that have no say in the policies. I'm still guilty of the curiosity to watch the War Porn, though.[352]" These comments describing content as War Porn are an example of the complicated nature of straddling the line between controversial content and professional image. Regardless, real death can be a source of a visceral and even sexual excitement.

Conclusion

As discussed above, Funker530's push towards mainstream professionalization included self-censorship in advance of retribution and the careful construction of Funker530 as a lifestyle brand. The brand presents War Porn as timely news, though parts of its collection dates back 20 years to the beginning of the Iraq War. The company has built its business on connections to shock websites, nationalist propaganda, and even as being a vehicle of Russian propaganda for U.S. audiences, as well as on a number of other problematic representations. Through these tactics and relationships, Funker530 has professionalized War Porn, though it may look markedly different than the chaotic and unfiltered collection of materials once housed on websites like NTFU.

The profitable commercial approach that Funker530 has taken brings into question the ethical nature of their work. These representations need to be understood in the context of Funker530 and then re-thought. As a media scholar and U.S. Army combat veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom III, I am disturbed by how these representations normalize spectatorship of death on social media platforms. By condemning these representations, I do not wish that they be removed from the public eye completely, but resituating this content in its true political context, presenting the material in a way fitting of a digital war memorial to honor the video dead.

As I will explain in more detail in the conclusion, a mass removal of this content comes with its own set of challenges, especially in that it would destroy vulnerable public archives that may serve as evidence of war crimes.[353] However, I believe that the matters represented on Funker530 are much too complicated to be summed up by amateur social media managers and that there are inherent ideological problems with normalizing dead non-western bodies in mainstream American social media outlets. Normalization of these videos puts the representations and politics of these videos in jeopardy of being simplified.

Content like this tends to create an appetite for more war in audiences instead of calling them to action, implicating them in accountability, and tagging them to do better to think critically about what is represented and how it is represented. In the conclusion, the analysis comes full circle. This initial question posed in the introduction regarding whether an anti-war text like *Krieg dem Kriege* (2004) could truly be anti-war, will end with one possible solution. In the conclusion, I will discuss the push by a self-described network of Ukrainian mothers working to document Russian was crimes in the ongoing war in Ukraine as well as the non-profit organization that has been built up around them. I will build on the Ukrainian mothers and their documentation of war crimes as an essential tool for justice. This is evidence of a method of using War Porn in the pursuit of justice instead of entertainment. I will raise one more question about an aspect of this chapter, the removal of videos depicting war crimes from the Internet. In 2017 for instance, YouTube took heat for removing large collections of war crimes in Syria gathered by activists.[354] Therefore, this dissertation will end by assessing the legacy War Porn, and by examining ways to liberate conflict video from commercialization.

Notes

[264] "(NSFW) Machine Gunner Tries to Be Rambo, But Makes Himself To Easy a Target." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-machine-gunner-tries-to-be-rambo-dies/.

[265] GoPro and other body worn camera systems were not standard issue for military, but they were often sold at on-base post exchanges.

[266] Jaffe, Greg. 2013. "Looking behind the Sightlines of an American Soldier under Taliban Fire." *The Washington Post*, January 26, 2013. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/looking-behind-the-sightlines-of-an-american-soldier-under-taliban-fire/2013/01/26/a277af20-6180-11e2-9940-6fc488f3fecd_story.html.

[267] "Soldier Speaks out on Wartime Viral Video, Getting Shot." 2013. CBS News. January 29, 2013. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/soldier-speaks-out-on-wartime-viral-video-getting-shot/.

[268] Miller, Joshua Rhett. 2017. "Marines Just Can't Stop Sharing Nude Pics and Sex Videos." *New York Post*, July 12, 2017. https://nypost.com/2017/07/12/marines-just-cant-stop-sharing-nude-pics-and-sex-videos; Brian Kates New York Daily News. 2005. "Mud-wrestling Soldier: Military Kicking Me Out." *Sun-Sentinel*, February 19, 2005. https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-2005-02-19-0502180739-story.html.

[269] In particular, this combining of amateur-recorded sexual pornography and conflict-related War Porn was a practice on the NTFU.

[270] Gronnvoll, Marita. 2010. *Media Representations of Gender and Torture Post-9/11*. Routledge.

[271] Baudrillard, Jean. 2006. "War Porn." *Journal of Visual Culture* 5 (1): 86–88.

[272] Hariman, Robert, and John Louis Lucaites. 2007. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

[273] Linehan, Adam. n.d. "Pics Or It Didn't Happen: Warfighting In The Age Of Videotaped Atrocities." https://taskandpurpose.com/opinion/pics-or-it-didnt-happen-soldiering-in-the-age-of-videotaped-atrocities.

[274] Linehan, Adam. n.d. "Pics Or It Didn't Happen: Warfighting In The Age Of Videotaped Atrocities." https://taskandpurpose.com/opinion/pics-or-it-didnt-happen-soldiering-in-the-age-of-videotaped-atrocities.

[275] Wasko, Janet, and Mary Erickson. 2009. "The Political Economy of YouTube." In *The YouTube Reader*, edited by Patrick Vonderau and Pelle Snickars.

[276] "Verizon, AT&T Pull Ads from Google over Extremist Videos." 2017. CBS News. March 23, 2017. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/verizon-at-t-pull-ads-from-google-over-extremist-videos/.

[277] "Pennsylvania Woman Indicted in Plot to Recruit Violent Jihadist Fighters and to Commit Murder Overseas." 2010. March 9, 2010. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/pennsylvania-woman-indicted-plot-recruit-violent-jihadist-fighters-and-commit-murder-overseas.

[278] Investigates, C.B.S. 2008. "Operation YouTube Smackdown." CBS News. June 25, 2008. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/operation-youtube-smackdown/.

[279] "Pennsylvania Woman Indicted in Plot to Recruit Violent Jihadist Fighters and to Commit Murder Overseas." 2010. March 9, 2010. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/pennsylvania-woman-indicted-plot-recruit-violent-jihadist-fighters-and-commit-murder-overseas.

[280] McNIFF, Eamon. 2010. " 'Net Posse Tracked 'Jihad Jane' for Three Years." ABC News. March 11, 2010. https://abcnews.go.com/TheLaw/Technology/Internet-monitors-tracked-jihad-jane-years/story?id=10069484.

[281] Conway, Maura, Moign Khawaja, Suraj Lakhani, Jeremy Reffin, Andrew Robertson, and David Weir. 2019. "Disrupting Daesh: Measuring Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and Its Impacts." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 42 (1-2): 141–60.

[282] Wasko, Janet, and Mary Erickson. 2009. "The Political Economy of YouTube." In *The YouTube Reader*, edited by Patrick Vonderau and Pelle Snickars.

[283] Moscaritolo, Angela. 2017. "Verizon, AT&T Pull Ads From YouTube Over Offensive Content." PCMag. March 23, 2017. https://www.pcmag.com/news/verizon-att-pull-ads-from-youtube-over-offensive-content.

[284] Moscaritolo, Angela. 2017. "Verizon, AT&T Pull Ads From YouTube Over Offensive Content." PCMag. March 23, 2017. https://www.pcmag.com/news/verizon-att-pull-ads-from-youtube-over-offensive-content.

[285] This tactic is reminiscent of the Motion Picture Production Association of America (MPPA), and the association seeing the business benefits of self-regulation without government intervention, via the Motion Picture Production Code. For more on the MPAA's tactic of self-regulation to avoid future censorship, see: Grieveson, Lee. 2004. "Policing Cinema." In *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America*. Univ of California Press.

[286] This is an observation from viewing the videos, quality, framerate, and era of video technology.

[287] "AMA Request: The Guy/guys Who Started Funker530 • r/CombatFootage." n.d. Reddit. Accessed August 23, 2017. https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/2f0ghu/ama_request_the_guyguys_who_started_funker530/.

[288] Think of these navigations pages as subgenres more so than contributors sourcing from these regions.

[289] These titles have mostly come and gone with the exception of Funker News Network which is hosted by Ronnie Adkins and is ongoing. In many cases, they are cobranding opportunities. For instance, Combat Ready was cohosted by 29-year Green Beret and Readyman CEO Jeff Kirkham who used the show to market his knowledge as well as his products before starting his own social channels.

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[293] Schaefer, Eric. 1999. *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*. 1st edition. Durham: Duke University Press Books.

[294] Karr, Kathleen. 1974. "The Long Square-Up: Exploitation Trends in the Silent Film." *Journal of Popular Film* 3 (2): 107–28.

[295] Remembering from Chapter 2, Rotten.com and Ogrish both sourced newswire photos.

[296] The sponsorship can be seen by scanning the Ogrish website circa 2006.

[297] In a now deleted Reddit AMA comment, founder Scott Funk states his regret over some of these practices and the apparent partnership, but LiveLeak.com-credit Funker 530 videos remain among Funker530's permanent collection. See the full AMA citation here: "AMA Request: The Guy/guys Who Started Funker530 • r/CombatFootage." n.d. Reddit. Accessed August 23, 2017. https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/2f0ghu/ama_request_the_guyguys_who_started_funker530/.

[298] "(NSFW) ISIS Fighter Uses Dying Friend as Cover While Frantically Reloading." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-isis-fighter-uses-dying-friend-as-cover-while-frantically-reloading/.

[299] "(NSFW) Graphic: Ukraine Soldier Opens Fire On Colleagues, 5 Dead." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-extremely-graphic-ukraine-soldier-opens-fire-on-colleagues-5-dead/.

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[302] Quinn, Ben. 2021. "Telegram Is Warned App 'nurtures Subculture Deifying Terrorists.'" *The Guardian*, October 14, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/14/telegram-warned-of-nurturing-subculture-deifying-terrorists.

[303] "(NSFW) Russian PMC 'Wagner Group' Releases Moto Video." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-russian-pmc-wagner-group-releases-moto-video/.

[304] IBID

[305] FUNKER530-Veteran Community & Combat Footage. 2023. "LIVE - Ukraine Requests UK Jets, Russia Responds | Combat Footage Review." Youtube. February 8, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-qfirKoJDA.

[306] "(NSFW) 2 Russian Soldiers Killed By Drone Munitions." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-2-russian-soldiers-killed-by-drone-munitions/.

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[308] IBID

[309] This slogan has been circulated widely, and is still up on the company's LinkedIn page at the time of this writing.

[310] Bielby, Caleb. 2019. "You're Welcome for My Service: 'Dysfunctional Veterans,' Stolen Valor, and the Social Groups of Post-War Soldiers." ttu-ir.tdl.org. https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/85309.

[311] "(NSFW) Graphic: Ukraine Soldier Opens Fire On Colleagues, 5 Dead." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-extremely-graphic-ukraine-soldier-opens-fire-on-colleagues-5-dead/.

[312] *RonnieFit*. n.d. Youtube. Accessed May 11, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCniPcvIx2hdo6cvuXiHDUNA.

[313] An offshoot of Black Rifle Coffee Company is *Coffee or Die* magazine, an independent military and police publication focusing on matters in those communities.

[314] "The Funker530 Collection." n.d. Black Rifle Coffee Company. Accessed March 23, 2023. https://www.blackriflecoffee.com/collections/funker. The official name for this partnership is "Coffee for a Cause." Though the page still exists on the BRCC website suggesting that proceeds from this collection go to select veterans' charities, there is no clear language elsewhere on the website that these proceeds go to charity. See more here: "Coffee For A Cause - Funker530." n.d. Black Rifle Coffee Canada. Accessed March 23, 2023. https://www.blackriflecoffee.ca/pages/coffee-for-a-cause-funker530.

[315] Benzvi, Maggie. 1574. "The Untold True Story of How Black Rifle Coffee Got Its Start." Coffee or Die Magazine. 1574. https://coffeeordie.com/black-rifle-coffee-true-story/.

[316] "Facebook Live." n.d. Accessed May 1, 2023. https://www.facebook.com/FUNKER530/videos/1703738419677787.

[317] "AMA Request: The Guy/guys Who Started Funker530 • r/CombatFootage." n.d. Reddit. Accessed August 23, 2017. https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/2f0ghu/ama_request_the_guyguys_who _started_funker530/. Military Minds, Inc, was dissolved in 2021, and details of continued charitable work are scant. See this evidence at: Per "Federal Corporation Information." n.d. Accessed February 2, 2023. https://ised-isde.canada.ca/cc/lgcy/fdrlCrpDtls.html?corpId=8228205&V_TOKEN=null&crpNm=.

[318] I remember watching a live video in circa 2016 where a BRRRT!-bundle was given away to one lucky audience member.

[319] "FUNKER530." n.d. Patreon. Accessed March 23, 2023. https://www.patreon.com/funker530.

[320] When I first stumbled upon the brand, I remember seeing ads for Nikon scope, the same company that makes cameras, leading into a violent video I had cued up.

[321] "YouTube Removed More than 8M Videos for Violent & Extremist Content during Q4 2017." 2018. April 24, 2018. https://marketingland.com/youtube-removed-more-than-8m-videos-for-violent-extremist-content-during-q4-2017-238875.

[322] This is based on a comparison of the videos on the website between late 2016 and early 2017.

[323] Gutowski, Stephen. 2023. "Newsletter: YouTube Reverses Course on Deleting Gun Channels and 2A Rulings Pour In." The Reload. February 3, 2023. https://thereload.com/newsletter-youtube-reverses-court-on-deleting-gun-channels-and-2a-rulings-pour-in/.; Edevane, Gillian. 2018. "YouTube Clamps Down on Gun Videos, Angering Content Creators." Newsweek. March 21, 2018. https://www.newsweek.com/gun-videos-youtube-policy-change-854975.

[324] "(NSFW) Machine Gunner Tries to Be Rambo, But Makes Himself To Easy a Target." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-machine-gunner-tries-to-be-rambo-dies/.

[325] This is an observation based on years of following this brand on Facebook. The more morbid and controversial the content, the more likely it will be on the Funkre530 website and the app, while less controversial material in shared to Facebook.

[326] Herman, Edward, and Noam Chomsky. 2012. "A Propaganda Model." *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks* 204. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=zNqMDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA204&dq =herman+and+chomsky&ots=SjrtMMEhtN&sig=24TljIXnRnDOzSQOugVMSb84ka0.

[327] How To Access The NSFW 18+ Area. (n.d.). Retrieved October 24, 2016, from https://community.funker530.com/t/how-to-access-the-nsfw-18-area/70

[328] "(NSFW) Graphic: Ukraine Soldier Opens Fire On Colleagues, 5 Dead." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-extremely-graphic-ukraine-soldier-opens-fire-on-colleagues-5-dead/.

[329] Examining clips like this one, it appears there was a significant content overhaul in 2015.

[330] "Suicide Bomb Instructor Blows Up His Entire Class." n.d. FUNKER530. Accessed January 27, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20140305031331/http://www.funker530.com/suicide-bomb-instructor-blows-up-his-entire-class/.

[331] This video was removed after January of 2015.

[332] I made personal contact with Chris Looft, the writer the *Vice* article on Funker, who explained why he hangs low. This quote is from the following source and has been since deleted: "AMA Request: The Guy/guys Who Started Funker530 • r/CombatFootage." n.d. Reddit. Accessed August 23, 2017. https://www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/2f0ghu/ama_request_the_guyguys_who_started_funker530/.

[333] "(NSFW) Graphic: Ukraine Soldier Opens Fire on Colleagues, 5 Dead." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-extremely-graphic-ukraine-soldier-opens-fire-on-colleagues-5-dead/.

[334] IBID

[335] "We Will Destroy Any Enemy Anywhere: US Armed Forces." (2016, October 20). Retrieved October 25, 2016, from https://www.funker530.com/armed-forces/

[336] "GoPro Footage: French Infantry Ambushed by Taliban." (2016, October 11). Retrieved October 26, 2016, from https://www.funker530.com/french-infantry/

[337] "Suicide Bomber Prematurely Detonated by.50 Caliber Machine Gun." n.d. Accessed February 7, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/suicide-bomber-prematurely-detonated-by-50-caliber-machine-gun/.

[338] "(NSFW) 2 Russian Soldiers Killed by Drone Munitions." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-2-russian-soldiers-killed-by-drone-munitions/.

[339] "PKK Fighter Films Own Death in Botched Raid." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/pkk-fighter-films-death-botched-raid/.

[340] IBID

[341] "(NSFW) ISIS Fighter Uses Dying Friend as Cover While Frantically Reloading." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-isis-fighter-uses-dying-friend-as-cover-while-frantically-reloading/.

[342] "(NSFW) Machine Gunner Tries to Be Rambo, But Makes Himself to Easy a Target." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-machine-gunner-tries-to-be-rambo-dies/.

[343] Look for a comment from Ttuck666 regarding this video's history. "(NSFW) Machine Gunner Tries to Be Rambo, But Makes Himself To Easy a Target." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-machine-gunner-tries-to-be-rambo-dies/.

[344] "2001 Ambush on Russian Armored Column by Chechen Fighters." n.d. Accessed May 7, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/2001-ambush-on-russian-armored-column-by-chechen-fighters/; "Iraqi Insurgents Attempt to Bring Down DHL Cargo Plane." n.d. Accessed May 7, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/iraqi-insurgents-attempt-to-bring-down-dhl-cargo-plane/; "[NSFW] Iraqi Insurgents Throw Themselves at Marine's M240B." n.d. Accessed May 7, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-iraqi-insurgents-throw-themselves-at-marines-m240b/.

[345] "Fail: Iraqi Army Turkey Peak Goes Terribly Wrong Instantly." (2016, October 5). Retrieved October 24, 2016, from https://www.funker530.com/instantly-wrong/

[346] "Rebel Idiot Blows Up Friends Trying To Take Selfie With Phone Detonator." (2016, September 15). Retrieved October 24, 2016, from https://www.funker530.com/blows-selfie/

[347] "(NSFW) Graphic: Ukraine Soldier Opens Fire on Colleagues, 5 Dead." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-extremely-graphic-ukraine-soldier-opens-fire-on-colleagues-5-dead/.

[348] IBID

[349] For a record of equivalent language in the heyday of NTFU, see Thomas Kvam's book featuring users comments: Kvam, Thomas. 2011. *Nowthatsfuckedup.com: Krieg Dem Kriege*. Oslo: Office for Contemporary Anarchy.

[350] "Commie Militant Catches Ricochet To The Face In Botched Philippines Attack." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/commie-militant-catches-ricochet-to-the-face-in-botched-philippines-attack/.

[351] "(NSFW) Fugitive Gunman Shot Dead By Israeli Security Forces." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/nsfw-fugitive-gunman-shot-dead-by-israeli-security-forces/.

[352] "Belarusian Fighter Almost Killed by Tank Shell." n.d. Accessed February 9, 2023. https://funker530.com/video/belarusian-fighter-almost-killed-by-tank-shell/.

[353] Browne, Malachy. 2017. "YouTube Removes Videos Showing Atrocities in Syria." *The New York Times*, August 22, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/world/middleeast/syria-youtube-videos-isis.html.

[354] Asher-Schapiro, Avi. 2017. "YouTube and Facebook Are Removing Evidence of Atrocities, Jeopardizing Cases Against War Criminals." The Intercept. November 2, 2017. https://theintercept.com/2017/11/02/war-crimes-youtube-facebook-syria-rohingya/.

Conclusion: The Legacy of War Porn

This dissertation set out to study the historical trajectory of War Porn, focusing on the technological and regulatory practices that professionalized the presentation of publicly appropriable combat footage, as evidenced in Chapter three with Funker530. The central question was: What social, cultural, technological, and regulatory conditions have allowed for War Porn to become a professional industry on mainstream social media platforms? This dissertation charted traces of War Porn across what would otherwise be a wide range of genres and many distinct mediums, demonstrating how this low hanging fruit of the publicly appropriable media archive has produced dividends for entrepreneurs. A primary objective was to demonstrate the direct interconnectedness between these usages of media, solidifying War Porn as a distinct media form. To demonstrate this interconnected trajectory, I focused on a range of exemplary cases that explored one or more key aspects of the course of War Porn from traces in the Mondo genre of the 1960s to the 2020s, examining a range of Mondo films and shock videotapes, shock websites, and mainstream social media.

Summary of Arguments

A primary finding of this dissertation is that War Porn has been shaped by and adapted to a range of regulations over the course of the history studied. In the introduction, I explain that the U.S. military's General Order Number 1, which was created in 1991 to outline prohibited activities for troops while on deployment was updated in 2000, but did not anticipate the ability of troops to take photos when the War on Terror began in 2001. The policy was updated in 2006, three months after the closure of Nowthatsfuckedup.com, to include a clause which prohibited the production, distribution and possession of amateur-recorded War Porn, defining the concept without naming it. This policy set a new precedent, outlawing American troops from posing in

War Porn, and essentially forcing content to focus on combatants from marginalized countries. The introduction also set up the idea that Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act (CDA) would create an echo system for shock websites to thrive on the Internet, so long as they followed the rules.

In Chapter one, I explain that the marketing of Mondo films and shock videotapes through mail order catalogs limited the interactions between the genre and the national spotlight. During this era, productions utilized archival clips and staged reenactments that became less controversial due to the duration of time between when clips were created and when they were pulled from the archive and exploited in these productions. A second critical finding was the ways in which the low-hanging fruit of the PAM archive were found ripe during this period and established the pattern that brought War Porn to its modern incarnation.

In Chapter two, I illustrate how shock websites beginning in the mid-1990s quickly learned to contend with Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). Section 230 established a division between website operators and users who uploaded content, releasing operators from liability from user uploaded content. This empowered websites like Liveleak.com to grow, but it also put limitations on the kind of materials that could be shared. Though some websites were shuttered in the early 2000s, the details of their vulnerabilities were made evident for shock websites still online in the early 2000s to avoid the same pitfalls, the primary key being the permanent anonymity of website operators and the performance of total regulatory compliance.

The path through all three chapters works towards the increasingly professionalized presentation of War Porn and comes to its peak in Chapter three. I examine Funker530 and how it effectively achieved professionalization through constructing and positioning itself as a veteran

lifestyle brand rather than a shock website, shedding much of the shock aesthetics and pretenses to present a cleaner and more wholesome image of War Porn. This performance of professionalization also included such tactics as self-policing to appease the policies of the social platforms utilized to draw audiences to the Funker530 website by using a breadcrumb method. As I argued, part of Funker530's constructedness is presenting materials as news from ongoing conflicts, though the total archive contains videos of the destruction of bodies dating back 20 years.

Finally, the research in this dissertation traces the ways in which the business of War Porn is part of a larger shock ecosystem across time, various mediums, and through various regulatory environments. This ecosystem has interconnectedness and shares much in common with the exploitation tradition, a tradition that largely operated on the margins of culture. As Eric Schaefer has said about classic exploitation film, studying content on the margins of culture can be enlightening for understanding culture and society more broadly.[355] In the case of this dissertation, studying shock businesses shed light on how regulatory policies created an environment for War Porn and have emboldened its presence over time.[356]

Regulating War Porn Through Demonetization

As the writing of this dissertation is coming to a close, Section 230 is being revisited by the U.S. Supreme Court, looking at the power platforms have to influence and shape content distribution. My analysis of the adaptations War Porn peddlers have made to become Section 230-complient leads me to believe that these forms of exploitation are here to stay, and it would be hard to create a policy that makes this form of exploitation go away. One thing the core analysis of this dissertation has demonstrated is that both the exploitive and legitimate usage of war and conflict footage are performative. In other words, each are presented through highly

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constructed presentations that make the consumption feel authentic. As I have discovered throughout, unpacking the veneer of these constructions is a complicated process with many steps and layers of research.

Since its inception, Section 230 has made it difficult to impose morality on content and collections because the number of websites, platforms, users, and the content they submit has proven to be difficult to police. Reflecting back on the history outlined in Chapter 3, Funker530 and other peddlers of violent media had their content demonetized on YouTube in 2016 based on YouTube's intent to clean up its image for shareholders. Not surprisingly, the decision to cut these profiteers out of the dividends their collections of content had been producing was later amended by YouTube to make a path forward for both channels and platform where both could profit. Ultimately, I believe that revisiting policies directed at the demonetization of War Porn online, either as an independent decision by social platforms or as a larger U.S. communication policy, is the only way to reconcile the disparities between War Porn and the commercial enterprise it has become entangled with.

Repatriating War Porn

One question remains: What is the appropriate deployment of these materials as an archive that is both publicly available and presented in a way that honors the video dead and wounded as much as society has collectively expressed concern about their physical remains? Recalling the introduction, Susan Sontag suggests that the viewing of such material could be best left to experts in medicine, law, or other fields where evidence of conflict could be used to impact overall social change.[357] Stemming from this discourse, Susan Crane explores the history of repatriating WWII holocaust photographs, including the impact of returning representations to survivors of conflict.[358] A general definition of repatriation is as follows: "The act or process of

restoring or returning someone or something to the country of origin, allegiance, or citizenship."[359] In the case of War Porn, this definition applies two-fold in that the repatriation of War Porn allows for the returning of the something to the someone's country of origin.[360] Repatriation would disrupt the power that these images have to titillate and entertain by invoking self-awareness for War Porn. As Crane explains, in some cases, living survivors have been able to reclaim these representations, with the handoff of material providing relief. As a WWII and Holocaust educator, she rarely uses photographs in the classroom anymore, citing the ethical complexities of using these photographs to teach about conflict in a reflexive way. Students are just learning the critical faculties to unpack these photos but may not learn them in the course of her class.[361]

When visual artist Thomas Kvam Stumbled upon NTFU between 2004 and 2006, he meticulously downloaded the entire website, seeking to preserve it as both historical record and evidence of potential war crimes, creating the text *Nowthatsfuckedup.com: Krieg dem Kriege* in 2010.[362] Chris Wilson who had created the website and Kvam who had preserved a carbon copy may have both seen their work in the vein of war pacificist Friedrich Ernst, whose 1924, post-WWI text *Krieg dem Kriege* sought to use images depicting the horrors of war as cautionary evidence to prevent future wars, as described in the Introduction to this dissertation.[363] Kvam's text opens with a critical essay reflecting on the NTFU archive, though it mostly re-presented the site in its full form. Though critical, Kvam's text fails to recognize that the social and cultural conditions around NTFU and WWI are hardly analogous. While Ernst's trove of visual war content was used first and foremost as an anti-war text, Kvam's was comprised of capturing materials already being presented as War Porn. Though Kvam contains a small essay at the beginning of his text, the outcome is that he presents the archive mostly as it was, including a

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note that to his knowledge it is the only record.[364] One of the most unsettling parts of Kvam's approach is that he includes the amateur military pornography that was posted on the website. In nearly every case, these were pictures taken in private, and were not meant to be uploaded to a gallery on the web. This move encourages the doxing of troops depicted in the photographs who happen to be part of the collection, including those that have no connection to the more egregious photographs depicting the destruction of Iraqi combatants. In this way, Kvam portrays all the troops as equally culpable.

Kvam has proposed an expansion of doxing with technology. In an ongoing project called "The Chosen Five," Kvam's project works to identify five soldiers posing with a charred corpse, a photo he captured by downloading the NTFU site. Kvam proposes using facial recognition technology to identify the soldiers posing in the photograph so that they can be questioned about it. Though the Geneva Conventions prohibit manipulating bodies of dead combatants, the military members in Kvam's selected photo are not touching the corpse. General Order Number 1 had not yet defined War Porn and established a policy against it. Kvam's photo is not evidence of a war crime. It is instead simply War Porn, a grotesque glimpse of what Baudrillard saw as the banality of war.[365] In all, Kvam's text feels more like the post-WWII documentaries created by Swedish filmmaker Tore Sjöberg described in Chapter one – that the holocaust was inevitable due to a few evil actors. Like Sjöberg's films, Kvam's text falls short of implicating a larger body of actors, including national leaders and global citizens more broadly.

As discussed in Chapter three, War Porn has been professionalized by virtue of its presence on mainstream social media platforms. Therefore, War Porn must be de-professionalized to lose its allure. If War Porn has indeed evolved into actual snuff or real-life body horror, as Mark Astley has argued, what should be done with the evidence?[366] It's worth

revisiting whether these photos and videos can and should be repatriated in some way, perhaps as a symbolic gesture because, unlike human remains, War Porn is infinitely reproduceable.[367]

Instead of War Porn

Any visual conflict content on the Internet can be subject to exploitation as War Porn given its non-copyrighted status. A video's status as PAM content typically assures its vulnerability for being exploited by shock video entrepreneurs who cull the Internet for such material, remembering Mark Astley's discovery of Ogrish's sourcing from non-English language websites from Chapter two.[368] Though ownership and exhibition on the Internet is a complicated matter, not all war and atrocity footage that has been uploaded to the Internet is intended to be propaganda or War Porn, as the case studies examined in this dissertation might otherwise indicate. Groups may rely on the convenience of YouTube to document, circulate, and archive evidence of war crimes, remembering YouTube's long history as the default public video repository. In 2021, news outlets reported that YouTube's policy for reigning in violent content had put collections of videos documenting war crimes in Syria in jeopardy.[369] The videos were removed, and then reuploaded. While YouTube has since learned to adapt to these types of challenges, this event was a reminder that the content of certain historical archives do not always align with the aesthetics of YouTube's goal to present a clean corporate image for shareholders and users.

These examples raise the question of whether an Internet-based collection of war and atrocity material can be structured and delivered to audiences in a way that resituates commercial approaches. There is little need for being a voyeur through War Porn when there are so many pieces of evidence available that document the impact of the conflict better than a chaotic collection of videos and photos can. It's possible to see the full scope of war through antiwar

content such as oral histories, written texts, and other presentations of evidence. One of the best examples of a highly anti-war text featuring honest and harrowing oral histories told by Iraq War veterans is *Winter Soldier, Iraq and Afghanistan: Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations*.[370] With the power of the Internet, and some of the military communities assembling online, video could exist in digital museum exhibitions rather than commercial websites, paired with other forms of evidence to bring clarity to history rather than ambiguity. Perhaps these accounts could bring fuller political context to War Porn as visual evidence. Brown University's "Costs of War" program maintains data dashboards of the human, economic, social, and political impact of war, keeping a running tally of the number of civilians killed in U.S. conflicts.[371] Data of the death toll creates a powerful argument for continued awareness with an anti-war and anti-imperial message, where glimpses of War Porn from the NTFU archive are situated in a particular place in time. As evidenced in this dissertation, that place in time is often unknown to viewers in the current approach.

One prime example of the purposive use of War Porn for the public good is Dattalion, founded in February of 2022. A Ukrainian-American NGO, Dattalion hosts and maintains a growing database of over 5,500 videos and 26,000 photos, grounded by eye witness accounts, documenting Russian attacks and war crimes since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the winter of 2022.[372] Run by executive director Sarah Chadzynski who left Poland at the beginning of the conflict, the network of contributors who collect the material is made up of over 100 brave women who've decided to fight Russia using visual evidence.[373] A disclaimer before accessing the archive warns viewers that the database "depicts the consequences of war, destruction of property, and injuries to civilians," implying that is purpose is to serve as direct evidence of war crimes.[374] To drive the point further, the site adds: "The content of the database is collected only

for intelligence and journalistic purposes. Commercial use of it with attribution of the database or the website is not allowed by Dattalion," a statement explicitly aimed at preventing the commercial exploitation of the database.[375] What makes Dattalion different from many of the sites examined throughout this dissertation is that the staff have a direct connection with the evidence they are tagging and cataloging to bring attention to the realities of their lived conflict to a world audience. Using many of the same technological tools Funker530 has utilized, such as an independent server of content, Dattalion offers an alternative path forward for video repurposed as War Porn.

If such video could be counted, categorized, and historically recontextualized through the use of technology and collective action, this might mitigate some of the harm caused by War Porn in the public sphere. Higher ethical standards would require making the subjects of videos known, no matter what side they fought on. Reframing this publicly available footage in ways that encourage respectful representations of the dead is more in line with the way the Geneva Conventions set out to respect the physical remains of combatants. This recognition would also work towards establishing video as memorial. One potential solution is tapping into the technology that supports DMCA, in some cases crawling webpages for copyrighted material. As discussed earlier, there are ethical issues to consider when identifying individuals represented in War Porn, but a discrete process of attributing War Porn back to a political context could aid the process of repatriation.

Looking Towards the Future

It is my hope that the research and findings detailed in this dissertation about the trajectory of War Porn will have a broader impact for the whole of media studies and expands the literature I have examined. I aspire to find that this dissertation also fits in with the corpus of

anti-war texts, and that it speaks to understanding the legacy of warfare more broadly. While

many scholars have worked to identify and unpack elements of War Porn as a genre, seeing it as

evidence, body horror, news, and even Mondo, it is my hope that I have pulled the scholarly

debate along by suggesting we reconsider the broader implications of what we have identified.

Future research into War Porn in the contemporary era needs to consider visual evidence

that, like Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1954), present War Porn in reflexive ways that

implicate audiences in their presentation of materials. Resnais used storytelling and editing

techniques to call audiences to see the holocaust beyond a monolith event in time and instead

inherently connected to present day politics and a broader collective memory of warfare.

Perhaps, War Porn can become self-aware through reflexive processes without showing the

destruction of bodies. Miles Lagoze, a former Marine combat camera operator working for the

public relations arm of the Marine Corps, has taken additional footage he shot on his deployment

to Afghanistan and crafted it into a nuanced anti-war documentary.[376] *Combat Obscura* (2018) is

a powerful collage of materials that focuses on aspects of the war that fit neither into a clean PR

image or into the corpus of War Porn described throughout this dissertation. Instead of closeups

of casualties, Lagoze's critique emphasizes the ambiguity, banality, and senselessness of war.

This sentiment was reenforced by the *Washington Post's* assessment of the Afghanistan Papers

in 2019, which identified that deployed troops were often working without clear objectives or

goals, and sometimes simply waiting to be attacked. Among the vignettes shown are Marines

smoking marijuana, a discarded corpse compared to a road kill deer, and an unnerving situation

that required a Marine to pull a pistol on a child based on rules of engagement and escalation of

force, a situation no doubt analogous to the experience of many deployed troops working outside

of the wire.[377] Combat produces many precarious situations that can often create cognitive

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dissonance between the people we want to be and the people that we have to be in a given moment based on standard operating procedures and rules of engagement. Like War Porn, these vignettes also present the banality of everyday war, but also point to the senselessness rather than inevitability of war. They are also different in that they are not designed to excite or create a visceral response – they are designed to promote reflection on conflict.

A goal of this dissertation is to identify War Porn more clearly as a concept with a long history across mediums and genres. It is an attempt to use research to create a definition that accounts for audiences that are implicated by War Porn based on the political proximity between their identities and the conflicts depicted but are not receptive to watching it as a typical viewer or spectator. Previous conceptualizations of War Porn, or real-life body horror as it was sometimes called, are constructed in a way that articulates audiences as passive viewers. Regardless of audience status, the implicated, such as troops, civilians, and other participants of conflict, deserve input regarding the status and legacy of War Porn as a media commodity.

This dissertation aims to provide a rough guide for understanding the history of War Porn, so that future readers can more critically reflect on the nature of its place in the public view. I started this dissertation discussing my own experience as an infantry machine gunner in Iraq, posing questions about this object of study as a representation of historical memory. I believe that troops should reflect on and question the implications of War Porn and conflict more broadly. My hope is that after reading this dissertation, readers like myself will be better equipped to understand and reflect on this genre as one aspect of conflict that still need more unpacking and more nuanced understandings, even decades after these materials were created and conflicts have ended.

Military service is complicated – it is a job you can't quit. As of 2023, America is considering officially deauthorizing the Iraq War as a symbolic gesture to reverse the 2003 declaration and to say it was the wrong thing to do.[378] This leaves veterans of the war in the uncomfortable position of being further maligned by their experience. If I didn't deploy to Iraq in 2005, my life could have been ruined, or at least made a lot more difficult. With threats of incarceration for desertion, it is difficult for members of the United States military to truly resist war. Clifton Hicks, who deployed to Iraq from 2003 to 2004, was one of the few conscientious objectors who refused to continue his combat deployment when he observed instances of the horrible futility of war. Hicks fought a multi-year fight to get out of the military.[379] A few years after Iraq, I was involuntarily extended and told I would be mobilizing to Afghanistan with my new unit.[380] My military ID card was reissued, designating my new military separation date as 2023, though they assured me it was just temporary. Ultimately, I would have had to sign a waiver to be redeployed since my last deployment had been so recent, but I decided to stay home to finish my undergraduate degree. Four members from my unit died on that deployment, including my good friend Chris Abeyta. They were delivering a truckload of shoes to Afghani school girls when the convoy was hit.[381] That memory still sends ripples of trauma through my community yearly, even more for families and the soldiers that were there. This grief stands in sharp counterpoint to the commodification of war documented in this dissertation. My research and scholarship thus far are dedicated to the many other friends I used to have. We can only do our best to be our best selves now, after the conflicts have ended, and act in ways that support appropriate remembrance of those war fighters, combatants, and civilians who are no longer here.

Notes

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[356] Schaefer, Eric. 1999. *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*. 1st edition. Durham: Duke University Press Books.

[357] Sontag, Susan. 2004. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. F First Paperback Edition Used edition. New York, N.Y: Picador.

[358] Crane, Susan A. 2008. "Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography." *History and Theory* 47 (3): 309–30.

[359] "Definition of Repatriation." n.d. Accessed May 10, 2023. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repatriation.

[360] IBID

[361] Crane, Susan A. 2008. "Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography." *History and Theory* 47 (3): 309–30.

[362] Kvam, Thomas. 2011. *Nowthatsfuckedup.com: Krieg Dem Kriege*. Oslo: Office for Contemporary Anarchy.

[363] Friedrich, Ernst, and Gerd Krumeich. 2004. *Krieg Dem Kriege*. München: Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt.

[364] Kvam may have had in some ways a fuller picture than was is presented on the Wayback Machine, but it is not likely due to the ability to shift between dates to create a web of various parts of the story.

[365] Baudrillard, Jean. 2006. "War Porn." *Journal of Visual Culture* 5 (1): 86–88.

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