

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: The Courtauld Institute of Art</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 34</p>
<p>Title of case study: 2008 Brighton Photo Biennial, <i>Memory of Fire: The War of Images and Images of War</i>, curatorial project by Professor Julian Stallabrass</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact <i>Memory of Fire</i>, the 2008 Brighton Photo Biennial, shown across nine venues, had public impact, as measured by audience figures, audience comment on the website and in gallery comment books, attendance at public events and in education programmes, and the analyses of the event in an independent audit and Audience & Visitor Evaluation Report. Its longer term impact derives from the stimulation of discourse about the role of imagery in the conduct of war, over a period in which the UK has continually been at war, and in which the media's treatment of war has been of pressing public concern.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research The Biennial was part of a long research process, which predated it and continues today. JS has been engaged on this research since the late 1990s, and with greater intensity since 2003. He has been in productive dialogue in many seminars and conferences from 2003 onwards with Courtauld colleagues and students, undertaking research in related areas (and in particular with Professor Mignon Nixon and Dr Satish Padiyar). These have included participation in events associated with Professor Nixon's MA, 'Art and Psychoanalysis: Fifty Years of War in the Time of Peace, 1960-2010', including public presentations by the artists Thomas Hirschhorn (January 2012) and Silvia Kolbowski (February 2012). JS was able to buy in teaching for the Spring Term of 2008, enabling him to spend more time researching the Biennial. In 2006-08, a number of interns conducted directed research on areas related to the Biennial, including the use of images online, army images and blogs from Iraq. The Biennial was the product of research combined with extensive negotiation with the various partners in 2007-08. Key research findings are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The growing extent and sophistication of state and military management of the news. The main case studies in this research are the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, both conflicts to which the media were invited to represent the exercise of state power. There are strong causal links between the two, Iraq being planned as a response to perceived press-management failure in Vietnam with consequent strategic, tactical and media relations' innovations. Images are used by all sides as 'force multipliers', an aid to the direct application of force. 2. The dialectical transformation of war and the media by new technologies and by new relationships of mass media ownership and operation. The practices, timings and publication of visual material from war zones have been utterly transformed by these changes. While to some extent these changes are masked by surface similarities in image products, they are profound, and have deep implications for the relations of military, media, states and the public. 3. The transformations described in 2. produce subtle changes in the aesthetics of photojournalism, documentary photography and video. The traditions of photojournalism, never far from the minds of its practitioners, are under pressure from over-production, time pressures in production and reception, and the new aesthetic implications of digital technology. 4. The remarkable rise of amateur production and publication of photography and video has had a great effect on the practice of photojournalism and documentary photography. Amateur work is increasingly emulated by professionals, using widely available cameras, including phone cameras. The field of war imagery has thus become increasingly differentiated, structured by oppositions with varying aesthetic, political and social affiliations. <p>This research has appeared in various manifestations: the Brighton Photo Biennial itself, its associated publications, and in various essays published in books and journals as detailed below.</p>

3. References to the research

Output 1:

Julian Stallabrass, chief curator

Brighton Photo Biennial, 2008: *Memory of Fire: The War of Images and Images of War*

Nine exhibitions and associated events:

Philip Jones Griffiths, *Agent Orange*, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, 30.09.08 - 16.11.08

Designs for Solidarity: Photography and the Cuban Political Poster 1965-1975, Design Archives, University of Brighton Gallery, 22.09.08 - 24.11.08

Iraq Through the Lens of Vietnam, University of Brighton Gallery, 03.10.08 - 15.11.08

Frank Hurley, *Photographing the First World War*, Charleston, 31.08.08 - 02.11.08

Photography & Revolution: Memory Trails Through the Latin American Left, co-curated with Susie Medley, The Winchester Gallery, 03.10.08 - 07.11.08

Thomas Hirschhorn, *The Incommensurable Banner*, Fabrica, Brighton, 03.10.08 - 16.11.08

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Simon Norfolk and Paul Seawright, *The Sublime Image of Destruction*, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, 03.10.08 - 04.01.09

Harriet Logan, *Unveiled: Voices of Women in Afghanistan*, Independent Photographers Gallery, Battle, 03.10.08 - 15.11.08

Julian Germain, *War Memorial*, Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth, 04.10.08 - 23.11.08

Geert Van Kesteren, *Why, Mister, Why? and Baghdad Calling*, Lighthouse Gallery, Brighton, 03.10.08 - 16.11.08

Full details of exhibitions, events and educational programmes may be found here:

<http://2008.bpb.org.uk/2008/>

Output 2:

Julian Stallabrass, ed., *Memory of Fire: The War of Images and Images of War*, Photoworks, Brighton 2013.

Contents:

Essays:

Julian Stallabrass: 'The Power and Impotence of Images'

Philip Jones Griffiths interviewed by Geert van Kesteren/Brigitte

Lardinois/Julian Stallabrass

Rita Leistner Embedded with Murderers: Balad, Iraq, July 15th, 2003

Ashley Gilbertson interviewed by Julian Stallabrass

Sarah James: 'Making an Ugly World Beautiful? Morality and Aesthetics in the Aftermath'

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin interviewed by Julian Stallabrass

Coco Fusco: 'Now You See It, Now You Don't'

Geert van Kesteren interviewed by Brigitte Lardinois

Stephan Decostere 'Image, War, Impactology'

Trevor Paglen interviewed by Julian Stallabrass *Interviews:*

Extent of publication: 224 pages; 70 illustrations

Output 3

Julian Stallabrass, author

'Bureaucracy and Crime: Photography at Guantanamo', in Edmund Clark, *Guantanamo: If the Light Goes Out*, Dewi Lewis Publishing, Stockport 2010, n.p. This book has been shortlisted for the Prix Pictet for 2012 for the theme of 'Power'; and chosen as Book of the Year by the National Association of Italian Photo Editors (GRIN).

Essay, 3,500 words

Output 4

Julian Stallabrass, author

Preface to Philip Jones Griffiths, *Recollections*, Trolley, London 2008, n.p.

Essay, 3,500 words

Output 5

Julian Stallabrass, author

'Hipstamatic Blues', preface to Rita Leistner, *Looking for Marshall McLuhan in Afghanistan*: Intellect, The University of Chicago, Chicago 2013

Essay: 1,000 words

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Output 6

Julian Stallabrass, author

'The Fracturing of Globalisation', in Jelle Bouwhuis/ Ingrid Commandeur/ Gijs Frieling/ Domenik Ruyters/ Margit Schavemaker/ Christel Vesters, eds., *Now is the Time: Art and Theory in the 21st Century*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam 2009, pp. 63-74. An updated version was published in *Modern Art* (Taipei), no. 152, October 2010, pp. 4-15.

Essay, 4,000 words

Evidence of the quality of the research

The Biennial was not a regularly funded arts organisation, and had to bid for funds based on the selection of the curator and the specific project: the 2008 Biennial was funded with grants from Arts Council England South East (£160,000), the AHRC (£12,400), the University of Brighton (£20,000), Brighton & Hove City Council (£5,000) and trusts and foundations funding (£50,000), plus considerable in-kind funding from Photoworks. The curator's post was an invited, paid position, with a fee of £15,000 coming out of the Arts Council grant; the decision to confirm the appointment was made by the BPB Board, which is composed of distinguished photographic practitioners, historians and arts administrators. At the time, they included David Alan Mellor, David Chandler, Emma Morris and the Magnum photographers Mark Waugh and Mark Power. The Biennial was shown at major arts venues throughout the Southeast, their participation being governed by their boards, directors and curators. The associated research outputs take in major photographic publishers in the UK (Photoworks, Dewi Lewis and Trolley Books) as well as the University of Chicago Press. The Biennial was well-reviewed in the national and international press, and was the subject of three sustained and scholarly treatments by Jeannine Tang in *Journal of Visual Culture*, Steve Edwards in *Historical Materialism* and Peter Campbell in *New Left Review*.

4. Details of the impact

Memory of Fire engaged a number of discrete and interlinked publics: visitor surveys show that the exhibitions were seen by those with a pre-existing interest in art and photography (many of whom travelled specifically to see the biennial), alongside a more general and local audience. Many of the visitors were schoolchildren drawn in by the education projects, along with students from the University of Brighton and the University of Sussex. There is evidence (detailed in the supporting document) to show that these various audiences were led to revise their understanding of the historical events depicted, and the significance and power of particular forms of representation. This had a social impact in having viewers reassess modes of media representation in contemporary conflicts. The historical and media-specific aspects of the biennial enabled citizens to move towards an understanding of how global conflict is conveyed to them, and how they may use visual and technological resources to gain an understanding of conflict, face up to trauma or mount a critique of events. The biennial worked to counter passivity in the face of media presentations, in part by presenting the differentiated field of war imagery including historical work from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, installation work, large-scale museum photography, current photojournalism, amateur photography and artists' video. In this way the particularities of the present become clear. The causal links, contrasts and similarities between photographic depictions of the Vietnam and Iraq wars were explored in detail in the exhibition, *Iraq Through the Lens of Vietnam* so that the different technologies, techniques and aesthetics of the photography of each war stood out in sharp relief. The changing character of amateur production could be understood through Julian Germain's commissioned work, *War Memorial*, which gathered photographic work from British armed forces' personnel spanning a century; through Geert Van Kesteren's use of Iraqi camera-phone images; and through Thomas Hirschhorn's re-use of trophy photographs in his installation, *The Incommensurable Banner*. The use of images as agents was made clear through the display and contextualisation of photographs showing the 'Shock and Awe' assault on Baghdad, the Abu Ghraib pictures and photographs made and appropriated by Iraqi resistance activists, among many others.

At each of the venues for which we have comparative figures, the Biennial showed a marked increase above normal attendance. The character of viewers' engagement can be tracked through the lengthy and thoughtful comments left online and in the galleries' comment books, and in the *BPB 2008 Audience & Visitor Evaluation Report*. A brochure mini-catalogue was provided gratis at

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the exhibitions, and 5,000 copies were distributed: it contained key images as well as critical texts by Julian Stallabrass and Sarah James. *Photoworks* magazine for autumn 2008 was devoted to war themes, and carried many important textual and photographic contributions, extending the scope of the discussion that the Biennial had opened up. *Photoworks* sells around 3,500 copies per issue, and is widely distributed; it is available in WH Smiths. On the evidence of the independent evaluation of the Biennial and the audience evaluation report by Fiona Burgess, viewers were highly engaged by the exhibitions, forming strong and informed opinions about what they had seen, and spending much time in discussion with the gallery invigilators. Burgess concluded that the exhibitions had elicited a highly positive viewer response, with many viewers describing the experience as revelatory, particularly with relation to the mainstream mass media coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In particular, the emphasis on amateur and do-it-yourself imagery, along with the Biennial's educational and portfolio review events, made for a practical impact on the way people thought about making as well as seeing photography and video. This was directly evidenced through many of the education events detailed in the support document. In addition, the website homepage, which had the form of a blog, carried debate about the *Memory of Fire* themes, which extended beyond the Biennial teams.

The Biennial received significant media coverage related to its different audiences. Articles appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Independent on Sunday*, and there was also coverage in the art press, including *Flash Art* and *The Art Book*. The local Brighton newspaper, *The Argus*, ran four features with extensive and well-illustrated coverage of the biennial. In addition, the Biennial was part of an ongoing research project, which has had many public manifestations, and has involved many collaborations, as listed in the support document. An indicative event would be the public conversation between Oliver Chanarin and Julian Stallabrass that launched the book, *Memory of Fire* in June 2013. It was held at Amnesty International's London building before an audience of 400, and was arranged in collaboration with the agency, Culture and Conflict.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Those directly involved with BPB 2008, and who can comment on all the claims concerning impact made above:

Evidence of impact:

- 1) Head of Education, BPB in 2008; now at Photoworks.
- 2) Director, BPB in 2008
- 3) Director, Photoworks in 2008

Directors/ curators of partner venues, who can corroborate claims re: local audiences at subsections of the Biennial:

- 4) Director, Independent Photographers' Gallery
- 5) Head of Media Arts, Lighthouse

Evidence of impact:

- 6) Brighton Photo Biennial 2008 Evaluation: internal document listing viewer and audience attendance figures.
- 7) Independent evaluation of the Biennial by the organisation, A Fine Line, February 2009: internal document containing quantitative and qualitative assessment.
- 8) Comments and discussion on the Biennial website: <http://2008.bpb.org.uk/2008/> confirming thoughtful viewer response to exhibition experience
- 9) Comments books from the University of Brighton Gallery, Fabrica and Lighthouse: image files of all pages are available; many comments were transcribed to the Biennial site on the individual exhibition pages. E.g. for the University of Brighton Gallery exhibition: <http://2008.bpb.org.uk/2008/blog/3224/iraq-through-the-lens-of-vietnam/>
- 10) *BPB 2008 Audience & Visitor Evaluation Report*, October-November 2008, Central School for Speech and Drama Intern for BPB 2008. Source material for this report in the form of interviews with Biennial viewers is also available