Roger Stahl. *Through the Crosshairs: War, Visual Culture, and the Weaponized Gaze*. Newark, NJ: Rutgers Press, 2018. 211 pages; hardcover \$120.00; paper \$30.95; ebook \$30.95. ISBN 0813585252.

In *Through the Crosshairs: War, Visual Culture, and the Weaponized Gaze*, Roger Stahl offers an unflinching look at the unsuspecting ways the military-industrial-media complex channels civic understandings of violence through the technological instruments of war itself. In what amounts to an erudite extension of Paul Virilio's (1989) historical analysis of the coevolution of camera and industrialized weapons of war, Stahl traces over the course of five case studies a genealogy of the "weaponized gaze," a cache of verbal and visual practices comprising the conditions of possibility by which looks can *kill*. Of paramount concern for Stahl is the militarized confiscation of the "civic gaze," a somewhat undefined and perhaps even promissory democratic *sensus communis*, in favour of the techno-strategic vision of smart bombs, satellites, drones, snipers, and helmetcams. How, Stahl asks, did the views and perspectives manufactured by high-tech weapons come to dominate the Western presentation of war? What subjects and subjectivities does the weaponized gaze summon and discipline in its mission to naturalize war? Finally, and most importantly, how can alternative lines of sight defiantly invert, convert, and subvert this rigid gaze to revitalize public deliberation and to include the victims of Western imperialism so often placed outside the frame?

Stahl confronts these questions by returning to the first Gulf War where he locates the *fons et origo* of the weaponized gaze in the proliferation of iconic gun-sight footage from cameras fixed to laser-guided munitions. Instead of capturing the immediate aftermath of detonation or following the trajectory of a projectile from a distance, this "smart bomb vision" forces audiences to embody the weapon's spectacular vantage point up to the moment of impact. Although the smart bomb video has historical antecedents, it became an enduring trope in news media reporting of the Gulf War and quickly seized the public imagination as a purportedly fresh, unmediated, and concentrated view of war. Of course, as Stahl makes abundantly clear, there is never an unfiltered depiction of war; rather, the weaponized gaze preys upon rampant and stubborn photo-realist assumptions, the misplaced belief that images make reality knowable beyond the bedevilmments of human ideology. Much scholarship in visual studies over the past fifty years has invested heavily in challenging oversimplified perspectives of influence that occlude the role of technology and social norms in establishing culturally habituated ways of seeing. Stahl's analysis contributes to this endeavour, hitting hardest when insisting that the

artifice of the image must never be overlooked and passively accepted. Indeed, as each of the technologically bestowed visions of war contained in *Through the Crosshairs* prove, *what* the public sees is far less consequential than *how* they see it.

Given that war images and imagery regularly evade critical detection, the stakes of the weaponized gaze reside at the level of subjectivity as much as representation. Drawing from the constitutive theory of Foucault, Althusser, Butler, and Rancière, Stahl identifies each instantiation of the weaponized gaze as a concretization and organization of individual subjects and collective identities within matrixes of power. In his critique of the 2014 film *American Sniper*, Stahl contends that pastoral metaphors and visual mechanics coalesce in “sniper vision” to authorize imperial aggression as the righteous obligation of shepherds (soldier/military) to protect sheep (white/citizens) from wolves (dark/terrorists). The morally unambiguous universe constructed through the sniper scope shifts the centre of gravity toward the apparatus as a means of assuaging collective responsibility and demanding strict public obedience. We learn that the idealized scope-rifle-human assemblage played by Bradley Cooper struggles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, plagued not with the guilt of killing, but the haunting regret from failing to kill *more*.

The sniper vision case study is emblematic of three characteristics found throughout *Through the Crosshairs*. First, Stahl’s expertise as both a critic and filmmaker is communicated in the book’s energetic prose, which keeps pace with high-velocity artifacts and phenomena by mirroring the tight and engaging style of documentary film. Second, *Through the Crosshairs* offers a convincing argument for embracing the inherent entanglement of words and images. An unintended consequence of dedicated efforts to establish and legitimize visual studies has been the artificial separation of verbal and visual rhetorics, and although rejecting this partition is now a routine gesture, few projects are as successful as *Through the Crosshairs* in avoiding the trappings of logocentric and ocularcentric assumptions. As the recognizable visual concept of the gaze is foregrounded, Stahl utilizes a decidedly “all of the above” approach, seamlessly incorporating narrative, metaphor, and diction with analyses of camera angle, colour, and framing to produce a generative and comprehensive account of the rhetorical force of weaponized ways of seeing. Finally, each chapter provides a bifocal inspection of the weaponized gaze insofar as precise attention is directed toward the vision endowed by specific military devices, and also the coupling of these visions in verticality. Sniper vision, like all of the militarized ways of seeing in *Through the Crosshairs*, is a distinct component of the weaponized gaze that scales both up and down to encompass the overarching logics and perspectives of soldier, bomb, drone, and satellite.

These are troubling times for critical theory broadly conceived, and *Through the Crosshairs* boldly refuses to concede that the task of mitigating collective problems is somehow the exclusive province of the hard sciences and big-data empiricists. With all of the tack and care of a diagnostician, Stahl authors a text that can be gifted to a skeptical grant officer, incredulous Dean, or uncooperative President, with the accompanying note: “Contains practical options for saving lives and democracy...” Stahl methodically prods and scans the weaponized gaze in a diligent search for frailties and pressure points waiting to be exploited. Some remedies come spontaneously in the form of a reporter’s nonchalant question that punctures the fog of military propaganda, others arrive painstakingly through aesthetic intervention in the fields of Pakistan to humanize drone victims, but regardless of source or method, strategies for “resistant vision” are shown to be always already encoded in the means of control that are made familiar and vulnerable in the process of responsible critical inquiry. *Through the Crosshairs* can be characterized as its own type of vision machine, one that I think is evocative of another device that untied the realms of cinema and war in WWI and beyond—the spotlight. As spotlight, the book functions initially by orienting audiences through saccade movements that survey the contours of our networked mediascapes and contemporary geopolitical conflicts. But in the smooth performance of setting the present scene, Stahl’s spotlight occasionally halts to attention, dramatically exposing a hidden danger, pinpointing a lost provision, or even blocking an oppositional beam of light. Consequently, *Through the Crosshairs* strives to equip citizens with the knowledge and confidence to disarm the weaponized gaze by bravely looking back and, when expedient, turning away.

As mobile and dexterous as the spotlight is in *Through the Crosshairs*, the range of its perceptibility is somewhat constrained by a field of view predicated on precarious notions of “inside”/“home”/“domestic” and “outside”/“abroad”/ “foreign.” After traveling back and forth in *Through the Crosshairs* across porous boundaries separating overseas wars and domestic messaging, Stahl opens the final chapter by writing, “Among the many definitions of ‘war,’ one might characterize it as the struggle to draw a line between bodies that matter and those that do not” (137). Stahl is absolutely correct on this point, but the full implications of this particular definition of “war” and its overt resonance with the Black Lives Matter movement and adjacent political controversies call for additional reflection. Following the mobilization of armed forces to New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and the creation of counterinsurgency doctrine to quell civilian rebellion in Iraq, the line between domestic politics and the global war on terrorism is difficult to discern, a growing symptom of the saturation of war and the weaponized gaze

at the level of everyday life. Is calling the events of Ferguson or Charlottesville “war” truly hyperbolic? Is it metaphor alone to say that Robert Bales and George Zimmerman are fraternal mercenaries for the American police state? In both instances, the momentum of Stahl’s analysis seems to suggest otherwise, and especially in his account of the ways helmetcam vision collapses war into a “it was him or me” scenario. One can’t help but to see Detroit and Fallujah in a new light. But regardless of whether the weaponized gaze returned “home” after refinement in the Middle East or took shape in the plantations of the American South, *Through the Crosshairs* teaches that collective resistance begins by (re)calibrating our senses to feel that which war has taken away.

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Works Cited

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