

Using at least 3 examples, consider how image makers have utilised digital technology to explore at least one of the following: Conflict, the Environment, Identity, the Surveillance State, the Technology Society?

Digital technology has transformed the way people see the world and how much of the world we see. It has also changed the way image makers practice. Image makers are individuals such as filmmakers, photographers, and designers. These people's practises shape the world around us; they inform us of the everyday activities going on in the world as well as reporting on hardships other people could potentially be facing. Digital technology is defined as the use of electronic systems that store, process and transfer information. This is used by photographers even down to something as simple as the SD card in their camera and with the digital editing platforms that they have access to their creative potential is limitless. My chosen theme is Conflict; I chose this theme due to the current issues in our world in this very moment. A clear example of this are the wars that are currently going on in Sudan and Gaza. These conflicts are documented heavily by digital technology, the reports coming from Gaza are filmed by ordinary civilians and journalists who enter Gaza. These individuals are putting themselves at risk entering these environments to showcase these issues. This essay dives into digital Technology and how it has enabled image makers to explore and broadcast the conflicts that our world struggles with. The artists and works I will be discussing in the essay are Walid Raad- *Hostages: The Bachar Tapes*. (2000), Richard Mosse *Infra* and Trevor Paglen- *Limit Telephotography* (2008-ongoing)

Digital technology has changed the creation and reception of images all around the world "digital imaging has united our hands with regards to technical limitations" (Dykstra, nd). Digital technology has changed the way we as people view the world, society and ourselves, social media has had a substantial impact on so many people's lives and continues to now more than ever, "social media has become a complex phenomenon because it is much more than individuals exchanging words. Social media sites – the venues where communications happen – are controlled by their platform owners" (Ashar L, 2024). Digital technology has also brought us software such as photoshop and light room, these image manipulation tools make anything possible! They can manipulate an image with the touch of a button; this is beneficial to many if not all photographers. Although photoshop is revolutionary, it can also have negative impacts on the art photography as some people use it to completely change the image itself "Lightroom enhances the truth, and photoshop tells the lie." (Do, 2021). Conflict has also evolved through time alongside the digital world whether its cyber conflict, digital security, or weapons/drones. Technology has rationally changed how artists present and critique conflict "Today, digital tools help artists capture the complex realities of war, revolution and authority in new ways". (Yuraart.org, 2021) The tools we have access to today give us the ability to capture things that the human mind could not comprehend. One clear example of how digital technology has been utilised by image makers is the current war in Palestine. If this war wasn't documented there is a very small chance people would be aware of what's happening there especially without the digital tools of today such as drones, go pros, cameras. However, something as small as a phone has changed people's perspective on what it's truly like to live in Gaza as a Palestinian "investigation techniques, often shortened to OSINT, refer to methods used by investigative journalists which rely on openly available information to corroborate claims. The information comes from sources such as social media, satellite imagery or freedom of information requests" (Marina, 2025)

Walid Raad- *Hostages: The Bachar Tapes*. (2000) is a piece of video that is semi fictional and digitally edited. This piece is based on the politics of representation surrounding the hostage crisis during the Lebanese Civil War. The work itself shows as a digital testimony, with a persona whose name is Souheil Bachar, this persona is held in captivity alongside the American hostage Beirut. Raad integrates staged digital footage, subtitles that have been manipulated and a digital video that gives the piece the look of an archival video. This makes the piece seem much more authentic while remaining constructed throughout. In 2007 Souheil collaborated with Atlas and produced 54 tapes only tape 17 and 31 are allowed to be shown outside Lebanon. Raad uses digital technology to express the physical as well as the mental struggle for so many people from Lebanon during the civil war. The usage of digital editing software as well as the camera he used created a heart touching piece to

show the world what captivity was like and how it altered his way of thinking and his view of the world "representation of traumatic events of collective historical dimensions; and the ways film, video and photography function as documents of physical and psychological violence" (TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary,2017) The digital presence within this piece shows the reflection of a fractured psychological landscape caused by the war, the representation of this within the piece is shown through the usage of digital technology.



"The ways film, video and photography function as documents of physical and psychological violence" (TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary,2017) In *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes* (2000) digital technology is essential to the representation of conflict in this piece as it allows Raad to fabricate doubt, inviting documentary traditions and overall it questions the morals of representing violence. "By using a series of documentary conventions such as choppy editing" (Magagnoli,2011) Digital editing is also a large contributing factor to this piece, the use of digital editing software helped to create a piece that touched people and gave this piece an archival point of view. "Choppy editing, low-resolution footage and the look of surveillance cameras, Raad creates a sense of detached objectivity that urges the viewer to believe in the displayed footage, despite its manifest absurdity." (Magagnoli,2001) Some things used are jump cuts, text inserts, layered audio and a colour gradient over the video to create the look of a typical hostage video. Raad used the media mentioned to question the reliability of digital images put out now "Through editing, the artist overlays a barrage of video and acoustic noises, glitches, freeze frames and other distortions on top of footage both staged and found so that it is turned into opaque and fragmentary material" (Magagnoli, 2011)

Richard Mosse's *infra-2011* is a series of photographs taken in the Democratic Republic of Congo. For these images he used a type of discontinued film called Aerochrome Kodak; this is a type of film used by the military to find camouflaged soldiers hiding in the terrain of the surrounding areas, which blurs the reality of the invisible becoming visible and displays the idea of revealing the unknown. Mosse is documenting the conflict going on in the Congo using technology that is used as a weapon to create these beautiful pieces. The way Mosse photographed these landscapes, and the people, is outstanding. This use of the digital world to show the effects of these conflicts, it has changed the way people view the landscape and he has changed the landscape of war into a landscape of beauty "visually representing natural landscapes" (Naik Neenan,2023) The natural landscape becomes the main source of the violence in these areas, the beauty hides the harsh reality hidden beneath the trees, many lives were lost in these areas. This is shown in the colour change between the landscape in these images using the Aerochrome Kodak film. The use of this changes the meaning of once a plain landscape. The usage of technically analogue film, the process of production, scanning and exhibiting as uses of digital technology. Through these processes Mosse is making the invisible conflict visible for the whole world. Congo is currently still going through hardships of war that aren't being broadcast to the wider world. Congo has been silenced by the



lack of journalism there, the work Mosse created still applies to the state of the Congo today digitally and ethically. Unfortunately, Congo has forever been a centre of war and conflict it's a never-ending cycle that isn't always broadcasted on by many journalists or artists for that matter "Its endless cycle of wars seems essentially intangible." (Coomes, 2012) However, you could argue the beauty in these pieces changes the meaning of the piece as a whole. It could be seen as the beauty of the pieces covering the true horrors of the violence created on these landscapes,

"Traditional documentary evidence is pushed unwillingly into fiction, and an unsettling pink world of magical realism is formed" (Coomes, 2012) The usage of digital technology toward this piece is understandably important. The usage of the film is really what makes these images digitally inclined, the process of printing revealing a once hidden area and opening it up to the world using technology once surrounded with such violence, this gives a really eerie feeling toward this piece.

Trevor Paglen- *Limit Telephotography* (2008-ongoing) is a piece that uses high tech equipment and lenses to photograph landscape that is classified US military and intelligence sites from a distance. The usage of digital technology for this piece is essential to the outcome as it is unfathomable to us as humans the amount of data that goes into the camera "Humans cannot understand these operational images because they consist of numerical data" (Bassnet, 2024) The fact that Paglen used high quality lenses usually used by astrophotographers to capture images of sites that were 20 miles away if not more, utilises digital photography to reveal places that centre around conflict. This piece pushes the limitations on digital photography while capturing these bases.



"Paglen's body of work turns to the nonhuman to investigate recent changes in the status of representation, and specifically how it is transformed by the world of data" (Sarah Bassnet, 2024). The fact that these military bases can't be seen with the naked eye gives these pieces an uneasy feeling to them. The places where the military are training and planning is the centre to the conflict and violence, the idea that these bases are so hidden almost gives a feeling of the conflict being hidden, the fact that these are also high security US military bases also creates a feeling of hidden messages. The US military are known for their censorship of information and their overall controversial ways of handling conflicts like Iraq. A clear example of this is the Gulf War "the first time that they were relayed "live" from the battlefield. It was not the first occasion on which the military censored what could be reported, but it did" (Baudrillard, 1991) involving a new level of military control of reportage and images. The images themselves have this blurred quality to them this gives them a sort of CCTV look to them adding to the thought of surveillance "curators and critics have discussed Paglen's work in terms of surveillance and

space" (Bassenet,2024) The military have been known to censor and corrupt the media being streamed out into the society and digital technology has helped them achieve that, "it was the first occasion on which the military censored what was being reported" (J Baudrillard, 1991). Paglen also explores the architecture around conflicts making us look directly at the source of these issues, the walls of these building hold so much violence and heartache. The military are known for hiding/ filtering the content put out by the usage of high-end digital technology, the usage of high end digital equipment to expose these supposed hidden sights of the military it's almost as if Paglen is using the military's biggest ally against them "It was not the first occasion on which the military censored what could be reported" (Baudrillard,1991) This could also reference Radd's and Mosse's work the way the camera created a different meaning to the pieces which is referenced earlier on in this essay, digital technology lends itself to this work throughout. The fact these bases are hidden and Paglen had to have lenses used by astrophotographers to capture these images adds to the capturing of the conflict. Although through this piece the conflict isn't so noticeable at first, when you look closer it is very much present throughout.

Overall, the world of digital technology grows day by day and the way artists respond to conflict using digital technology evolves with it as well. Trevor Paglen, Richard Mosse and Walid Radd's work all utilises digital technology to provide feedback and a contemporary outcome responding to certain conflicts. The way these artists use digital cameras, film and editing software brought so many people to question the very existence of war in the countryside of conflict. It also highlighted the rise of conflict within their respected places. The way Mosse's work is still relevant to the Congo today has an everlasting impact, the work itself made such a violent area filled with conflict look like a magical land with a dark secret hidden the same as today. This also taps into Trevor Paglen's work, the idea of photographing what the naked eye misses. Without these respected cameras the work loses the meaning Mosse's work becomes less linked with the documentation of conflict and more about just the landscape, paglen's work would be of Landscape not these distorted buildings filled with violence. This also then ties into Walid Raads work the usage of the old grainy camera and the digital editing software created this disturbing piece of footage, even though it was staged it still had the look of a hostage tape and gave the viewer the same uneasy feeling as if you were watching a real hostage tape through the awful quality created by the camera. Together these artists demonstrated how digital technology is not only key to representation of a piece, but it is crucial to demonstrate political injustice and shows that it is key for artists all around the world to utilize this to the best of their ability.

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