

FOREWORD

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A Special Forces veteran and libertarian in Fayetteville, North Carolina, told me, years ago, that “defense is the first need of any organism.” The thinkers in this volume follow him, if in a more critical vein, in seeing security as the guiding framework and dominant force for organizing collective life in our era. They encourage us to ask: How did this man come to feel that way about the nature of being human? How did many others come to operate within the strict limits of security discourses and to be presented with political, economic, and life constraints and choices structured by this guiding principle rather than another one? How did the number of things against which defense is thought to be needed expand so radically in this era as opposed to earlier ones?

This volume uses ethnographic perspectives and broadly distributed cases to help us look for the family resemblances among a variety of institutions and practices that are based in either the fear of distinct or inchoate threats or the desire for security, as those things are variously defined. Its authors want us to see security not simply as a *good* or as a *need* provided for, but as a *mode of power*, or an authorizing and coercive regime of governance. They want us to broaden our sense of what the relevant institutions and practices are that should be considered as based on a security paradigm. Widening the object of attention beyond the military and police, traditionally seen as a society’s “security institutions,” the chapters show us that security-seeking or security-marketing involves the quest for, or selling of, protection not just from military attack but also from disease, stranger danger in the park, home invasion and theft, the sudden collapse of stock or housing prices, and climate change. The quest, most prolifically, has become protection from the very idea of an unknown future, and often in contrast to a nostalgically reimagined past that was predictable or knowable.

Many aspects of our world and its recent history are evidence for the ubiquity of a security framework (even if not always with the same biological

or evolutionary understanding as that Fayetteville resident). The signs of its omnipresence are not simply in how people talk with each other about their present and future fears or security aspirations. The symptoms include sharply rising budgets for the public and private employment of soldiers, police, transit security agents, and mercenary, paramilitary, and private security forces. They include remarkable new types of baroque weaponry, set in vast arsenals kept in perpetual readiness for use by both states and individuals. There is also the rising status and public visibility of more militant, protectionist/nationalist, and misogynist masculinities in political leaders and popular culture figures alike. They are in the normalized infrastructure of gates and walls; of antivirus software and passwords; of the literally millions of video cameras trained inside homes and businesses, above sidewalks and at borders, standing sentry; and in the broad-scale surveillance or digital scanning of populations via online data collection, computer algorithms, blood tests, airport scanners, and threat prevention investments on everything from the cellular to the bodily level and from the international to the planetary scale as climate engineers anxiously discuss how to prepare to secure our future from our past greenhouse gas emissions.

viii

The innovation of this particular volume within the now mushrooming critical literature on security is to ask about the political aesthetics of these practices. Following Teresa Caldeira's (2000) pioneering work on the "aesthetics of security" in São Paulo, the contributors want to draw our attention to how it is that "security, as a form of power, operates through distinct aesthetic registers, including notions of beauty and taste, style and genre, form and appearance, representation and mimesis, and emotion and affect" (Ghertner, McFann, and Goldstein, this volume). They want us to see how people learn to make judgments of taste (variously in different communities) and to feel (whether anxiously or angrily or pleasurably) about the world in this register of judgment. When we go beyond seeing security as simply disciplinary, and come to see it as involving matters of distinction, per Pierre Bourdieu, we can discover more about the power and endurance and attractions, as well as the fragilities of modern militarism, for example. We are encouraged to look at the spatial or social location of aesthetic judgments which, in some communities, give elevated worth not just to the soldier but to those who know that a man in uniform is a beautiful thing, that a field of Arlington graves makes a tragically beautiful landscape, that video games involving danger and escape are more fun than others, that a refugee child in an ambulance promises to teach us about the goodness of the rescue, the truth of who the perpetrator is, and the beauty of youth that was and might yet be, or that an array of Transportation

Security Administration officers and machines is a comforting sight at best, an acceptable nuisance at worst. These modes of judgment educate many to see the publishing of a photograph of someone killed as a result of war or brutal policing as in “bad taste,” and to see those who represent no threat because of their wealth or other modes of power as eminently beautiful and viewable.

While the chapters in this volume generally draw our attention to urban infrastructures and practices, we can also examine the media productions that so powerfully tutor collective taste in a world increasingly lived on-screen. Take the *New York Times* photographs of war examined by David Shields in his book *War Is Beautiful* (2015). Every photograph, war-related or not, is a teller of tales. It suggests an often complex event, with a history and a sequel, and its colors, composition, and subject matter propose how viewers ought to feel about what is happening. But most of us continue to see photos—and especially photojournalism—as thin slices of life, as objective records of the world out there. Text is widely approached with suspicion as to its writers’ ideological bent, but images—whether because of their presumed objectivity or their aesthetic appeal—push those concerns to the side. The photos of war become that much more powerful in structuring our taste for security.

Shields (2015) looks at the fourteen years of *New York Times* front-page photos of images related to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; hundreds have been published from 2001 to the present. He writes emphasizing the *Times*’ status as an American newspaper whose editors, through the years, have presumed the basic goodness of the U.S. government and its activities even when they have investigated its functionaries’ failings. Shields arranges sixty-five of them, in rich color and large format, clustered by the implicit themes that give their viewers the overwhelming sense that war is a thing of some horrible or not-so-horrible beauty. America’s longest and ongoing wars have been devastating in their human costs. By contrast, the *New York Times* photos, Shields shows, often focus on their rewards: on American power being exercised for good; on the Iraqi, Afghan, and American citizenry’s love for the dead and wounded; and on the heroics and values of those who fight (and report on) them.

These themes are seen in recurring images of the striking natural world of a conquered “wilderness” in Iraqi deserts and Afghan mountains across which U.S. soldiers move, and Shields sees Hollywood as providing the templates for the *New York Times* photographers and picture editors through hundreds of war movies that focus on the pyrotechnics of blasting weaponry. These images include the warrior presented as an imposing father figure bringing protection and order, whether cradling a toddler or helping a comrade recover in a military hospital. There is beautiful religious imagery in pietà-like tableaux

(an Iraqi man cradling the limp, bloody body of his brother) and stunning God's-eye views of leadership scanning for bad guys and securing the landscape (President Obama and General Petraeus surveying Baghdad rooftops by helicopter). Shields points to the inordinate number of photos of sweet and tragic-faced Afghan and Iraqi "womenandchildren" whose beauty and fragility make visible the need for their protection.

The evidence of death in these photos is more likely to be trails of blood on an Afghan hospital floor than butchered flesh. And it is more likely to be mourners collapsed on a coffin than ugly hysterical grief. What we find is love, art, nature, and religious sentiment rather than the revolting destruction of these things. These photos are evidence of the *New York Times*' complicity in the warmakers' desire to make each American war a "good" war, and war marketers' knowledge of the common U.S. desire to construe the "securing of the globe" as beautiful, even when Americans regret or critique the wars that result. And they represent the epitome of high-brow, objectivist, Manhattan-based judgments of taste in security photographic style.

x Security objects with such aesthetic qualities are consumed in vast quantities, some in the form of images, some in the form of documents like constitutions or political advertisements or immigration laws whose aesthetics we should understand as well. The security aesthetic in political life is not simply a beautiful design that enhances or markets a prosaic ideology; rather, "an ideology is an aesthetic system, and this is what moves or fails to move people, attracts their loyalty or repugnance, moves them to action or to apathy" (Sartwell 2010, 1). In looking at the aesthetics, we are reminded to continue to examine security as a *good*, both in the sense of a moral claim—the specifying of who or what places are dangerous and who (almost always paternally) protects—and in the sense of a commodity—this is the product being sold and this is who profits. As the editors of this volume argue, security is contested terrain, and those studying it have often focused on parsing and locating the moral claims and counterclaims involved. The commodity good, however, has received less attention. There are three sources of threat that the contemporary United States economy is focused on: the fear that racial others will enter or attack the United States (e.g., protection from which structures large parts of the federal budget), the threat and prevention of redistribution or property theft (evident in the one in four American workers who fall in the category of "guard labor" [Bowles and Jayadev 2004]), and the threat and prevention of illness both individual and pandemic (via the many medical surveillance and prevention allocations in the federal budget). Erased, however, are the ugly truths that the true threat of violence for many is untreated disease,

the threat of arrest and incarceration, or the car crashes that killed 1.2 million globally last year and more Americans in the twentieth century than died in all the wars of that period.

People gradually become conversant in a new security language and come to “delight” in a new sense of what is beautiful about their preferred language and speakers of security speak. When Carol Cohn (1987) years ago identified the emerging security aesthetics of nuclear strategists in her classic article “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals,” she made the point that gender was implicated in the abstractions, euphemisms, and sexual metaphors used in those strategists’ technostrategic dialect. This is all the more important to understand when the Trump administration is virtually predicated on demonstrating that white men are in charge of security in every form, from rebordering the nation to securing life for the unborn.

Each of the chapters in this book explicitly or implicitly asks what an *anti*-security aesthetics would look like—how a tastefully subversive sensibility might be cultivated. The artist elin o’Hara slavick shows us one way in which representations of war can be made tastefully subversive in her remarkable series *Bomb after Bomb: A Violent Cartography*. slavick’s aesthetic intentions are clear. The colorful and complex drawings of the many places the United States has bombed in its history are, in her words: “relatively abstract—and I say relatively because there *are* some recognizable cartographic, geographic and realistic details like arrows, borders and airplanes, and as in war, civilians are rendered invisible. I employ abstraction to reach people who might otherwise turn away from realistic depictions. People approach abstraction with fewer expectations and defenses. I want to reach people who have not made up their minds, who long for more information, the people who vote and want to believe that we are living in a democracy but are filled with fear and doubt” (slavick 2007, 97). The drawings are also “beautifully aerial to seduce and trap the potentially apathetic viewer so that she will take a closer look, slow down, and contemplate the accompanying information that explains that what she is looking at may implicate her. I also chose the aerial view to align myself, as an American, with the pilots dropping the bombs, even though I would not, myself, drop them.”

slavick’s aesthetic is meant not just to draw attention to the moment of trauma or bombing, but to point as well to the long-term impact of having organized U.S. society around a view of security that makes war a self-evident good and allows it to provide the threat template for ever-widening obsessions and the products to cope with them. The contributors to this volume use a similarly subversive and accessible style and content to address an audience



xii

Figure F.1 elin o'Hara slavick, *Johnson Atoll, U.S., 1958–1962*. Mixed media on Arches paper. Image reproduced from slavick (2007).

that might be called into being in a world where the marketing of security goes far beyond war to the very imagination of the future as a whole.

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