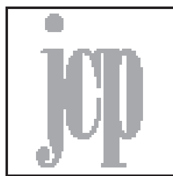

Abu Ghraib and the Temporal Logic of Interruption

Laura Sparks
Assistant Professor of Rhetoric & Composition, English Department
California State University, Chico
lsparks@csuchico.edu

ABSTRACT

On April 28, 2004, CBS News broadcasted the first photographs of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib Detention Centre. These photos, a censored fraction of more than two hundred photographs and nineteen videos taken at the detention centre, render in colour all manner of abuse at the hands of US Army military police. Taken the previous fall, the photographs were anonymously shared with Army criminal investigators by Sgt. Joseph Darby, a soldier stationed at Abu Ghraib. At the behest of the Bush Administration, the story was kept sealed for months and "amnesty" was declared by the military. But in the spring of 2004, the story broke. The documentation of abuses at Abu Ghraib quickly travelled, their digitality facilitating local and global circulation.

This essay argues that the Abu Ghraib scandal is a form of "what crops up," (3) in Paul Virilio's terms, what is invented by the War on Terror and the United States willingness to treat human bodies as a means to an end. I propose that the Abu Ghraib scandal illustrates a key temporal logic structuring the contemporary relationship between rhetoric and torture: the rhetorical interruption. The narrative of violence produced by the photographs and their release demonstrates how such visual representations of violence can disrupt and displace attention from the system that created them; and this interruption serves as a manifestation of one of several complex connections between time, rhetoric, and violence.

Keywords: Torture, Rhetoric, Temporality, Abu Ghraib, Interruption, Paul Virilio

On April 28, 2004, CBS News broadcasted the first photographs of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib Detention Centre, in Baghdad. These photos, a censored fraction of more than two hundred photographs and nineteen videos taken by soldiers at the US -run detention centre, render in colour all manner of abuse at the hands of US Army military police, from naked detainees forced to simulate sexual acts to photographs of a deceased Iraqi prisoner packed in ice. The most publicised of the released photographs depict a female soldier, Lynndie England, holding a detainee by a leash; a pyramid of naked and hooded men; and a cloaked prisoner standing on a box with electrical wires dangling from his fingers and genitals. Taken the previous fall, these photographs were anonymously shared with US Army criminal investigators by Sgt. Joseph Darby, a soldier stationed at Abu Ghraib. At the behest of the George W. Bush Administration, the story was kept sealed for months, and "amnesty" was declared by the military. But in the spring of 2004, the details of the story broke. Two days after their release by CBS News, the photographs' back story was published by Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker.*

As most journalists, scholars, and activists well know, however, the release of photographs is only one "beginning" to the complex scandal. Hindsight reveals that the treatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib functions within a troubling ecology of foreign policy, covert intelligence operations, even the treatment of domestic terrorists that extends as far forward as the US 's new presidential administration and as far back as September 11, 2001, at the very least. Indeed, despite our temporal distance from the events at Abu Ghraib, interrogational torture's legacy remains distressingly potent. One might look to, for example, newly-elected President Donald Trump's rabid support of inhumane interrogation techniques. While President Barack Obama had been clear about his opposition to torture, Trump has played on anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, and terrorist fears to re-instigate the discussion of where "enhanced interrogation" techniques fit into current and future US policy. During his presidential campaign, the Republican nominee casually remarked that waterboarding and more should be back on the table in regards to Islamic State militants. "I like [waterboarding] a lot," he stated at an Ohio rally, in June 2016. "I don't think it's tough enough" ("US Election" n.pag.). In his first television interview as president, on January 25, 2017, Trump reiterated his confidence in techniques like waterboarding, explaining to the interviewer that the US must "fight fire with fire" ("Weaver" n.pag.). At the time of this writing, Trump is on the verge of signing an Executive Order that would

reinstate CIA "black sites" and thus pave the way for a return to more coercive interrogation techniques. As President Trump's recent comments and impending policy shift indicate, Abu Ghraib continues to have long-running consequences for how the US public understands its complicity in the abuse of detainees.

This essay argues that the Abu Ghraib scandal is a form of "what crops up," (3) in Paul Virilio's terms, what is invented by the War on Terror and the US 's willingness to treat human bodies as a means to an end. Indeed, torture's temporal fractals echo and are echoed in myriad traumatic events, extending beyond the torture victims' bodies themselves and producing cultural and political resonances that affect people seemingly distanced from the interrogation room. Wedding Virilio's work with theories of *karios and akairos*, I contend that the scandal illustrates a key temporal logic structuring our understanding of the relationship between rhetoric and torture: the rhetorical interruption – or "accident," to use Virilio's term. In this case, the logic of interruption functions as an inverted *kairos, or akairos*, that obscures the bed of events from which Abu Ghraib arose. The narrative of violence produced by the photographs and their release demonstrates how, despite images' crucial role in documenting and revealing atrocities, such visual representations of trauma can displace and deflect attention from the system that created them. In what follows, I first offer an overview of several theories of time, then move to consider how the Bush Administration's deviance narrative functions within a logic of (temporal) interruption. Building on Virilio's notion of the "accident," I conclude by theorising how the photographs themselves operate as a kind of hyper-visible, akairotic rupture that nevertheless misses its emancipatory potential.

Kairos, Akairos, and the In/opportune

For the Greeks, time could be understood in terms of kairos, or the opportune moment, and *chronos*, or sequential time. *Chronos* is quantitative, measurable, "the age of an object or artefact and the rate of acceleration of bodies" (Smith 4). In that sense, *chronos* is empirical; it is the measure of the world. In his Physics, Aristotle posits that what we understand as time is linked to change and movement: "[N]ot only do we measure change by time, but time by change, because they are defined by one another" (220b 14-15). Prior to this, Aristotle defines time as "a number of change in respect of the before and after" (219 b 1-2), which scholars commonly understand as *chronos*. So, time is successive, with the possibility of moments even between moments. *Kairos*, on the other hand, is not necessarily bound within

such ordered temporal parameters. The opportune or timely moment can arrive suddenly and depart without notice. *Kairos* operates within a temporally situated understanding of human agency and rhetorical action with consequences for both interrogational torture and torture legislation. If we conceptualise time in terms of change, for example, then the physical and environmental aspects of torture – those that come along with linking imprisonment and interrogation, or using detention centres themselves to enhance the interrogation process – become all the more relevant. In the hands of interrogators, time can become a tool of torture.

Rhetoricians have long recognised that effective oratory relies on time, whether in terms of time constraints or timeliness. In her work on genre and chronotopes, Catherine F. Schryer notes that classical rhetoricians understood forms of oratory as also particular orientations to time. She reminds us that, even as the complexity of contemporary discursive interactions requires adjustments to these once all-encompassing categories, temporal (and spatial) orientations "reveal strategies of power at work in discourse" (81).[1] Rhetoricians are not, of course, the only ones to have meaningfully recovered and repurposed *kairos* and *chronos* from their classical roots. Philosopher John E. Smith explains that *kairos* should be read as opportunity. *Kairos*, he proposes, "points to a qualitative character of time, to the special position an event or action occupies in a series, to a season when something appropriately happens that cannot happen just at 'any time,' but only at that time, to a time that marks an opportunity which may not recur" (4). Not unlike Aristotle's notion of time as linked with change and movement, for Smith, *kairos* appears to have an empirical location among successive moments. *Kairos*, though, has not just a temporal position, but a value. A missed ideal moment is a missed opportunity and a missed possibility for connection or for action.[2]

1. *Kairos* complements this focus, in that it can refer to the right time and place for making an argument – what James Kinneavy and Catherine Eskin call "situational context" (4), or, knowing what to say when. Kinneavy defines kairos as "the appropriateness of the discourse to the particular circumstances of the time, place, speaker, and audience involved" ("Kairos" 74). Though *kairos* does not appear in Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, it would be fair to say that "Aristotle's art is to be applied at a particular *kairos*" (Kinneavy 67).

2. Smith cautions against a purely rhetorical understanding of the term, one which relies on, or exists only in terms of, human interaction or will: "It is, of course, true," he writes, "that there will always be a subject-situation correlation where *kairos* is concerned, since someone will have to know or believe that he knows the right 'when' but this insight does not create that 'when' out of itself" (5-6). Smith, echoing Plato, contends that *kairos* is part of the basic structure of things and insists, "while that time calls for a human response, the occasion itself is not of human devising" (13). Smith suggests here that there are kairotic constraints and opportunities outside of human control.

Smith's insights demonstrate a key tension between such traditional rhetorical and philosophical treatments of *kairos*. He draws attention to the ways it is an aspect of time in nature beyond or apart from human intervention and human desire; there may be a kairotic moment for avoiding a predator in the wild, for example, or the ideal conditions for a plant to grow. But let us consider the roles of human subjects, power, and the possibilities of, or constraints against, recognising and seizing opportune moments. Rhetorical studies scholar Carolyn Miller proposes, "timely action will be as understood as adaptive, as appropriate, only in retrospect" (xiii). There must be a time after kairos when the success or failure of an act might be assessed by a human subject. But there must also be a time prior to *kairos* when one chooses to act. Such moments thus exist within complex temporal frames that, while certainly relying on present timeliness, are inexorably linked to chronologically-oriented perspectives of past and future.[3]

Such conceptions of *kairos* as the opportune or proper moment do pose challenges, however, when one considers the *im*proper or the *in*opportune. Roland Boer argues persuasively that the Greek term *akairos*, which he defines as "the wrong time and place" (117), can offer an important corrective for theorising the unexpected or perhaps untimely. Problematising the presumed oppositional relationship between *chronos* and *kairos*, as well as Marxists' sense of *kairos* as revolutionary time, Boer notes:

> One gains a distinct sense that kairós actually refers to what is in its right place and time, duly measured, appropriate and opportune. Indeed, although kairós takes on a range of meanings [...] the semantic cluster coalesces around the idea of what is duly measured and proportional, in short, the right time and the right place. (123)

3. Amélie Frost Benedikt helpfully notes that "situational contexts necessarily change," such that rhetors must understand as much of the situational context as they can "without becoming constrained by too great a respect for the norms of the present" (231). She argues for a kind of far-seeing *kairos* that "leads one to look beyond the factuality of the present to counterfactual worlds that are not, or not yet" (231). This notion of *kairos* is in keeping with Frank Kermode's claim that it is "a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (47). So a sense of *kairos* demands not only past and present thinking, but also future imagining – even an end. Yet rhetorician Thomas Rickert's materialist perspective troubles how one might figure human agency: [O]pportunity becomes something dispersed into the material environs. This includes the social, but the social as it too is wedded to the material world. Thus what is afforded in a kairotic situation is no longer something simply willed or achieved by an individual; it is no longer solely human doing. (95)Rickert's contribution underscores that the question is not so much when *kairos* appears, but rather what the relationship between environments and sociality can co-produce.

By contrast, *akairos* designates both the untimely and out-of-place. While the opportunity afforded by *kairos* might be understood as creative or even inventional, *akairos* is more accurately a not-belonging, an "out of joint" or "out of proportion" (126), if not a rupture. From a rhetorical perspective, the change-making possibilities for *kairos* are thus limited, if one accepts the notion that its very proportionality and appropriateness render it structurally incapable of disrupting the status quo. Boer's work, in turn, rehabilitates *akairos* for revolutionary or even emancipatory politics. In keeping with Boer's claims, I argue we should also consider *akairos* in terms of the unintentional or the interruptive–a disruption that might itself be strategically seized after the fact.

World-Time and Human Being

To understand interruption as functioning within a temporal logic is to recognise its reliance on another present sequence (*chronos*), or that which has been interrupted or halted by the interference. In rhetorical terms, an interruption stops the flow of speech and potentially introduces a new exchange, new subject matter, as well as a new speaker. It is an imposition of power, even a violation, as the interrupter imposes his or her speech on top of or in place of an already-present speaker. We might consider the interruption potentially *akairotic*, in that sense. But the interruption also obscures its relationship to the present. While itself highly visible, whether sonically or otherwise, in order to count as an interruption it must be in contrast to whatever it has interrupted. An interruption is a disruption that comes from another register. It must thus be understood as something unconnected, something not belonging to the regular passage of time, speech, or current sequence of events; the interruption is, in effect, a violation of time that halts, however briefly, what was already taking place. Unlike *kairos*, dubbed by some to mean "the spur of the moment," the interruption is less likely to harness and activate than it is to impede progress or even distract.

The Bush Administration's response to the now-infamous Abu Ghraib scandal is invested in a logic of interruption that is both strategic and eerily accurate. It is strategic in so far as it deflects attention away from the systematic interrogational abuse sanctioned, if not institutionalised, by the US government. It is accurate in that the public indeed viewed Abu Ghraib as an interruption, and, in so doing, participated wilfully in a temporal framework that then permitted a return to individuals' regular lives "afterwards." Not unlike Marita Sturken's argument that the "culture of comfort [is the primary] mode through which the US practice

of torture is mediated" (424), the logic of interruption ultimately serves as a form of reintegration via unacceptable identification. The interruption, in other words, simply does not belong.

While *kairos* and *akairos* offer ways to think about un/timeliness in rhetorical acts, we might also take up broader conceptions of temporality in relation to torture, so as to better understand the temporal frameworks already in place. In addition to rhetorical and philosophical approaches to timeliness, Martin Heidegger's "world-time" serves as a productive way to think through temporal disruption in torture and its aftermath. I offer it here as a theory of temporal engagement consonant with *chronos* and *kairos* that, in structuring human experience, is also vulnerable to violation.

World-time, through its emphasis on human engagement, offers a perspective through which to rhetoricise measurable or objective time. In Heidegger's formulation, world-time is datable and public and is thus a time that belongs to the world. But unlike the measurements of clock-time, or *chronos*, entailed in world-time is a sense of "spannedness" charged with "significance" (415) – there are human interpretations at work to determine if the appropriate time is "now," and that "now" is imbued with meaning. As such, world-time can take time, as in when one is caught up in a particular activity or behaviour and does not notice the passage of time. Interpreted time, Heidegger explains, "has by its very nature the character of 'time for something' or 'the wrong time for something'" (415). And this becomes essential to his understanding of the "world-structure": "As 'the time for something', the time which has been made public has essentially a world-character" (415).

World-time, as its name implies, is shared. In William Blattner's terms, "[w]orld-time is the temporality of everyday human activity and engagement" ("Philosophy and Temporality"). Examples of world-time include such moments as lunch time, play time, story time, or time for bed. By this standard, which Blattner explores in *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*, one experiences the "now" as not just an abstract moment, but rather as "a time when such and such happens" (129). This time matters because of its association with meaningful human activity. We know these times not simply because we are told this is them/then, but we also often *feel* them. World-time is connected to our experiences as humans who interact with others and is thus vital to meaning-full life. An essential feature to notice about world-time, then, related to its spannedness and significance, is its worldliness.

World-time belongs to the structure of the world; it is a "dimension of being in the world" (Blattner 227). So rather than understanding temporality as purely objective or subjective, here we see mapped onto notions of countable clock-time a recognition of temporality as lived and as intimately tied to being in the world. Considered alongside *kairos* and *akairos*, world-time offers a theoretical underpinning for our understanding of humans' intimacy with time.

The Scapegoats and the Photographs

In one sense, a cultural rhythm was indeed interrupted as these shocking photographs of prisoner abuse entered the scene, intruding in some fashion on Americans' everyday lives. At the same time, however, positioning Abu Ghraib as an interruption is an investment in acting as if it were not already woven into the fabric of people's lives, as if it were not already built in to the world, but instead arose from elsewhere. For the US government and much of the US public, Abu Ghraib provided an akairotic interruption to the nation's all-too-familiar narrative of moral and military superiority. The interruption itself was thus provided a new story, one which neglected to account for the Bush Administration's reinterpretation of the Geneva Convention's ban on torture and instead newly imagined Abu Ghraib's origins, its chronology. This story was, in effect, a plea of aberration, in which the low-ranking soldiers depicted in the photos were scapegoated and rhetorically, and even legally, positioned as deviants. Once the photographs pierced the public consciousness, the horrors seemed to speak for themselves, such that the photographs, many taken by the participating soldiers as souvenirs, seemed proof positive of an underlying pathology among the wayward prison guards. For this scandal that seemed to erupt from nowhere, a rejection of American values, if not a secret sadism, must have lain beneath. James Schlesinger, for example, chairman of the four-member advisory panel appointed by Rumsfeld to investigate allegations of prisoner abuse, observed that "there was sadism on the night shift at Abu Ghraib, sadism that was certainly not authorized. It was kind of 'Animal House' on the night shift" (CNN Report n.pag.). President Bush expressed his own shock and disgust at the Abu Ghraib photographs, explaining that Abu Ghraib "became a symbol of disgraceful conduct by a few American troops who dishonoured our country and disregarded our values" (President Bush's Address n.pag.).

The series of decisions that led to Abu Ghraib was masked and the collective crimes at Abu Ghraib were located solely at the level of individual US soldiers'

pathology. The problem seemed internal, part of a small-group dynamic or pathology sustained by the individuals' poor character and lack of self-control. In a radio address to the nation, President Bush insisted that "All Americans know that the actions of a few do not reflect the true character of the United States Armed Forces" (President Bush's Address n.pag.). This distinction between the Armed Forces' "true character" and the lack revealed in "the actions of a few" is telling, for it implies that, rather than being a product of the US military's training and indoctrination practices, the soldiers at Abu Ghraib somehow developed or evolved apart from the rest. Bush also assumed a consistency to the character of the Armed Forces that these individuals violated, not only by their actions, but by their very nature. The soldiers themselves protested that they were doing what they had been ordered to do, soften up prisoners for interrogation; but as their subsequent jail sentences indicate, those arguments were largely unpersuasive.

In the deviance narrative, torture itself is framed as an interruption to regular world-time, an interruption that also violates established norms and beliefs. The torture of detainees seems to erupt from a different place, if not from out of nowhere, obscuring its relationship to that which has been interrupted. In that sense, the logic of interruption has much in common with Virilio's theory of the accident. Virilio, in *The Original Accident*, explains: "Creation or collapse, the accident is an unconscious oeuvre, an *invention* in the sense of uncovering what was hidden, just waiting to happen. Unlike the 'natural' accident, the 'artificial' accident results from the innovation of a motor or of some substantial material" (9). Disasters, even public relations ones, occur as a result of an underlying bed of events.

Here Virilio fashions a theory akin to Thomas Rickert's materialist "placement" of *kairos* and Eric Charles White's notion of rhetorical invention. In his prologue to *Kaironomia*, White proposes that "[e]loquence is inspired by the need to produce a novel response to the situation confronting the speaker, by the desire to give voice to the previously 'unheard of' – precisely, by the 'will-to-invent'" (7). Like Virilio's "unconscious oeuvre," White understands kairos as the "passing instant when an opening appears [...]" (13). Rickert, himself invoking White and attending more specifically to kairotic spatiality, argues for the "vital emplacement of *kairos* [that explains] how the situational environs can be a willing and inventive agent" (95). All three require what is, in White's terms, "conveniently at hand" (13). Virilio argues, following Aristotle, that "the accident reveals the substance." "What crops up" is a sort of analysis of "what is beneath" (10). With the invention of the train,

for example, comes the invention of the train wreck. With the invention of the nuclear power station comes the Chernobyl catastrophe. The term "accident" pairs well with "interruption" here because it emphasises the problematic reallocation of blame. An accident is generally understood as no one's fault, but by Virilio's estimation, artificial accidents now structure our everyday interactions in the world. The military's development of model interrogation techniques *invented* Abu Ghraib. But while an interruption can be a conscious choice, the akairotic nature of the accidental interruption suggests there may be something to hide.

Wrapped up in the Bush Administration's narrative of deviance is a sense that the photographs' release was, like the abuse of detainees, simply an unwelcome accident. In a 2004 response to the incident in which he claims that the abuse was "un-American," then-US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld made a telling remark:

> We're functioning in a–with peacetime restraints, with legal requirements in a wartime situation, in the information age, where people are running around with digital cameras and taking these unbelievable photographs and then passing them off, against the law, to the media, to our surprise, when they had not even arrived in the Pentagon. ("Excerpts" n.pag.)

Rumsfeld, disclaiming any responsibility, positions the photographers as part of the problem. Their "running around," we are to understand, was not only unsanctioned, but downright irresponsible. They were, in an akairotic sense, "out of place." But since the photographers were also participants in the abuse, this suggests that taking these "unbelievable photographs" (Rumsfeld n.pag.) was somehow separate from the treatment of prisoners, that photographing prisoner abuse was an additional, perhaps even the central, problem. Framing the issue in terms of irresponsibility points to a tension between those who are serious about the US's work and those that seek to subvert or challenge it. Rumsfeld's surprise, as he articulates it here, is not that the abuse was happening but that the photographs made it visible, visible to publics who should not actually be seeing. Rumsfeld was not the only one to identify photo-taking and photo-dissemination as the true evils. In March 2008, Lynndie England, one of the often-pictured soldiers, claimed that the media were to blame for the Abu Ghraib scandal's aftermath. "If the media hadn't exposed the pictures to that extent, then thousands of lives would have been saved," she told *Stern*, a German magazine (n.pag.). So the problem was not so much that prisoners were abused, but that unauthorised photographs were taken and disseminated, threatening the Bush

Administration's careful public relations campaign and potentially endangering the lives of US soldiers.

The documentation of abuses at Abu Ghraib assuredly travelled, their digitality facilitating both local and global circulation. The initial and intended audience was comprised of other servicemen and women, as well as friends and family members of the photographers; some of the images were used as screen savers on the military prison's computers, for example. But due to the reproducibility and store-ability of digital photographs, as well as the whistle-blower's conscience, the images' viewership later expanded exponentially to include members of the US government, the media, and soon both national and international audiences. Though the government continues to restrict access to some images and other texts documenting detainee-abuse, the viewing audience nevertheless can continue to witness in these images numerous acts of degradation and abuse at the hands of US military police.

Concern over the images' role in US public life is echoed to varying extents in Richard Grusin's work on the mediation of images and David Simpson's on commemoration post-9/11. Grusin argues that the photographs are so powerful not simply because they depict horrifying acts, but because they are personal: "they reveal to us the continuity between our experience of the Abu Ghraib photographs (and their creation and distribution by American soldiers) and our own acceptable, civilized, everyday, humane media practices" (65). In the acts of taking and disseminating these photographs, Grusin recognises the US public's everyday media-related behaviours, from self-disclosure on Facebook to posting photographs for friends to see. He identifies a link between how people regularly use technology and the "feeling that [our] media practices are connected in some way with committing or abetting torture, with the humiliation or dehumanization of others" (72). The public is made to feel (temporarily) complicit. It is in part the images' uncanny similarity to some individuals' regular interactions with visual media that causes such revulsion. Simpson, while still interested in the technological work of the photographs, suggests in contrast that the Abu Ghraib photos "arrayed their individually familiar components (pornography, the funfair, torture, death) into formats that were not familiar, idiosyncratic groupings [...] that were and continue to be disorderly and challenging" (132). In that sense, they are recognisable; the soldiers they depict are perhaps like us. And yet they resist the kinds of inherited genres associated with war documentation. Despite humans' history of documenting atrocity, this form of war photography is unlike

that which we have seen before.

But Abu Ghraib is not itself an aberration; it is merely one war-time prison among many. Not only were these soldiers following orders, but the softening-up techniques rendered in graphic color in fact resemble the interrogation techniques authorised by military officials. Despite its stark interruption, the relationship of Abu Ghraib to larger systems of war, crime, and punishment has been well documented. The events at Abu Ghraib came out of social, economic, and political structures of power that rig violence together with truth-seeking and military devotion with patriotism. And the photographs' reception, while certainly coloured with horror, is tinted also, following Grusin, with resemblances to Americans' and others' daily life, whether in terms of our media practices, our domestic penal system, or our sense of what it means to be human with national identifications.

Exposure and the Move to Action

How the American public understands what lies beneath, and how it reconcile people's relationship to this bed of events, determines the potency of the accidental interruption. Public perceptions of Abu Ghraib, including the beliefs, fears and other emotions that arise, are of course managed in part by media. Virilio proposes, for example, that our persistent media engagements result in a synchronisation of mindsets among the viewing public (59). Synchronicity, in this sense, reinscribes a present-ness and orders timing such that we are exposed to a particular accident nearly at the time in which it occurs. We, along with the rest of a listening, viewing, tweeting public, experience an event at once. In that sense, the accident is linked with visibility and ease of access. It becomes a highly reproducible spectacle. Like the Abu Ghraib photographs, whose circulation has been unparalleled, the spill over from the accident manifests as a hypervisibility.

If, as Judith Butler maintains in *Precarious Life*, the public sphere is constituted by "the limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear" (xvii), we might read the Abu Ghraib photographs as having punctured, but not rewritten, the public mindscape. The digital images produced and circulated are also, in a sense, what crops up from everyday life. Because the public's experience of the dark events at Abu Ghraib continues to revolve around exposure to these photographs, our understanding of the issue is mediated by our spatial and temporal distance from the prison, as well as the visual spectacle the photographs present. By distance,

I do not simply mean that all of us are physically distant from Abu Ghraib, some are and others are not, but that we also maintain an uncomfortable proximity to it. By dint of the photographs' availability, scenes from Abu Ghraib can be on our laptops, and the horrific human pyramid can seem to exist simultaneously with our writing of an essay.

In essence, the images maintain not only a hyper but a dual visibility: they both visually depict scenes of abuse and are immediately accessible through modern technology. Though constrained by their medium, the Abu Ghraib photographs frame and represent torture in such a way as to demand feeling and response, making immediately accessible that which took place elsewhere and at an earlier time. As Butler puts it, a "photograph, in framing reality, is already determining what will count within the frame; this act of delimitation is surely interpretive, asare the effects of focus, angle, and light" (*Frames* 823). For photography, in its immediacy, seems to suspend time – it makes present that which may have occurred, may be occurring, or may yet occur, and in so doing it collapses many possible narratives in favour of its own. Photographs can become unmoored. The before and the after are never accessible through the image, and whatever is depicted there is, for all intents and purposes, suspended in time. In that sense, photographs produce a curious kind of synchronicity or temporal compression, in which the past and the present seem to exist side by side. This potentially obscures, if not distracts from, the underlying sequence of events that, for lack of a better term, "invented" the image.

Despite their importance in raising awareness about the abuses, the images' digital circulation and subsequent accessibility in the public sphere have remained issues of concern, particularly for human rights activists. With questions of voyeurism, unethical exposure, objectification, and spectacularisation[4] in the mix, a tension persists between the possible ethical import of viewing photographs of atrocity and the potential for a deadening of the nerves. Susan Sontag, for example, argues in *Regarding the Pain of Others* that repeated visual exposure contributes to atrocities' normalisation, and, despite our best efforts, we can become immune to violence. And such exposure can also circulate outside the ethical intentions of advocates.

4. For more on visibility and the role of the spectacle/spectacular in human rights rhetorics, see Wendy Hesford's *Spectacular Rhetorics.*

In “Torture Culture” Dora Apel notes similarities between widely circulated lynching postcards and the Abu Ghraib images, suggesting that through such visual representations, torture becomes a commodity that serves a political function. Apel implicitly locates the images as part of a visual economy that participates in, if not produces, power relations. At the same time, however, she questions the dual possibilities for such troubling images: “How do photographs of torture produce their own undoing? When is the power of an image turned against itself, transforming it into a picture that opposes the very thing the photograph means to uphold?” (100). Apel suggests here that such photographs can indeed work beyond the intentions of their creators, which, as Susie Linfield astutely argues in *The Cruel Radiance*, is part of the ethical responsibility entailed in seeing.

The Abu Ghraib photographs’ surfacing in the public consciousness, not unlike the release of photographs documenting the treatment of prisoners at concentration camps, simultaneously works to display abused people and to publicise those abuses in ways that can inform calls to action. This kind of exposure, however troubling, is particularly important for making visible abuses enacted by people and institutions in power that might rely on evasion, secrecy, and a carefully-maintained invisibility to maintain the status quo. The implication is that, by making viewers participate in the act of seeing, or witnessing, they also become complicit in some form. No one, as Linfield points out, can claim not to know.

Some have argued that, despite the photographs’ distribution, it has proven difficult to move the wider US public to action. Discussing the photographs’ complex role as documentation of flagrant detainee-abuse, journalist Mark Danner posits that too few have been willing to follow the threads of blame and accountability. He reminds us that “while lower-ranking soldiers have been court-martialed for abusing detainees at Abu Ghraib, the US has remained effectively insulated from the charge that the photographs are evidence of abuse derived from US policy and sanctioned by the US government” (47). Errol Morris has noted, “the Abu Ghraib photographs serve as both an exposé and a cover-up. An exposé, because the photographs offer us a glimpse of the horror of Abu Ghraib; and a cover-up because they convinced journalists and readers they had seen everything, that there was no need to look further” (Synopsis n.pag.). And while internal investigations have since been underway, the trail of legal action has focused on the perpetrators exposed in the photographs, rather than on the policy-makers and military officials who set the conditions for detainee-abuse. And we still know very little about the interrogators working behind the scenes

at Abu Ghraib. The real crimes were, it seems, taking and appearing in the photos. Those not pictured have been held largely unaccountable, as if visibility were the chief marker of complicity.

Abu Ghraib's surfacing in the public consciousness temporarily forced a reckoning between the evil-doing "them" and the liberty-loving "us"–a self and other distinction the US had banked on for years (Ivie). But the realisation that the US, too, was responsible for committing crimes against humanity was a realisation of decidedly limited scope, as official narratives were worked and re-worked to paint the perpetrators as sadistic individuals who acted alone. These narratives of blame not only apportioned responsibility but also distracted the US public from the systematic use of torture in interrogation in favour of a renewed commitment to US values and military success. A scene of torture can be mistaken for an aberration that pierces our world but rarely, and one over which we have neither power nor responsibility. Too, a temporal logic of interruption means that while we might come face to face with that which interrupts, the course of our lives need not be drastically changed. In the case of the emotionally-charged Abu Ghraib photographs, their very exceptionality rendered them difficult to reconcile; their disruption, however akairotic, was short-lived, and it has been far easier to maintain that distance than to live with them. The rhetorical frames constructed by the Bush Administration strategically set the conditions for understanding Abu Ghraib as a brief, albeit shocking, interruption to Americans' daily life. Such a temporal logic is particularly troubling because it permits us to view torture as operating on a different plane, so to speak, and beyond our ken.

Conclusion

In his seminal work on the history of the human rights movement, Aryah Neier notes that the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 in many ways changed the human rights conversation, as nations like the US sought the authority to imprison and punish suspected terrorists or sympathisers. And this shift's full repercussions remain unclear. Debates over extended administrative detention without charges, for example, have not yet been resolved, and the human rights movement is still fighting to persuade governments to respect the civil liberties of those captured in the War on Terror. Further, Neier remarks, "[t]he use of coercive measures up to and including torture against those suspected of involvement in terrorism [...] still has significant political support in the United States" (22).

The torture question's continued relevance, even in public spaces and particularly in governmental ones, highlights the ways in which the new kinds of war ushered in by decades of US police (among other factors) remains potent in the US cultural imagination.[5] Abu Gharib is a continuing exigency for the project of understanding contemporary intersections of temporality and violence. Abu Ghraib has passed its ten-year anniversary, but as Trump's misguided policy positions reflect, its effects on governments, institutions, public policy, and people continue to crop up.

5. The opening, the oeuvre, persists. Henry Giroux, in his critique of post-9/11 neoliberal policy shifts, writes that "Bush's war on terror has produced a culture of fear and a battered citizenry increasingly powerless to defend the ideals of democracy and freedom that have been largely gutted in the name of security, privatisation, deregulation" (12). Here Giroux anticipates the ways in which Bush-era policies created a nation unwilling or unable to demand more of its leaders. And despite Obama's admirable legacy, the U.S. is just as mired as ever. *The New York Times* reported in 2015 that "CIA officers who built the [drone] program more than a decade ago – some of whom also led the CIA detention program that used torture in secret prisons – have ascended to the agency's powerful senior ranks." Regardless of that and other critiques, however, the "[Obama] White House continues to champion [the drone program]" (Mazzetti).

Works Cited

Aristotle. *Physics*. Trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye. The Internet Classics Archive. Web Atomics and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Web. 1 Dec. 2013.

Benedikt, Amélie Frost. "On Doing the Right Thing at the Right Time: Toward an Ethics of Kairos." *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Practice*. Eds. Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin. Albany: SUNY, 2002. 226-235 Print.

Boer, Roland. "Revolution in the Event: The Problem of Kairós." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30:2 (2013): 116–134. Web. 30 Nov. 2016.

Bush, George W. "President Bush's Address at the Army War College." *New York Times*. 24 May 2004. web. Transcript. 3 Jan. 2013.

Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* New York: Verso, 2010. Print.

---. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso, 2004. Print.

Danner, Mark. *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror*. New York: New York Review of Books, 2004. Print.

England, Lynndie. "Rumsfeld Knew." Interview. stern.de. 17 Mar. 2008. Web. 13 Apr. 2012.

Giroux, Henry A. "Beyond Neoliberal Common Sense: Cultural Politics and Public Pedagogy in Dark Times." *JAC* 27.1-2 (2007): 11-61. Web. 1 Sep. 2016.

Grusin, Richard. *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Ivie, Robert L. *Democracy and America's War on Terror*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2005. Print.

Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976. Web. 12 Jan. 2012.

Kinneavy, James L. and Catherine R. Eskin. "Kairos in Aristotle's Rhetoric." *Written Communication* 17.3 (2000): 432-444. Jstor. Web. 15 Dec. 2012.

Kinneavy, James L. "Kairos in Classical and Modern Rhetorical Theory." *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Practice*. Eds. Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin. Albany: SUNY, 2002. 58-76. Print.

Linfield, Susie. *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010. Print.

Mazzetti, Mark and Matt Apuzzo. "Deep Support in Washington for C.I.A.'s Drone Missions." *The New York Times*. 25 Apr. 2015. Web. 15 Jul. 2016.

Miller, Carolyn. Forward. *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Practice*. Eds. Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin. Albany: SUNY, 2002. xi-xiii Print.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Cloning Terror*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011. Print.

Neier, Aryeh. *The International Human Rights Movement: A History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012. Print.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Trans. Gregory Elliott. Brooklyn: Verso, 2009. Print.

"Report: Abu Ghraib was 'Animal House' at Night." *CNN*. 25 Aug. 2004. Web. 13 Oct. 2013.

Rickert, Thomas. Ambient Rhetoric: *The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2013. Print.

Rumsfeld, Donald. "Excerpts of Rumsfeld Testimony." Washingtonpost.com. 7 May 2004. Web. 18 Mar. 2012.

Schryer, C.F., "Genre Time/ Space: Chronotopic Strategies in the Experimental Article." *Journal of Advanced Composition* 19.1 (1999): 81-89. Jstor. Web. 11 Jul. 2012.

Smith, John E. "Time and Qualitative Time." *The Review of Metaphysics* 40.1 (1986): 3-16. Web. 19 Dec. 2012.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003. Print.

Sturken, Marita. "Comfort, Irony, and Trivialization: The Mediation of Torture." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 14.4 (2011): 423-440. Web. 9 Sep. 2013.

"Synopsis." Standard Operating Procedure. Dir. Errol Morris. Sony Pictures, 2008. DVD.

"U.S. Election: 'I like waterboarding a lot', says Donald Trump." *BBC News*. 29 Jun 2016. Web. 1 Sep. 2016.

Virilio, Paul. *The Original Accident*. Trans. Julie Rose. Malden, MA: Polity, 2007. Print.

Weaver, Matthew and Spencer Ackerman. "Trump claims torture works but experts warn of its 'potentially existential' costs" *The Guardian*. 26 Jan. 2017. Web. 26 Jan. 2017.

White, Eric Charles. *Kaironomia: On the Will-to-Invent*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987. Print.