

Argentinean commandos who assassinated the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle (Chapter 4). Williams is a fine storyteller and these highly diverse subjects, in terms of both genre and geography, are pulled together skilfully to make his overall case against human rights norms and for alternative ethical frameworks. No doubt, not everyone will agree with his reading of the narrative messages in the films and texts he discusses. His take on *Caché*, for instance, in my view understates the effect of the passivity which he identifies in the colonial subjects depicted – although they may be passive in the way Williams describes, the passivity also works in an active sense to maximize the psychological impact on the film's central 'northern' character. Elsewhere in the book, there is also a tendency to reify decolonization as a singular social struggle against a somewhat simplistic reading of Empire or US imperialism. While these are not the book's core focus, such references obscure a far more geographically complex and disaggregated operation of global power – something that similarly radical critiques posed by Hardt and Negri or the Autonomy of Migration scholars, for instance, have identified, if not always succeeded in portraying.

Williams's book is at its best in critiquing the false idealism of liberal internationalism, in insisting that there is in fact 'no such thing as non-violence', and radically unsettling adherence to absolute ethical

principles. What is less well developed is his advocacy of alternatives that draw on the Zapatistas' philosophy of struggle ('from below and to the left') or Franz Fanon's defence of violence as a legitimate tool of anti-colonial resistance (Chapter 5). I couldn't help wondering whether these alternatives, taken to their extremes, would ultimately result in arrangements that avoided injustice, even though it may be injustice of different kinds, served out to different people. And this led me to wonder if the imperfection of international law and human rights norms (and it is indeed a *profound* imperfection) is enough to warrant its outright dismissal, thus rejecting the various progressive ends to which human rights norms can be put, as Williams himself acknowledges. The argument ultimately left me unsatisfied as to what is to be done; though this may be less a criticism of Williams than a reflection of the ambition of his project and the limitations of a single volume.

After reading Williams's book it becomes more difficult to dismiss those who are violent without asking what reasons they have to take up arms – an important critical task in today's context as ever. Williams compels his readers to consider whether an injunction to non-violence can be maintained consistently with the effects of liberal humanism that defends such an injunction.

Anne McNevin



World of warcraft

Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010. 300 pp., £55.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 74563 849 2 hb., 978 0 74563 850 8 pb.

Addressing the tangled multimedia web of reporting through which most of us experience conflicts such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War* is a timely book that facilitates our understanding of contemporary media ecology, along with our role as spectators and consumers within such ubiquitous media. While war coverage is an increasingly urgent topic in film, television and new media studies, Hoskins and O'Loughlin's interdisciplinary contribution to this line of inquiry allows for a mapping of the multifaceted ways in which reporting is conducted, observed and consumed. The authors begin with the example of the Crimean War, now understood as the first 'media war' given its dissemination through embedded front-line reporting as well as the photography, works of art and war-themed attractions that it spawned for curious and horrified nineteenth-century spectators. What Hoskins and O'Loughlin aim to uncover in their genealogy is precisely how the waging of warfare is shaped in such a way as to be 'always already' produced, banishing any hope of 'authentic' or 'original' experience.

If reporting on the Crimean War signalled a major shift in how war was experienced, in so far as it came to audiences through a fully fledged apparatus of front-line observation assisted by artists and photographers, the current possibility of crowd-sourced reporting has still more profound consequences. As the book aims to show, the mediatization of war through active as well as passive spectatorial practices now gone global gives rise to more diffuse relations between action and effect, and creates greater uncertainty for policymakers. The chaotic and subversive flow of information through an ever-widening spectrum of sources such as WikiLeaks makes flows impossible to control, while at the same time rendering information flows and their affects more radically reflexive. For example, attempts to prevent the diffusion of jihadist materials online ultimately has serious ramifications for the structure and functioning of the Internet as a whole, since any measures taken will invariably affect actors occupying any and all positions in the conflict. At the same time, the random and unexpected movement of people, things (money, viruses and so on) and images makes social order entirely contingent rather than given, while

the resulting connections between ostensibly discrete phenomena set up unpredictable shock waves, and yield unexpected results.

The diffusion of war through an ever more complex mesh of everyday sources such as television news, YouTube, Facebook, podcasts, blogs and video games also raises questions concerning spectatorship. How cynical, for example, is the experience of warfare mediated through game interfaces such as *America's Army*, at once a massively multiplayer online game and a military recruitment tool? How 'genuine' is televisual reporting that relies on a presentational stylization of events, and a self-reflective mechanism that relies on celebrating stories already covered ('remember when we brought you...')? What does it mean to glean the details of human suffering by always necessarily observing what the media observe, and what role does mediation play in the process of compassion fatigue whereby audience sympathy for any given atrocity becomes measurable and predictable? Has the spectacle of suffering become a new source of pleasure, a sort of catharsis of being moved, and, therefore, a more insipid form of sentimental self-interest and voyeurism? In this case, shouldn't users now bear a 'vicarious responsibility' as partial collaborators when they click through to catch glimpses of horror that contribute to a particular experience of the sublime? And, finally, how are we to understand the memory of trauma when it becomes prosthetic, coded or templated on the basis of previously reported genocide or massacres?

While the authors address questions concerning media impact and spectatorship, their analysis of viewer input is equally detailed and troubling. As systems of mass media become porous – that is, interactive and open to any number of random inputs volunteered by audience members – the question of credibility becomes paramount. Throughout the book the authors return to the reporting on Saddam Hussein's execution, first in the official Iraqi government video, and then in the form of mobile phone footage that was uploaded to websites and sold on videotapes. While on the one hand the official report sought to convey a relatively orderly execution, and came with viewer warnings concerning violence, the mobile footage offered a more chaotic image of Hussein's

death, and the cautionary statements that had framed the official footage were dropped when the mobile video was picked up on mainstream television. Not only does this particular example raise questions of authenticity and credibility while alerting us to the potential of media to become weaponized within a larger political-military context, it also begs the question of acceptable levels of violence for viewers as they become both acclimatized to and fatigued by troubling events such as real-time executions.

Although *War and Media* covers a good deal of well-rehearsed territory – spectatorship, mediation, premediation, and so on – it also does so in a way that makes this a particularly useful volume. For example, while Jenkins, Grusin, Kline, De Peuter Kücklich and others have been writing for some time now about intermediality, group sourcing, premediation fan-based Internet content and the like, *War and Media* both narrows and broadens currently available accounts. By providing a thoroughgoing and meticulous study of one particular kind of reporting from a number of perspectives, and by incorporating a variety of disciplinary insights, the book is able to revisit familiar topics while moving us further into the digital age.

Joyce Goggin

An ordinary philosopher

Stanley Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2010. 548pp., £31.50 hb., 978 0 80477 014 9.

What is the story of a life? And where is the place and what is the form in which to tell it? These are questions given a careful hearing in Stanley Cavell's recently published autobiography. Renowned as one of the most influential and prolific of contemporary American philosophers, Cavell has moved in his meditations from Shakespeare's *Othello* to the late poetry of Wallace Stevens to the dance routines of Fred Astaire. In a philosophical career spanning sixty years, this idiosyncratic philosophical voice has inspired both cultish devotion and disciplinary censure. *Little Did I Know* is, in part, an accounting for this idiosyncrasy. Given Cavell's career-long obsession with avoidance, with the disappointingly human tendency always to shrink from offering accounts of ourselves, *blocking* ourselves from exposure, this accounting is doubly significant.

Cavell grew up in Atlanta and Sacramento, California. The only child of an artistic mother and an entrepreneurial father, his childhood was marked by constant movement and upheaval as his father's business ventures consistently failed. Of every place he moved to with his parents, it seemed to the young Cavell that 'we existed with bags packed and stuff near our hands, poised for departure'. Something of this itinerant upbringing translated to his initial searches for a profession, an intellectual and artistic home. Cavell first studied at Juilliard, before giving up music for philosophy. He enrolled in UCLA as a 'special student' then progressed to Harvard, where he found his philosophical calling in the lectures of the visiting Oxford professor John Langshaw Austin. The significance of Austin in Cavell's philosophical development cannot be overestimated. It was, *Little Did I Know* suggests, an influence of life-changing, indeed life-giving, proportion. Austin's stress on the philosophical importance of the ordinary, of careful attention to our words as and when we say them, registered for Cavell as morally and epistemologically crucial touchstones for life and learning. The ordinary-language philosopher attends to words and phrases in contrast to language that is, as Wittgenstein says, merely 'idling'; language theoretically spinning its wheels outside any actual language games that people engage in with each other, in actual things they do in the world. As Cavell practises it, in readings of Shakespeare, Beckett, Emerson, Thoreau, Capra, Astaire and Austen, ordinary-language criticism attends to the specific plight of mind and language within which a human being gives voice to his condition, to the importance of *what we say when*. Even Cavell's choice of autobiographical form in *Little Did I Know* (dating his depiction of events as diary entries) takes guidance from this philosophical inheritance, faithfully remembering Austin's emphasis on the context of every utterance.

Returning philosophy to the concerns of ordinary human persons and showing how it might speak across disciplinary lines of inquiry are not easy tasks, and it is characteristic that Cavell should struggle with his own procedures. Straining to allow even the most incomplete idea or figuration its due and careful elaboration, his philosophy has always held itself open to the fear of inexpressiveness and the anxiety of exposure. Cavell is nonetheless aware of the dangers of over-expression, the pitfalls of obscurity, the many charges (first voiced by Austin, interestingly, who commented that an early prose extract of Cavell's was 'a bit purple') of philosophical self-indulgence. Finding a voice of his own

to live with, or to live by, is Cavell's own accounting for the heavy difficulty and sometime *resistance* of his prose, which is not simply explained, as Cavell suspects of Blanchot (or as Cavell's own critics might claim), by the philosopher's 'horror of understanding'. *Little Did I Know* both acknowledges this self-imposed difficulty and works to find a way beyond it.

In *Little Did I Know*, the awkwardness of living (a fact Cavell associates with the accidentally decisive) is registered at several moments. Cavell sees human lives as inherently interrupted, things chronically occurring at unripe times or in the wrong tempo. He tells the story of his father, then eighty-three, waking up after heart surgery and asking about all the commotion in the hospital room. It's ugly, his father says, to run around as if an old man's death were an emergency and not a natural occurrence. Cavell then wonders whether his father might question his philosopher son on the responsibility of a doctor, a wife, or any family member. This is, after all, the concluding paragraph of a memoir encouraging its reader to expect some form of reconciliation between father and son. Cavell had already praised his three children for 'curing, or curbing, this vindictiveness, this recurring self-destructive longing to consign his father to hell'. This father, however, falls back to sleep; this son walks out to find his mother. There is no rumination on life and death, no dialectical exchange on duty. Perhaps Cavell offers this final vignette as a kind of empty punchline, a commentary on the perpetual lack of sophistication in everyday events.

The great themes of Cavell's career – avoidance, disappointment, exile, fraudulence, grace, redemption, therapy, the ordinary – are taken up and taken further in this, his most recent attempt at autobiography. The first attempt was occasioned by the foreword to his 1994 *A Pitch of Philosophy*. Of necessity more pointed and more concise than *Little Did I Know*, this earlier work was but one of many that urged philosophical writing, in general, to follow lines of the personal and the intimately revelatory. Indeed, we might say that Cavell's writing has always been for and from the private imagination. A tone of moral urgency (Cavell describes the attendant state of mind as one of 'psychic emergency') permeates *Little Did I Know*. There is also a quiet poetry to the book. Writing of his six-year-old daughter, and his own sense of inadequacy as a divorced parent, Cavell pictures father and daughter 'together lifting the mild sadness for the wind to take out of our hands'. Reminiscences of his children are touching and revelatory, perhaps the most instructive comments, indeed, on the philosopher's relationship

with his own parents. What is perhaps most striking is the enlivening sense that the philosopher has, in his own words, finally escaped from his work's judgement of him. It would be misleading to suggest that the judgement of others (though painful to witness) had ever constrained his philosophical voice. Still, perhaps Cavell needed the full licence of autobiography in order to move surely into the poetic register anticipated by *The Senses of Walden* (1972). There, as in *Little Did I Know*, the importance of accounting for oneself, of returning one's own actions to the grounds and tribunals of the everyday, is itself offered to others as a philosophical gift. Cavell's memoir is the private achievement of a single figure, passing by 'just this edge of things in just this broken light'; but, most crucially, in fully *meaning* what it says, it also enters a claim to speak for others.

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