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Terrible Security

Bifocal Visions of Horror

Bruce Buchan

How do we see security? Is it seen in images of peace and safety, or is it perceived in the depiction of the horrors of violence and suffering? The question is not an obvious one, for security is not typically thought to be a quality of vision, or of the other senses. Rather, security is typically thought to pertain to the experience of physical, bodily integrity. The conventional view of security is that it subsists in a 'political relation ... between the individual and the political community' to provide minimum conditions of physical safety and the protection of law.¹ Such a view belies a very long history of conceptual uncertainty not simply about who is to be secured from whom, or the structure of mechanisms for providing security, but over the moral and even spiritual value of security itself.²

1 E. Rothschild, 'What is Security?', *Daedalus*, vol. 124, no. 3, 1995, pp. 79–80.

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2 J. Hamilton, *Security: Politics, Humanity and the Philology of Care*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013; W. Conze, 'Sicherheit, Schutz', in O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 5, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1974.

Thomas Hobbes attempted to sweep away such uncertainties in the seventeenth century by construing security as the purpose for political order and the establishment of sovereignty. By these means, aggressively acquisitive individuals could secure themselves and their properties through mechanisms of government capable of inspiring mutual fear.³ Framing security in Hobbes' way, however, perpetuates an assumption that security should be understood merely as part of a contractual arrangement between subjects and sovereigns, ignoring the discursive strategies by which populations are 'striated' into zones of security and insecurity, and those 'perpetually traversed by relations of war'.⁴

In this article, I will consider the visual framing of security in order to reflect on how the desire for security is activated in the depiction of its absence. I am not seeking here to study, as Chiara Bottici has, the mediation of politics through images, nor, as Peter Goodrich has revealed, how the law 'looms' over us in emblems and symbols.⁵ Rather, I want to explore how security is seen and, in particular, how our vision of it is bifocal. On one plane, we see security in the certainty of physical safety. On the other, we see security in the terrible uncertainty of its absence — in the sheer horror of violence and cruelty. Our vision of security switches between both planes of perception. The horror of violence is folded with the peace of security, and the axis along which they are joined in our field of vision activates our readiness to switch from one to the other in sheer terror.

I begin with an image (Figure 1), neither troubled nor troubling in itself, but an image I think should be read as both terrifying and horrifying nonetheless. It is the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' 1651 masterwork, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*.⁶ The frontispiece was supervised by Hobbes himself, and it conveys in remarkably vivid terms the

3 J. Coleman, 'Negotiating the Medieval in the Modern: European Citizenship and Statecraft', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 22, 2012, p. 93.

4 Quote from M. Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 227; see also G. Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, trans. N. Heron, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, p. 3; J. Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, London, Verso, 2010, pp. 66–79; and M. Foucault, 'Society Must be Defended': *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, ed. M. Bertani and A. Fontana, trans. D. Macey, New York, Picador, 2003, p. 49.

5 C. Bottici, *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 93–5; P. Goodrich, *Legal Emblems and the Art of the Law: Obiter Depicta as the Vision of Governance*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 25.

6 T. Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, ed. R. Tuck, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1651].



Figure 1: Frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, 1651.

Image: Wikimedia Commons.

central elements of his then-revolutionary argument. An earlier preparatory sketch of the frontispiece was produced by either of two of the leading artists working in England at the time, Abraham Bosse, or possibly Wenceslaus Hollar, for presentation to King Charles II (Figure 2).

There are some subtle but significant and interesting differences between the two images that I will come back to shortly. Together, the two images neatly encapsulate Hobbes' argument that at the basis of all civil association, at the heart of any legitimate commonwealth lies the provision of security. Security is the supreme good that we all crave from the mutually violent and mutually acquisitive self-interest of our fellow men and women. Given this relentlessly bleak appraisal of human motivation, Hobbes' answer to the security conundrum was to argue that we should understand our obedience to sovereign power as if it were established by social contract among the members of civil society to surrender their own power of self-protection to an awesome sovereign — king, assembly or parliament, it really didn't matter so long as the sovereign's power vis-à-vis the subjects was awesome. This sovereign was named Leviathan in echo of the biblical sea



Figure 2: Drawing of frontispiece of *Leviathan*, 1651. Image: British Library.

beast in the Book of Job, whose terrifyingly scaly form could be overmastered only by God. Hobbes' sovereign Leviathan was a literally terrifying creature, a beast of security Hobbes famously described as 'that *Mortall God*, to which we owe under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defence'.⁷ The function of the sovereign Leviathan was to terrify us into security. The sovereign, Hobbes wrote, 'hath the use of so much Power and Strength ... that by terror thereof' this beastly monster is able to override our own violent and competitive nature to ensure 'Peace at home' and defence against 'Enemies abroad'.⁸

The conceit of the final frontispiece image (Figure 1) is that the body of the Hobbesian sovereign is made from the bodies of those who have contracted to form it. The Leviathan thus appears in this image as a composite body, the individual subjects making up its form resembling the scales of the biblical beast. Significantly, the sovereign Leviathan is framed in panoramic vision — in spectacular demonstration of its awesome status.⁹ In that sense, Hobbes' frontispiece image has something in common with a much earlier personification of security: Ambrogio Lorenzetti's 1338–39 fresco depicting 'Good Government' in the Sala dei Nove of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena.

In Lorenzetti's vision, the angelic form of 'Securitas' (Figure 3) flies out over a peaceful, orderly and productive *contado* of tilled fields, sturdy homesteads and safe highways conveying prosperous merchants, demonstrating the salutary effects of a well-governed city for the inhabitants and travellers passing in and out of its gates. Most recently, Hamilton reads this image as typical of a pervasive concept of security understood as the 'removal' of threats.¹⁰ This negative quality of security pays scant regard to the dependence of security on the visualisation of terror. Not only did Lorenzetti pair his idyllic fresco of 'Good Government' with a terrifying fresco of 'Bad Government' in which the fabric of the city and the peace of the countryside were consumed by decay and war, Securitas herself was depicted holding in her hand the abject figure

7 In his early work, Hobbes in fact used the term 'body politic' when speaking of the sovereign (*The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic, Human Nature, De Corpore Politico*, ed. J. Gaskin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, part I, XIX, p. 107). In his later work, the imagery of artificiality jostled with the earlier organicist connotations (*Leviathan*, part I, chapter xvi, pp. 111–14, part II, chapter xxix, p. 230, chapter xvii, p. 120).

8 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part II, chapter xviii, pp. 120–1.

9 J. Martel, 'The Spectacle of the Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes, Guy Debord and Walter Benjamin on Representation and its Misuses', *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, vol. 2, 2006, p. 87.

10 Hamilton, *Security*, pp. 140–4.



Figure 3: Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 'Securitas', *Effects of Good Government in the Countryside*, 1337–40. Image: Public Domain.

of a hanging body at the gallows. Lorenzetti's message is that by the terror of its punishment and the certainty of its laws, security means peace and protection.¹¹ Thomas Hobbes also employs the visual field of panorama, but the panoramic sweep of Leviathan's vision is significantly different from that of Securitas. Where she

11 Q. Skinner, 'Ambrogio Lorenzetti and the Portrayal of Virtuous Government', in *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2002; J. Sliwka, "'Armet ed Duritia': Domenico Beccafumi and the Politics of Punishment', in T. Smith and J. Steinhoff (eds), *Art as Politics in Late Medieval and Renaissance Siena*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2012, p. 169.

sees a populated landscape, he sees a cityscape and landscape denuded of people. His sovereign eye sees all; his mighty arms overreach the puny works of his tiny subjects. The subjects themselves are shown with backs turned to the viewer, as if they all, in pilgrimage or homage to the sovereign, look up and inward to the body of the beast.¹²

Much ink has been expended on the interpretation of Hobbes' frontispiece image — its biblical framing, its portraiture likeness to King Charles II, its scenic structure conforming to a stage set that conceals as much as it reveals, and most recently its symbolic representation of monstrosity.¹³ Less attention has been given to its representation of corporeal security in a frame of vision that is at once panoramic in its sweep across imagined terrain while also being intimately embodied. There are two visual registers here, but the curious (and truly revolutionary) effect of the image is to show them bifocally. Spectacle here does not operate by fragmenting our vision into 'separate, detached images' but by intimately relating two fields of vision.¹⁴ Sovereignty must be understood as an effect of switching seamlessly between them. The body of Leviathan is constituted by an inward field of vision. The mutual contract among the subjects to establish sovereign power is directly implied by the fact that the subjects, in looking into the sovereign's body, are gazing at each other. Here, security is intimate in its mutually constitutive embodiment. Hence the subjects' vision is direct, it is face to face, but its intimacy is powerfully suggested by the fact that we (the viewers) do not see it. It is a field of vision from which we are excluded.

This too is a deliberate effect that echoes Hobbes' argument. Our exclusion from the mutually intimate field of vision between the subjects suggests that we remain outside the bond of security, in a condition Hobbes so vividly described as the perpetually insecure 'state of nature':

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where

12 In this sense, there is a certain parallel between my analysis of the uncanny embodiment and sovereign eye of Leviathan, and Goodrich's analysis of the dismembered and spectral vision implied in legal symbolism — see *Legal Emblems and the Art of the Law*, pp. 100–1.

13 M. Kristiansson and J. Tralau, 'Hobbes's Hidden Monster: A New Interpretation of the Frontispiece of Leviathan', *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2014. See also A. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 362–8; P. Springborg, 'Hobbes's Biblical Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth', *Political Theory*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1995; Q. Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 187–98.

14 Martel, 'The Spectacle of Leviathan', p. 69.

every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to a time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.¹⁵

The state of nature was an anthropological fantasy, but not an idle one, in the sense that Hobbes used it to suggest that its horrible uncertainty should make us prefer to join the compact for sovereign security forthwith. The sovereign's gaze alone is directed outward over a panoramically rendered landscape and cityscape — a terrain of security surveyed, seen, known, controlled. The sovereign towers mountainously over the denuded fields and streets, dominating the scale of both nature and civil society. Here, security is panoramic in its ambition and sweep.

The remarkable conceit of the frontispiece image is unprecedented, as just a cursory glance at earlier related images attests. Lorenzetti's *Securitas* demonstrates that the idea that the collective security, safety and protection of people can be pictured was not new. Perhaps the most common early examples, however, were not exclusively civic and political visions such as Lorenzetti's but spiritual and theological — such as the depiction of the protective figure of the Madonna of Misericordia, sheltering fragile humanity beneath her capacious robes (Figure 4).¹⁶

In the standard form of this representation, Mary stands and extends her arms, drawing a wide cloak around the huddled forms of kneeling or just penitent worshippers — typically, in the early

¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part I, chapter xiii, p. 89.

¹⁶ The depiction of Mary as a merciful source of shelter to the weak was a recurrent trope in medieval art, but over the course of the fourteenth century the representations and spiritual functions of Mary proliferated and diversified across Europe. The significance of this act of enfolding with a cloak not only referred to the obvious act of sheltering but also, from at least the eleventh century, to rituals of adoption derived from the revival of Roman law. The form itself would appear to have derived from much earlier Roman depictions of the personified virtues, *Pietas* and *Concordia* — see G. Waller, *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Popular Culture*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2011.



Figure 4: Lippo Memmi, *Madonna della Misericordia*, Duomo, Orvieto, 1350s.
Image: Public Domain.

depictions, monks and nuns — gathered within its folds. Following the unprecedented mortality and attendant social disorders in the wake of the Black Death that swept across Western Europe in 1349–51, the figures sheltering under the protecting mantle of the Madonna of Misericordia broadened from monks and nuns to



Figure 5: *Avis aus Roys*, 1347–50. Image: Morgan Library and Museum.

include the whole of humanity seeking security through the intercession of Mary, *mater omnium*. The figure of Mary as *mater omnium* was occasionally adapted to more explicitly political images of security. The most obvious was the image from the mid-fourteenth century, *Avis aus Roys*, showing a crowned monarch, sword raised against approaching armed enemies, protecting his cowering subjects beneath the folds of his cloak (Figure 5).¹⁷

In the 1370s, the *mater omnium* image was used in Nicholas Oresme's French vernacular translation of Aristotle's *Politics* to depict the female form of Universal Justice sheltering the smaller female figures of the virtues (Figure 6). The explicitly political connotation of the image (and of the translation itself) was suggested by the forms of Justice and the virtues being pictured in a physical space protected by crenellated walls within which the royal fleur-de-lis serves as the stamp of regal power and law.¹⁸ The message here was clear — royal power secures the physical space wherein royal law ensures that justice and the virtues

17 J. Lepot, 'Le prince justicier dans l'*Avis aus roys*, un "miroir au prince" enluminé du XIV^e siècle', in S. Menegaldo and B. Ribémont (eds), *Le roi fontaine de justice: Pouvoir justicier et pouvoir royal au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2012, p. 198.

18 C. Sherman, *Imaging Aristotle: Verbal and Visual Representation in Fourteenth-Century France*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, Figure 24A, p. 97.

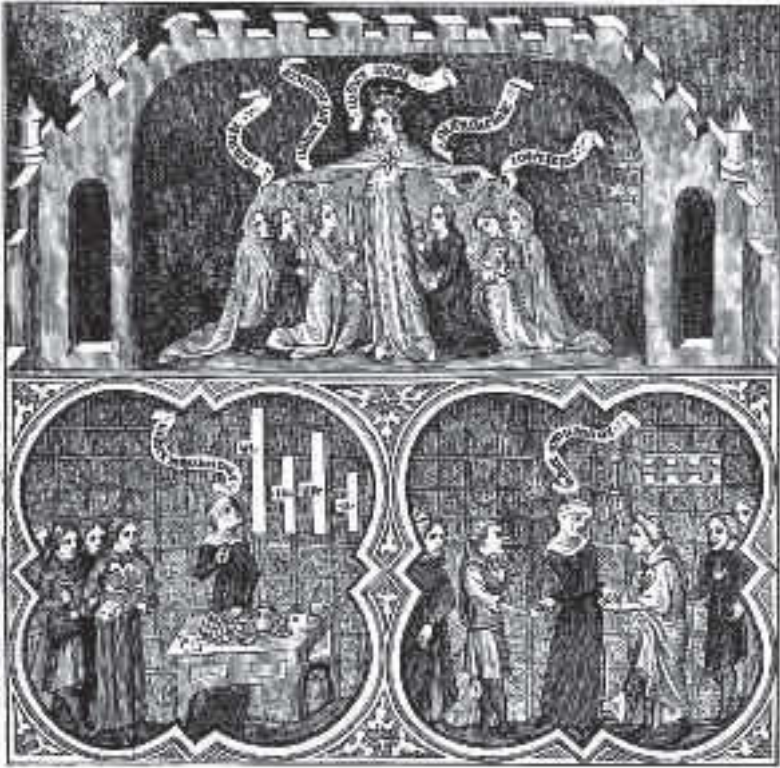


Figure 6: Allegory of Justice, from Aristotle's *Ethics*, 1370s.
Image: Public Domain.

flourish.¹⁹ In these earlier images, the intimate corporeality of the vision is enhanced by seclusion. The *mater omnium* trope is an agoraphobic figure who offers protection underneath and within her cloak. She is a figure who stands within spaces already delimited by walls, or by her intercessory mediation of the division between the physical and spiritual realms.

The Leviathan of Hobbes' frontispiece, by contrast, stands over and dominates territory. The security offered by Leviathan is not agoraphobic but claustrophobic. Leviathan surveys an entire land-

¹⁹ The combination of the symbol of French royalty — the fleur-de-lis — along with the ornate towers and walls might have made the association of justice with royalty. This would have formed the ideological context of the translation. The point was to provide the French royal state with a powerful rhetoric underscoring its prestige and its moral claims. A key feature of this rhetoric, however, centred on the activity of security. In this sense, Sherman argues, justice 'operates in and orders the social relationships of a political community' and serves as a kind of 'tutelary guardian, both securing and ruling the political community' (*Imaging Aristotle*, p. 103).

scape and cityscape of security. Leviathan's security is not walled; it is not sequestered, nor is it cloaked. Leviathan does not merely shelter bodies but is literally made from them. The image is unprecedented in picturing security in a bifocal visual field that is both corporeal and panoramic. The visual affect of this bifocal vision can be explored by comparing it with the earlier frontispiece sketch (Figure 2). Here, as in the final image, the body of Leviathan towers over the landscape and cityscape. Leviathan's perspective is panoramic, but there is a wrinkle in the field of vision. The bodies making up Leviathan are now distinctly seen, not as tiny scales, but as faces staring out from within the sovereign. This image unsettles because it seems to imply sovereign consumption. The visual confrontation achieves an affect reminiscent of medieval illustrations of the mythical Blemmyes, who were also variously described as Anthropophagi (Figure 7) — monstrous cannibals supposed to inhabit the unknown torrid zones.



Figure 7: Anthropophagi or Blemmyae, from *Historia de Proelis*, 1444–45.
Image: Public Domain.

The Anthropophagi, like the initial sketch of Hobbes' Leviathan, are monstrous bodies. Each is a body from which a face or faces gaze out to meet ours, but not in recognition.²⁰ These are faces whose gaze reinforces their monstrosity. Their gaze is supposed to elicit terror — these are the beasts of our worst nightmares. The Anthropophagi live in flagrant breach of the sacred ban on the consumption of human flesh. The sketch of Hobbes' Leviathan does not directly impute cannibalism, but the bodies, or at least the faces, seem to have been consumed — they are not constituting the sovereign by their sequestered gaze upon each other. Rather, they seem to have been disembodied and now stare out at us as if their very bodies have been consumed. Here is the most remarkable feature of the sketch: the gaze of subjects and the sovereign is undifferentiated. The frontispiece sketch seems to take the agoraphobia of the *mater omnium* image to a new level — by sheltering within the body of the sovereign, the sovereign's panoramic perspective is dissipated, refracted through a thousand pairs of eyes. The intimately corporeal and the panoramic perspectives of security are thus disjointed. There are two fields of vision here, but they remain mutually mysterious, as if divided one from the other.

This is where the later 1651 final frontispiece image (Figure 1) succeeds in a way that the earlier sketch (Figure 2) does not. In its bifocal linkage of the two perspectives, the later image succeeds in depicting Hobbesian security. Security has become so close to a political article of faith that its meaning regularly escapes notice. In an age where the common good has been leached of all content in democratic discourse beyond the dicta of market and money, security offers the last refuge for the ideologue in search of a common purpose. At a time of seemingly unprecedented global challenges, security has become the foundation stone of modern liberal-democratic politics. The provision of security constitutes the minimum threshold for political legitimacy, while, in the name of security, state power is impelled towards ever-receding maximal limits. Yet for all its allure of certainty, of universality, and of mundane tangibility, security is a disruptive and destabilising con-

²⁰ As Surekha Davies has pointed out, early modern monsters occupied an 'ethnological continuum' with human beings. What was considered 'monstrous' were the biological or cultural 'differences' separating Europeans from others, and as such 'monstrosity began to blur into savagery and barbarism' ('The Unlucky, the Bad, and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment', in A. Mitman and P. Dendle (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2012, p. 68).

cept. Inherent in the concept of security is a radical temporal indeterminacy. As Foucault memorably described it, 'security refers ... to a series of possible events; it refers to the temporal and the uncertain'.²¹ This indeterminacy was present in the prioritisation given to security in modern political thought by Hobbes himself, who invited his readers to consider security as a desire for protection²² impelled by the apprehension of its future uncertainty. In the absence of his awesome sovereign Leviathan, Hobbesian security is perpetually immanent; as Hobbes himself put it, there is:

... no way for any man to secure himself, so reasonable, as *Anticipation*; that is, by force, or wiles, to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other power great enough to endanger him.²³

This avid search motivated by anticipated insecurity drives an incessant conquest that results in a furious pre-emption 'so as to avoid having to face prospective adversaries later'.²⁴ Hobbes' infamously bleak but resonant image of a brutish existence in the absence of the cooperation and amenity won through security was founded on the inability of the insecure to secure their future properties and livelihoods in both temporal and spatial dimensions.²⁵ The condition of insecurity in the state of nature would persist, Hobbes argued, not merely because it was the price we paid to serve our own selfish interests, but because of our sovereign-less incapacity to pursue those very same interests by forming plans, making investments, or seeking knowledge — in short, by building the architecture of civilisation. To live in Hobbesian

21 M. Foucault, 'Lecture 1: 11 January 1978', in *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, ed. M. Snellart, trans. G. Burchell, Houndmills, Palgrave, 2007, p. 20.

22 T. Hobbes, *De Cive [On the Citizen]*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, ed. R. Tuck and M. Silverthorne, 1998 [1642], chapter IV, article 3, p. 77.

23 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part I, chapter xiii, pp. 87–8, emphasis added.

24 I. Evrigenis, *Images of Anarchy: The Rhetoric and Science in Hobbes's State of Nature*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 75. As Evrigenis points out, the strategy of pre-emption in the state of nature was a feature of Hobbes' thought from its earliest formulation in *The Elements of Law, I*, 14.13. Here Hobbes even countenances the elimination of the weak and infants who are mastered by the strong.

25 Hobbes here asked his sceptical readers to reflect on the precautions she or he might take 'when taking a journey', thus demonstrating the premise of his argument — quoted in Evrigenis, *Images of Anarchy*, pp. 104–5. Conrad Zwierlein has also spoken of the early modern language of 'security' as a spatial phenomenon linked to the safeguarding of travel and transportation of goods ('Security Politics and Conspiracy Theories in the Emerging European State System [15th/16th c.]', *Historical Social Research*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2013, p. 68). Above all, see Conze, 'Sicherheit, Schutz', p. 836.

security, then, was not simply to live in safe or protected space but also to live in anticipation of it. This spatial and temporal bifurcation implicit in the concept of (Hobbesian) security is mirrored in the bifocal vision of Hobbes' frontispiece image, which also speaks to the perception of security as an apprehended object of horror inviting a constantly renewed anticipation of terror.

Our vision of security is split. On the one hand, we view security sharply as a fixed condition of stolid protection. Security here is viewed as safety and well-being. On the other hand, we see security more hazily in its absence. Security here is an effect of the immediate apprehension of its absence. The horror of cruelty and violence, of living subjects made merely abject by the application of force prompts a reflex of fear — of pure terror. It is from this terror that we derive a future implication of safety, protection or well-being. It is not that horror and terror themselves supply security; rather, they are the indispensably necessary activators of security. Security is enabled by and requires real suffering. The two perspectives, secure and insecure, operate as bifocal vision. There is an oscillation or switching between them, rather than a definitive shift from one to the other. What switches are not the vistas revealed to us but the lenses through which we view them. Each lens enables something different to be seen in the field of view. What we see is security–insecurity, but how do we see it — as terror, or as horror?

Consider the recent analysis of the so-called Kill Team photos. These were a series of photographic images taken by a team of up to twelve US military specialists deployed in Afghanistan in 2010. The self-styled Kill Team went in search of random Afghans to kill while on patrol. At least three unarmed Afghans were slaughtered by the Kill Team in 'combat' engagements that were entirely faked in order to cover up what became known as the Maiwand District Murders.²⁶ The photos taken of the corpses of their victims, along with a selection of souvenired body parts, were used as trading tokens and gambling chips among the team and other US military personnel.

According to Henry Giroux, the Kill Team is a product of a deep depravity in American society (and, by implication, in other Western

²⁶ The US military recorded charges against eleven of the twelve servicemen; one of them pleaded guilty to three charges of murder, was dishonourably discharged from the army and was sentenced to twenty-four years' imprisonment in exchange for his testimony against the other members of the Kill Team.

societies) whereby our moral world has become so saturated with a succession of images of human suffering and cruelty served up for momentary consumption that their interpretation within any viable moral framework is rendered all but impossible.²⁷ In Giroux's thought-provoking analysis, a growing indifference towards violence and cruelty (and the consequent normalisation of war) is fed by the ubiquity of horror; indeed, that which we take for security and social order is indistinguishable from the production and consumption of scenes of horror. Can horror be normalised in this way? If our moral consciousness is so compromised by an abundant wellspring of scenes of horror, then would not horror lose its capacity to horrify? If horror were mundane, then what would drive the surging terror that fuels our quest for security? In what follows, I will argue that this analysis does not capture the mutually constitutive role of both horror and terror in our vision of security.

Edmund Burke (1729–97) famously wrote in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied that ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure ... When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply too terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience.²⁸

Burke described 'horror' as the passion most excited by the sublime, a kind of stunned or awed 'astonishment' at the revelation of what terrifies us. But what terrifies is an effect of 'obscurity'²⁹ — it is the very indistinctness of 'terror', its apprehended uncertainty, that renders it sublime. Our apprehension of uncertain terror is

27 H. Giroux, 'Disturbing Pleasures: Murderous Images and the Aesthetics of Depravity', *Third Text*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2012, p. 271.

28 E. Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, London, R. and J. Dodsley, 1757, part I, section VII.

29 Quotes from Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, part II, section I, and part II, section III.

indeed so powerful, so visceral, because it is ‘an emotion of distress’ activated by our desire for ‘self-preservation’.³⁰

In Burke’s rendering of the sublime, ‘self-preservation’ stands in for security. Here security is less a concept or policy than an emotional state — a rapture that consumes the self. It was the little-known English novelist and trailblazer of Gothic fiction Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823) who reflected that the sublime was less a rapture brought on by apprehension than an effect of differential visualisation — that is, of a visual field bifurcated between terror and horror:

Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.³¹

For Radcliffe, terror is that which can only be indistinctly seen ‘in glimpses through obscuring shades, the great outlines only appearing, which excite the imagination to complete the rest’.³² Horror is that which captures the mind and holds it, binding it by the ocular nerve to the scene. Horror drives out thought and imagination. Horror sucks us into a vortex of suffering. Herein lies the significance of the ontology of horror. Horror, as Debrix and Barder argue, is that which obliterates bodies, that which seeks to ‘eradicate any trace of humanity’.³³ Horror subsists in the transformation of the living subject into the inert object.³⁴ The horror invoked by this transformation is perfect and complete; it is impossible for horror to be confused with any other reaction — this is the nub of Radcliffe’s distinction.

For Radcliffe, terror can be confused in a way that horror never can be. The ‘obscurity, or indistinctness’ of terror ‘leaves the imagination to act upon the few hints that truth reveals to it’, and thus:

... it may, by mingling and confounding one image with another, absolutely counteract the imagination, instead of exciting it. Obscurity leaves something for the imagination to

30 Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, part II, section XXII.

31 A. Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 1826, p. 149.

32 Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, p. 150.

33 F. Debrix and A. Barder, *Beyond Biopolitics: Theory, Violence, and Horror in World Politics*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013, p. 92.

34 T. Gregory, ‘Dismembering the Dead: Violence, Vulnerability and the Body in War’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2015, p. 957.

exaggerate; confusion, by blurring one image into another, leaves only a chaos in which the mind can find nothing to be magnificent, nothing to nourish its fears or doubts, or to act upon in any way.³⁵

Here Radcliffe hints at something distinctly of our moment — the succession of images, the chaos that comes from a blurring between images, creates an obscurity that is itself terrifying. ‘Now’, she asks, ‘if obscurity has so much effect on fiction, what must it have in real life?’ In real life, our confusion elicits a reflex ‘to ascertain the object of our terror’ by ‘acquir[ing] ... the means of escaping it’.³⁶

In Radcliffe’s terms, terror is the fear that awakens the senses and sharpens the mind, mobilising the faculties required to avoid or escape from it. But what is it that is being escaped from? Terror does not originate in clarity but in obscurity. Terror is an effect of the confusion of images, of the projection of our fear into the uncertainty of the unknown or the dark. Terror is flighty, constantly destabilising, defying comprehension. Horror holds the individual fast, gripped by the proximate certainty of explicit atrocity. Switching between the two constitutes the dynamic disruption of security. Judith Butler argued that we must come to see the traces of fragile, precarious, vulnerable humanity not only in the precise and explicit depiction of human cruelty and suffering but in the ‘framing’ of it — ‘by what is left out, maintained outside the frame within which representations appear’.³⁷ Her examples were drawn from the release of the sickening photographs of humiliation and torture of hooded, unnamed Iraqi prisoners by US army personnel in the Abu Ghraib prison in 2003–04 (Figure 8). Although the frames contain explicit and grotesque detail, the identities of the victims have been occluded or erased in the framing of the images, rendering the victims nameless, anonymous sufferers of cruelty. ‘In other words’, Butler writes, ‘the humans who were tortured do not readily conform to a visual, corporeal, or socially recognizable identity; their occlusion and erasure become the continuing sign of their suffering and of their humanity’.³⁸

Judith Butler’s analysis invites us to use the images against the process that created and framed them. Notoriously, the images

35 Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, p. 150.

36 Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, p. 150.

37 Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 73.

38 Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 94.



Figure 8: Abu Ghraib, 2003–04. Image: Wikipedia.

were taken by US servicemen and servicewomen as part of a process of torture — of degrading and destroying the human dignity of the victims through violence and profound psychological pressure. Butler invites us to tilt the images on their frames, to highlight the process by which the victims were anonymised, thereby locating their humanity in these frozen moments of scarifying fragility and precarity. In the reflex of indignation at the use of terror by those supposedly charged with the defence of liberty (functionaries deployed in the mission grotesquely named ‘Iraqi Freedom’), Butler’s technique of paying attention to the framing of fragile humanity hits a raw liberal nerve. The precarity she highlights is all the more compelling because it has been created (no matter how disingenuously) in the name of humanity, freedom, peace and democracy — all invoked to justify the United States’ and coalition’s invasion of Iraq.

How well, then, does Butler’s technique apply to those horrifying images we have seen in the years since the torture at Abu Ghraib? How well can we apply her technique to the images so carefully framed by Islamic State executioners of terrifying, televised and tweeted beheadings? These are not images of any-

mous victims but of victims very clearly identified and deliberately, publicly, pitilessly and viciously eliminated. At one level, the all-too-fragile and precarious humanity of the victims is heightened by the image, but identifying with the precarious humanity of these victims is precisely the effect that Islamic State seeks to manipulate both in the intimate horror of the images and by the panoramic terror of their framing. This is the object of campaigns of terrorism — to mobilise a generalisable condition of disorienting fear — a fear so profound it disrupts the framework of norms and expectations among the target population. Although the particular victims of these acts of terror are meant to be clearly identifiable, it is their vulnerability to attack, their random replaceability by any other individual or group, that makes the strategy of terrorism so effective. In what remains of this article, I would like to reflect on another effect of these images that takes us back to the framing of security with which I began, and that gives us another perspective on Butler's technique of paying attention to the frames of horrifying and terrifying images.

What we see in the Islamic State executions is horrific. I have chosen one example, that of the image taken before the videoed



Figure 9: The murder of American journalist James Foley by Islamic State, 2014. Image: Wikipedia.

beheading of American journalist James Foley in 2014 (Figure 9). There has been such a proliferation of images of Islamic State violence, including beheadings, that I do not claim to speak of them all. Rather, I have chosen this one example to stand for a particular genre of images deliberately staged and framed for American and Western consumption. These are images of pure, unmediated, unmitigated horror. The essence of the cruelty lies in its pitilessness. The brutality is remorseless. Yet this is also the intention and the deliberate effect of the way in which the image has been framed and publicly released. These are images made for mass consumption and for sharing and 'liking' on social media. There is a cruelty in that also — that cruelty here has been commodified. In the globally integrated social-media economy of cruelty, these images are the jackpot. All this suits our offended and horrified consciences. But in a sense, this perspective misses an essential connection between the images of Islamic State executions and the torture at Abu Ghraib, and indeed the Hobbesian frontispiece image of Leviathan. The connection I speak of is that all, in rather different though mutually reinforcing ways, are images of security.

Our modern obsession with security derives in part from the ultimate valuation of the term by Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan*. Hobbesian security is a disruptive concept that is reliant on a visual field that switches seamlessly from delimited and intimate surveillance to expansive, even panoramic spectacle. Consider the setting of both the Abu Ghraib and Islamic State images. The torture depicted in the Abu Ghraib images is sequestered in confined spaces — prison cells or empty corridors. The intimacy of horrific torture reverberates between the walls and bars. This is a crime that thrives on and in incarcerated space. Typically (though not exclusively) the Islamic State beheadings take place in open, empty landscapes. This is a crime that is brazen. It is a statement of imperial possession — a terrain is being claimed and colonised, a state is being made in and by these acts of horror. The blood shed on the empty terrain is a consecration of claimed sovereignty. In that sense, Islamic State is viciously aping the bloody tropes of Western imperialism. Each execution is a ceremony of possession, a reanimation of colonial presumption.

Be that as it may, my present concern is with the image of security. Both the Abu Ghraib and Islamic State images are framed, produced from, indeed made possible by a wider spectacle of

warfare beyond the frames. It is war that activates the torture and it is war that summons the executions. Our gaze beyond the frame is drawn to the panoramic display of death, destruction and suffering that is war. Our vision of war switches seamlessly between the intimate and the panoramic, the fragile and the brutal, the horrifying and the terrifying. Herein lies the effect of the Islamic State and Abu Ghraib images. In that bifurcated field of vision, security resides not only in the *vision* but the *framing* of horror — a moment frozen in abject insecurity. Both are images of horror — of absolute cruelty inflicted without mercy or pity, remorseless, chilling, explicit in every detail. These are images that leave nothing to the imagination. How then can they be images of security?

By activating the surveillance of horrific spectacle, security is shunted beyond the frame into a realm of constant anticipation of new horrors — a state best described as sheer terror. Security, as Hobbes described it, was a state of mind, an orientation of thought best described as ‘anticipation’.³⁹ To anticipate is to look forward in time, to seek out that which is likely but not yet readily apparent (that which is, in Radcliffe’s terms, still ‘obscure’). That which is likely (in Hobbesian terms) is an equation built on the certainties of human passion and frailty. To secure oneself, in Hobbesian terms, is thus to look forward to what one expects from other men and women, namely self-interest, competition, desire for wealth, power, and the adulation of others (‘glory’).

The Islamic State and Abu Ghraib images are incarnations of horror, the condensation of moments of horror inscribed on, inflicted upon sentient bodies. Their purpose, however, is to point beyond the frames to the war each set of images seeks to normalise. These pictured horrors are intended to serve as momentary realisations of a brutality already in existence beyond the frames, impinging on and conditioning every moment of the actions pictured within the frames. The connection to that brutality is an implication these images invite us to make — the brutality of terrorism, of Islamic fundamentalism, of a revived Caliphate (call it what you will) on our doorstep tomorrow, or the next day, or at any indeterminate point in our future. By inviting us to draw out this implication — to look the present horror in the face but to see the

39 On the ancient origins of security as a state of mind, see J. Hamilton, *Security: Politics, Humanity and the Philology of Care*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013.

future threat — the Abu Ghraib and Islamic State images activate and heighten our extreme fear — our terror — at what the images portend. In that sense, both are images of security.

Thomas Hobbes could not have dreamt of the possibilities of modern photography, but in the absence of it, his frontispiece image already pre-empts the framing of security that we see in more recent images of security. The sovereign Leviathan is literally a beast of security — a strange beast, corporeal but inanimate. It is composed of the bodies of its subjects, and it towers over a human landscape and cityscape as a protector but also as a destroyer. The sovereign summons powers in law and in war to kill — this is the *ultima ratio* of Hobbesian sovereignty. The beastly connotations of the frontispiece Leviathan are meant to horrify. Confronted with such a beast, the appropriate human response is awe, a condition of the sublime, a subjugation of the self. The security we are asked to imagine lies not in the image but beyond the frame in the anticipation of what the image portends. Our security is a condition of terrified anticipation of the manifold horrors that lie not just within but outside the frame of the image, the reality of which has been distilled and condensed within the frame.

This condition of viewing horror and anticipating new horrors is the condition of our age. It is the condition of witnessed horror that we cannot avoid in our streets, on our screens, or through social media. It is the condition of anticipated terror activated by a live streaming of horror at our fingertips. This is the condition of our security — to be horrified by what we see in a succession of carefully framed images of cruelty and violence, but also to be terrified in switching our gaze beyond the frames.