



Detail of 29th Infantry Battalion advancing over "No Man's Land" through the German barbed wire and heavy fire (see Fig. 2)

Words and Pictures: Writing Atrocity into Canada's First World War Official Photographs

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The Canadian War Museum (CWM) possesses a little-known photography collection of some 80,000 catalogued images. About 40 percent of this collection relates to the First World War (1914–18). With the exception of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) albums, which contain some 6,800 official prints, and a considerable number of black and white professional portraits, the bulk of the images are the work of regular soldiers, nurses, and other military personnel. In recent years the collection has increasingly become a source of illustrations for books, films, documentaries and, more recently, web and internet projects. Deserving of thoughtful interpretation, it has not to date been the subject of any extensive academic exploration.

Most studies of Canadian First World War photography have been carried out using the somewhat similar Library and Archives (LAC) collection, which for decades has been better known than the CWM's. In part, this is because the LAC traditionally employed a number of trained photographic archivists with an academic interest and commitment to the collections they were responsible for. To date, the CWM has not emulated this approach, although its collections, like LAC's, are now more accessible thanks to web-based databases. Whether, in today's electronic world, the staff of national institutions should subject their collections to internal academic analysis or concentrate on standardized descriptions of their holdings is another debate, although both have a role to play in forwarding public knowledge of our material heritage.

One of LAC's former photography archivists, Peter Robertson, was the first to explore the CEF photographs in his 1972 book, *Relentless Verity: Canadian Military Photographers since 1885*. His 1978 article in *History of Photography*, exposed an admittedly limited contemporary readership to the very real presence of fake war photography.¹ By then, most of the soldiers who had denounced the practice in their own time were dead. His colleague Andrew Birrell, in his brief 1978 article in *Photo Canada*, identified a further example of the practice of faking, which is discussed below.² Authors such as former LAC archivist and current CWM historian Tim Cook have revisited their conclusions and given them an important larger context but have not

contributed new visual analysis.³ Others have responded to theoretical concerns as much as to the need for formal analysis. David Alexandre's MA thesis, *Looking through Ruin: Canadian Photography at Ypres and the Archive of War*, examines specific First World War photographs and their post-war appropriation and, like Robertson and Birrell, he used imagery from the LAC collection. Alexandre argues that, "the archive is an accumulative institution capable of incorporating a variety of conflicting narratives without ruining its authority."⁴

While recognizing that Janina Struk's and Barbie Zelizer's recent writings on Holocaust atrocity and war photography are studies of photographs from another period and mindset, their approach is relevant to an analysis of First World War imagery. Struk's 2004 book on interpreting Holocaust images, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence*, questions the nature of such photographs as documentary evidence and argues that, more often than not, their provenance and true meaning take second place to the uses to which political interests have put them. At different times, and in different contexts, what mattered about such images, Struk suggests, "was what they appeared to show."⁵ Zelizer, in her 1998 book, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye*, writes that the published photographs of the 1944 liberation of Poland's Majdanek camp "offered only generalized interpretations of what the images depicted . . . The words alongside the images, authenticated the depictions at their side, but they did so in broad language that rendered them generic representations of the atrocities . . . The photographs guided publics to the broader story of atrocity. The photos thereby were set in place as symbols of context."⁶ In developing her theme of photographs as symbols of a larger context, in "When War is reduced to a Photograph," Zelizer writes that war imagery tends to reflect existing commonly-shared thinking about conflict as opposed to "actually reflecting how war is waged."⁷ Drawing on Roland Barthes's work on semiotics, she refers to the twinning of the 'denotative' and the 'connotative': the 'denotative' being associated with verisimilitude and realism, i.e. what the photograph depicts, and the 'connotative' with symbolism, or what the photograph means.⁸

While neither the history of First World War fake photography nor the events of the Holocaust are central to this article, they do provide some useful parallels to the story of First World War atrocity images and supply an entry point to their analysis. In both cases, new meaning was constructed out of existing photographs to make very specific points that the public could then accord with their own views of what such imagery should look like. To show how this was achieved in the context of vilifying the enemy during the Great War, this study will consider four official Canadian First World War

photographs presented as powerful images of atrocity in wartime exhibitions and publications. Source material was drawn from the souvenir catalogues for the three wartime touring Canadian official photography exhibitions that originated in London, England, copies of which are found in the CWM library;⁹ the sleeves of the original glass negatives housed in LAC;¹⁰ and the War Museum's albums of prints compiled from these negatives sometime after 1919.¹¹ We cannot reliably assign authorship to any of the contemporary writing associated with these sources although the images can be credited based on the photographer's service dates. The three official Canadian photographers, all British, Ivor Castle, Harry Knobel, and William Rider-Rider, worked overseas successively from 1916 to 1919.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines 'atrocity' as an extremely wicked or cruel act, especially one involving physical violence or injury. Rape, murder, and torture are typical examples involving humans, but the wanton destruction of religious structures, for example, or the razing of crops, also fall within the definition. War involves many acts of this kind and the circumstances in which they would not be considered atrocities are generally enshrined in international laws and conventions. The recent debates surrounding the U.S. practice of "waterboarding" demonstrate that views on torture depend on the practitioner's perspective. Combatants, however, need to believe that war is only brutal when practised by the enemy and thus atrocity stories were widely distributed by the Allies (and similarly by their enemies) through means that included cartoons and magazine stories. Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemaekers (1869–1956) attained a world-wide reputation with his anti-German cartoons that focussed on the unspeakable fates meted out to Belgian and French civilians. It is estimated that his drawings reached a newspaper circulation of 300 million in the United States alone during the war. His images include one featuring the British nurse Edith Cavell, *Thrown to the Swine: the Martyred Nurse* (1916), which shows her dead body on the floor of a barn while rotund pink pigs, identified as Germans by their distinctive helmets, eat her.¹² Many believed the atrocities Raemaekers depicted to be true following the publication of the widely disseminated *Bryce Report* of May 1915 that purported to have documented, based on 1,200 witness depositions, the systematic murder and violation of Belgians by German soldiers during their invasion of Belgium, including details of rape and the slaughter of children. Indeed, Raemaekers played a role in ensuring this result by creating illustrations that drew on the Report following its publication. According to historian Suzanne Evans, Raemaekers successfully "depicted the war as a religious battle between good and evil."¹³

The Canadian First World War official photographs housed in the Canadian War Museum present no comparable images of obvious atrocities.

Furthermore, while the descriptive captions that accompany each picture in the post-war albums and the original sleeves containing the glass negatives very occasionally allude to atrocities, the word ‘atrocities’ is never mentioned. This apparent absence of atrocity images and text might imply that this evil did not exist or, perhaps, when photographers viewed potentially horrific situations, respect for the dead and sensitivity to the living took precedence. We know, however, from the catalogue captions for photographs displayed in wartime exhibitions that atrocity was meant to be visible and its absence was not an issue of respect or sensitivity. During the war, violence was made present when the text associated with the atrocity-free photographs injected new meaning. Described as a “murdered orchard,” a picture of felled trees took on new meaning and the absent was made present.

At the beginning of the war, Canadian soldiers were allowed to carry cameras with them while on active duty.¹⁴ In early 1915, however, the authorities effectively banned the possession of such equipment by officers or men in their units as a matter of security. In 1916, the newly created Canadian War Records Office under Sir Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, successfully petitioned the Canadian War Office for the right to allow official photographers to accompany the forces to the front lines. The goal was to create an historic record, but Beaverbrook also wanted to ensure that the civilian population knew what was going on. He believed that this documentation, which also included film, diaries, magazines, books, and art, could serve as an adjunct to propaganda in wartime through publication and exhibition, and still maintain its role as an historical document after the war. All the photographs were passed by a censor before they could be viewed publicly. Those that were not passed are marked in the albums as “not for sale or reproduction.”

Working with heavy equipment including glass plates (the eventual negatives) and often far from the action, the work of the official photographers was almost immediately published in newspapers, magazines, and books and exhibited for sale. According to the final 1919 souvenir catalogue, millions visited the touring exhibitions between 1916 and 1919. Indeed, the first exhibition, which opened in London in December 1916, was so successful that it afterwards travelled in Canada and the United States for two years, acting as an effective propaganda machine in support of the war, especially at its two known Canadian locations, Ottawa and Toronto. The two most prolific photographers on view were Ivor Castle (1877–1947) and, particularly, William Rider-Rider (1889–1979). Between them, they covered the war from August 1916 to its end. Both were newspaper photographers, seconded from the British *Daily Mirror*, and both had, as a result, an instinct for photographs that told a story. In Castle’s case, he had also learned how

to construct a more meaningful photograph by putting parts of several photographs together. Indeed, Castle's constructions (never publicly described as such and, possibly even today, not all identified) were widely popular and played a significant role in drawing the public into the exhibitions.

Castle's image entitled *The Taking of Vimy Ridge* was the highlight of the second exhibition of Canadian war photographs, which opened in London in July 1917 soon after the important April Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge (Fig. 1). Reproduced with the massive dimensions of 11' × 20' (3.35 × 6.09 m), the photograph could be purchased for the unbelievable sum of 120 pounds, the price of a house for some people. It was not, however, a single shot. It was made up from two photographs, only one of which included dead bodies, with a little artistry applied to create the explosions in the sky (Figs. 2 and 3).¹⁵ A note on the back of the glass negative for the un-peopled shot implies its future use: "Trim and print out shell in centre of plate." The shell, however, remains in the constructed photograph. The bodies in the composite, however, are closer together than in their original shot, suggesting some trimming at the centre. What is important is that when no authentic photograph existed, the composite photo *had* to exist in order to provide an expectant public with an image that accorded with what they anticipated in any depiction of such a significant battle. This meant that the Vimy Ridge photograph had to include dead Canadian bodies to accord with common perceptions of the cost of victory.

The First World War was different from its predecessors in terms of the vast numbers of soldiers fighting – tens of millions – and the sheer quantity of horrible injuries they received from the powerful machinery used. With rare exceptions such as Castle's constructed photograph discussed above, depicting the dead was frowned on for religious, ethical, and social reasons. In the finding aid that accompanies the CWM albums among the suitable subjects listed are generals and their troops, men on bicycles, but no victory shots and definitely no *identified* members of the more than 60,000 Canadian dead prior to burial. Ironically, because of Beaverbrook's expressed support, depicting the enemy's dead was slightly more acceptable. "Sir Max says cover up the Canadians before you photograph them as much as you like, but don't bother about the German dead," reported Captain Wilfred Holt-White to Lieutenant-Colonel R. Manley Sims.¹⁶ As the photograph discussed above attests, this clearly was not always achieved.

However, there was a significant lack of photographic evidence of death and the Canadian War Records Office found other ways to visually document it. Photographs of carefully tended burial plots and cemeteries were the predominant means used to record the cost of war and lend dignity to the mangled remains that lay below. This, however, did not deal with the lack of



1 | Unattributed, *The Second Exhibit*, Grafton Galleries, July 1917, photograph, 10 × 11.1 cm, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 19930003-299. (Photo: Canadian Expeditionary Force series M262q).

2 | Ivor Castle (attrib.), *Photograph taken during the Battle of Vimy Ridge – 29th Infantry Battalion advancing over “No Man’s Land” through the German barbed wire and heavy fire*, April 1917, photograph, 9.5 × 12.3 cm, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 19920085-915. (Photo: Canadian Expeditionary Force series O-1162).

3 | Ivor Castle (attrib.), *Photograph taken during the Battle of Vimy Ridge – Canadians occupying old German third line trenches*, April 1917, photograph, 9.8 × 11.1 cm, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 19920085-941. (Photo: Canadian Expeditionary Force series O-1188).





4 | Unattributed, *A crucifix in a cemetery recently shelled by the Boche – note two German graves*, June 1917, photograph, 9.7 × 12.3 cm, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 19920085-436. (Photo: Canadian Expeditionary Force series O-1533).

visual documentation of atrocity. In this instance, text and photograph were combined to create a symbolic language that could readily impart particular messages to those who viewed the photographs without causing distress by showcasing real violence. In essence, atrocity was visually absent, but symbolically present, just like the dead. To achieve this, the caption writers had to draw on existing notions of the nature of atrocity and give new meaning to their selected photographs. The Canadian and British public, which included the staff of the Canadian War Records Office, acquired most of their knowledge of atrocities from listening to the stories of others about Belgian babies being stabbed and French women being raped and from reading their papers and magazines and seeing Raemaekers's cartoons. The organization's staff thus chose texts that aligned the exhibited photographs

with known propaganda and, furthermore, laid the atrocities at the enemy's door because in their eyes only the enemy was capable of such brutality.

The four photographs discussed below show how text was used to 'connote' stronger meanings in photographs that already 'denoted' a related interpretation. The four photographs I have selected to demonstrate this process also show how the twinning of 'denotative' and 'connotative' associated with Barthes's works in Canadian official war images. In the first picture, a Canadian soldier is looking at a German grave marker in a damaged cemetery. Titled *Even the Grave is Not Sacred*, it was included in the second exhibition of Canadian war photographs (Fig. 4).¹⁷ Oddly, for such a seemingly innocuous photograph of a broken stone, it was marked "Not on sale." Not only its title but its catalogue caption explains its unsuitability for purchase. "While the Allied Troops treat the dead, friend or foe, with the same care and the same reverence, the Hun is quite incapable of such humanity . . . in the section of this 'God's Acre' which the Germans appropriated for their own dead, they erected 'suitable memorials' to their own fallen, they blasted the bodies of the hated French from their tombs and left them uncovered and uncared for to rot still further into decay."¹⁸ In the exhibition such images were contrasted with pictures of Canadians carefully tending their comrades' graves. This undoubtedly ensured that any photograph of a destroyed cemetery could be understood as the result of German action and the enemy's lack of respect for the dead. There is no hyperbole in the text accompanying the destroyed cemetery photograph in the post-war album; the war is over and demonization is no longer required. It states simply: "A crucifix in a cemetery recently shelled by the Boche – note two German graves."

Four entries later in the second wartime exhibition catalogue, one reads the title, *What the Germans did to Vraignes* (Fig. 5).¹⁹ This print is also marked "not on sale" and the text rather than the photograph explains the reasons. "There will never be a more complete illustration of a German orgie [*sic*] of destruction than is represented in this picture . . ." it begins before going on to explain that the little town was not shelled but set on fire by the retreating Germans. "When the fire was done its work," the caption continues, "great chain cables were threaded through the windows [of the remaining buildings]. To either end were hitched horses. The animals were then flogged until the chains burst through what remained of the standing walls, and brought the buildings tumbling down." Here again, the purpose was to engender a conclusion that ruined towns and villages were the result of German action and in addition, to ensure that the animal-loving British public knew that horses were badly treated. The caption in the post-war album and on the glass negative sleeve references a village rather than a town; without overstatement, it reads factually: "Village of Vraignes recaptured



5 | Ivor Castle (attrib.), *Village of Vraignes recaptured from the Germans in the Great Advance*, March 1917, photograph, 7 × 16 cm, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 19920085-110. (Photo: Canadian Expeditionary Force series 0-1107c).

from the Germans in the Great Advance.” To some degree, this may confirm Beaverbrook’s belief that photographs could be an adjunct to propaganda in wartime and become an historical document after the war.

The third photograph is of the destroyed French cathedral of Roye and is titled *The Gate of Destruction* (Fig. 6).²⁰ It was also not on sale at the second exhibition. The caption opens by stating that it “illustrates the most inexplicable piece of Hun psychology on record . . . [the Germans] blasphemously blew up the House of God.”²¹ Putting the enemy on the wrong side of God was an important part of the Allied propaganda message. In the popular wartime Canadian War Records publication *Canada in Khaki*, a double-page spread on pages 110–11 of volume 2 features six photographs of ruined churches; one of the individual captions includes the loaded words, “A violated sanctuary.” While the short album caption for Roye Cathedral is a little closer in tone to that of the catalogue it specifies the organ only: “Wanton destruction of the organ in Roye Cathedral – removing and smashing the pipes.” The caption on the negative sleeve is similarly worded.

The fourth photograph, titled *The Murdered Orchard*, was for sale at the second exhibition for eight pounds, ten shillings (Fig. 7).²² This title is far more chilling than the image, and certainly implies atrocity. The caption reads: “The wanton destruction of these trees can only be stigmatised as



6 | Ivor Castle (attrib.), *Wanton destruction of the organ in Roye Cathedral – removing and smashing the pipes*, April 1917, photograph, 12 × 9.5 cm, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 19920085-309. (Photo: Canadian Expeditionary Force series O-1419).



7 | Ivor Castle (attrib.), *The wanton destruction of the Hun – every tree and orchard in the evacuated area is cut*, March 1917, photograph, 9.5 × 12 cm, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum 19920085-059. (Photo: Canadian Expeditionary Force series O-1058).

‘murder.’ To prevent their being of any use to the advancing troops, the Germans took the life of each one by severing its trunk.” Standing in for the photographer, as figures do regularly throughout the official pictures, the two figures act as witnesses to the destruction. Again, the album and negative sleeve captions are close: “The wanton destruction of the Hun – every tree and orchard in the evacuated area is cut.” In Christian iconography, trees symbolize life lived in accordance with God’s plan: the tree’s annual cycle refers to life, death, and resurrection. In the context of the exhibited photograph, the destroyed trees may refer not only to the atrocious loss

of human life in the war but also to the Crucifixion, a theme that would resonate with a public that increasingly looked to the Christian faith for an explanation for the war's destructiveness. If Christ's death on the cross was redemptive, then the deaths of millions of soldiers on the battlefield were redemptive too. The equation of trees and bodies was also the subject of war poems. British poet and soldier Edmund Blunden wrote of the battlefield in *Thiepval Wood* (1916): "Ember-black the gibbet trees like bones or thorns protrude/From the poisonous smoke." Although this poem was not published until a decade after the war's end, it clearly shows the mentality of the period with its intersections of the natural and human worlds. Perhaps Canadian military doctor John McCrae's ubiquitous poem *In Flanders Fields* (1915) is even more pertinent; generations then and now equate the poppy with the dead.

With its veneer of verisimilitude and its association with witnessing, photography was a promising medium for documenting atrocity. The Canadian War Records Office, however, was faced with a dilemma because there were no photographs of atrocities. This was particularly problematic when it came to exhibitions. Official photographer Ivor Castle had to superimpose two images taken from behind the lines in relative safety to create an image of impending victory at human cost in his photograph, *The Taking of Vimy Ridge*, and the Canadian War Records office had to connote meaning from images that denoted something somewhat more prosaic. By aligning the meaning of hundreds of photographs of ruins, broken trees, churches, and cemeteries with existing expectations about the prevalence of wartime atrocity, the Canadian War Records office was able to give a documentary presence to violence despite its absence from the official photographic record, but one coloured more by propaganda than by reality.

NOTES

- 1 Peter ROBERTSON, *Relentless Verity: Canadian Military Photographers since 1885* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Peter ROBERTSON, "Canadian Photojournalism during the First World War," *History of Photography* 2, no. 1 (January 1978): 37–52. Canadian First World War photography is also discussed in Jane CARMICHAEL, *First World War Photographers* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- 2 Andrew BIRRELL, "The war to end war," *Photo Canada* 2, no. 5 (November–December 1978): 61–8.
- 3 See Tim Cook, "Documenting War and Forging Reputations: Sir Max Aitken and the Canadian War Records Office in the First World War," *War in History* 10 (July 2003):

- 265–95 and “Over the Top: Iconic war image not what it seems” in *100 Photographs That Changed Canada*, ed. Mark Reid (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2009), 36–7.
- 4 David ALEXANDRE, *Looking Through Ruin: Canadian Photography at Ypres and the Archive of War*, MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2000, ii.
 - 5 Janina STRUK, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 38.
 - 6 Barbie ZELIZER, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 60.
 - 7 Barbie ZELIZER, “When War is reduced to a Photograph” in *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, ed. Stuart Allen and Barbie Zelizer (London: Routledge, 2004), 116.
 - 8 Roland BARTHES, “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). Barthes's 1964 essay describes the analogical relationship between the photographic image and the real world as ‘denotative.’ The ‘connotative’ he understands as rhetorical, in that it delivers meaning.
 - 9 *Catalogue of the Canadian War Photographs Exhibition*, 1917; *Catalogue of the Canadian War Photographs Exhibition (Second Exhibition)*, 1917; *New Exhibition of Canadian War Photographs in Colour*, 1919. The date of the first exhibition refers to when it was seen in Glasgow and is not the date of the first viewing, which was 1916. These catalogues are in the CWM's Hartland Molson Library.
 - 10 These are part of LAC's Department of National Defence fonds.
 - 11 At the CWM, these are known as the Canadian Expeditionary Force official war photographs and a contemporary finding aid is part of the album series. The acquisition number of the whole is 19920085, with each individual image having its own subsequent number.
 - 12 <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ARTraemaekers.htm> (accessed 3 November 2010).
 - 13 Suzanne EVANS, *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs: World War I and the Politics of Grief* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 65.
 - 14 See Andrew C. RODGER, “Amateur Photography by Soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Archivaria* 26 (Summer 1988): 163–8.
 - 15 The photograph of the bodies in the CWM album is numbered O.1188 (19920085-941). Combined with CWM's O.1162 (19920085-915) it becomes the LAC's O-1162.
 - 16 Quoted in ROBERTSON, “Canadian Photojournalism,” 41.
 - 17 CWM O.1533 (19920085-436).
 - 18 *Catalogue of the Canadian War Photographs Exhibition (Second Exhibition)*, 11.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 11–12. CWM O.1107C (19920085-110).
 - 20 CWM O.1419 (19920085-309).
 - 21 *Catalogue of the Canadian War Photographs Exhibition (Second Exhibition)*, 15.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, 19. CWM 19920085-059 (O.1058).

Les mots et les images : inscrire l'atrocité sur les photographies canadiennes officielles de la Première Guerre mondiale

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Les photographies canadiennes officielles de la Première Guerre mondiale (1914–1918) conservées au Musée canadien de la guerre (MCG) ne montrent aucune représentation évidente d'atrocités. Nous savons pourtant, d'après les légendes des images présentées lors d'expositions en temps de guerre, que les atrocités étaient censées être visibles. Pendant la guerre, le Canadian War Records Office (CWRO) a compensé l'absence d'atrocités et montré la violence en se servant des textes associés à ces photographies pour leur donner un sens nouveau. Décrite comme un « verger assassiné », une photo d'arbres abattus prenait une nouvelle signification et ce qui était absent devenait présent. Pour montrer comment cela a pu être réalisé dans un contexte visant à discréditer l'ennemi pendant la Grande Guerre, j'ai étudié quatre photographies canadiennes officielles de la Première Guerre mondiale présentées au public comme de puissantes représentations d'atrocités. Par ces exemples, je montre comment, en retravaillant le sens de centaines de photographies de ruines, d'arbres brisés, d'églises et de cimetières, exposées dans des lieux publics, pour les accorder aux attentes concernant la prévalence d'atrocités en temps de guerre, le CWRO a pu donner une présence documentée à la violence en l'absence d'archives photographiques officielles, présence qui reflétait cependant davantage la propagande que la réalité.

Ma source principale se trouve dans une collection peu connue et étudiée de quelque 80 000 photographies cataloguées du Musée canadien de la guerre. Environ 40 pour cent de cette collection se rapporte à la Première Guerre mondiale. Ces images, qui méritent une interprétation attentive, n'ont, jusqu'ici, fait l'objet d'aucune exploration savante approfondie. Ce qui a été fait a presque exclusivement utilisé la collection à peu près semblable de Bibliothèque et Archives Canada (BAC), qui, pendant des décennies, était mieux connue que le MCG. Toutefois, en utilisant les albums du Musée de photographies de la Première Guerre mondiale, compilés quelque temps après 1919 cependant, et trois catalogues souvenirs du MCG d'expositions tournantes de photographies canadiennes officielles provenant de Londres, ainsi que les pochettes des négatifs sur verre originaux conservées au BAC à partir desquels les photographies des albums ont été reproduites, j'ai pu reconstruire

la démarche photographique canadienne officielle concernant les atrocités du temps de guerre.

Tout en reconnaissant la difficulté inhérente qu'il y a à utiliser comme exemples des photographies d'une autre époque et témoignant d'un état d'esprit différent, je me suis inspiré, pour aborder ce sujet, des écrits récents de Janina Struk et de Barbie Zelizer sur les atrocités de l'Holocauste et la photographie de guerre. Se fondant sur le travail de Roland Barthes en sémiotique, Zelizer se réfère au jumelage du « dénotatif » et du « connotatif » : le « dénotatif » étant associé à la vraisemblance et au réalisme, c'est-à-dire ce que la photographie représente, et le « connotatif » au symbolisme, ou ce que la photographie signifie. J'examine aussi la pratique officielle de réaliser des images composites à partir de plusieurs photographies afin de donner à un public curieux des images qui s'accordent à l'idée qu'il se faisait de la guerre, alors que de telles images n'existaient pas. Bien que les événements de l'Holocauste et la fabrication de fausses photographies ne soient évidemment pas au cœur de cet article, ils fournissent des parallèles utiles à l'histoire des images d'atrocités de la Première Guerre mondiale et une porte d'entrée à leur analyse. Dans les deux cas, un nouveau sens a été construit à partir de photographies existantes afin de présenter des idées très spécifiques qu'on pourrait ensuite associer à l'idée qu'on se faisait de cette sorte de représentation.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette