

# Deliberative Rhetoric

## Retoryka deliberatywna

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The Visualization of War Crimes and Human Rights  
Violations* by Marouf Hasian, Jr. Lanham/London:  
Lexington Books. 2016**

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*Forensic Rhetorics and Satellite Surveillance: The Visualization of War Crimes and Human Rights Violations* by Marouf Hasian, Jr. – a professor of Communication Studies at the University of Utah – is an interesting contribution to postdisciplinary studies. The 240-page-long 2016 publication from Lexington Books is located at the intersection of rhetoric and security research. The book comprises an introductory chapter (“Satellite Imaging, Humanitarian Dreams and the Twenty-First Century Pursuit of Forensic Truths”) that showcases the author’s research perspectives and justifies the rhetorical approach to satellite imagery, five case studies into how satellite surveillance over the skies of Bosnia, Gaza, Darfur/Sudan, Pakistan and the Mediterranean Sea has been used to provide forensic evidence and document war crimes, human rights violations and migrant rescue operations, and a concluding chapter in which the insights from these case studies are used to argue for a conceptual expansion of the Foucauldian notion of *dispositif*. The conclusion (“The Constitutive Power of Satellite Surveillance and the Crafting of Securitized and Militarized Dispositifs”) alerts the reader to the close future need to confront the rhetorical nature of surveillance data and to deconstruct the *realpolitik* of hegemonic forces behind the securitized and militarized public policies drafted on the basis of surveillance and biopower control. The publication is supplemented with an extensive bibliography of academic, policy and popular sources, a useful index, and a few reproductions of satellite images with annotations that illustrate the specific mechanisms of forensic rhetorics of surveillance.

Although in Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric* the forensic genus relies mainly on witness accounts and provides interpretative schema for determining guilt/innocence rather than on material sources to reconstruct the factuality of an alleged crime, the current enchantment with surveillance imagery in many instances of court practice, according to Hasian, seems to displace human testimony and attribute the

proof value to visual or even satellite images. Even though at the end of the twentieth century, satellite photographs were still seen as too abstract and remote to make a claim to truth documentation, the growth in technologies of surveillance, their regulatory frameworks, and their profuse commercial and public uses have contributed to a gradual acceptance of surveillance as not just subsidiary material open to interpretation, but even as the corroborative proof of the crime. This, according to the author is a result of the recent formation of *dispositifs* – discourses, institutions, administrative and scientific frameworks, and belief systems – that foreground risk, insecurity and governance in the post 9/11 world.

In the book the author skillfully traces many cases in which the colour-coded schemes emanating from public and private satellite operators provide convincing, albeit imaginative and aesthetically enhanced, forensic “evidence.” The visual rhetoric of this evidence relies on the *topos* of contrast, as the images are clearly deliberately coded to compare the “before” and “after” scenes of attack, destruction, raid or movement. Another validating device is the *topos* of scale or degree through which destructive effects or humanitarian costs can be “measured” through visual evidence emanating from surveillance maps. This purportedly lends itself to adequate preventive or punitive means being possible to be finally administered. Yet another variable considered is the granularity of satellite visuals or the level of articulation of detail that can be used to either narrow down the scope (and lose the grand perspective), or to provide perspective without nuancing minute forms of damage. For many stakeholders satellite images have the argumentative power of dispassionate, long-distance, machine-operated screening that obliterates the contextualized, motivated and individualistic experience of witnessing.

The main question asked in the book is whether the images “can speak for themselves” (NB the *prosopopeia* inherent in this formulation). Do they provide the necessary and sufficient type of evidence required for the fair trial and administration of justice or for further evidence-grounded policy proposals? In the overall context of such visualization and mapping, too little attention, according to the author, is given to who does the coding or scaling and to what persuasive or ideological effects. The question of control over the surveillance technologies as well as the economic access to and political censoring of such material is revisited in the book’s five case studies several times. Each of these case studies enables the readers to see both the advantages and the traps of selective and decontextualized applications of surveillance mapping and deployment of sensor monitoring devices.

Chapter 2: “Visualizing Srebrenica, The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the Growing Acceptance of Satellite Evidence” shows how some of the Serbian military installations and networks were visualized for

the public opinion in 1999 through satellite imagery and thus how they helped to garner support for the NATO intervention in the form of air war. Although they were portrayed as legitimizations of responsive measures, the NATO surveillance materials can be also claimed to have “created” the crisis.

In Chapter 3: “Satellite Imagery and the Visual/Virtual Israeli Occupation of the Gaza” the author traces the war of disinformation between the Palestinian and Israeli parties involved in the 2014 operations. The chapter interrogates the truth criteria the international public has used to justify or reject the Israeli claims to have eradicated dangerous terrorists with the use of remote sensory imaging.

The focus of Chapter 4: “George Clooney, Surveillance of Sudanese Borders, and the Sentinel Project” is a discussion around the current possibility that celebrity initiatives could foot the bill of some humanitarian organizations’ as well as justice tribunals’ need to police the conflict zones and prevent (or document) atrocities against remote populations, such as those in Darfur.

Chapter 5: “The Drone Wars over Pakistan and the Aerial ‘Manhunts’ for Taliban and Al-Qaeda Enemies” highlights the controversies of producing visualities of conflict zones and provide military intelligence to “take out” dangerous individuals by remote-controlled drones originally allowed over Pakistan for reconnaissance purposes.

The last case study on “EUROSUR Surveillance, Mediterranean ‘Search and Rescue’ and the Visualization of Europe’s ‘Migrant Crisis’,” in Chapter 6 takes up the issue of moral implications of tracking “irregular migrants” trying to reach Europe illegally. While the surveillance data can be used to pin down human traffickers and save lives, they can also be used to avoid rescue missions and to deter desperate refugees from crossing dangerous waters.

The main merit of the publication is alerting the public to the rhetorical nature of surveillance imagery and the need to establish interpretive frameworks that could prevent manipulating the images for ideological purposes, for example by changing the resolution of the images to hide some types of destruction or movement (especially if it represents “our” actions). The author reiterates the commitment to distinguish between the epistemic “truth effects” that arise from a conventional reading of surveillance data and the “ontological material conditions on the ground.” Even though it is sometimes hard and costly to gather, human intelligence, witness accounts, photos and video-recordings of data on the ground, and monitoring other signals can help triangulate the access to facts and provide objective forensic evidence. The author rightly calls for critical legal rhetoric studies that would explain why, in some case studies, high-resolution images have been accepted as primary or exclusive evidence to prove (lack of) human rights violations. Without denying their tremendous usefulness in the pursuit of justice and their deterrent value in

the case of future conflicts, the author explores the power/knowledge/discourse junctions of surveillance missions and directs out attention to the rhetorical nature of satellite imagery that can be used to legitimize ethical solutions as much as to manipulate public opinion.