Emergency Images:

The COBR Committee and the visual culture of emergency politics.

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Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruption throughout the globe. The disruptions it caused to my PhD seems minuscule in comparison to medical emergencies, death and loss of earnings. The personal impact is not something to be discussed here.

However, I should outline some key effects that COVID-19 had upon my ability to conduct my practice-based research. Firstly, the primary practice-based research output of a public exhibition, had been planned to take place in the atrium entrance of The Guardian Newspaper, Kings Cross, in July 2020. This had to be firstly postponed and then cancelled due to national lockdowns. When the situation eased, I spoke with The Guardian again and I was informed that they were cancelling all exhibitions in the space for the foreseeable future. Due to this, and the general closure of the majority of art galleries, museums and public spaces during the pandemic, it became urgent to find a space to host the physical exhibition and to time it between the end of one lockdown and the potential start of another. In this way, I am hugely grateful to Turf Projects for giving me free reign to convert their workshop into a gallery space at such short notice. This involved a total revamp, redecoration and new lighting instillation. Even during the exhibition itself, the space had to close for a number of days due to a COVID outbreak in the building.

In addition to the public exhibition, I had planned to hold workshops with local groups around the claiming of their own emergency events. This was not possible as the University of Essex had stopped granting ethics approvals for face-to-face meetings due to the pandemic.

Despite these setbacks, it is my opinion that the project has benefited from this adversity. Holding the exhibition in a disused shop within a shopping centre in Croydon offered it to a new and wider audience than The Guardian building ever would have.

Declaration

I, Theodore William Price, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written consent.

Signed: Date July 8th , 2022

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I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Gavin Grindon and Dr Bernadette Buckley who have guided me over the last six years of this project. Gavin's clinical reading of drafts was immeasurably useful, and helped funnel my creative ideas into a more academic form. The often three-hour long online conversations with Bernadette helped me contextualise the project and continually realise its value in wider debates and artistic practices within the field of art and politics. Together they were a formidable team.

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I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the people who work at Turf Projects in Croydon and acknowledge their generous support and the freedom they gave me to take over their workshop for the Emergency State exhibition.

The largest acknowledgement must be given to my partner Alexis Ramsden who has supported me throughout this extraordinarily long and winding project. And finally, I thank my twin daughters Tilda and Lerryn who arrived after the first year of study. They have grounded me throughout this process, constantly reminding me of the importance of experimentation, play and humour when learning new tasks.

Abbreviations

COBR	Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms
CCA	Civil Contingencies Act 2004

How to Read This Thesis and Practice-Research Outputs

This is a practice-based research project which compromises of four practice research outputs and a thesis. These research outputs are outlined in detail in Chapter 5, but should also be viewed via the websites detailed below and in the Appendix A, B, C and D.

A: Exhibition: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017.*

URL link to exhibition website: https://www.cobr-committee.uk/

B:. Web Archive: *COBR Committee Archives.*

URL link to Digital Archive: www.cobr-committee-archives.uk

C: Data set of all COBR Committee meetings publicly announced between 1997-2017 deposited with *UK Data Archive*

Dataset reference and URL link:

Price, Theodore. W (2022). *UK Government's Publicly Announced Emergency Response Committee Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms Meetings, 1997-2017.* [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Service. 10.5255/UKDA-SN-855344, https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=855344

D: The COBR re-enactment performance and images are documented in the thesis, the Emergency State exhibition website and on Alamy.com.

Abstract

This practice-based research examines the development of the visual culture of British emergency politics between 1997-2017. It cites the first naming and emergence of the British government emergency response committee COBR (Cabinet Office Briefing Room) in 2000 as the beginning of a new condition in the visual culture of emergency politics. This study pinpoints the combination of camera phone images and social media in 2005, with the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 as a pivotal moment in who can now claim, and counter-claim, the legitimacy of civil emergency events. This study will show how emergency images have now become a set of standardised visual conventions and modes of habitual participation, normalising the condition of a continual state of emergency.

This inquiry identifies a new category of images, namely the emergency image and the emergency response image. I argue that the emergency image and emergency response image have not only altered the public perception of emergency events and the State's response to them, but have opened up a new space for political contestation where the claiming of emergency events is now distributed between the State *and* the public.

This investigation uses a practice-based research methodology to publicly *reassemble* the COBR Committee by actively collating, curating and documenting its previously siloed visual elements and fragments, and its emergency events between 1997-2017. Four original practice-based research outputs include: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee between 1997-2017* held in July 2021, the web archive (www.COBR-Commitee.uk), a formal entry of a dataset of all publicly held COBR meetings between 1997-2017 to the UK Data Archive (dataset ref number: 855344) and an intervention in which images of a restaged COBR meeting are placed within the economy of images.

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1 Introduction

Figure 1: The only official image of the COBR Committee room released in 2010 under a freedom of information request. The image appears to have been taken on a mobile phone. This remains the only official image of the COBR facility.

The image above (figure 1) remains the only official image of the British Government's emergency response Committee COBR (Cabinet Office Brief Rooms). Released in 2010 under a freedom of information request, five years after the advent in social media and camera phones, it presents a limited image of the visual culture that surrounds civil emergency events. Due to poor quality and composition, the image appears to have been taken on a mobile phone.

The image depicts a room containing a large barrelled conference table, with enough chairs for approximately twenty-four people. The room contains three CCTV cameras, which we can assume are used to broadcast live COBR meetings to other locations, agencies or governments both within the United Kingdom and abroad. This international connection is furthered by what appears to be a set of current international times displayed within the celling alcove. On the far wall is a bank of screens. Two of the screens appear to feed back

the COBR room image taken on some of the CCTV cameras. Both display a barrelled table with chairs around it (see figure 1, top row of screens, second from left and bottom row far right image). Another screen shows a figure (bottom row, third from left image), either a news anchor or a profile picture. The remaining frames are either blank or displaying undiscernible information. What is crucially omitted from the image, and is a central concern of this thesis, are any human figures; no senior ministers, advisors or civil servants can be seen. Moreover, as no minutes are ever released of the COBR Committee's meetings, nor a list of those attending, or decisions made, this lifeless image becomes a visual representation of the lack of clear public information regarding the COBR Committee itself.

This single, official image of the COBR Committee room acts as a departure point for this investigation into the visual culture of the COBR Committee and British emergency politics. This image fails to fully represent the extensive visual culture that I argue now surrounds the COBR Committee during and following British civil emergency events between 1997-2017. As will be demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, as well as via the practice-based research outputs, an extensive range of primary image-based material directly associated with the COBR Committee, either by name or location, does exist. In effect, this research reassembles a new picture of the COBR Committee from the disparate visual elements already in existence within the public domain. In doing so, it will create a more comprehensive, interactive and publicly accessible representation of the COBR Committee and the visual culture of British emergency politics more broadly.

In building a new picture of the COBR Committee and the visual culture of its emergency politics, this inquiry identifies a new category of images, namely emergency images, that become prominent within the visual production and dissemination of British civil emergency events between 1997-2017. It therefore maintains that the management,

definition and narration of British civil emergency events is now contested via images.[1] I claim that this new image-based visibility of the COBR Committee was fuelled by the rapid growth in wide public ownership of mobile phones with cameras, and the rise in social media platforms in the mid-2000s. Prior to 2005, images that did capture emergency events were taken from a greater distance, and often after the event's climax had passed. From 2005, a highly networked and participatory public began to visually capture emergency events and disseminate their images instantly via social media networks. I argue that in response to these new images of emergency circulating within the digital network, the British government was forced to increase its own visual presence by publicly announcing the COBR Committee. Since then, the COBR Committee has increasingly been relied upon as a publicly recognisable visual symbol of government action and response to civil emergencies.

This study presents an urgent and original analysis into how images both constitute civil emergency events and help the State to govern them. Despite the broad and ever-expanding field of studies into civil emergencies and the political exception post-9/11, there has been little substantial discussion into how images now constitute civil emergencies within the United Kingdom. This research begins to fill the gap. To examine this, I break down the visual culture of a COBR-led British emergency politics into two key categories; *emergency images* and *emergency response images*. The emergency image is defined as a type of image which announces, for the first time and within the public domain, the existence of the emergency event itself. Crucially, in announcing the emergency itself, the emergency image becomes the primary, and often iconic, visual reference through which the event is registered

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[1] When considering the management of an emergency event, there are some key British institutional apparatus which are specifically designed to prepare for future emergency events. This study does not deal with these specifically as they have limited association to the COBR Committee itself but it is worth noting their existence here. They include, "The Emergency Planning College", accessed May 21, 2021, https://www.epcresilience.com; "Local resilience forums", accessed May 21, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-role-of-local-resilience-forums-a-reference-document; "The Resilience Capabilities Programme", accessed May 21, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/preparation-and-planning-for-emergencies-the-capabilities-programme; "Futures, foresight and horizon scanning", accessed May 21, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/futures-and-foresight

within the public domain. The emergency image has a specific set of visual qualities associated with its amateur production. These might include a blurred visual frame, high pixilation and often short duration but within close proximity to the epicentre of the emergency event itself.

By contrast, what I have termed the *emergency response image* is a set of standardised visual conventions that emanate from the British government via clearly defined channels of dissemination – namely the news media but increasingly also via social media - and come into existence in direct response to emergency images. Emergency response images are directly associated to the COBR Committee either by name, content or geographical location. They attempt to reframe the emergency event within official governmental narratives and most commonly take the form of: a televised official statement, a tweet declaring the convening of the COBR Committee, or as images of ministers arriving at a COBR meeting. I argue that the emergency image and emergency response image have not only altered the public perception of emergency events and the State's response to them, but have opened up a space of political contestation where the claiming of emergency events is now distributed between the State *and* the public.

The old monopoly of State guided media narratives over certain emergency events has been replaced by a more dynamic and multidirectional communication environment, whereby anyone in the vicinity of an emergency event can digitally record and upload its content to the social media network, and in doing so gain wide public exposure which in turn acts as a claim for the necessity of a political response. In this way, emergency images can be understood as a form of bottom-up communication and political contestation from a disparate locale without associative institutional power, neither mainstream media nor governmental. Emergency response images, however can be seen as top-down communication from a fixed, specific and iconic locale with full institutional power, supported by the mainstream media.

These two sets of images are defined by clearly differing visual qualities, levels of public participation, and often exist in direct opposition to each other. It is in this oscillation between emergency image and emergency response image that I conclude the visual culture of British emergency politics is most recognisable. Before continuing further into the visual culture of emergency politics, it is necessary to briefly outline what the COBR Committee actually is and how it functions.

What is COBR?

The COBR Committee is the unofficial name for the Civil Contingencies Committee. Established in 2000, it is led by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and guided by the Cabinet Office Secretary, with legislative backing via the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA).[2] This infrastructure supports the government's ability to plan for, and respond to, perceived national civil emergency events. The COBR Committee is usually chaired by the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary, although it can also be chaired by a cabinet minister, and is attended by senior ministers and representatives from respective governmental departments under whose jurisdiction the emergency event falls.[3] Since 2000, the COBR Committee's convening has been publicly announced in response to a diverse set of civil emergency events, from large scale flooding to terrorist attacks. Despite the increasing public announcements of COBR meetings in response to major and minor civil emergency events,

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[2] The Civil Contingencies Committee (CCC) was established in 2000 following the "three F's": fuel-duty protests, foot and mouth disease, and wide scale flooding. While the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) is a permanent position, and helps to facilitate the everyday running of the CCC, the CCS is also tasked with contingency planning and horizon scanning for potential future emergency events. The CCS manages the 'Resilience Capabilities Programme' and is a department under the guidance of the Cabinet Office. For more information see the British Government website here, accessed May 21, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/preparation-and-planning-for-emergencies-the-capabilities-programme.

[3] For terrorism related events, the Home Secretary will usually chair the meeting, with senior representatives of the police and intelligence services also attending. While for flooding, the Environment Secretary would be a key attendee or chair, alongside senior ministers and members of Department for Environment and Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). In addition to senior ministers and officials from specific agencies or departments there are also senior advisors and civil servants present. If it is a nation-wide emergency, such as Brexit or the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders from the devolved administrations are also invited to attend.

there is no public record containing the exact information on who attends its meetings, how many meetings have been held or what decisions have been made.[4]

I have chosen to focus this study on the COBR Committee for three key reasons. Firstly, the public emergence of the COBR Committee in the early 2000s marks a pivotal break with the previous century's British emergency committees being secretive and not publicly visible. This demonstrates the political power the British government now invests in the COBR Committee. However, unlike British parliamentary Select Committees, the House of Commons or the House of Lords, all of which are now televised and visually documented, the content of COBR Committee meetings, their minutes, and decision-making process remains hidden from public scrutiny. Despite there being a certain need for secrecy for sensitive and security based-content, the lack of consistent public information, or even meta-data from COBR Committee meetings, warrants investigation, especially within a parliamentary democracy such as Britain's.

Secondly, as I show in the following section, COBR led emergency events have become more frequent. This increase in public announcements of COBR meetings demonstrates its increased use as an instrument of governance, and therefore demands closer inspection.

Thirdly, due to the assent of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the decision on what constitutes a civil emergency is now subjective and does not require Privy Council approval, nor an Order in Council. This has allowed the COBR Committee to be used as a symbolic declaration of a state of emergency without the legislative issues such a formal declaration previously entailed. This has allowed for previously marginal emergency events to be centralised via their declaration as national emergencies, with the potential for any marginal

[4] Commonly known as 'the twenty-year rule', the normal public release of government files to the National Archive was amended in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 from thirty years to twenty years. This has created a backlog, meaning the files for between 1997-2017 will be released in 2022.

emergency event to be instrumentalised for political gain. In this way, the COBR Committee is not simply a room for meeting in, as Boris Johnson suggested, but acts as a visual symbol that helps to offer leverage to the government's decisions over what it defines as a civil emergency, and moreover, in what it defines as normal.[5] I use the COBR Committee as a frame through which to chart and critique the changes in politics and governance within the United Kingdom between 1997-2017. Therefore, this study attempts to pull the COBR Committee from the windowless bunker and into a critical frame, and in doing so offer an examination into how emergency events and the public more broadly, are governed using images.

Throughout this study I refer to the COBR Committee simply as 'COBR'. This is not for a lack of formality but simply as 'COBR' is often how the committee is referred to by politicians and the media, and therefore how it has been most established within the popular imagination. Moreover, it is in this erasure of the word 'committee' that COBR, in the public domain, becomes an image outside of a fixed location, and becomes something more totemic and representative than simply a committee.

Research Objectives

This study is centred around three central research objectives. Firstly, to locate and analyse the emergence of a visual culture of emergency politics in Britain between 1997-2017 and in doing so, define a new categorisation of emergency images. This will be investigated though a close examination of the visual material associated with civil emergency events during this

[5] "PMQs: Jeremy Corbyn attacks 'part-time prime minister' over flooding response", www.news.sky.com, accessed July 4th 2021, https://news.sky.com/story/pmqs-jeremy-corbyn-attacks-part-time-prime-minister-over-flooding-response-11943652?fbclid=IwAR1_gdyZBVf3R785XZ-VVz3Kitnqa7c0-cpvH-2IziXxHKDK4elwyqW1QMo

period as a way of exploring the dynamics of emergency images, their historical context and their contemporary ritualised forms.

Secondly, this research aims to demonstrate how emergency images have influenced the way that emergency events are claimed and by whom. This study pinpoints the combination of camera phone images, social media and the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 as a pivotal moment in the shift in the claiming, and counter-claiming, of emergency. This research suggests that it is due to emergency images, and their production, that certain claims of emergency can now be contested. This is most pressing in relation to how emergency images have been instrumentalised in the framing of specific claims of emergency by newly appointed British Prime Ministers. Moreover, it is through examining these visual frames as constituting emergency claims, that this study aims to demonstrate the power of the emergency image. Most importantly this study will show how emergency images, as a set of established visual cultural conventions, have come to standardise and normalise the condition of a permanent emergency.

Thirdly, this investigation aims to *reassemble* the image of COBR by actively collating, documenting, analysing and most importantly, making public, the previously siloed visual elements and fragments of the COBR Committee, and its emergency events between 1997-2017. This will culminate in a series of practice-based research outputs that for the first time, present the COBR Committee and its visual culture within a permanent and publicly accessible location.

Time period of research study 1997-2017

Between 1919 – 2001, the British government's emergency response committees had never been publicly acknowledged and remained secretive. [6] Prior to 2000, civil emergency events, such as the London nail bombings of 1999, were not responded to via a public announcement of the COBR Committee.[7] I claim that the new public visibly of the COBR Committee became instrumentalised during Tony Blair's premiership (1997-2007) when he publicly mentions the Civil Contingencies Committee for the first time in response to 9/11. It is then during Gordon Brown's premiership (2007-2010) that the first images of a restaged 'COBR meeting' are publicly released. However, the most dramatic shift in visible emergence of COBR was during Prime Minister David Cameron's term in office (2010-2016) when the definition of what constituted a civil emergency was expanded to include a wide range of international incidents. This wider definition increased the number of COBR meetings, in turn increasing the necessity of official images in response. The final year of the research study, 2017, contains the first year of Theresa May's premiership (2016-2017). This offers the clearest examples of the establishment of the government's visual convention in response to civil emergency events. Over the same summer, a number of civil emergency events took

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[6] The first British civil emergency committee was established in 1919 with the aim of addressing the potential risks posed by a copycat popular uprising and general strike following the Russian revolution in 1917. Following this, the emergency committee continually changed its name, from The Industrial Unrest Committee, to the War Cabinet Strike Committee and finally settling on the Supply and Transport Committee. Throughout the 20th Century, the Supply and Transport Committee remained highly secretive and ultimately a strike-breaking committee. In 1947, the committee became known as the Emergency Committee. In 1972, all civil emergency committees were amalgamated into one central hub with the creation of the Civil Contingencies Unit. It was known in cabinet as "cuckoo" due to the acronym used at the time of 'CCU', and 'the winter committee' as the majority of industrial strikes took place in the winter to maximise effect on fuel supplies. By 1973 the Civil Contingencies Unit was housed in the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms facility on Whitehall, London, but was not yet referred to as COBR. This was the first time that the COBR facility was used for civil emergency planning and response. In 1980, the Civil Contingencies Unit formed the central command centre through which the government would respond to a number of key civil emergencies, most notably the Iranian Embassy siege in 1980, where twenty-six people were held hostage within the Iranian embassy in Princess Gate, west London, and the miners' strike in 1984. It is not exactly clear when the name 'COBR' was first used inside government to refer to the Civil Contingencies Committee itself, but its first mention in public was in 2005 in response to the 7/7 London bombings. For a more detailed account of the British Governments emergency committees between 1919-1984 see: Peter Hennessy and Keith Jeffery, *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strikebreaking Since 1919* (Sydney: Law Book Co of Australasia, 1983), 10-15.

[7] The London nail bombings were a series of bombs set off in London between 17th -30th April 1999. The bombs killed three people and injured one hundred and forty.

place within a three-month period, and the visual rituals of emergency response images became clearly fixed as repetitive visual conventions. It is also during the summer of 2017, that the Grenfell Tower fire took place. This provides the study with a clear example of the ability for the visual culture of emergency politics to offer a public platform for the contestation of political authority during moments of civil emergency.

Within the middle of this timeframe, the networked communication infrastructure became active, with social media platforms and camera phones gaining wide public usage in 2005. I argue that this increased ability to capture and disseminate images of emergency events resulted in an increase in the number of COBR meetings publicly announced; the more images of emergency, the more the government needed to reassure and publicly demonstrate responsive action. As evidenced in the contextual literature outlined below and throughout the thesis, social media and citizen witness images have previously been well documented. This study, however, examines these networked images in relation to British emergency events, and charts how they have fundamentally altered the processes through which the British government now publicly responds to perceived civil emergencies.

It is also during this twenty-year research period that the most comprehensive shift in legislation for dealing with civil emergencies is established, via the creation of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, this newly created piece of legislation had great importance by not only providing the government with the widest set of post-war emergency powers but, more importantly for this study, removing the official process of approval needed for declaring an emergency from the Privy Council and Order in Council, to simply that of the prime minister and central government.[8] I suggest that this is a

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[8] For detailed analysis on the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 see: Clive Walker, 'The Governance of Emergency Arrangements', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 18:2 (2014): 211-227; Clive Walker and Jams Broderick, *Civil Contingencies Act 2004: Risk Resilience, and the Law in the United Kingdom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter Adey and Ben Anderson, Affect and Security: Exercising Emergency in 'UK Civil Contingencies*', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 29:6 (2011): 1092-1109; Peter Adey and Ben Anderson "Event and Anticipation: UK Civil Contingencies and the Space-Times of Decision", *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 43:12 (2011): 2878 –

return to a quasi-royal prerogative, where the State can declare the exception without oversight. Unlike France or the United States of America who grant the president's executive power during an emergency via declaration of a state of emergency*,* the British government now relies on the non-legislative announcement of the COBR Committee to *symbolically* declare a state of emergency but without any of the exceptional legal effects that traditionally go with such an announcement.[9] I argue that the separation between emergency law and the COBR Committee included in the CCA has facilitated the promotion of the "COBR" announcement to become a subjective decision based on an image-justified necessity, rather than via an objective legal framework.

Lastly, I claim the combination of these separate but connected elements outlined above had a marked increase on the number of publicly announced COBR meetings within the twenty-year study period. As can be seen in figure 2 below, the convening of COBR was publicly announced on average once per year in the early 2000s, which subsequently increased to an average of nearly one every two weeks by 2017.

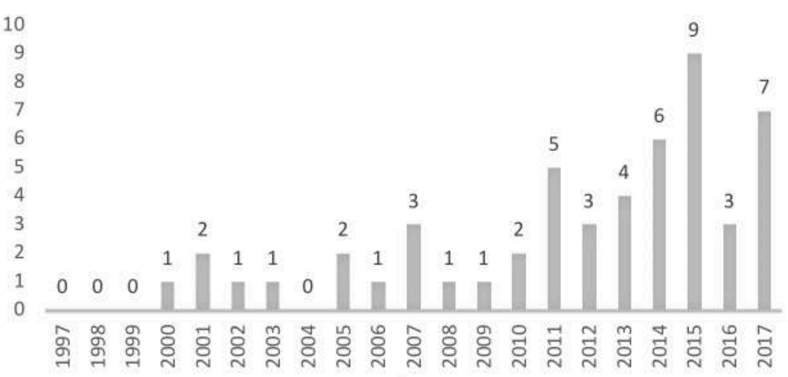

Figure 2: Total number of known COBR Committee meetings between 2nd May 1997 - 31st Dec 2016

2899; Rebecca Moosavian, "Keep Calm and Carry On': informing the public under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004", *The international Journal on Human Rights,* 18:2 (2014): 178-194.

[9] This position would have been held, symbolically at least, by the monarch, who still retained the power to grant exceptional powers (under the Emergency Powers Act 1920) but is another key component of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, in that it removed the need for the royal prerogative. For a detailed analysis of the state of emergency in Britain in the 20th century, see: Ben Anderson, "Scenes of Emergency: Dis/re-assembling the Promise of the UK Emergency State", *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*.; 39 :7 (2020): 1356-1374.

I only deviate from this twenty-year research period when it is useful to prove a pattern or historical condition. This is demonstrated via an historical comparison between the contemporary emergency image, and the unfurling of the Royal Banner to declare martial law in the fourteenth-century and the performative reading of the Riot Act in the eighteenth-century. Moving into the contemporary era, I use examples from the appointment of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister in 2019 to confirm a pattern that every newly appointed, not elected, prime minister announces a COBR meeting within two weeks of taking up residency in No.10 Downing Street. This is an important indicator as it evidences, along with similar examples from the premiership of Gordon Brown and Theresa May, the instrumentalisation of COBR for political gain.

Key Concepts

What follows is a survey into the key concepts and their associated literature central to contextually positioning this study. It will be broken down into four key areas. Firstly, Emergency. This will contain literature and key governmental definitions on civil emergency and emergency politics, and will be followed by the key concepts from political theory on the political exception. Secondly, I will outline key literature on images, political images and images in relation to emergency. Thirdly, I will examine social media and camera phones technologies as the apparatus that has allowed the visual culture of emergency politics to gain wide public exposure. My fourth and final section will examine investigatory aesthetics as the framework through which I develop my practice-based research.

While a detailed historiography of the creation of emergency committees since the First World War has been examined by Hennessey and Jeffery in the book *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strikebreaking Since 1919,* the study ends in 1983 and therefore offers little comparison between the 20th and 21st Century modes of governance during civil emergencies. This study will, in part, continue this analysis albeit from 1997. The central literature on the COBR Committee is produced and released to the public by the government itself, usually as formal documents via the Cabinet Office, Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Emergency Planning Collage, Home Office or numerous select committees during the review of major emergency events.[10]

Other literature held at The National Archives has released detailed correspondence and meetings of earlier versions of the COBR Committee, namely the Civil Contingencies Unit, but due to the twenty-year rule, the information concerning the period of this study has not yet been fully released.[11] Moreover, even civil emergency events that do exist outside of the twenty-year rule, such as the fuel duty strikes of 2000 and '9/11' in 2001 have either still not been fully released or their content has been highly redacted due to Cabinet Office restrictions. There have been freedom of information requests made about the COBR Committee since 2000 but these have largely been rejected, bar the image outlined above (see figure 1).[12]

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[10] "Responding to emergencies in UK central government response: Concept of operations" Cabinet Office, 2013 accessed June 17th 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228651/7788.pdf; "The Home Office's Response to Terrorist Attacks", Home Office, accessed June 17th 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192425/CONOPs_incl_revised_chapter_24_Apr-13.pdf; "UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL EVIDENCE To be published as HC 1007-I",, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmpubacc/uc1007-i/uc100701.html.
For more information on government structures for dealing with emergency events see: "The Emergency Planning College", https://www.epcresilience.com; "Local resilience forums", https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-role-of-local-resilience-forums-a-reference-document; "The Resilience Capabilities Programme", https://www.gov.uk/guidance/preparation-and-planning-for-emergencies-the-capabilities-programme; "Futures, foresight and horizon scanning", https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/futures-and-foresight;
Emergency planning frame work: "How do you know you are managing a crisis?" accessed July 4th 2022, https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/emergency-planning-framework/

[11] "20-year rule", National Archives, accessed June 9th 2022, https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/our-role/transparency/20-year-rule/

[12] What do they know? Search "COBR Committee" accessed June 12th 2022, https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/search/COBR/all

I have therefore had to supplement the minimal official information provided by the government with politician's biographies. Prime Minister Tony Blair outlined COBR in relation to the fuel duty strike of 2000, as did Home Secretary Jack Straw who detailed, in passing, the establishment and use of COBR for non-terrorism related events for the first time.[13] The biographies and published diaries of senior police such as Sir Ian Blair or Andy Hayman, as well as senior civil servants and Cabinet Secretaries all offer insights into the internal working of COBR.[14]

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic COBR came under greater scrutiny, as it was used as the central mechanism through which the government coordinated and made public its strategy for the pandemic. During this time, COBR and the process of governmental response to emergency more broadly were the subject of two podcasts via the Institute For Government. These featured previous Home Secretaries, senior civil servants and political advisors. [15] Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Dominic Cummings (Chief advisor to Prime Minister Boris Johnson between 24th July 2019 and 13th November 2020) outlined the problems of the COBR Committee during a hearing of *The Joint Inquiry of the Health and Social Care and the Technology Committees* in May 2021. During his televised statement, Cummings detailed COBR's inability to process live data during the pandemic due to the COBR room being a "strap-3 security environment" meaning laptops and mobile phones were not allowed inside. This meant the government had to run most of its COBR-led

[13] Tony Blair, *A Journey*. (London: Arrow Books. 2011); Jack Straw, *Last Man Standing: Memoirs of a Political Survivor*.(London: Macmillan, 2012), 311.
[14] Andy Haymen, *The Terrorist Hunters: The Definitive Inside Story of Britain's Fight Against Terror* (London: Corgi .2009); Ian Blair, *Policing Controversy*, (London: Profile Books, 2009); David Blunkett, *The Blunkett Tapes: My Life in the Bear Pit*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006); David Cameron, *For the Record,* (Glasgow: William Collins, 2019); Ian Beesley, *The Official History of the Cabinet Secretaries,* (London and New York: Routledge 2016).
[15] The think tank, Institute for Government, and specifically its two podcasts: "How to handle a National Emergency", accessed November 12th 2021, https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/podcast, and "Leading in an emergency, cabinet secretaries and crises", featuring Lord Butler, Cabinet Secretary from 1988–98, Lord Wilson, Cabinet Secretary from 1998–2002 and Lord O'Donnell, Cabinet Secretary from 2005–11, Accessed November 12th 2021, https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/events/leading-emergency-cabinet-secretaries-crises

response to the COVID-19 pandemic from the lower security graded cabinet room.[16] This literature demonstrates firstly the opaque nature of official information regarding COBR, and secondly that the details emanating from these biographies and podcasts are extremely subjective, relying mostly on unverifiable anecdotal evidence.

In relation to official narratives, in the framing and management of emergency events there is an ever-growing field of crisis communication and crisis management studies. A key concept from crisis management and political communication theory is 'framing'. Framing is defined as, '*the purposeful utilization of crisis-type rhetoric to significantly alter levels of political support for public office holders and public policies.*'.[17] The way that emergency events are framed culminates in the justification of specific narratives that support long-term governmental policy. It can be argued that the framing of civil emergency events such as industrial strikes in the 20th Century built support for the neoliberal economic reforms and wider policies of the 1980s, while the framing of civil emergencies via security in the 21st century has built popular narratives that act as justification for recent foreign wars abroad and anti-immigration policies at home. In this way, emergency events should not be viewed in isolation but as part of larger patterns. As Charlotte Klonk has suggested, visual political frames are now so common and repetitive as to form 'image patterns', which act as, 'regularly recurring representations'.[18] Moreover, what I refer to as 'crisis rituals' in Chapter 3, demonstrates the increasing homogeneity of the British government's set of visual conventions that (re)frame and define the emergency event and the COBR-led civil

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[16] and 'The Joint Inquiry of the Health and Social Care and the Technology Committees', May 2021 accessed June 12th 2021, https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/81/health-and-social-care-committee/news/155285/mps-question-dominic-cummings-on-government-decisionmaking-over-pandemic/

[17] Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart and Allan McConnell, "Crisis Exploitation: Political and Policy Impacts of Framing Contests", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16 (1) (2009): 81-106.

[18] Charlotte Klonk, *Terror: When Images Become Weapons*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 4.

emergency response within these previously established narrative frames. This is confirmed in the government's 'Emergency Planning Framework' document from 2018:

> 'From flooding to terror attacks, the public expect the government to be a fast and reliable source of information in times of crisis. With the pace at which emergencies can evolve and new forms of media allowing information to be disseminated in real time, high quality and timely *communication during a crisis is now arguably as important as the management of the crisis itself.*'[19] (italics added)

The advent of social media and camera phones made the necessity for responsive framing and communication ever more pressing. As I outline in Chapter 3, this new rapid framing was achieved by publicly announcing more COBR meetings via Twitter.com and more traditional image-based press conferences. In this way, the announcement of COBR itself operates as a specific type of framing of the importance of certain emergency events over others. This will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4, using the example of the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire, when the COBR Committee was not convened in response. This left the framing open for what Boin et al have referred to as a 'framing contest'.[20] This echoes Polletta and Ho's analysis on the power of political framing but from the perspective of social movements and their influence to affect wider public perception of previously marginalised issues.[21] Lastly, as Judith Butler reminds us, every frame always excludes something outside its boundary. This is most acute when thinking about the visibility, and therefore recognition, of certain emergency events over other, often less visible, emergencies.

> '…frames that govern the perceptible, that exercise a delimiting function, bring an image into focus on condition that some portion of the visual field in ruled out'.[22]

[19] "How do you know you are managing a crisis?" accessed December 22, 2020, https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/emergency-planning-framework/
[20] Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart & Allan McConnell,. "Crisis Exploitation: Political and Policy Impacts of Framing Contests", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16 no.1 (2009): 81-106.
[21] Francesca Polletta and M. Kai Ho, "Framing and their Consequences", in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, e Ed. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[22] Judith Butler., *Frames of war: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009), 74.

Although this study will only focus on the British context, it is useful to understand how the British government's response to emergencies goes beyond its own domestic audience and helps to form alliances and define enemies abroad and at home through foreign policy. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'loughlin and Laura Roselle have examined how crisis communication influences a wider global setting, as networked media carries images and its political response across the globe.[23] In this way, the political response to civil emergency events is also a framed political message to a global audience.[24]

Within critical theory, the governmental approach to emergency management has been termed 'governing emergencies' by Ben Anderson and Peter Adey, 'governing insecurity' by Fillppa Lentzos and Nikolas Rose and 'governing catastrophes' by Pat O'Malley .[25] This opens up a rich vein of analysis of the perception of emergency events as offering potential for political and policy leverage beyond the emergency itself. As I suggest in Chapter 3, it is not only emergency events which need to be governed but images themselves.

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[23] Brian McNair, *Communication and Political Crisis: Media, Politics and Governance in a Globalized Public Sphere*. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016);, Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle,. *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*, (London and New York: Routledge 2013).

[24] This is not a new phenomenon, as during the Iran Embassy Hostage crisis in 1980, the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was keen for the SAS raid to take place during the day rather than at night and not to use smoke bombs so that the world media, congregated in Hyde Park, could film and broadcast the raid across the world.

[25] Peter Adey and Ben Anderson, "Governing Events and Life: 'emergency' in UK Civil Contingencies", *Political Geography* 31(1) (2012): 24-33; Peter Adey and Ben Anderson and Steve Graham, "Introduction: Governing Emergencies: Beyond Exceptionality", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 32 no.2 (2015): 3-17; Ben Anderson, "Governing emergencies: the Politics of Delay and the Logic of Response", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41 no.1. (2016): 14-26; Ben Anderson, "Emergency Futures: Exception, Urgency, Interval, Hope", *The Sociological Review*, 17:65 no. 3 (2017): 463-477; Claudia Aradau, "Crowded Places Are Everywhere We Go: Crowds, Emergency, Politics", *Theory Culture and Society*, 32 no. 2 (2015): 155-175; For more references in relation to governing emergencies via networks see: Claudia Aradauand Tobias Blanke, "Governing Circulation: A Critique of the Biopolitics of Security", in *Security and Global Governmentality: Globalisation, Power and State*, eds. Miguel de Larringa and Marc Doucet (London: Palgrave, 2010): 44-58; Chris Zebrowski, "Governing the Networked Society: a Biopolitical Critique of Resilience", *Political Perspectives*, 3 (2009): 1-38; See also: Pat O'Malley, "Governable Catastrophes: A Comment on Bougen", *Economy and Society* 32 (2) (2003): 275-9; Fillippa Lentzos and Nikolas Rose, "Governing Insecurity: Contingency, Planning, Protection, Resilience" , *Economy and Society*, 38:2 (2009): 230-254.

Civil Emergency / Exception

The following two sections will firstly outline the official definition of civil emergency, followed by the informal definition of emergency within political theory as the exception. The first formal definition is highly practical and based on temporal span of emergency and its clear definition and separation from the norm. This is due to its necessity to communicate both clearly and quickly to a wide audience. The second set of definitions come from political theory on 'political exceptions' and offers a more complex and contested definition of emergency events, their politics and history, and how these separate methods constitute differing modes of power.

Throughout this thesis I refer to the emergency events that the COBR Committee deals with as 'civil emergencies', as this is how they are defined within the political space of the British government. Civil emergencies can be defined as emergency events which impact and disrupt the capacity of the nation to continue to function. Civil emergencies take place within *civil* space and affect *civilian* populations. They are separate from military emergencies such as war, or international emergency events, and are not considered public emergencies.[26]

Emergencies are often described using other terms such as a 'crisis', 'catastrophe' or 'disaster'.[27] However, what these terms denote is an ongoing situation or something that has already taken place. By contrast, an emergency arrives unexpectedly and retains the potential for actionable response to avoid it developing *into* a crisis. The government's emergency

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[26] Whereas "public emergency" is referred to in European convention of human rights (1950) (Article 15.1).

[27] Michael Guggenheim, Manuel Tironiand Israel Rodriguez-Giralt eds., *Disasters and Politics: Materials, Preparedness and Governance*. (Hoboken: John Wiley Blackwell, 2014); Arjen Boin, "From Crisis to disaster: Towards an integrative perspective", in *What is a disaster? A dozen perspectives on the question*, ed. Enrico Quarantelli (London and New York: Routledge 1998); Thomas Stubbfield, *9/11 and the Visual Cultural of Disaster*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Adi Ophir, "The Politics of Catastrophization: Emergency and Exception", in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, eds., (New York: Zone Books, 2013): 59–88; Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster, *Politics of Catastrophe: Genealogies of the Unknown (*London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

planning framework details, 'Not all emergencies are crises but every crisis is an emergency'.[28] I define a clear distinction between emergency and crisis as one based on differing temporalities: crises are longer in duration and could be a fuel, health or humanitarian crisis for example.[29] The government acknowledges a crisis as something that can be solved on a long-term basis through new strategy announcements and alongside large funding pledges, while emergency events are responded to via COBR. Emergencies can be defined as short events that take the form of unexpected shocks or ruptures[30] that momentarily break through and disrupt the normative time / space of everyday life. Emergencies have a window of opportunity for action, in what Anderson terms the emergency 'interval'.[31] In this way, the interval of emergency allows an opportunity to prevent the situations becoming a longer-term crisis or - due to failure in response - a catastrophe or disaster.

Traditionally, theories on political exception have been primarily concerned with the suspension of law and the implementation of executive power. These practices originated in Roman law, whereby during an emergency event the senate would vote in a temporary dictator who would retain sole charge of the crisis for a limited period.[32] Jumping forward, the major theoretical discussion about the exception resides with Carl Schmitt and his belief that it is only through the sovereign's ability to suspend the law that an exception can be resolved, and that it is the decision to declare an exception itself which defines the

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[28] UK government's Emergency Planning Framework, accessed June 4th 2021, https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/emergency-planning-framework/
[29] William Scheuerman, "The Economic State of Emergency", *Cardozo Law Review*, Vol. 21, no. 5-6 (2000).
[30] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2007); Roland Bleiker, "Living with rupture: Postmodern perspectives on international events" in *International relations and the "third debate": Postmodernism and its critics,* ed. Darryl S. L. Jarvis, ed. (Westport: Praeger 2002): 15-42.
[31] Ben Anderson, "Scenes of Emergency: Dis/re-assembling the Promise of the UK Emergency State", *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 39 no.7 (2020): 1356-1374.
[32] For a more detailed account of Roman dictatorship model of emergency governance see: Oren Gross and Fionnuala Ní Aolaín, *Law in Times of Crisis: Emergency Powers in Theory and Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 17-26.

sovereign.[33] Schmitt's theory of exception allowed the legislative justification for The Weimar Republic to legally operate a near permanent state of emergency.[34]

The key academic literature to examine the permanence of emergency, comes from Walter Benjamin who suggested that the 'state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule.[35] This sits in direct opposition to Schmitt's theory of the temporariness of the exception. Giorgio Agamben, who extensively uses Schmitt, has outlined how the state of exception is enacted through a series of *practices* that are now embedded within everyday politics of western democracy.[36] Agamben uses the example of 'bare life' and the camp to demonstrate the permanence of the exception, in that it exists inside and outside the confines of society, or as Agamben states is an 'inclusive exclusion'. [37]

Following the declaration of the War on Terror, Mark Neocleous has suggested it is 'historically naïve' to claim that the permanence of the state of emergency is a new condition. Neocleous cites the practices of a permanent state of emergency within British colonialism in India and Jamaica, and the occupation of Northern Ireland.[38] Brian Massumi suggests that it is not the permanence but the fluidity of permanence, in what he terms as 'a nonlinear looping', where the constant newness of crisis is in perpetual flux as an 'exceptional' condition.[39] He suggests that the sense of a beginning and end point punctuated by the exception is an illusion, as the distinction between what is an emergency and what is a normal or a non-emergency condition is now permanently blurred. Moreover, the emergency is continually *emergent* within society, whereas the exception suggests something outside of the normative condition. I suggest that the normalising of the permanent emergency within

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[33] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006), 1.
[34] Carl Schmitt *Dictatorship*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).
[35] Benjamin Walter, "Thesis on the philosophy of nature", in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999): 248.
[36]Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).
[37] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[38] Mark Neocleous, "The Problem with Normality: Taking Exception to "Permanent Emergency", *Alternatives*.31 no.2 (2006): 204.
[39] Brian Massumi, "National Enterprise Emergency: Steps Toward an Ecology of Powers", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26 no.6 (2009): 162.

Britain is established by the normalisation of the apparent exceptionalism of the COBR Committee itself. As outlined in Chapter 3, the visual rituals and standardised statements used in association with COBR, present exceptional events, and their images, within both a normalised *and* exceptional frame.

Moreover, the normalisation of the permanent emergency can be thought of an overarching and continual condition of a *slow* emergency. [40] These types of slow emergencies exist in the background and form underlying, long-term emergency conditions such as inadequate housing, systemic health issues or deregulated working conditions and employment status. Such permanent, long-term slow emergencies can be viewed through the lens of Lauren Berlant's 'systemic crisis', Ben Anderson et al. 'slow emergencies', Galtun's 'structural violence' or Rob Nixon's 'slow violence'.[41] These types of emergencies can, and have, lasted decades or even centuries. They are visually obscured from popular view and therefore political response due to what Rob Nixon terms the 'invisibility of slow violence'.[42] This reiterates the power and importance of the image, of visibility as *affect*, as a vital necessity for any emergency to gain public attention and therefore any hope of a possible resolution.

[40] The permanence of emergency legislation following civil emergency events has a detailed history. Despite Britain not officially declaring a 'state of emergency' since 1973, other nations have and either remained under that condition or have subsumed the emergency law within the civil legal framework. Israel has been in a permanent state of emergency since the 'six day war' in 1964 and the occupation of Palestine. The United States has remained in an official state of emergency since 2001 after the 9/11 attacks. France was in a three-monthly renewal of its state of emergency powers following the Paris attacks in 2015. These emergency powers were continually extended until 2017, when they were written into civil law and became permanent. Nigeria has lurched from one declaration of a state of emergency to another to deal with a host of issues from terrorism, flooding and COVID -19, also using the state of emergency to quell political protests.

[41] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) :10.; Ben Anderson, Kevin Grove, Lauren Rickards, and Matthew Kearnes, "Slow Emergencies: Temporality and The Racialized Biopolitics of Emergency Governance", *Progress in Human Geography*44 no.4 (2020): 621-639; Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research* 6 no.3 (1969): 167–91; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[42] Nixon, *Slow Violence, 4.*

Emergency Law

Since the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 the public declaration of British emergency events do not warrant the law to be suspended.[43] Unlike France or the United States who grant the presidents executive power during an emergency via a declaration of a state of emergency*,* the British legal position for emergencies is contained within the potential invoking of the CCA. This means no state of emergency declaration needs to be made. For example, if the CCA were to be invoked, which it never has since its inception, then it would most likely be announced in parliament.

When considering emergency powers and emergency law, the historical perspective of the origins of emergency law see Nasser Hussain.[44] Hussain outlines how the British used their colonisation of India as a testing ground to develop emergency powers via the suspension and replacement of habeas corpus with a version of martial law. With an earlier historical period, John M. Collins outlines the process of martial law within Britain, which is the origins of the emergency law and can be traced up until the CCA.[45] Supporting such a claim is the work of Karin Loevy, who outlines the process of emergency *containment* within emergency law and legal traditions within the United Kingdom.[46] More broadly Oren Gross and Fionnuala Ni Aolain have outlined a global legal perspective on crisis as a set of 'emergency regimes'.[47] Michael Head examines emergency law in relation to political theory,

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[43] For detailed analysis on the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 see: Clive Walker, *The Governance of Emergency Arrangements,* The International Journal of Human Rights, 18:2 (2014): 211-227; Clive Walker and James Broderick, *The Civil Contingencies Act 2004: Risk Resilience, and the Law in the United Kingdom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter Adey and Ben Anderson, "Affect and Security: Exercising Emergency in 'UK Civil Contingencies",*,',* *in* Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 29 (6) (2011): 1092-1109; Peter Adey and Ben Anderson, "Event and Anticipation: UK Civil Contingencies and the Space—Times of Decision", *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 43 (12) (2011): 2878-2899; Rebecca Moosavian, "Keep Calm and Carry On': informing the public under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004", *The International Journal on Human Rights*, 18:2, (2014): 178-194.
[44] Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency, Colonialism and the Rule of Law*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003).
[45]John M Collins, *Martial Laws and English Laws, c.1500 – c.1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[46] Karin Loevy *Emergency in Public Law: The Legal Politics of Containment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[47] Oren Gross and Fionnuala Ni Aolain, *Law in Times of Crisis: Emergency Powers in Theory and Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

especially that of Schmitt,[48] while Michael Freeman has outlined the specifies of using emergency powers in the War on Terror.[49] In a more British centric analysis, Clive Walker and James Broderick give a highly detailed and critical analysis into the largest British legislation for dealing with emergences via the CCA. Their work forms the basis for my own argument in Chapter 4.[50]

Emergency politics

Emergency politics as a theoretical framework can be viewed as a set of critical ideas that place conditions of emergency as a set of political practices. As Monika Heupel et al. have suggested, emergency politics,

> '… denotes a set of *practices* on the one hand, in which actors break with legal rules or established norms in a supposedly temporary fashion, and a way of *rationalizing* such moves on the other hand as responses to extreme circumstances.' [51]

Bonnie Honig has drawn the conclusion that, paradoxically, emergency events and their politics, rather than supressing or containing politics, instead present opportunities for renewed democratic engagement via her notion of *survivability* of emergency events.[52]

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[48] Michael Head, *Emergency Powers in Theory and Practice: The Long Shadow of Carl Schmitt*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2016); John Ferejohn and Pasquale Pasquino, "The Law of the Exception: A Typology of Emergency Powers", *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 2:2 (April, 2004): 210–239.
[49] Michael Freeman, *Freedom of Security: The Consequences for Democracies Using Emergency Powers to Fight Terrorism* (Westport: Preager, 2003).
[50] Clive Walker and James Broderick,. *The Civil contingencies Act 2004: Risk Resilience, and the Law in the United Kingdom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[51] Monika Heupel, Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, Markus Patberg, Astrid Séville, Jens Steffek, Jonathan White, "*Emergency Politics After Globalization*, International Studies Review, 23 (4) (Dec 2021): 1961.
[52] Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics, Paradox, Law and Democracy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Jonathan White, *Politics of Last Resort: Governing by Emergency in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, *Emergency Powers of International Organizations: Between Normalization and Containment* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019); Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions,* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

Elaine Scarry suggests we need to find space to *think*, and slow down the pressure from governments that ask us to suspend our rational judgment in the name of national security or an (in)direct threat.[53] As outlined in Chapter 5, the practice research of this study adopts this slower process of changing the temporary but rapid frequency of emergency events by slowing them down and bringing them back to the surface, so as to calmly and critically view the mass of emergency events.

Visual Culture of Emergency Politics

By examining the visual culture of emergency through images and their circulation, I argue that emergency politics is now comprised of a visual practice that constitutes emergency events. This culture is made up by the people and mediums used to create it. The history of images begins with a history of photography [54] and none more prominent than Roland Barthes who allowed us to think about the separation between the *punctum a*nd *studium* in how certain images resonate over others.[55] Allan Sekula detailed the origins of the image via a process of tracing and mapping the image in relation to law, criminality and the archive.[56] W.J.T Mitchell demonstrated the sheer variety of image 'types' from perceptual to mental and optical images.[57] Through this, he highlighted a separation between images and pictures. Pictures hang on walls and frame certain things, whereas images, something he defines as '..active players in the game of establishing and changing values',[58] can be reproduced in

[53] Elaine Scarry, *Thinking in an Emergency* (London: W. W. Norton & Co, 2012).
[54] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images, Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989); Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive", October 39. (1986): 3-64; Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (London: Penguin, 1979). Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Media, Body* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jacques Ranciere, *The Future of the Image,* (New York: Verso, 2009); Diarmuid Costello and Dominic Willsdon, *The Life and Death of Images: Ethics and Aesthetics,* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008).
[55] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucia: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Classics, 1993); Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1987).
[56] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive", October 39. (1986): 3-64.
[57] W. J. T. Mitchell "What is an Image?" *New Literary History* 15, no. 3 (1984): 503–37.
[58] Mitchell, W.J.T, "Pictorial Turn", in *Visual Global Politics* ed,. Roland Bleiker, (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 232

different mediums. Nicolas Mirzoeff refers to the power of seeing and being seen, where structures of societal control are enacted via direct and indirect acts of 'visuality'. Mirzoeff offers an alternative perspective by highlighting that whenever power exercises its monopoly on visuality, there was often a form of 'counter-visuality' to resist it.[59]

The literature on images in relation to conflict and terrorism offers a more specific contextual reference to emergency images. Charlotte Klonk gives an historical perspective of images of political events by suggesting that the visual representation of terrorism began in 1880, via illustrations of the assignation of the Russian Tsar appearing in global newspapers and magazines.[60] The contemporary view of images in the War on Terror can be examined in relation to Ben O'Loughlin's suggestion of 'images as weapons', Nathan Roger's 'image warfare' and Jens Eder and Charlotte Klonk's 'image operations'.[61] Brigitte Narcos' study into mass-mediated terrorism outlines a shift that terrorists have taken. No longer simply in front of the camera, they are now also behind it, exploiting images and social media as their primary tools for political exposure.[62] As Laura Scaife has noted, terrorism exists within this hyper-visual mediated environment where, 'Terrorists do not think like army generals; they

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[59] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "On Visuality," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (April 2006): 53–79.
[60] Klonk, *When Images Become Weapons.* See also literature on images of war: Butler, *Frames of War;*Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1995); Julian Stallabrass, *Killing for Show: Photography, War, and the Media in Vietnam and Iraq*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); H. Farocki, "Phantom Images", *Public*, 29 (2004), accessed Dec 12th 2020, https://public.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/public/article/view/30354
[61] Ben O'Loughlin, "Images as Weapons of War: Representation, Mediation and Interpretation", *Review of International Studies* 37 (2011): 71 – 91; Nathan Roger, *Image Warfare in the War on Terror*. (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jens Eder and Charlotte Klonk, eds.., *Image Operations: Visual Media and Political Conflict* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017). See also: Aurora Hoel, "Operative Images. Inroads to a New Paradigm of Media Theory" in Luisa Feiersinger, Kathrin Friedrich, Moritz Queisner, eds., *Image – Action – Space: Situating the Screen in Visual Practice.* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018): 11–27; Trevor Paglen, "Operational Images", *e-flux*. (2014) accessed Dec 12th, 2020, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/59/61130/operational-images/; Marie-Jose Mondzain and Sally Shafto, "Can Images Kill?", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 36, no.1 (2009): 20-51; Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018). Klonk, *Terror: When Images Become Weapons*; Ben O'Loughlin, *Images as Weapons of War*. For literature on images and terrorism, see: W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present.* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011); Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Henry A. Giroux, *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism: Global Uncertainty and the Challenge of the New Media*, (Boulder: Paradigm, 2006); Francis Debrix, *Global Powers of Horror: Security, Politics and the Body in Pieces*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2017); Thomas Stubblefield, *9/11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster,* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 2015). For literature on images on iconography see: Marie-Jose Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?" *Journal of Visual Culture*, 9 no.3. (2010): 307-315; Martin A Kayman. "Iconic Violence: Belief, Law and the Visual", *Textual Practice*, 32 no.1 (2018): 139-161;W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Barbie Zelizer, "When War is Reduced to a Photograph", in *Reporting War: Journalism and Wartime* eds., Stuart Allen and Barbie Zelizer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 115-135.
[62] Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism.*

think like theatre producers.'[63] This area is foregrounded in International Relations, especially in post-9/11 literature,[64] by the 'visual turn', as outlined by Roland Bleiker, [65] and in visual cultural studies as the 'pictorial turn' as suggested by W.J.T Mitchell.[66] In this way, we can think of certain images as having political affect, images that not only represent something but are inherent in how that something is now constituted in the world; from images of refugees in dinghies,[67] to pictures of prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib prison. [68] Images form the primary way in which we view and make judgments about major political events.

Emergency Images

Despite the broad and ever-expanding field of emergency, and studies on the exception post-9/11, there has been little substantial discussion into how images constitute civil emergencies events within the United Kingdom. The closest literature on images and emergency are Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster's examination of aesthetics in relation to the politics of catastrophe.[69] They highlight the role that sensory experience plays in the potentiality of

[63] Laura Scaife, *Social Networks as the New Frontier of Terrorism*. (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2017): 37.
[64] Giroux, *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism*); Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (New York: Verso, 2003), Iain A. Boal, T. J. Clark, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts *Afflicted Powers*: *Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (New York: Verso, 2005).
[65] Roland Bleiker, "The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory", *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 30:3 (2001): 510.
[66] W.J.T Mitchell, *The Pictorial Turn,* Artforum.com, accessed June 12th 2022, https://www.artforum.com/print/199203/the-pictorial-turn-33613
[67] T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A political Ontology of Photography* (New York: Verso 2012); Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolić,, *"*Rethinking Media Responsibility in the Refugee 'Crisis': a visual typology of European news", *Media, Culture and Society*, 39 no.8, (2017): 1162 – 1177; Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolić*, "*Photojournalism as political encounter: western news photography in the 2015 migration 'crisis'", *Visual Communication*, 18 no.3 (2019): 311 – 331.
[68] Susan Buck-Morss, "Visual Empire", *Diacritics*, Vol 37, No. 2/3; *Taking Exception to the Exception*. (2007): 171-198; Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: Counter History of Visuality*, (Durham: Duke Press, 2011); Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, (New York: Zone Books, 2008); Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, (London: Reakton Books 2007); W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006).
[69] Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster, *Politics of Catastrophe: Genealogies of the Unknown* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

catastrophe, and how such visual modes of future prediction are used by governments to shape and control the present. As the public receive its information through sensory means, they suggest a new subject should be recognised; an 'aesthetic subject, who is governed through the senses as much as through knowledge'.[70] Within a European political context, Jan Suntrup has outlined the symbolic politics of the exception via its images and performance during emergency response.[71]

Most literature on images and emergency focus the image of humanitarian emergencies within news media. Craig Calhoun suggests there exists an 'emergency imaginary' whereby images of humanitarian emergencies conform to a specific set of 'emergency images' that will garner the most effective response via the collective 'social imaginary'.[72] Similarly Roland Bleiker, Emma Hutchison and David Campbell examine how a process of 'imaging catastrophe' influence the moral obligation of the public to respond to certain humanitarian crises. [73] Chouliaraki has referred to the process of viewing such events as a 'spectatorship of suffering'.[74]

A central concern of this study is how and where images of emergency events circulate. Ideas on the image economy has been explored by Susan Buck-Morss in relation to ritualised image *as* power. She took her lead from Maris Jose Mondzain's work on the economy of images within early Byzantine iconography. Mondzain examines images of Christ as a visual process of *oikonomia*, (economy). Her key principle of the power of images both then, and now, is of the same image being able to be seen in two places

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[70] Aradau and Van Munster, *Politics of Catastrophe,* 91.
71 Jan Santrup, "The Symbolic Politics of the State of Exception: Images and Performance*"*, *Die Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 28, (2018): 565–580.
[72] Craig Calhoun, "The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order" in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions,* Fassin Didier and Mariella Pandolfi, eds., , (New York: Zone Books, 2013): 29-5830.
[73] Roland Bleiker, Emma Hutchison and David David, "Imaging Catastrophe: The Politics of Representing Humanitarian Crises" in ed. *Negotiating Relief: The Politics of Humanitarian Space*, ed. Michele Acuto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; London: Hurst and Company, 2014): 47-58.
[74] Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London: Sage, 2011).

simultaneously.[75] This is further explored by Hito Steyerl in relation to a hierarchy of images within a digital economy that is flooded with 'poor' and substandard images via GIFs and temporary social media images.[76] As counter to previous images of political events, the quality is not of central importance, more the volume of people it reaches. As Hoin et al. have suggested, 'The more people agree that a problem needs to be resolved quickly, the bigger the crisis level.'[77]

The advent of mobile phones with cameras and social media has created an environment whereby the emergency is now highly interactive and exists within multidirectional communication networks.[78] As Castell has outlined, this marks a shift from mass communication to mass *self*-communication.**[79]** The main literature on the visual culture links between citizen media vs. traditional media, and its relation to new power structures, has been examined in the context of conflict,[80] humanitarian intervention[81] and activism.[82] Social media and politics has been examined via interactive networks, a habitual process that can be viewed as a form of digital governmentality.[83] The images produced on mobile phones

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[75] Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2004).
[76] Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen,* (Cambridge: MIT, 2012).
[77] Bengt Sundelius, Arjen Boin and Eric Stern, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 8.
[78] Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect. Are Some Things Unrepresentable?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004); Linda Herrera, *Revolution in the Age of Social Media* (New York: Verso Press, 2016); Geert Lovink, *Social Media Abyss: Critical Internet Cultures and the Force of Negation* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Press, 2016); Dhiraj Murthy, *Twitter: Digital Media and Societies Series* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: a Critical Introduction* (London: Sage, 2014).
[79] Manuel Castell, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 58.
[80] David Patrikarakos, *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).
[81] Lilie Chouliaraki, "Symbolic Bordering: The Self-Representation of Migrants and Refugees in Digital News", *Popular Communication,* 15 no.2 (2017): 78-94.
Lilie Chouliaraki and M. Georgiou, "The Digital Border: Mobility Beyond Territorial and Symbolic Divides", *European Journal of Communication*, 34 no.6 (2019): 594-605.
[82] See the work of the following organisations who all use 'open source' images to form evidence to expose human rights abuses: *Witness NYC,* accessed May 1st 2021, www.witness.org; *Forensic Architecture* , accessed May 1st 2021, www.forensic-architecture.org; *bellingcat*, accessed May 1st 2021, www.bellingcat.com; *Amnesty International Citizen Evidence Lab*, accessed May 1st 2021, www.citizenevidence.org. Paolo Gerbaudo,, *Tweets and Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); Joss Hands, *Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).
[83] See: Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks, Electronic Mediations*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): 39 – 67. See also Manuel Castell, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Wendy Chun, "Crisis, Crisis, Crisis, or Sovereignty and Networks", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 28 no.6 (London: Sage, 2011): 91-112; Caroline Levine, *Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Wendy Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge: MIT 2016); Alexander Galloway,

and shared via social media have been commonly referred to as: 'prosumer images',[84] 'amateur images',[85] 'citizen journalism and citizen media'[86] 'networked images'[87] and 'eyewitness images'.[88] I use the term 'citizen witness images',[89] as it best describes the two key aspects of the *images* of *civil* emergency events. [90]

To witness is associated with a history of Christian testimony and contemporary legal evidence. The circulation of images of emergency events within a social media communication network has the potential to reach millions in a form of mass mediated witnessing that Stuart Allen calls 'media witnessing'[91] and Barbie Zelizer simply terms 'eyewitnessing'.[92] Mette Mortensen has suggested we call this 'connective witnessing',[93] and where she suggests the political 'struggles for visibility'[94] now takes place. Wendy Chun **[95]** suggests the relation between emergency and social media has created a habitual condition

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Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralisation (Cambridge: MIT 2004); Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis, "A Life More Photographic – Mapping the Networked Image", *Photographies* 1 no.1, (2008): 9-28; On networks as circulation see David Beer, *Popular Culture and New Media: The politics of circulation* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013);Claudia Aradau and Tobias Blanke "Governing Circulation: A Critique of the Biopolitics of Security", in *Security and Global Governmentality: Globalization, Power and the State,* eds., Miguel de Larrinaga, and Marc G. Doucet (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

[84] Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave: The Classic Study of Tomorrow*. (New York: Bantam, 1980).

[85], Kari Anden-Papdopoulos and Marvi Pantti, *Amateur Images and Global News*, (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), 9

[86] Mona Baker and Bolette B. Blaagaard, "Reconceptualizing Citizen Media: A Preliminary Charting of a Complex Domain", in *Citizen Media and Public Spaces: Diverse Expressions of Citizenship and Dissent*, eds., Mona Baker & Bolette B. Blaagaard(London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 1-22.

[87] Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis, "A Life More Photographic; Mapping the Networked Image". *Photographies* 1 (2008): 9-28.

[88] Mette Mortesen, *Journalism and Eyewitness Images: Digital Media, Participation and Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).
Barbie Zelizer,"On "having been there": "eyewitnessing" as a journalistic keyword", *Critical studies in media communication* 24 no.5 (2007): 408-42.

[89] Stuart Allen, *Citizen Witnessing: Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

[90] Engin Isin and Evyeln Rubert, *Being Digital Citizens* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. 2015); Hilda C. Stephansen, "Understanding Citizen Media as Practice", in *Citizen Media and Public Spaces: Diverse Expressions of Citizenship and Dissent,* eds., Baker and Blaagaard (London and New York , Routledge, 2016): 1-22.

[91] Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski eds., *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski, "Media Witnessing and the Ripeness of Time", *Cultural Studies* 28 (4) (2014): 594 – 610.

[92] Zelizer, Barbie "On "having been there": eyewitnessing" as a journalistic keyword". *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no.5 (2007): 408-42. For more literature on witnessing see: Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski, "Crisis-Readiness and Media Witnessing", *The Communication Review*, 12 no.3. (2009): 295-304; Karen Cross "Memory, Guardianship and the Witnessing Amateur in the Emergence of Citizen Media", in *Citizen Media and Public Spaces: Diverse expressions of citizenship and dissent* eds. Mona Baker, Bolette B. Blaagaard (London and New York: Routledge 2016): 225-238; Lilie, Chouliaraki, "Ordinary Witnessing in Post-Television News: towards a new moral imagination", *Critical Discourse Studies*, 7 no.4 (2010): 305-319.

[93] Mette Mortensen, "Connective Witnessing: reconfiguring the relationship between the individual and the collective", *Information, Communication and Society,* 18 no.11, (2015): 1393-1406.

[94] Mette Mortensen, "Struggles for Visibility: surveillance representations and self-representations of terrorists in the news media", *Journalism Studies*, (2018): 911-931.

[95] Wendy Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same.*

whereby social media and camera phones are active ‘crisis machines’.[96] They have led to increased anticipation of the next emergency in what Frosh and Pinchevski have termed ‘crisis-readiness’,[97]

> ‘…the extensive mediation of everyday life, which creates a condition of conspicuous impendingness, a heightened sense of the latent and potential imminence of noteworthy – testifiable – events.’(sic)[98]

The habitual use of social media and camera phones to document everything has created a new visual ‘attentiveness’, or as Louise Amoore has described it, an ‘anticipatory gaze’.[99] The public mediation of images during emergency events forms what Mortensoen and Hans-Jorg Trenz have called ‘impromptu publics’[100] that are ‘spontaneous and quickly forming publics, which instant news icons at once generate and are themselves generated by.’[101] Taken together, these new elements of emergency production and complicit participation form an visual cultural condition of Ulrich Beck’s ‘risk society’.[102]

As Robison has noted, despite the technological shift from the ‘CNN effect’ to the ‘Youtube effect’, the *effect* is still similar for the power of media and images to shape political processes.[103] Instead, what new media has done is allow the public to be a participatory node within the network, rather than simply receivers of content. In a security frame, this forms a new national ‘theatre of war’ that demands a public contribution more akin to a mediated Artuadian ‘digital theatre of cruelty’ where the ‘production’ abandons the separation between the stage, actor and audience and merges them all together in the same

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[96] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 75.
[97] Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski, “Crisis-Readiness and Media Witnessing”, *The Communication Review*, 12 no.3 (2009).
[98] Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski, “Media Witnessing and the Ripeness of Time”, *Cultural Studies, 28 no.4* (2014): 595.
[99] Louise Amoore, “Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror”, *Security Dialogue*, 38: 2 (June 2007): 216
[100] Mette Mortensen and Hans-Jörg Trenz, “Media Morality and Visual Icons in the Age of Social Media: Alan Kurdi and the Emergence of an Impromptu Public of Moral Spectatorship”, *Javnost - The Public*, 23:4 (2016): 344.
[101] Mortensen and Trenz, “Media Morality”, 346.
[102] Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. (London: Sage, 1992).
[103] Roland Bleiker, *Visual Global Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018): 63.

digital space.[104] These images act as domestic 'images of war'[105] and exist within notions of 'moral spectatorship',[106] or as Chouliaraki has termed it, a 'spectatorship of suffering'.[107] In doing so, networked images break the visual codes of what was considered visible – in what Jacques Ranciere termed the 'distribution of the sensible'.[108] It is this attraction of the spectacular, often violent emergency image, unbounded by language or geographic location, that has allowed images to become the currency through which emergency politics is now traded.

Therefore, emergency images offer us an insight into different modalities of perception. As Ranciere suggests, aesthetic practices,

> '…suspend the ordinary coordinates of sensory experience and reframe the network of relationships between spaces and time, subjects and objects, as well as the common and the singular.'[109]

Emergency events are an intensification of this 'reframed network'. Yet there is still a hierarchy of perception, in that if no images exist of the event, there is no increased opportunity for public perception.[110]

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[104] See: Artuad, Antion. *Theatre and its Double*, (Alma Classics, 2013).
[105] See notes on image and war above.
[106] Mette Mortensen and Hans-Jörg Trenz, "Media Morality and Visual Icons in the Age of Social Media: Alan Kurdi and the Emergence of an Impromptu Public of Moral Spectatorship", *Javnost - The Public*, 23:4,(2016): 345
[107] Lilie Chouliaraki,*The spectatorship of suffering*. (London: Sage, 2011).
[108] Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).
[109] Jacques Ranciere, *Aesthetics and is Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity press, 2009): 25.
[110] A clear example of this can be found after the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris, 2015. The day after the attacks, Islamist extremist's Boko Haram reportedly murdered two thousand people in the village of Baga in north-eastern Nigeria. This event but gained little or no media or political attention due to the lack of images of the atrocity. Moreover, when images *did* emerge they came from satellites, displaying a distanced visuality which replicates the distanced engagement by the public consumed the close images of the attack in Paris. See: "Boko Haram Baga attacks: Satellite images reveal destruction", accessed 21st June 2021, https://www.amnesty.org.uk/nigeria-boko-haram-doron-baga-attacks-satellite-images-massacre

Image-based politics has partly been examined in the decade that followed 9/11.[111] But despite a growing field of literature on the visual culture of politics,[112] there is minimal analysis of a *visual culture of the exception*. Moreover, there has been minimal examination of the relationship and power of images in relation to emergency politics within a British civil emergency context. Fassin and Pandolfi highlight the necessity for this analysis by suggesting we '… remind ourselves that this is the way in which we imagine - and thereby help constitute - emergencies, not simply an accurate description of their character'.[113] In this way, emergencies and their images do not simply constitute the event but also the wider societal perceptions and relations to reality and politics more broadly.

Methodology

This investigation adopts a practice-based research methodology based on the primary research objectives outlined above. Firstly, to document and evidence the COBR Committee's visual culture and make that information publicly accessible, and secondly use this information to examine the existence of a visual culture of emergency politics to form a new categorisation of emergency images.

The primary research material for this investigation are digital images and the way they circulate within the image economy during and after British civil emergency events. The method for collecting, categorising and processing images will be based in two groups, firstly

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[111] Post 9/11 there was wide academic interest in the visual qualities of terrorism and its relation to art. See T. Nikki, Cesare Schotzko, *Learning How to Fall: Art and Culture After September 11* (London and New York: Routledge 2014); Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art after 9/11* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2012); Thomas Stubblefield, *9/11 and the Visual Culture of Disaster,* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 2015).

[112] Most studies focus on the aesthetics of politics outside of the art field, most notably: Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics", in *Jacques Rancière: The Politics of Aesthetics,* ed. Gabriel Rockhill; (London: Bloomsbury, 2004): 7-25; Pnina Werbner,, Martin Webb, Kathryn Spellman-Poots, eds., *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Russ Castronovo, *Beautiful Democracy: Aesthetics and Anarchy in a Global Age,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Those discussing the politisation of aesthetics within an art context include: Boris Groys, "The Logic of Equal Aesthetic Rights", in Boris Groys, *Art Power*, (Cambridge, MIT, 2008); Claire *Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso Press, 2012); McKee, Yates. *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (New York: Verso, 2016).

[113] Fassin and Pandolfi, *Contemporary States of Emergency,* 32.

images of the emergency event that form what I term the emergency images and secondly, images of the political response, which I have termed the emergency response images. Emergency images are primarily located within social media accounts by people who have documented an emergency event in real time. As content is not deleted from social media platforms for a number of years, I was able to harvest detailed content from previous emergency events within the twenty-year research period. CCTV footage and press photos and videos sourced through the internet and via mainstream media channels are also used. Images that existed before mass digitisation were sourced from newspaper archives held at the British Library. Images of governmental response were sourced from government press releases, mainstream news broadcasts and stock photography agencies such as Reuters, Getty and Alamy. Due to the limited budget for this project, I have not paid the licence fee attached to stock photography and have therefore been forced to include the watermark on the image. However, it is interesting to note here that while emergency images largely exists through social media and are mostly free to use, the government's emergency response images exist mostly behind the paywall of stock photography. Even before this research study both sets of images have already been categorised, albeit in relation to their monetary value.

Each set of images was processed using an archival and curatorial method, whereby the images are first categorised into dates, locations and events, and then curated via their differing visual qualities and political importance. This approach allowed for the mass of images and events to be viewed side by side and in their entirety, allowing for patterns and distinct collative qualities to emerge. Forming a comprehensive image-based topography of British emergency politics between 1997-2017 allowed me to track the historical changes and development in imagery within the twenty-year research period. These changes and image-patterns form categories in their own right, providing an overarching body of image-based evidence into the visual culture of the COBR-led emergency politics.

My curatorial method uses previously existing images and data to investigate the visual culture of emergency politics. In what Fuller and Weizeman have termed 'investigatory aesthetics', I too adopt the approach whereby the collation of information is reassembled into a cohesive and public viewable whole. Fuller and Weizeman describe investigatory aesthetics as,

> '…a process of collectively assembling accounts of incidents from media flotsam. It involves tuning into and interpreting weak signals and noticing unintentional evidence registered in visual, audio or data files or in the material composition of our environment. It also refers to the use of aesthetic sensibilities in assembling cases, in editing material into effective films and videos or installations.' [114]

They term these processes and practices that help us navigate the disparate fragments of events and form new bodies of evidence, 'heterogeneous assemblages'.[115] This emerging 'forensic turn' in contemporary artistic practice is further highlighted by David Houston Jones's broad analysis of a visual culture of forensic aesthetics.[116] While Alfredo Cramerotti terms this 'documentary turn' in practices of contemporary art, 'aesthetic journalism',[117] where the process of art, documentary and journalisms blur in a process of 'investigating (and reporting) the social and the political via aesthetics'.[118]

It is through the experimental and often playful process of practice-based research that new patterns, or juxtapositions within the visual material began to emerge. This process allowed me to learn how to reassemble the COBR Committee via a process of *doing* rather just thinking or writing. Through video editing, curation, performance and intervention, my investigation into the visual culture of emergency politics became material-based. This

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[114] Matthew Fuller and Eval Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth*, (New York: Verso, 2021): 13.
[115] Fuller and Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, 13.
[116] David Houston Jones *Visual Culture and the Forensic: Culture, Memory, Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022).
[117] Alfredo Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform Without Informing* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010). See also "Forensic Architecture." The group's practice uses the process of investigatory journalism but displays it in the spaces and infrastructure of contemporary art. In 2018 they were nominated for the Turner Prize. Accessed May 1st, 2021, www.forensic-architecture.org.https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/turner-prize-2018/forensic-architecture
[118] Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism*, 40.

fostered a space in which accidental associations and patterns could emerge freely. Using this method, I compiled and then curated the visual and data-based information already in the public domain. This process has allowed me to build a new comprehensive picture of the elusive and unpredictable COBR Committee, bringing it into the calmness of the non-emergency moment, where it can be fully analysed and its patterns studied.

In this way, the curatorial process acts a distribution hub of this previously siloed information. This follows previous examples of curation whereby the curatorial process became political through the act of collation and re-presenting previously unseen information within the public sphere. This emphasis on making previously private material public formed my curatorial approach for this project, and is examined in more detail in Chapter 5. This approach was influenced by the artists Roger Hiorns, Thierry Geoffroy and Alfredo Jarr, alongside the collective projects of Group Material, COBR RES, Bureau D'Etudes, The Museum of Cruel Designs and Forensic Architecture.

As outlined above, a primary research objective was to make the COBR Committee permanently visible. This was achieved through the public exhibition *Emergency State: The COBR Committee between 1997-2017,* held in July 2021 (see Appendix A), the online COBR Committee Archives (see Appendix B) and dataset submission to the UK Data Archive (see Appendix C). The final practice research output, outlined in Chapter 5, exists slightly outside the parameters of the previous three. It adopts a more experimental, performative and interventionist approach. This output saw me stage a 'live' COBR Committee meeting and distribute the images of that meeting within the image economy itself. By restaging a COBR meeting I aimed to disrupt the visual economy of images surrounding emergencies. Actors were hired to play senior politicians within the reconstructed COBR Committee room. Photographs taken during the performance were SEO tagged and uploaded to the stock image website Alamy, where they now appear alongside internet search results for 'COBR

Committee' (see Appendix D). These images imagine how a COBR meeting might appear if we could see inside. However the 'ministers' are not engaged in high level decision making but seem instead to be wasting time, sleeping or reading the newspaper. This is not political parody. Instead it acts as an intervention that slows down any apparent political urgency while opening up the hidden space of the COBR room to new interpretations. In this way, this practice-based research method was not simply an illustration of the workings of emergency images but a political act of intervention and discovery within the image economy itself. Despite this final output appearing more artistic practice than the others, I view all the research processes as strands of the same experimental practice of reassembling the COBR Committee.

The adoption of a practice-based research methodology was fundamental in answering two of the key research objectives, namely making COBR permanently visible while also evidencing a visual culture of emergency politics. To retain a permanence of visibility, strategies were adopted to future proof the research and preserve the public availability of the practice-based research outputs: the public exhibition, data archive, and web archive. The public exhibition invited its audience to engage with the material in real-time. Access to this immediate physical space was time-limited to the two weeks the exhibition was open. With this in mind, the exhibition retains its own website with images of the event and links to the performance video. The running costs of this website and the web archive were factored into the budget to cover costs for two years following the completion of the research until further funding could be secured. In addition, the submission to the UK Data Archive has allowed for the raw data to be preserved with a longer-term vision beyond the initial two years, should further funding not be forthcoming. In this way, this body of visual information and metadata can now be engaged with beyond the completion of this study.

The focus of the practice-based research method shifted once the primary collation and curation of COBR and its visual culture was complete, moving from a documentary, archival and curatorial approach to that of intervention and response, something more akin to the COBR Committee itself. In testing potential engagement with these archives, the final practice-based research output was a re-enactment of a COBR Committee meeting. Photographs taken during the event were made publicly available through being uploaded to image stock agency Alamy.com (see Chapter 5).

The restaged COBR meeting acts as another way to engage with the lack of substantial documentation of the internal COBR meetings and their response. This final research output leads into the next phase of practice-based research, one that adopts a more interventionists and disruptive approach, and that uses these archives as a departure point for critical and creative engagement with the COBR Committee and emergency politics more broadly. As can be seen in Chapter 5, what this amounts to is a divergent set of research methodologies that began to change and adapt as the primary research objectives - locating the COBR Committee and discussing its position within the wider visual culture of emergency politics – was fulfilled.

Rational for Case Studies

What follows is a brief outline of the rational for the case studies that are detailed in the thesis. All were selected due to their suitability in demonstrating a visual shift in both the *visible* condition of the COBR Committee and that of the emergency image itself. In Chapter 2, the following case studies are used to demonstrate the visual condition of the emergency image. The 7/7 bombings marked the first time social media images were used as the primary

imagery of a British civil emergency event. Although not announcing the emergency itself, they were the first images from ordinary people within immediate proximity to a civil emergency event. The murder of Lee Rigby marked a defining moment when the emergency event was publicly announced by members of the public taking and sharing images online. In doing so, the civil emergency event became fully interactive, forcing the government to communicate and respond in new ways, namely by announcing, for the first time, the convening of COBR on Twitter.com. In this way, the networked images of the murder of Lee Rigby marks the emergence of the social media sphere as a territory of emergency politics to be governed during civil emergency events. The London Bridge and Borough Market attack in 2017 is the final case study in Chapter 2 and shows both how emergency events were visualised by members of the public and the government's response to them. The attack took place during a four-month period in which there were four substantial terror attacks. Each emergency event was responded to with an almost identical set of visual rituals that I argue were first established during David Cameron's phase of experimenting with emergency rituals and further solidified during Theresa May's premiership (as outlined in Chapter 3). In this way, the London Bridge and Borough Market emergency images confirm that the visual culture of emergency politics exists within a ritualised and repetitive process of State 'image making as emergency' response. Lastly, the Grenfell Tower fire is used in Chapter 4 as a clear example of how emergency images now enable a process of contestation during the emergency event itself. The lack of a COBR Committee meeting in response to the fire left a void in the visual space normally occupied by the COBR images, and was instead filled with images of the community-led emergency response. All four case studies offer a different set of frames through which to view the visual culture of British emergency politics.

There are two major factors which have influenced the current position of emergency politics but which this study does not retain the scope to offer a comprehensive survey of.

Firstly, this inquiry will not examine emergency politics in relation to Northern Ireland, nor the government response to it. Despite this being a legislative and military testing ground for emergency politics, as the conflict mostly took place prior to 1997, it was never under the remit of the COBR Committee. It is however, worth noting that a future, longer historical study into the visual culture of civil emergencies should include Northern Ireland largely due to the political instrumentalisation of images during this period. In addition, although it had a major impact on British security, this inquiry will not be examining the events of 9/11. Nor will I be examining the highly mediated wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the visual rhetoric on the practices conducted under the banner of the War on Terror. Images during this period fostered a new public receptivity to the dramatic visual culture of emergency politics within a militarised and globalised frame. However, this study is focused on the British civil emergency context and therefore does not examine these in any detail, but acknowledges their contextual influence.

As a proviso, the immediate research of this thesis is focused on the COBR Committee and the emergency events it responds to. That is, it does not have the scope to critically engage with the literature or practices relating to the wider set of government strategies in relation to risk, resilience, or preparedness.[119]

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[119] Jon Coaffee, "From Counter-Terrorism to Resilience", *European Legacy* 11:4 (2006): 389-403;, Sarah Walklate, Gabe Mythen and Ross McGarry, "State of Resilience and the Resilient State", *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, Vol 24, No.2 (2012): 185-204; Ulrich Beck, *The Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1986); Jane Franklin ed., *The Politics of Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity,1998); Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster, "Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions (un)knowing the Future", *European Journal of International Relations*, 13(1), (2007): 89-115; Pat O'Malley, "From Risk to Resilience. Technologies of the Self in the Age of Catastrophes", a paper given during "The Future of Risk Symposium", University of Chicago, May 11, 2012, accessed May 4th, 2021, www.ccct.uchicago.edu/events/the-future-of-risk-symposium; Nick Pidgeon,, Roger E. Kasperson and Paul Slovic, eds., *The Social Amplification of Risk,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2003); Christopher Hood, Henry Rothstein and Robert Baldwin, *The Government of Risk – Understanding Risk Regulation Regimes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Andrew Lakoff "Preparing for the Next Emergency", *Public Culture*, 19. (2), (April 2007): 247-271; Many have focused on resilience as a form of neoliberal politics, where the responsibility for protection is laid at the feet of the individual. . For further reading see: Susan Tmka and Catherine Trundle, eds., *Competing Responsibilities: The Ethics and Politics of Contemporary Life,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Mark Neocleous, "Resisting Resilience", *Radical Philosophy,* 178 (Mar/Apr 2013). Onresilience as a form of governmentality, see: Jonathan Joseph "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: a Governmentality Approach*", Resilience*, 1:1 (2013): 38-52. On visualising the future see, Louise Amoore*,* "Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror", *Security Dialogue*, 38 (2), (2007): 215-232. In addition, for the latest information regarding the British Government's preparedness for risk, see the 'National Risk Register' accessed June 3, 2022,
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969213/20210310_2008-

Chapter 2: The Birth of Emergency Images, examines the birth and development of the *emergency image* through social media images from three key emergency events: the 7/7 London bombings in 2005, the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013 and the terrorist attack on London Bridge and Borough Market in 2017. In examining these three events and their images, I set out one of the key visual conventions of the visual culture of emergency politics. To do this, I examine differing image quality, temporality of image and spatial dynamics in relation to the emergency image.

Chapter 3: Crisis Rituals: Image Acts of Emergency Response, examines the birth and development of the government's *emergency response image* which I term as a set of image-based 'crisis rituals'. I examine the different qualities of these response images and identify consistent elements which make up the assemblage of emergency images more broadly. I begin by using a comparative approach to demonstrate the differing qualities of the emergency response images to their emergency image counterparts. I then set out the differing elements that make up the assemblage of emergency response images: the first public announcement of a COBR meeting by the prime minister, the images of the arrival of ministers at the COBR meeting, the post-COBR statement and the follow-up statement by the prime minister. Each stage of the chapter demonstrates how these sets of images first emerged in the early 2000s and how their visual conventions were established from disordered and chaotic pictures into highly choreographed images that form a consistent and standardised form of image-based response to civil emergencies.

Chapter 4: Dynamics of Emergency Images, charts the dynamics of emergency images in relation to who can now claim an emergency. Firstly, I outline the history of the

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NRR-Title-Page_UPDATED-merged-1-2.pdf. These core frames are part of a larger State process of prediction and prevention of emergency events under the overarching banner of 'CONTEST'. Under this, there exists four separate strands: PREVENT, PURSUE, PROTECT AND PREPARE. For more details see: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2018, accessed July 4th 2020.

use of images in the emergency claim via the proclamation of an emergency via the unfurling of the Royal Banner in the fourteenth-century and the reading of the Riot Act in the eighteenth-century. I suggest the contemporary public announcement of the COBR Committee is equivalent to these earlier proclamations with one key exception, the COBR announcement does not invoke a change in the law. I argue that since 2004, the separation between proclamation and law, instigated via the central legislative frame work of Civil Contingencies Act 2004, firmly evidences the uses of COBR primarily existing as a governmental tool based on aesthetics rather than that of law. This separation has allowed the COBR Committee to be more subjective in its claiming of certain emergency events as COBR worthy. It is in light of this that I argue COBR has now been instrumentalised to support the leadership credentials of newly appointed, not elected, prime ministers. In the final section, I outline how networked images facilitate the contestation of emergency claims by the public. I do this through an examination of the images surrounding the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 when the government did not announce a COBR meeting but the local population did, via the creation of their own emergency images.

Chapter 5: Reassembling the COBR Committee, begins by outlining how the COBR Committee has been represented within popular culture such as television dramas *Spooks*, the *Bodyguard* and Sky's *COBRA*. It argues that such cultural productions condition a wider acceptance and normalisation of the legitimacy of COBR as the logical and only response to civil emergency events. The chapter goes on to outline in detail the practice-based research and the four specific research outputs of my investigation: the temporary public exhibition *Emergency State: The COBR Committee between 1997-2017*, the permanent public archiving of data of the COBR meetings via a web archive, the deposit of a data set to the U.K Data Service and finally the reenactment performance of the COBR meeting. In this way, Chapter 5 outlines how this study is actively engaged with documenting, analysing and also

disrupting the visual culture of emergency politics by using practice -based research to produce new knowledge on the visual culture emergency politics and the British Government emergency response committee COBR.

2 The Birth of Emergency Images

On 7th July 2005, three men boarded three separate London underground trains. At 8:49am they simultaneously detonated improvised explosive devices strapped to their backs. By 9:15am, as emergency services headed to Liverpool Street Station, reports began circulating on mainstream news of a 'power surge' on the underground network. At 9:47am, the fourth bomber blew himself up on the No.30 bus at Tavistock Square.[120] Commonly known as '7/7' or the '7/7 bombing', the tragic events of 7th July 2007 caused fifty-six fatalities with seven hundred and eighty-four injured. It was the largest terrorist attack within the UK since the 1998 Lockerbie bombing. Despite the 7/7 bombing having been the subject of much academic research, especially in the decade following the attacks, it is valuable to revisit it here. It was the first set of images of a British civil emergency event taken by members of the public and circulated online.[121]

Figures 3 & 4: Left: Image taken on a mobile phone by Eliot Ward shows Adam Stacey immediately following one of the explosions during the 7/7 bombing. Right: Image taken on a mobile phone by Alexander Chadwick shows people walking down an underground tunnel immediately following the 7/7 bombing.

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[120] For a detailed account of what happened on 7th July 2005 see: "*7 July London bombings: What happened that day?*" accessed April 2nd 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33253598

[121] For key literature in relation to the 7/7 bombing, and the production and circulation of its images. see: Angharad Closs Stephens and Nick Vaughan-Williams, eds., *Terrorism and the Politics of Response* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Stuart Allan, *Citizen Witnessing: Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013): 5; Karen Cross, "Memory, Guardianship and the Witnessing Amateur in the Emergence of Citizen Journalism" in *Citizen Media and Public Spaces: Diverse Expressions of Citizenship and Dissent,* eds., Mona Baker & Bolette B. Blaagaard (London and New York: Routledge, 2016)

Taken on mobile phones, figures 3 and 4 became the most widely viewed images to emerge of the event and gain popular recognition. Figure 3 depicts Adam Stacey just outside a Piccadilly line carriage, between Kings Cross and Russell Square stations, minutes after one of the four bombers, Germaine Lindsey, detonated his bomb. Although reminiscent of a selfie, the image was taken by Elliot Ward. It shows Stacey covering his face with a sports sock due to the high levels of dust in the air created by the explosion. Figure 4, taken by Alexander Chadwick, depicts a series of figures walking through an underground tunnel near Kings Cross station. For the first time, these images offered a more personal perspective of the emergency event and began to form a new image-based connection between civil emergency events and the government's COBR Committee.

Initially, the circulation of these images was minimal. They had originally been uploaded to Moblog.com, a blog dedicated to sharing amateur images taken on mobile phones, and were later added to Flicker.com. As most social media platforms were in their infancy, or did not exist in 2005, the majority of user-generated content was uploaded to personal blogs or directly to mainstream news channels. The amount of news information receivable on mobile phones was extremely limited in 2005. One of the most popular mobile phones at the time, the Sony Ericsson V800, replicated the fixed times of daily news bulletins on television, providing news updates only four times per day.[122] This low connectivity is further demonstrated in figure 5, which shows people watching the 7/7 events on television screens in a shop window.

[122] Stuart Miles, "Sony Ericsson V800 mobile phone - WORLD EXCLUSIVE", accessed May 21st 2021, https://www.pocket-lint.com/phones/reviews/sony-mobile/67926-sony-ericsson-v800-mobile-phone

Figure 5: People watch the events of 7/7 on television screens in a shop window, Edgeware Road, London.

The first COBR meeting was held at 10am of the same day, but the images did not enter wide public circulation until they appeared on mainstream news at 11:30am, two hours and forty-one minutes after the first explosion.[123] At 11:30am the image of Stacey was sent directly to the BBC's newly-created 'User-Generated Content hub'.[124] At 10:55am the Home Secretary Charles Clark publicly announced, "a COBR meeting of senior ministers" had taken place in response to the bombings.[125] Therefore, the images themselves were uploaded before the COBR meeting but they did not publicly announce the emergency. The social media infrastructure for the quick sharing of images was not yet established. In this way, the images of the 7/7 bombing marks the emergence of the emergency image as a new set of visual conventions. However, they had not yet gained the instantaneity of future emergency images, allowing them to declare emergency events before the government.

[123] "7/7 London bombings - Sky News coverage", accessed May 21st, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LxzGZHNGmY
[124] "How did you help us change the way we report the news?", accessed Dec 12th 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-30421631
[125] "London Bomb Blasts: Charles Clarke press conference", Getty Images, accessed June 12th 2021, https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/videos/charles-clarke77?phrase=charles%20clarke%207%2F7&sort=mostpopular

Historically, the power of images to render emergency events publicly visible within the United Kingdom was facilitated by mainstream media. With the advent of the BBC Six o'clock news in 1984,[126] images of emergency events were recorded and shown at specific intervals. The additional ability to report events in real time, from 'on the spot reporters' via satellite from international locations, created a new public receptivity to mass televised events, broadcast directly into people's homes. Events such as the Iranian Embassy hostage siege[127] (1980), the Falklands war (1982), the famine in Ethiopia (1983), and the aftermath of Lockerbie bomb (1988) all began a process of visualising emergency events in real time.[128] The attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001 can be seen as the most paradigmatic version of the emergency image. By the time the second plane had struck the South Tower, live television crews had trained their cameras upon the burning north tower and so caught the second plane's impact. Like the images of that second plane, the emergency image emerges unexpectedly and arrives unannounced to interrupt the normative frame of everyday visual communication.

Since 2005 and the emergence of wide public participation in the internet, more commonly termed 'Web 2.0', there has been exponential growth of images and their interactivity as the primary form of communication, predominantly via social media. Social media sites were in their infancy during the 7/7 bombing in 2005, with some key platforms not yet in existence (Facebook: 2004; YouTube: 2005; Twitter: 2006; Instagram: 2010).

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[126] Twenty-four-hour news channels are launched during the same period.

[127] As mentioned above, the live television broadcast of the siege of the Iranian Embassy in London in 1980 with its now famous footage of the storming of the building by the SAS, displayed an early form of civil emergency imagery. Although we now know that this event was coordinated by the government's precursor to the COBR Committee, the Civil Contingencies Unit, the images do not amount to emergency images as they did not announce the exception. In an early display of government awareness of the visual power of the emergency event, the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher ordered that no smoke bombs be used during the raid and that it take place during the day so that the SAS raid could be viewed and recorded by the mass of news media gathered in the park opposite the embassy. The Iranian Embassy siege opened the doors of public perception of a previously secretive military group. Following the Iranian embassy siege, a television drama, *The Professionals* was made about the SAS. It included an episode in which a training exercise was conducted on a building identical to the Iranian Embassy. See: Philip Schlesinger, Graham Murdock, and Philip Elliott, *Televising Terrorism: Political Violence in Popular Culture* (London: Comdia, 1983): 73.

[128] See also: Julian Stallabrass, *Killing for Show: Photography, War, and the Media in Vietnam and Iraq* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

When Facebook launched in 2004, users were only allowed one image per profile, however by 2006 unlimited images could be uploaded via the aptly named 'newsfeed' function.

Expanding what Buck-Morss has termed the 'economy of images',[129] the production and distribution of emergency images during this period began to permeate the ever-expanding social media image-based infrastructure. This change meant emergency images were not only framed and presented as news items by mainstream news channels, but were shown as raw, unedited and uncensored content through social media channels designed for domestic communication. It was this merging between domestic images and emergency images that helped, in part, to foster a new public receptivity to emergency events and their visual representation. Castell termed this move from mass-communication to that of 'mass-*self* communication',[130] whereby anyone with access to a mobile phone and the internet could visually document and disseminate political events themselves. What emerged was a period in which the claiming of emergencies was now open to anyone and was not reliant upon the old structure or hierarchy of mainstream news or the overarching narratives of the State.

The Visual Qualities of the Emergency Image

The emergency image exists within a specific set of visual conventions commonly associated with exceptional moments that disrupt the normal visual frame. Emergency images are exceptional both in content and in their visual quality. This visual quality is made up of pixelated images, blurred footage and overall poor composition. The poor image is not usually valued by an image economy focused on the latest pixel count via HD or 4K rendering, but during emergency events certain poor quality images are elevated within the

[129] Susan Buck-Morss, "Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display", *Critical Inquiry* 21. No.2 (1995): 434-467; Susan Buck-Morss, "Visual Empire", *Diacritics*, 37, no. 2/3, (2007): 171–98.
[130] Castell, Manuel, *Communication Power.*

image economy,[131] meaning the low quality image gains elevated status due to its exclusivity of content and iconic appeal.

Arguably, the earliest popularised rendition of this exceptional visual quality can be seen in Robert Capa's photographs of the D-Day landings. These blurred 'action' shots depict the physical and emotional bombardment of the moment. Today, images that represent the visual convention of the emergency image are sourced from CCTV footage, secretive undercover filming during documentaries, or even candid camera television shows such as *You've Been Framed!* This particular aesthetic has been extensively mimicked in horror and action films. 'Exceptional' moments are created by intentionally altering the frame rate to achieve 'strobing' or 'motion blur', causing the frame to appear urgent and fragmented.[132] In this way, the emergency image was subsumed within an already existing set of publicly recognisable visual troupes used to denote an exceptional moment. [133]

The poor quality of the emergency image denotes authenticity by its appearance as unintentional or accidental. Accidents are exceptions to an established order, where the normal condition is broken unintentionally. As suggested by Freud, the accident, or parapraxis (Freudian slip) may expose a previously hidden truth or repressed unconscious desire.[134] This is not to say that amateur images of emergency events reveal repressed desires but rather the accidental witness image of a civil emergency event is considered to be more

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[131] Buck-Morss, Susan "Visual Empire". *Diacritics*, vol. 37, no. 2/3, (2007): 171–98.
[132] See the films: Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick, *Blair Witch Project,* Haxan Films (1999); Steven Spielberg, *Saving Private Ryan* Paramount Pictures (1998).
[133] Political amateur images originated in the 1850s with warfare photography. Amateur photography became increasingly popular by new advances in handheld cameras such as the Kodak Box and the Brownie in 1880s. By the turn of century new British groups such as The Film Society (1925), Federation of Workers Film Societies (1929), Masses Stage and Film Guild (1929) Atlas Film Company (1930) and the Workers' Film and Photo League (1933) used images to counter hegemonic narratives emanating from both the State and its media partners. Although I do not define these as emergency images, they did aim to highlight the ongoing slow emergency of working-class life within Britain at that time. What is of note here are the beginnings of an image-based alterative to hegemonic narratives. While the rise in domestic photography was especially prominent during the 1950-60s post-war economic expansion of America, where the photographic camera became affordable to far greater numbers of ordinary citizens. The two most cited examples of historical civil emergency events being captured on camera by an amateur, was the filming of the assassination of the American president John F Kennedy in 1963 and the beating of Rodney King by LAPD police officers in 1991.
[134] Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, (London: Penguin, 2003).

truthful and authentic than other types of more formal images. They are images taken en-masse and captured without prior intention.

Figure 6: A collection of social media images taken on a mobile phones showing the 7/7 bombing. Presented as part of TIME magazines 'Best Pictures of the Year 2005'.

Figures 7,8 & 9: Left: An image taken on a mobile phone shows people exiting along a London underground tunnel following 7/7 bombing. Centre: An image taken on a mobile phone shows people inside an underground train following the 7/7 bombing. Right: An image taken on a mobile phone shows Alexander Chadwick with dirt on his face after exiting the underground tunnels following the 7/7 bombing.

These collective sets of images comprised from the subjective (singular image), *become* objective (collective images) due to their quantity. They offer validation of the event's authenticity.[135] Composed of multiple perspectives all arriving at different moments following the event (seconds, minutes, hours, weeks or months after), the emergency image forms a dynamic, active and constantly evolving set of visual information as new images are

[135]"We had 50 images within an hour". The Guardian Newspaper online, accessed, May 22 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2005/jul/11/mondaymediasection.attackonlondon

made public. In what Mette Mortesen terms 'eyewitness images',[136] where the accidental witnessing of an event via its images can be compared to the witnessing of a crime, where multiple perspectives corroborate a specific version of reality when placed in relation to other fixed elements within the event.[137] Where singular images or testimonies can be manipulated, multiple images from a variety of perspectives are less easily falsified; social media facilitates this multiplicity of perspectives and the presentation of authenticity.[138] In this way, emergency images not only represent the event but *form* the emergency event itself within the visual landscape of social media and the internet.

Whilst the physical emergency event sits within the parameters of time and space, in the visual realm, it is stretched, edited, reordered and multiplied, existing from multiple perspectives and on multiple planes. Each new participatory node within the network engages with the emergency event and its images as if it were happening at that exact moment in time. In this way, emergency images are not only 'live' but a*live*. During emergency events they take on a life of their own. Once the physical emergency event has reached its conclusion, the visual event keeps going within the space of digital media. As Wendy Chun has noted, 'In new media, crisis has found its medium; and in crisis, new media has found its value.'[139] It is this heightened value within a political context via the combination of new media and emergency events, that this thesis is most interested in examining.

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[136] Mette Mortensen, "Citizen Investigations and Eyewitness Images. The Boston Marathon Bombing (2013)". In *Journalism and Eyewitness Images, Digital Media, Participation and Conflict*. London and New York: Routledge, 2015:144-159.
[137] Barbie Zelizer, "Death in Wartime: Photographs and the "Other War" in Afghanistan", *Harvard International Journal of Press and Politics*, 10 no.3 (2005): 115-131.
[138] Mervi Pantti and Piet Bakker, "Misfortunes, Memories and Sunsets: Non-Professional Images in Dutch News Media," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12 no.5 (2009): 471-489.
[139] Wendy Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 74.

The Economy of Emergency Images

The emergency image offers a new conceptualisation of image value within the wider image economy. During moments of crisis, the vernacular image is elevated to iconic status by its momentarily rare content. This is most apparent in the elevation of poor quality images to high production mainstream news. The news media reduce the multiplicity of images to a singular and iconic image, and uses it to build an ordered, chronological narrative around the event. As we see in figures 10 and 11, the social media images of the 7/7 bombing were framed within the clean and authoritative mainstream news platforms. This framing legitimised the images, while presenting traditional news media as still relevant alongside the latest image-sharing processes.

Figures 10 & 11: Alexander Chadwick's mobile phone image appears on Channel Four news and the front cover of the New York Times.

Hito Steyerl has argued that there exists a 'hierarchy of images', [140] where the poor image is monopolised by mainstream media,

> '…poor images …testify to the violent dislocation, transferals and displacements of images – their acceleration and circulation within the vicious cycles of audio-visual

[140] Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 33.

> capitalism. Poor images are dragged around the globe as commodities or their effigies, as gifts or as bounty'.[141]

Emergency images become highly valued commodities that are bought and sold between news agencies, news corporations and stock image platforms. Like the economy of physical and digital commodities, the emergency image gains its value due to its perceived urgency, scarcity and affective charge. Moreover, the emergency image usually portrays physical danger, reconfirming the old media maxim, 'if it bleeds, it leads.' The combination of extreme violence, closeup shots of the epicentre of the event and the live timeframe form a hyper-spectacle that are framed as 'infotainment'.[142] As Hans Magnus Enzensberger suggests, 'If the terror of images doesn't turn you into a terrorist, it will turn you into a voyeur'.[143]

Where once we might have considered emergency images as disrupting the hegemonic power of rich media structures,[144] they are now harvested by mainstream media. This forms a process that Bolter and Grusin have defined as 'remediation', where all media sources now merge together.[145] Social media images have proven instrumental in shifting the visual culture of emergency from the periphery to the centre of the media scope. In what Belting has termed 'intermediality', the emergency image helps to galvanise the mainstream media as narrators, or even curators, of emergency images.[146] This process has helped to widen and legitimise the emergency image itself, and in doing so helps to normalise its occurrence within the established frames of mainstream media.

The wide public attentiveness to emergency images allows the government to justify their specific policy directives (increased surveillance, sanctions aboard, raising of terror

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[141] Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 32.
[142] For an analysis of media and infotainment see: Debrix, Francois. *Tabloid Terror: War, Culture and Geopolitics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).
[143] Klonk, *Terror: When Images Become Weapons*, 2.
[144] Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 35.
[145] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
[146] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2007), 31-32.

threat levels at home) as well as solidifying an objective and overarching narrative of national security. In the case of the 7/7 bombing, it was the first time so-called ‘home grown’ terrorists had undertaken suicide bombings. Although the event was alarming in its own right, it was aided and supported by images which offered a graphic, first person account of the event.

The 7/7 bombing was the first emergency event within the United Kingdom to be partially documented using mobile phones and uploaded to the internet. This makes it the first iteration of the emergency image in Britain. Although it did not announce the emergency before the COBR Committee meeting, it established conventions of the emergency image as the dominant visual reference for civil emergency events. What followed 7/7 was a huge surge in the number of images produced depicting emergency events.

Emergency images announce the civil emergency event.

The next substantial shift in visual reception of emergency events came in 2013, with the brutal murder of Lee Rigby in south London. This event marked the first widespread interactive civil emergency event within the United Kingdom, where those recording the events on mobile phones from the street, and those sharing and commenting online, became real-time participants in the production and reception of the emergency event rather than simply being passive audience members. [147] While the images of the 7/7 bombing in 2005 needed mainstream media hubs for wide dissemination, by 2013 social media and camera phone technology was now ubiquitous in Britain, meaning the images of the murder of Lee

[147] It is worth noting that this shift was also true concurrently in the United States. The Boston Marathon bombing also marked a paradigm shift in public participation facilitated by new media. Although I do not examine the Boston Marathon bombing here, it is useful to note that 2013 marked a threshold point at which point new citizen-led technology, in the UK and United States, was sufficient to be the primary means of visual information following emergency events. For a detailed account and analysis of the use of citizen witness images in the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 see: Mette Mortensen, *Journalism and Eyewitness Images, Digital Media, Participation and Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015) 144-159.

Rigby could by-pass the centralised hubs of mainstream media and be disseminated directly within the network of social media.

On 22nd May 2013 at 2:21pm two attackers named Michael Abalaojo and Michael Adebowale rammed a vehicle into the off-duty British soldier Lee Rigby as he made his way towards Woolwich barracks, south London. After the two men had killed Rigby by stabbing and attempting to behead him, they actively encouraged people standing nearby to film them on their mobile phones, with Michael Abalaojo holding an impromptu press conference for one bystander recording on her camera phone (see figure 13).[148] Armed police arrived after fourteen minutes. They shot (not fatally) both Abalaojo and Adebowale who had charged at them holding a gun and meat cleaver.

These images, shared on social media and ITV News, were the first images to declare an emergency event *before* the government. Though the images went viral on social media at 2:30pm, the government did not declare a COBR meeting until four hours later, at 6:30pm, chaired by the then Home Secretary Theresa May. The following morning Prime Minister David Cameron, who was in Paris, France at the time of the attack, chaired another COBR meeting at 9am.[149] The images were viewed and circulated in real time. I argue that the government and security services first saw the images of the murder of Lee Rigby at the same time as the public. In this way, for the first time it was the images that announced the exception and not the government. This marks a pivotal shift from emergency events dominated by the State's own monopoly on information.

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[148] Laura Scaife, *Social Networks as the New Frontier of Terrorism, #terror* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2017); P. Burnap, M. L. Williams, L. Sloan, O. Rana, W. Housley, A. Edwards, .A. Voss, "Tweeting the Terror: Modelling the social media reaction to the Woolwich terrorist attack", *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 4: 206 (2014).

[149] Haley Dixon, "Woolwich attack: as it happened May 23." The Telegraph, accessed May 4th 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10077616/Woolwich-attack-soldier-terror-live.html

Figures 12, 13 & 14: Left: A image taken on a mobile phone posted on Twitter.com showing a woman, Ingrid Loyau-Kennett, talking to one of the attackers, Michael Adebowale. Centre: One of the attackers, Michael Abalaojo, gives an impromptu speech to a woman holding a mobile phone. This footage was later used exclusively on ITV News. Right: An image taken on a mobile phone posted on Twitter.com of a crowd near the body of Lee Rigby while the police shoot and arrest the attackers in the background.

Figure 15: David Cameron announces a COBR meeting via Twitter.com for the first time.

In contrast to the images of the 7/7 bombing, the images of Lee Rigby's murder were not uploaded to blogs or image only sharing sites but directly to Twitter.com and YouTube.com, with the most iconic image being recorded on a mobile phone and sold exclusively to ITV News.[150]

Social media-based emergency images made Lee Rigby's murder occur in two places simultaneously, in the physical location of Wellington Street, Woolwich, south London and within the virtual territory of social media. This reformed the social space into a new political territory that the State immediately felt it needed to govern, and in response, Prime Minister

[150] For a detailed analysis of the social media data in the aftermath of the killing of Lee Rigby see: **Martin** Innes, Colin Roberts, Alun Preece and David Rogers, "Ten "Rs" of Social Reaction: Using Social Media to Analyse the "Post-Event" Impacts of the Murder of Lee Rigby", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 30, no.3 (2018): 454-474.

David Cameron became the first British prime minister to announce his convening of a COBR meeting via Twitter.com (see figure 15). Social media has always been political but its content rarely requires State intervention. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 3, the emergency image has forced the State to form a new visual-information strategy, one in which it responds both on and offline.

Public involvement during the murder of Lee Rigby kept the event live and facilitated its ever-widening exposure – albeit from a safe distance – as people shared or commented on the emergency images unfolding in front of them.[151] These horizontal networks of interactive communication cause a new type of interactive visibility that Mette Mortensen has termed 'connective witnessing'[152] where new media 'merges political participation and self-expression'.[153] This process redistributes mainstream media's monopoly on 'news' and reforms it via a dynamic and instantly adaptable haptic participation akin to a form of semi-anonymous collectivised news production, based on the variable and differing modalities of the participatory nodes in the network. [154] As Wendy Chun has noted, new media can,

> '…constantly produce crisis – by linking and breaching the personal and the collective, the political and technological, the biological and the machinic, the theatrical and the empirical.'[155]

The habitual process of new media facilitates the merging of entertainment, socialising and emergency, as is facilitated by what Chun describes as 'crisis machines'.[156] Within these 'crisis machines' I suggest participants become the visual engineers of emergency events, both for major national emergencies and minor domestic crisis. Social media is built upon the uploading of potentially exceptional, and often domestic, content to a public space. The user-

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[151] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 39.
[152] Mette Mortensen "Connective Witnessing", 1393-1406.
[153] Mortensen, *Connective Witnessing*, 1400.
[154] Debrix, Francois. *Tabloid Terror: War, Culture and Geopolitics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).
[155] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 81.
[156] Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 75.

experience of online platforms facilitate a haptic and emotive engagement where the process of 'liking' or 'sharing' a funny cat video, requires the same actions as sharing and commenting on violent images of a civil emergency event. In this way, the domestic online space of social media becomes infused with the *potentiality* of the next political exception where the public are not only complicit in the production and facilitation of emergency images but also, and more widely, in the maintenance and regulation of the crisis machines themselves.

Within the domestic frame, self-made image production on social media has blurred the traditional boundaries between users and producers, and formed 'prosumers' of visual political information in what Andre Lepecki has termed 'multitudinal fascism'. Social media has effectively forced us all into a constant state of self-expression, as both viewers and content producers are now offered and 'mesmerised' by countless opportunities for "screenal expression" rather than 'real' freedom of expression. Lepecki terms 'multitudinal fascism' as,

> 'A fascism in which the main concern is to ensure that life and subjectivity does not find *freedom of expression* but gets mesmerised in and by a weak image of freedom understood as the corporate offering of screenal occasions for ventilating to the world so many *self-centred expressions*? Might this corporate-governmental offering of opportunities for self-expression as expression of nothing other than selfies, be the necessary operation that power finds to mask the otherwise blatant corrosion of rights in our Western democracies (human rights, civil rights, worker's rights, rights on freedom of expression) – a corrosion that has been implemented as badly and barely justifiable 'exceptional measures', or 'temporary emergency measures' by our democratically elected governments and that remain in effect not for weeks, not for months, not for years, but for decades? Indeed, the vast majority of contemporary Western democracies confirm Giorgio Agamben's diagnosis made already twenty years ago: they exist by implementing a regime of permanent exceptionality, of permanent executive and legislative lawlessness.'[157]

For Lepecki, it is the 'mesmerising' process of continual self-expression in social media that masks and implements a regime of permanent exceptionality. To expand Lepecki's

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[157] Andre Lepecki *Under Attack (or Expression in the Age of Selfie-Control),* accessed 21st May 2022, https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/real_democracy/17_under_attack_or_expression_in_the_age_of_selfie_control/

assessment I suggest that each social media post, each selfie, each posted cat video is made in the pursuit of the exceptional. An exceptional social media post brings with it attention, likes, and the holy grail of going viral, which in turn would bring more follows and likes and so on and so forth. Through 'crisis machines', we are habitually conditioned to not only to view exceptional content but also to facilitate it. We are expectant of the exceptional potential. In this way, there is a merging between the emergency image, the self-expression of social media and the politics of the exception that all combine to normalise and make permanent the emergency condition.

What emerged was a period in which the claiming of emergencies was now open to anyone and was not reliant upon the old structure or hierarchy of mainstream news or the overarching narratives of the State. This had both beneficial and negative effects. It has allowed for anyone to project a marginal or hidden emergency into the spotlight of the global social media networks.[158] This has led to positive political engagement as numerous open-source human rights organisations using social media to reframe events and highlight crimes by compiling and recomposing fragmented images to form a comprehensive picture.[159] At the same time, however, the infrastructure of the internet and social media are being recuperated as a surveillance device, far out weighting anything Deleuze and his 'society of control' could have imagined.[160]

What follows is a brief image analysis of my final case study in this chapter, which outlines how emergency images now constitute the emergency event itself.

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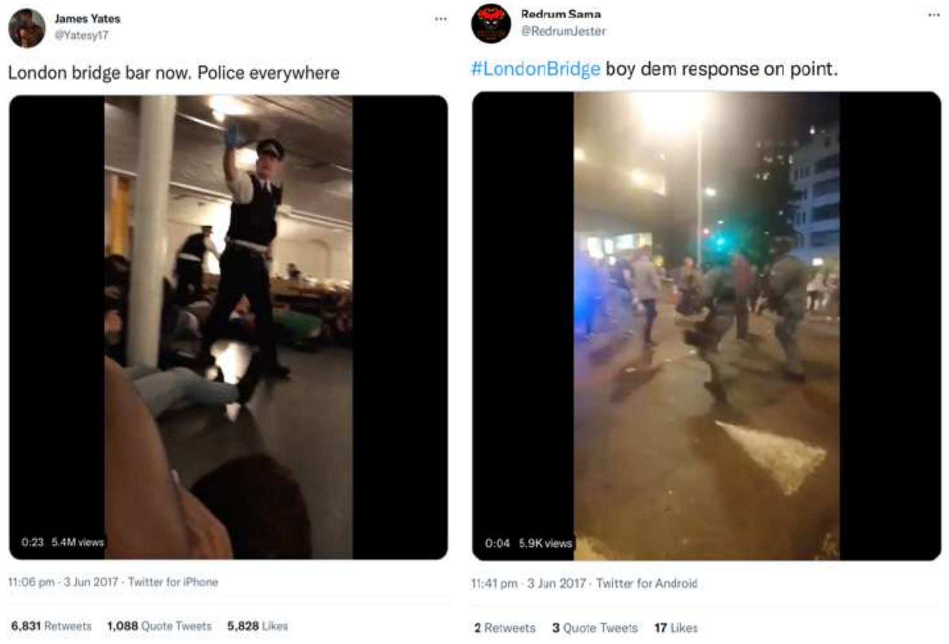
[158] Hands, Joss, *Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion.*
[159] See: Bellingcat, Witness NYC and Forensic Architecture among others.
[160] Gilles Deluze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", *October*, 59. (1992): 3-7.

Between 22 March - 19h June 2017, the United Kingdom witnessed a succession of terror attacks: a vehicle ramming knife attack on Westminster Bridge 22nd March,[161] the suicide bombing of Manchester Arena following the Ariana Grande concert on 22nd May,[162] the London Bridge attack on 3rd June and the vehicle ramming attack outside a mosque in Finsbury Park, London on 19th June.[163] This section will focus on the 3rd June attack, when Khruram Butt, Rachid Redouane and Youssef Zaghba rammed a van into pedestrians on London Bridge at approximately 10pm, before going on to stab people in the London Bridge and Borough Market area. Eleven people died, including the perpetrators, and forty-two people were injured. The COBR Committee was convened the following morning at 9am on 4th June and was chaired by Prime Minister Theresa May.[164]



Figures 16 &17: Left: Mobile phone footage uploaded to Twitter.com showing police telling people in a bar to get down. Right: Mobile phone footage uploaded to Twitter.com showing armed police running towards London Bridge.

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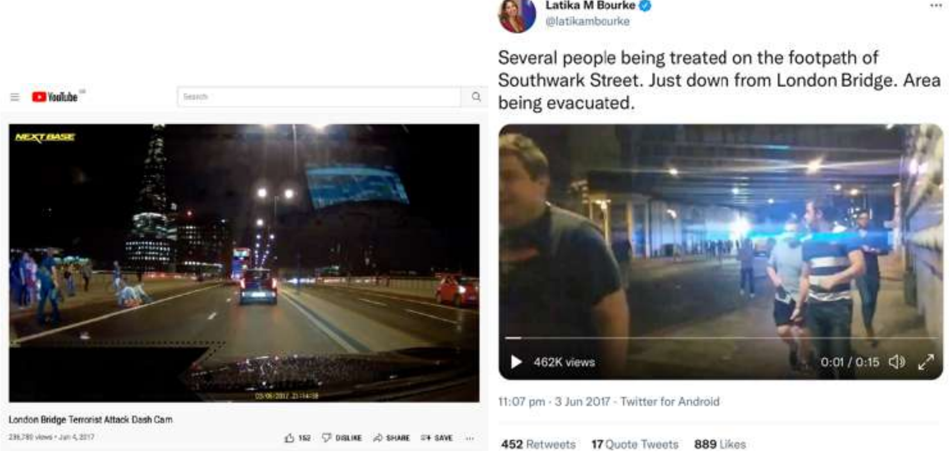
[161] On 23rd March 2017 a car driven by Khalid Masood rammed and killed pedestrians on Westminster bridge before crashing and entering the grounds of Westminster.

[162] On 22nd May 2017 Salman Ramadan Abedi walked into the foyer of the Manchester Arena at the end of Ariana Grande concert and blew himself up, killing twenty-three people including himself.

[163] On 19th June 2017 a man drove a van into pedestrians leaving a mosque in Finsbury Park, North London killing one.

[164] "Ministers arrive for Cobra security meeting after London Bridge attack", Reuters, accessed June 23rd 2020, https://www.reuters.com/video/watch/ministers-arrive-for-cobra-security-meet-id371810243



Figures 18 & 19: Left: Dashcam footage uploaded to Youtube.com showing people injured on London Bridge. Right: Mobile phone footage of people running away from London Bridge.

Figures 20 & 21: Left: Mobile phone footage of one of the attackers after being shot by police. Right: Mobile phone image showing the aftermath of the attackers' van.

What these images demonstrate is how the emergency image now covers and details every scene of the event in real time, from the attack itself (figure 16) to people fleeing the scene (figure 19), to the armed police response (figure 17 and 20) and finally to the death of the attackers by fatal gun shots fired by police (figure 20). In acknowledgement of the power and public receptivity of social media during emergency events, the Metropolitan Police acknowledged the event on Twitter.com within eighteen minutes of the initial attack. Exactly thirty minutes later, for the first time in a live terrorist attack, the Metropolitan Police issued the 'Run Hide Tell' warning (figure 23).[165] In this way, the virtual space of social media during an emergency event is not only governed by the COBR meetings and the Prime

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[165] Helen Davidson, Met Police use 'run, hide, tell' warning for first time during London terrorist attack", accessed 21st June 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/04/met-police-use-run-hide-tell-warning-for-first-time-after-london-terrorist-attack

Minister's announcements via Twitter.com, but is also policed. The London Bridge attack was participated in by the majority of people through social media. Its images were shared on social media, the government's response was announced and the Metropolitan Police also issued warnings via its platforms. In this way, emergency events have become fully interactive and participatory via the social media platforms that now facilitate their digital exposure.

Figures 22 & 23: Left: Downing Street announce COBR meeting via Twitter.com. Right: Metropolitan Police Issue 'Run, Hide, Tell' warning via Twitter.com

Figure 24 and 25. Left: British newspaper front covers following the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013. Right: British newspaper front covers following the London Bridge and Borough market terrorist attack in 2017.

It has largely been the mainstream media that has decided which images of emergency events become most circulated (see figures 24 and 25). But as people increasingly gain their news from other sources, images can gain iconicity from differing processes of dissemination,

namely by going viral on social media. [166] In relation to the emergency event, the iconic emergency image gains political power which increases its public exposure and attention, framing a specific event within a simple common frame. As the emergency image gains wider exposure and public receptivity, it can be instrumentalised by a number of differing elements due to its wide public attention.

Emergency Image as exception

The State needs the emergency image so it can expel it and display its own sovereign image. I suggest that the emergency image is a representation of the repellent 'ban' or banishment, that which lives outside of the system and yet legitimises that which is included. As Agamben suggests,

> 'The ban is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception: bare life and power, *homo sacer* and the sovereign'.[167]

In this context, the emergency image is the ban, the bare life, the repellent condition to which the State legitimises its own existence in relation to. This echoes Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction, by which the inclusivity of the State is galvanised through its opposition to the enemy of the State. In this context, the emergency image is the enemy, while the emergency response image represents the friend. However, the exceptional image is now normalised within a visual state of exception, where all events, both political and domestic, are framed as urgent and in crisis. As stated above, this is aided by the hype of the mainstream news media,

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[166] For literature on iconography and images see: Martin Kayman "Iconic Violence: belief, law and the visual", *Textual Practice* 32:1 (2018): 139-161; Mondzain and Shato, "Can Images Kill"; Butler, *Frames of War;* Robert Halman *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Hannah Adrent *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Publishers, 1970); Slavo Ziziek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2009); Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*; Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology.*)

[167] Agamben, *Homo Sacer,*110.

the desire for attention by politicians and the habitual process of the ‘crisis machines’ of social media.

The declaration of COBR does not declare a state of emergency or the legislative shift that it would bring, nor is it simply another government committee. It holds symbolic power. It is in both the visibility and non-visibility of COBR that I argue there exists the zone of indistinction similar to the ban/sovereign exists outside or inside law, as COBR exists outside and inside the visible. The emergency image prompts the government to adopt COBR so as to embody a visual representation of that zone indistinction, of the space between law and non-law. Returning to Agamben,

> ‘In truth, the state of exception is neither external nor internal; to the judicial order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other.[168]

If the emergency image is the exception then the emergency response image is the rule.

Practice Research Output: Exhibition Timeline

Like the images outlined above, one of the key methodologies of the study is to analyse the images as a whole body that displays a larger visual condition of emergency politics. This was only possible through the practice of reassembling its meetings and their images in their entirety on a wall so that the full twenty-year period can be viewed at the same time. One practice-based research output of this study was the public exhibition *Emergency State: The COBR Committee between 1997-2017*. By placing all the publicly announced COBR events side-by-side and within a chronological order for the first time, I was able to present the

[168] Agamben, *State of Exception*, 23.

overall separate COBR meetings as emblematic of a condition of British emergency politics (see Figure 26, 27 & 28)

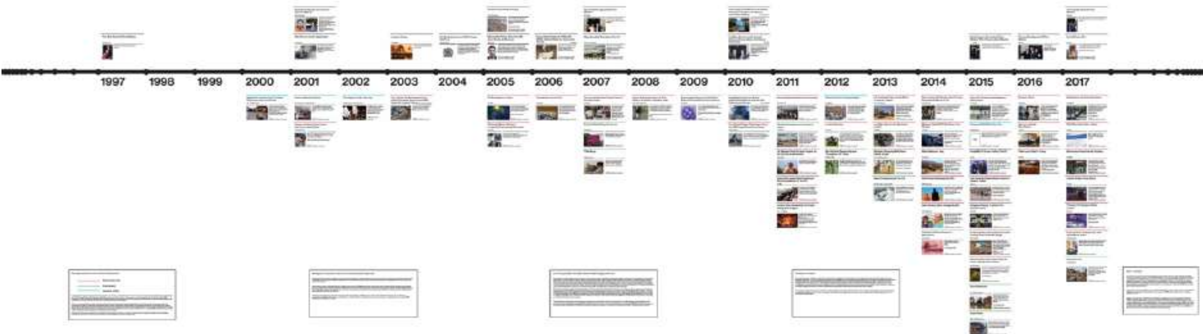

Figure 26: Image of COBR meetings timeline from the exhibition: *Emergency State: the COBR Committee between 1997-2017.*

Figures 27 & 28: Left: COBR meetings timeline in situ at *Emergency State: the COBR Committee between 1997-2017.* Right: Detail of COBR meetings timeline.

This chapter has argued that the increased connectivity and widely availability of camera phones has facilitated the acceleration of public participation in the visual recording, sharing and commenting on civil emergency events. This has marked a new departure point in amateur images of emergency. I defined these images as emergency images due to their ability to publicly announce the emergency before the government could announce the

COBR Committee. If the images of the 7/7 bombing announced amateur images of civil emergency within the image economy, then the images of the murder of Lee Rigby created a set of participatory images which accelerated public engagement, as citizen witnesses became the key technicians of the visuality of the emergency event. Images of the attack on London Bridge and Borough Market further established the territory of social media as one that needs governing during emergency events.

For the first time, citizens temporarily dominated the visual framing of the emergency event itself, providing the central information via emergency images that the government, via the COBR Committee, would have to respond to. By creating, sharing and commenting on the images, this global audience became participatory nodes in the visual communication network. Those receiving and viewing the visual information were no longer passive observers reliant on news reports to gain access to an event, but actively engaged with the event and its dissemination in an onward, habitual motion. Each click not only shared the image but alerted the social media algorithms that something was happening, and to promote the new content even wider.[169] It is the speed and connectivity of the image in the communication network that is a key component of the new emergency image and one that has gone on to shape how emergency images influence the way the British government responds to emergency events. As we will see in the next chapter, the emergency image ushered in a new set of image and performative crisis rituals that acted as a direct response to the emergency image.

[169] It should be noted that although social media exists within the void previously unattainable by mainstream news, it is still mainstream news that disseminates the bulk of information on emergency events. In this way, news media become second visual responders to an emergency event.

3 Crisis Rituals: Image Acts of Emergency Response

Chapter 3 will map the topography of image rituals deployed by the State apparatus in direct opposition to emergency images. To analyse this condition, I have named this set of visual conventions ‘emergency response images’. Emergency response images are a set of publicly recognisable images that form the government’s visual and public relations response to a COBR defined civil emergency. The defining characteristics of the emergency response image exists as a counter to the emergency image (see figure 29). Not only is its opposition based in the content of the image but also in its quality, temporality and spatial qualities. The emergency response image acts as a recognisable set of visual symbols, codes and tactics that are deployed into the image economy to visually signify exceptional government action.

Emergency image	**Emergency Response image**
Circulates at speed	Circulates slowly
Presents a visual transgression via disordered visual convention	Re-establishes visual order via standard visual conventions and rituals
Created by amateurs	Created by professionals
Geographic location may be unrecognisable.	Geographic location immediately recognisable.
Distributed on social media	Distributed on mass media and social media
Blurred, low resolution image quality	In focus, high resolution image quality
Short in duration	Long in Duration

Figure 29: Table showing differing qualities of the emergency image and emergency response image.

Since the public emergence of the COBR Committee and the visual culture of emergency politics, emergencies are now often exploited and instrumentalised to bolster political

legitimacy and authority. By contrast, emergencies pre-2000 were often viewed as problematic and something that could destabilise governments and dramatically reduce their authority. This shift can be identified most clearly as taking place following the fuel duty protests in 2000 and the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Civil emergency events had moved from being dominated by the long and societally crippling industrial strikes of the twentieth-century[170] to the security-based emergency events of the twenty-first. These later emergencies are far shorter in duration, and where the danger to the functioning of the society was minimal, and the images could amplify the event and its potential risk to a national level. Moreover, unlike industrial strikes, security affects everyone, traversing traditional political boundaries and galvanising a population against a common enemy. In this way, I suggest it is the visual culture of emergency politics that has enabled the successful securitisation of British life.[171] By firmly establishing its own set of visual conventions that not only counter and attempt to frame the emergency images in circulation following an emergency event, this visual culture acts as a platform to frame a wider, longer-term governmental policy based on security. The COBR led emergency responses image is a frame through which to examine the practices of the visual culture of emergency politics as a key facilitator of securitisation within British politics. Emergency events are framed both literally (by camera phones and screens) and metaphorically (by the State) to demonstrate how the State is not only reactive but also proactive in its framing of emergency events by selecting certain emergencies that sit at the

[170] A section of events which were declared state of emergencies in the twentieth century include the following coal miners' strike 1921; General Strike and coal miners' strike 1926; Seamen's strike 1966; Dock workers strike 1970; Coal miners' strike and Glasgow fire workers 1973; Coal miners' strike 1984.

[171] Securitisation is a form of political power that uses security, its potential threats and its responses as a form of political leverage to justify certain policy decisions or political responses. Issues of security are often elevated above other pressing societal needs such as improved healthcare or better transport networks, as the power of the proposed threat is often framed as time-dependant and is assumed to require immediate action to avert it. Securitisation is thus closely linked to not only the speedy response to an emergency event but more broadly to the culture of emergency, as security offers a recognisable narrative to many emergency events.

threshold of definition, exploiting them to visually present its own political authority within a frame of security.

Securitisation is used to regulate the population through risk and fear, yet its practices form a process of Foucauldian governmentality. By applying Foucault's 'tactic of governance' to the visual culture of emergency politics, we see the emergency response image as a form of disciplinary image. It not only regulates the emergency images and the wider visual culture emanating from the emergency event itself, but also the space and time beyond and before the emergency event, via the *potentiality* of emergency events. I suggest that it is the intensification of the public gaze and participation via emergency images, their multiplicity and circulation on social media, as outlined in Chapter 2, that allows civil emergencies to become opportune moments for the government to represent its own legitimacy via the reconfirmation of security narratives.

The first visible governmental response to formally declaring an event as a national emergency is the announcement of a COBR committee meeting. The announcement comes in the form of a press release or an audio-visual statement by the Prime Minister or Secretary of State. This is made public via a number of mediums: a press release from Number 10 Downing Street, a recorded interview with the Prime Minister or Home Secretary and official government social media accounts, usually via Twitter.com. These form the basis for the emergency response image and follow a general rule of establishing the symbolic presence of government action within the mainstream news feed and social media networks during civil emergency events. As the previous Prime Minister Tony Blair admitted many years after the fuel duty protests in 2000, 'The only thing to do at a time like this is to show you are on top of it and give a general appearance of being in charge, whatever the panic underneath.'[172] The following section will firstly outline the relevant literature, followed by some historical

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[172] Blair, *A Journey,* 295.

examples that will help contextual this approach via framing, while the final section will detail the six key visual conventions used in the State's visual response to emergency images

The closest analysis of the power of images during crisis in crisis management and communication theories refer to 'framing'. This is a process of acknowledging and responding to an emergency event as 'meaning making' through creating a 'framing effect'.[173] As Boin et al. have noted, 'leaders must seek to achieve and maintain some degree of influence over the images of the crisis that circulate in the public domain.'[174] As previously mentioned, the government's own handbook on managing a crisis states, 'high quality and timely communication during a crisis is now arguably as important as the management of the crisis itself'.[175] Whilst framing features widely in studies on the framing of crisis management,[176] crisis communication,[177] contingency,[178] and resilience,[179] neither these areas nor the recent studies on 'governing emergencies'[180] have examined the relationship between aesthetic framing of civil emergency events as preforming a regulatory capacity beyond the event itself.[181] This chapter defines the visual culture of emergency politics as that of a visual culture of governmentality via a clear set of visual conventions and

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[173] Denis Chong and James N. Drunkman "Framing Theory", *Annual Review of Political Science*, no.10 (2007): 109; In relation to crisis see, Boin et al., "Crisis exploitation: political and policy impacts of framing contests,", 81-106. Shahira S. Fahmy "Contrasting Visual Frames of our Times: a framing analysis of English- and Arabic-language press coverage of war and terrorism." *International Communication Gazette* 72 (2010): 695 – 717.
[174] Boin, et al. *The Politics of Crisis Management,* 18.
[175] "How do you know you are managing a crisis?" accessed 22nd December 2021, https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/emergency-planning-framework/
[176] Boin et al.,*The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure* Arjen Boin, Paul 't Hart and Allen McConnell, eds., *Governing after Crisis: The Politics of Investigation, Accountability and Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Tony Moore and Raj Lakha, *Tolley's Handbook of Disaster and Emergency Management.* (Amsterdam: Elsevier/Newnes, 2006)
[177] Dan Schill, "The Visual Image and Political Image: a review of visual communication research in the field of political communication", *Review of Communication* 12:2 (2012): 118-142; McNair, *Communication and Political Crisis*;; Miskimmon et al., *Strategic Narratives*; Robert R Ulmer, Timothy L. Sellnow and Matthew W. Seeger. *Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity*. (Thousand Oaks 2007); W. T. Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing and Responding* (London: Sage, 2012).
[178] Adey and Anderson, "Governing Events and Life: 'emergency' in UK civil contingencies", 24-33.
[179] Lentzos and Rose, "Governing insecurity: Contingency Planning, Protection, Resilience", 230-254.
[180] Adeyet al., "Introduction: Governing Emergencies: Beyond Exceptionality", 3-17; Adey and Anderson, "Governing Events and Life: 'emergency',): 24-33; Adey and Anderson, Emergency Futures: Exception, Urgency, Interval, Hope", 1-17; Aradau, "Crowded Places are Everywhere We Go: Crowds, Emergency, Politics", 1-21. On governing emergencies in relation networks see: Aradua, and Blanke, "Governing Circulation: A Critique of the Biopolitics of Security", 44-58; Zebrowski, "Governing the Networked Society: A Biopolitical Critique of Resilience", 38; O'Malley, "Governable Catastrophes: A Comment on Bougen", 275-279.
[181] Angharad Closs Stephens and Nick Vaughan-Williams, Nick, *Terrorism and Politics of Response* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

State generated images that are intensified during a civil emergency, but inform the time and space beyond the emergency interval. In this way, the emergency event is instrumentalised as an aesthetic-based mechanism through repetition and standardisation of its images.

This approach has been adopted most notably in Britain in the post-war era when Churchill's 'V for victory' sign became a highly recognised visual trope (see figure 30).

Figures 30, 31 & 32: Left: Prime Minister Winston Churchill gives the 'V for victory' sign outside Downing Street, 1943. Centre: Prime Minister Clement Attlee leaves No.10 Downing Street for the House of Commons to make his 'crisis' speech on the situation in Abyssinia,1947. Right: Prime Minister Antony Eden addresses the nation during Suez crisis, 1967.

Framing is often examined via a verbal or textual narrative construction that sets out a clear definition of the event within the public where a frame can affect the attitudes and behaviour of its audience. Klonk has suggested such framing, within a visual context, forms 'image patterns', that act as, 'regularly recurring representations within a specific field'.[182] The field of crisis management refers to 'framing contests', where the images and narratives attempt to directly contest one another.[183] Before the advent of social media, the detailed information surrounding an emergency event was not instantly available in the public domain. This allowed the government's control over the framing of the event within a specific narrative to be conducive to the government's official policy agenda. Since the arrival of social media in

[182] Klonk, *Terror: When Images Become Weapons*, 4.
[183] Boin et al., "Crisis Exploitation: Political and Policy Impacts of Framing Contests",81-106.

2005, and the immediacy of the emergency image at the same time, the power of the government to be the only official frame producing entity is now contested. As Boin et al. suggest,

> 'Among a cacophony of voices and sentiments, leaders must seek to achieve and maintain some degree of influence over the images of crisis that circulate in the public domain. Their messages coincide and compete with those of other parties, who hold other positions and interests, who are likely to espouse various alternative definitions of the situation.'[184]

If rituals are defined as, 'symbolic behaviour that is socially standardised and repetitive', then image-rituals are symbolic images that are standardised and repetitive. [185] Framing contests are less prevalent during well-defined emergency events such as terrorism where the framing falls into a well-established set of image patters via predefined rituals and narratives, often on security. During flooding however, where the emergency may remain at a higher crisis level for longer and the public are more critical of the State and its responses, the power of images of people with sewage in their homes, or the elderly being evacuated via boats along flooded streets, presents the government with increased counter-frames and increases the pressure on the government to act decisively. Part of the solution has been to increase the number and variance of framing senior ministers in associative attendance at COBR, alongside clear image patterns of ministers in wellington boots visiting flood hit areas (see figures 33-35). These images and statements help to frame the event and contain it within official narratives.

[184] Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 18.
[185] Paul 't Hart, "Symbols, Rituals and Power: The Lost Dimensions of Crisis Management", *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 1 (1993): 42.

Figures 33, 34 & 35: Right: Prime Minister David Camron visits flooding in York. Centre: Labour Leader Ed Miliband visits flooding in Purley on Thames. Right: London Mayor Boris Johnson visits flooding in Kenley, Croydon.

Figures: 36, 37 & 38. Newly elected Prime Ministers wave to crowds in front of No.10 Downing Street next to their spouse. Left: Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Centre: Prime Minister Tony Blair. Right: Prime Minister David Cameron.

Such images become a ritualised public process of governmental response to emergency images, in the same way that the televised performative opening of parliament, or the holding up of the red briefcase before the budget statement or the images of the newly elected prime minister waving on the steps of Downing Street; these are all aesthetic rituals that display the continuation of power and order (see figures 36, 37 & 38).[186] To display order and control is not simply as Butler suggested a ‘repetition of acts’ but a repetition of *image* acts.[187] In this

[186] Eric J. Hobsbawm, and Terence O. Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[187] Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”, *Theatre Journal*, 40, no. 4 (December, 1988): 519-531.

way, the performativity of power during emergency events is the invention of visual tradition via a set of image-based 'crisis rituals'.

What follows is a selection of image-based elements that make up the wider assemblage of emergency response images. These employ the same language as the images outlined above to assert the continuity of power and control. I have chosen to display these in an approximate chronological order, from the first governmental response to its assumed conclusion.

Visual Conventions of Civil Emergency Response

The following section sets out six visual conventions that appear in a sequential order following an emergency event, from naming "COBR" within the public domain, to the footage of senior ministers arriving at a COBR meeting, the restaging or recoding of a COBR meeting, the post-COBR meeting statement and the follow-up COBR statement. These conventions form a central component in understanding the visual culture of the COBR Committee and the aesthetics of emergency response.

Visual Convention 1: Naming "COBR".

The first government act in response to a national emergency is to publicly announce a COBR meeting. The naming of "COBR" as a publicly recognisable form, brings the government's public response into being via a symbolic speech act. This formally labels the publicly circulating emergency images as the imagery of an official national emergency, which in turn sets in motion a number of governmental logistical, political and financial processes. The key literature on speech acts and their ability to designate action within types

of political rhetoric has been examined by Austin, Searle and Butler.[188] While Bredekamp suggests, such isolated naming are not simply speech acts, but *word* acts. The word "COBR" denotes the exception by its associative relationship to the emergency images in public circulation, but also through its very naming. This can be thought of an act of Althusserian interpellation, where the act of naming an event "COBR" defines it as an exception and requires minimal other justification.[189]

Between 1997 and 2000, Tony Blair did not mention COBR or the Civil Contingencies Committee. In response to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, however, he publicly announced, for the first time, the existence of a British emergency committee by saying, "I have just chaired an emergency meeting of the government's Civil Contingencies Committee".[190] Between 2000 and 2005, the Civil Contingencies Committee was only publicly mentioned again once, despite there being five other widely acknowledged civil emergencies.[191] Following the 7/7 bombing, Charles Clarke was the first person to publicly name "COBR" by stating, "I have just chaired a meeting of the government's COBR Committee".[192] Since then, "COBR" has been named each time the government responded to a national emergency. Below is a selection of the use of "COBR'" or "COBRA" by politicians in response to emergency events:

> "I chaired a meeting of our COBR senior ministers committee earlier today".
> 7/7 bombing, Home Secretary Charles Clarke, 2005.[193]

[188] John L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); John Richard Searle, *Speech Acts: an essay in the philosophy of language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).
[189] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press (1968).
[190] 'Further comment from Prime Minister AP Archive, Youtube.com, accessed June 2nd 2022 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HO2rNxQWno
[191] The civil emergencies between 2000-2005 were: Fuel duty protest 7-14th September 2000; Foot and Mouth outbreak in Britain 19th February -30th September 2000/2001; Attack on World Trade Centre 9Th September 2001; Firefighters strike, 13th November - 2nd December 2002; Two suicide car bombings in Istanbul, hitting the British Consulate General and the HQ of HSBC bank, 15th and 20th November 2003.
[192] "I chaired a meeting of our COBR senior ministers committee earlier today" 7/7 bombing, Home Secretary Charles Clarke, still from video, 2005, accessed June 5th 2020, https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/video/charles-clarke-press-conference-itn-audio-track-1-fx-news-footage/697148070?adppopup=true
[193] Home Secretary Charles Clarke, still from video, 2005, accessed June 5th 2022, https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/videos/charles-clarke-77?phrase=charles%20clarke%207%2F7&sort=mostpopular

“I’ve just attended a meeting of the government’s emergency committee”.
7/7 bombing, Prime Minister Tony Blair, 2005.[194]

“I have just come from a meeting of the emergency committee COBR”.
Flooding, Prime Minister Gordon Brown. 2007.[195]

“There's been another session this morning with COBRA”
Mumbai attacks, Prime Minister Gordon Brown. 2008.[196]

“On Saturday I chaired a meeting of COBRA, the government's emergency committee, to manage our response to this latest threat.”
Bombs found on freight planes from Yemen destine for USA, Home Secretary Theresa May. 2010.[197]

“I’ve come straight from a meeting of the government’s COBR committee, for dealing with emergencies, where we have been discussing the action we will take”
London Riots, Prime Minister David Cameron. 2011.[198]

“This morning I’ve chaired a meeting with COBR.”
Woolwich terrorist attack, David Cameron. 2013.[199]

“I have just chaired a meeting of the government’s emergency committee COBR, where we discussed the details of – and the response to – the appalling events in Manchester last night.”
Manchester Arena attack, Prime Minister Theresa May. 2017.[200]

"The government's Emergency Committee, Cobra, has just met and I can set out what we know about what happened and the steps that we are taking to respond”
Finsbury Park Mosque attack, Prime Minister Theresa May. 2017.[201]

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[194] Prime Minister Tony Blair, 2005, accessed June 5th 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WOH5fuDJTQ
[195] Prime Minster Gordon Brown, still image from video, 2007, accessed June 5th 2020, https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/videos/gordon-brown-cobra?phrase=Gordon%20Brown%20cobra&sort=best#license
[196] Prime Minster Gordon Brown, still from video, 2008, accessed June 5th 2020, https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/videos/gordon-brown-cobra?phrase=Gordon%20Brown%20cobra&sort=best#license
[197] Theresa May, still from video, accessed June 5th 2020, https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/videos/theresa-may-cobra?phrase=Theresa%20May%20cobra&sort=best#license
[198] Prime Minster David Cameron, still from video,2011, accessed June 5th 2020 https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/videos/cameron-london-riots?phrase=Cameron%20London%20riots&sort=best#license
[199] David Cameron “Woolwich attack 'sickened us all”, accessed June 5th 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogDnG9k62YE
[200] Theresa May statement on the Manchester Arena attack 2017, accessed June 5th 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-following-terrorist-attack-in-manchester-23-may-2017
[201] PM statement following terror attack in Finsbury Park: 19 June 2017, accessed July 2nd 2022, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-following-terror-attack-in-finsbury-park-19-june-2017

The term 'COBR' is more dramatic than the 'civil contingencies committee'.[202] Moreover, as I highlight in Chapter 5, the naming of the non-visible "COBRA" symbolically taps into the aesthetic dramatisation of secretive government infrastructure that has been culturally produced within the United Kingdom since the first James Bond books in the 1950s and the cultural reproduction of the Cold War. The most recent incarnation is the Sky One television drama series '*COBRA*' produced in 2020 which uses the COBR Committee as its main vehicle for its fictional political drama. The naming of "COBR" to signify the exception in both a linguistic and an operational sense is significant as it has no other referent within British culture other than that which represents it fictionally.

Despite 'COBR' being the mundane acronym of 'cabinet office briefing room', COBR also, and most obviously, evokes refences to the cobra snake. The cobra snake is most well-known of the snake species due to its performative associations, its spitting and hood fanning when threatened and striking out – all attributes that could be associated with the COBR Committee.[203] The naming of COBR within the British public presents something exceptional while adding a further dramatic layer to a government wanting to present an image of a dynamic response and protection where the actual operational response may not be forthcoming or even necessary. In some ways, the term 'COBR' feels dated, and too macho for the twenty-first century's generation Y condition of post-Black Lives Matter protests, gender fluidity and hyper-interconnectedness. This is confirmed by the naming of the newly created £9 million emergency response room that will function alongside COBR. The new emergency room has been given a less dramatic title of the National Situation Centre, (or 'SitCen' for short) and is in keeping with the *NATO Situation Centre* in Brussels,

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[203] The cobra snake is far more performative than other snakes. The Committee is not called the 'black mamba' or the Python. It has a broad enough cultural referent but is also not a common term associated within Britain.

(which is also known via its abbreviation 'SITCEN').[204] However, despite this uncharacteristic allying of a Conservative government with NATO, it has taken the British government almost two decades to the get the name "COBR" to register within the public consciousness and to change it now would appear a risky strategy in terms of crisis communication management. As Boin et al. have suggested, 'in the ever more densely "mediated" political context of crisis management, the capacity to capture the public attention is a fundamental political-administrative asset.'[205] From the very moment the government first responds to an emergency by naming COBR, a visual cultural set of associations around security and its dramatisation and cultural history are triggered within the wider population.

In response to this new networked emergency image, the announcement of COBR is now also made using social media in an attempt to occupy and govern the space and territory that the emergency image inhabits. As I stated in the previous chapter, David Cameron was the first prime minister to announce a COBR meeting via Twitter.com in response to the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013. This has now become a recurring pattern (see figures 39 and 40).

Figures 39 & 40: Left: Prime Minister David Cameron announces a COBR meeting via Twitter.com in response to flooding in 2016. Right: Prime Minister Theresa May announces a COBR meeting via Twitter.com in response to London Bridge attack 2017.

[204] Situation Centre (SITCEN), NATO, accessed July 4 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_57954.htm?selectedLocale=en
[205] Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management,* 80.

In naming the event under the sign of 'COBR', all emergency events are now cast within the frame of securitisation. I borrow Andrew Neals's definition,

> 'Securitization theory considers that security is a *process* by which things become securitized through practices of Securitization.'[206]

The first iteration of such a practice of securitisation in relation to COBR comes at its very inception in to mainstream British politics during the fuel duty protests in 2000. During that highly tumultuous period for the Blair government, the Cabinet Secretary David Omand suggested to Blair,

> "why don't we run this crisis the way we would run the response to a terrorist incident: use COBRA".[207]

This was the first time Blair had seen the COBR rooms and marks the exact moment when civil emergency events within the United Kingdom move from being concerned with industrial strikes in the 20th century to focusing on issues of security in the 21st. From this moment on, COBR would be developed as representing a set of practices and process of securitisation for dealing with a range of civil emergency events. This was bolstered by the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, which offered the most compelling and justified set of emergency images that set the world on a destructive path of 'global security' under the frame of the War on Terror.

As the majority of events could now easily be cast as security issues, non-security civil emergency events were now automatically imbued with a security frame simply by association with COBR. This is apparent with a number of questionable emergency events

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[206] See Claudia Aradau, 'Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation", *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 7 no.4 (2004): 388–413; T. Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context", *European Journal of International Relations*. 2005;11(2): 171-201.
[207] Straw, *Last Man Standing,* 311.

that were elevated to national emergency level simply by being declared COBR emergencies. These include: Ash tree die back disease (2012), the London Olympics (2012), refugees attempting to enter the Channel Tunnel in Calais (2015) and the proposed strike by nurses over pay (2015). Moreover, as detailed in Chapter 4, certain high intensity security events that appear to have little to do with British *civil* emergency, were also responded to under COBR: no fly zone enforced with missile strikes in Libya (2011), the Singja Massacre in Iraq (2014) and the failed military coup in Turkey (2016). Such 'civil emergency events' infuse COBR with a frame of high-level international security seemingly far beyond its Civil Contingencies remit. However, as Permanent Secretary Sir Richard Mottram has stated,

> 'COBR came out of a defence and nuclear release set of arrangements ...it had an interesting impact... It drove the way communications were thought of ... [and it] gave it a defence flavour, which may not have been that helpful.' [208]

Within the confines of crisis management theory, as Boin et al. suggest, the securitisation of the event by government means,

> '…an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; thus, by labelling it as *security*, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means.'[209]

Although the citizen witness often gets to announce the event with an emergency image, the State gets to categorise and frame the event within that of security. The State knows how to respond to issues of security, in fact it can be said that all issues of the State are issues of security to its own existence. The labelling of the event under the categorisation of security demonstrates the State's engagement with a process of meaning making and the control of public perception of the event.

[208] Catherine Haddon, "Political Decision-Making in a Crisis", accessed June 12 2022, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/598/04-Haddon.pdf
[209] Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management,* 88.

Meaning making is not just about defining the event but also defining what constitutes legitimate knowledge. I borrow Lilie Chouliaraki's assessment of regimes of meaning as,

> '…the bounded field of possible meaning relationships that obey a certain regularity in the ways in which they can be combined and circulated and, as a consequence, the possibilities they offer to constitute legitimate forms of knowledge about the world.'[210]

In this way, the emergency response image forms a set of assemblages of differing images and texts that position themselves as legitimate forms of knowledge fused with the power of security.

It is important to note that following an emergency event, the State attempts to increase its positive reputation. During short-term emergency events such as terrorism, the operational action is not always visible and therefore harder to qualify to the public. Whereas ongoing emergencies of longer duration, such as flooding or health crises, the government's operational action can be observed by the public and therefore influences their assessment of how effective the government response is. Due to this, the government attempts to retain a monopoly on information by visually displaying its control over the narration and thus perception its response. This is increasingly hard in the new media ecology where cameras and social media allow for widespread counter narratives and information as shown by citizen witness images in Chapter 2.

[210] Lilie Chouliaraki, *Spectatorship of Suffering.* (London: Sage,2006): 70.

Figure 41: No.10 Downing Street logo and social media tags which appears at the end of all No.10 Downing Street videos on Youtube.com.

Like the citizen witness, the government does not only rely on mainstream news outlets to disseminate its information following an emergency event. The government has its own No.10 YouTube channel (10 Downing Street) where it produces and releases its own videos,[211] a Twitter account (@10DowningStreet), Facebook (@ukgovernment) and Instagram accounts (@ukgovoffical). The government's 'Social Media Playbook' produced by Government Digital Services, acts as a guide and justification for government uses of social media.[212] The government employs the company Brandwatch to monitor and examine social feedback and conversations online around specific key words or themes, allowing them to judge public opinion.

There is also the Government Communication Service which devised the 'Emergency Planning Framework',

> 'During a crisis you experience reputational damage and criticism that is significant and escalates. You know you are in a sustained reputational crisis when you can't close the story down: criticism becomes the story.'[213]

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[211] Started in April 27th 2010 during David Cameron's premiership.
[212] *Social Media Playbook*, Government Digital Service, 2018, accessed May 13 2020, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-media-playbook
[213] *How do you know you are managing a crisis?* Emergency Planning Framework, accessed May 13 2020, https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/emergency-planning-framework/

The government can also deploy the News Coordination Centre (NCC) to coordinate communication during a national civil emergency, and can be temporarily set up within Whitehall.[214] Working alongside the NCC and within the Government's Communication Service, is the communication Rapid Response Unit (RRU). In response to the rise of fake news on social media, the RRU established in 2018, works to counter false stories that would have a negative impact on the government. Between the NCC and RRU the control of the government message is crucial to steering the narrative of the event within the boundaries and parameters of the State's own long-term narratives. Informing the public and displaying control and order is a central component of emergency response where the government inherently uses aesthetic-based tools to shape public opinion.

As I have demonstrated, the invoking of "COBR" is an interpellation that evokes a number of differing associative and real elements that cast any civil emergency event within a security frame while presenting government action as dynamic and the event exceptional. In addition, the government have adopted a number of new framing apparatuses to counter the emergency image by announcing the COBR meetings via Twitter.com and setting up the Rapid Response Unit to counter any fake news on social media. In this way, before the COBR Committee has even met, the emergency is immediately being shaped within a specific frame.

[214] 'The NCC will help to co-ordinate the information activities of the various government departments and agencies involved by pulling together different expert bodies and ensuring that interview bids for ministers are handled appropriately. They will work closely with the national and international media and monitor the output of major broadcasters, in order to correct inaccuracies and spot subject areas where additional material would provide better balance in coverage. It can be up and running within 90 minutes and can operate 24 hours a day as required.' Civil Contingencies Act Enhancement Programme, Annex 7 A: Communicating with the public: News Co-ordination Centre, Revision to Emergency Preparedness (2012).

Visual Convention 2: Images of ministers arriving and/or leaving a COBR meeting.

Figures 42,43,44 & 45: Ministers arrive for a COBR Committee meeting holding red Secretary of State folder. From left to right: Labour Foreign Secretary David Miliband taken in 2007, Labour Business Secretary Lord Mandelson taken in 2010, Conservative International Development Secretary Justine Greening taken in 2014, Conservative Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt taken in 2016.

Figures 46, 47 & 48: Ministers arrive for a COBR Committee meeting holding red Secretary of State folder. From left to right: Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond taken in 2014. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon taken in 2015. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson taken in 2017.

Figures 49, 50 & 51: Ministers arrive for a COBR Committee meeting next to senior military personal in uniform. From left to right: Defence Secretary Liam Fox taken in 2011. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon taken in 2014. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon taken in 2015.

The government's announcement of a COBR meeting starts a process of images of senior ministers, security personal and advisors arriving and leaving the Cabinet Office building at

No.70 Whitehall, which houses the COBR facility (see figures 42 - 51).[215] Pictures of ministers walking briskly to the COBR meeting wearing purposeful expressions visually perform ‘urgent government action’ to supplement the invocation of COBR hours earlier. Their carrying of red government files renews visual tokens of the seriousness of the situation and their own political power to solve it. These become a set of standardised images that visually enact the transformation of government ministers into emergency committee members. Such images form part of the large assemblage of images that make up the emergency response image. Moreover, the public announcing of an ensuing COBR meeting acts as a press-call to the mainstream media who are given enough time to amass outside the cabinet office and wait to record images of ministers arriving and leaving which can then be used to visually represent the COBR meeting within the news cycle (see figure 52).[216]

Figure 52: The media line up outside the entracnce to the Cabinet Office building, No.70 Whitehall which houses the COBR Commitee Room.

Within this visual convention exist further performative aspects of the government displaying the securitisation of both terror events and flooding (the two main causes of emergency

[215] Minister and officials can also enter and exit through Downing Street which is connected to the Cabinet Office.
[216] It seems counterintuitive that following a terrorist event, when the threat level is deemed at its highest, government ministers’ proposed location is announced through the mass media.

within the U.K between 1997-2017).[217] These images also show the pairing of ministers with security personal in official uniform arriving or having just attended a COBR meeting (see figures 49- 51). These images symbolically present the government literally and metaphorically shoulder to shoulder with the military or police and further help to define the emergency as a security issue. Furthermore, such images underline and aim to reassure the public of the continuation of law and order, by demonstrating what Dan Schill terms 'social proof'.[218]

These symbols are performative action displayed to represent the full force and power of the State, as the uniform denotes power due to it recognisability as an aesthetic form. Moreover, with the establishment of a set of visual conventions, the emergency response images themselves now visually represent the uniformity of the COBR Committee, enacted not through official clothes but via uniform images. The ministers can be interchanged but the ritual of movement, content and framing remains a highly recognisable symbol due to their standardisation and repetition.

Part of the practice-based research of this investigation into the visual culture of emergency politics was to collate the footage of ministers arriving at COBR meetings and edit them together to form a continuous, never-ending stream of ministers arriving and leaving COBR meetings. The seemingly endless COBR meeting attempts to interrupt the ritualised representation of a government dynamically responding to one-off emergency events and begins to make a visual representation of the permanence of the state of emergency. The footage was slowed down which makes it appear fragmented, further restricting the sense of urgency. This acts as a counter-image and distorts the temporality of a

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[217] See list of COBR meetings between 1997-2017 in the practice-research output web archive: www.cobr-committee-archives.uk
[218] Dan Schill, "The Visual Image and the Political Image: A Review of Visual Communication Research in the Field of Political Communication", *Review of Communication* (Volume 12, 2012 - Issue 2): 124.

heightened emergency state, slowing down the emergency response to a trickle of fragmented, permanent images which display a disordered mode of government action.

Visual Convention 3: Making visible the non-visible COBR

Once the ministers have arrived at the COBR meeting all visual information is placed on hold while the nonvisible meeting takes place. In a paradoxical move of anti-framing, the government visibly announces its intended action and response to an image-based emergency by retreating from the visual frame for its own decision-making process inside COBR. The COBR meeting itself is not publicly visible, taking place in a windowless room, probably underground. There are no images or minutes of the meeting, no press are invited nor public access granted. The only image that officially exists was taken as part of a freedom of information request (see figure 53).

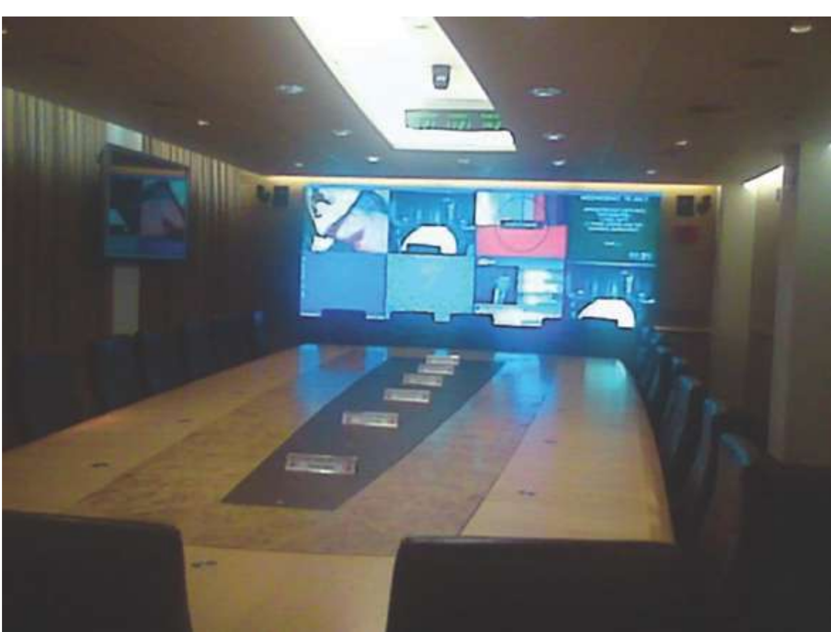

Figure 53: The only official image of the COBR Committee room released in 2010 under a freedom of information request. The image appears to have been taken on a mobile phone. This remains the only official image of the COBR facility.

To retain the prerogative to be nonvisible during an image-based crisis appears counterintuitive, especially in a democratic system where decision making and debate is increasingly visible via live video streaming from the Houses of Parliament, the House of Lords and the numerous select committees that make up the claims of transparency and public scrutiny within modern government. However, the non-visibility of COBR itself can be seen as a further demonstration of political power to retain the authority to be able to remove itself from the visual field. As Elspeth Van Veeren has outlined, this type of invisibility forms a political barrier, creating a,

> '…tension between invisibility as safer or as more threatening is productive in a number of ways, including the (re)production of social, political and religious hierarchies as they are used to differentiate between those who can see and those who cannot'.[219]

In addition, Van Veeren suggests that such barriers to visibility also create 'economies of secrecy',[220] something ingrained within British culture through spy thrillers based on the secretive government security apparatus of MI5, MI6 and GCHQ.[221] Although not as large as these institutions, the COBR Committee's invisibility ties in with these, forming part of an economy of secrecy.

The decision to be nonvisible during the emergency COBR meeting can be read as a symbolic representation of the sovereign's existence outside the rule of law. As Hobbs, Schmitt and Agamben have suggested, to make the law, the sovereign must reside outside of its jurisdiction. Understood in this way, the government's removal of itself from the image economy mimics the sovereign gesture to remove itself from statutory law. This is a central

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[219] Elspeth Van Veeren, "Invisibility", in *Visual Global Politics,* ed. R.. Bleiker (London and New York: Routledge, 2018): 196.
[220] Van Veeren, "Invisibility", 196.
[221] MI5, MI6 and GCHQ are the primacy security apparatus for the United Kingdom. They are traditionally considered highly secretive due to their operational capacity being largely non-visible. For more information see: MI5 https://www.mi5.gov.uk MI6 https://www.sis.gov.uk, GCHQ https://www.gchq.gov.uk

distinction within the power of the COBR Committee as an aesthetic and symbolic act of response, where the COBR Committee no longer needs to exercise its power to declare a legal exception within law, as it can alter the aesthetic regime to formally mark the exception and the government response via the power between its visibility and non-visibility.

If the paradox of democracy is the inclusive exclusion, then the paradox of the visual culture of emergency politics is the power of the executive to remove itself from visibility while visually announcing its presence. It is the aesthetic version of Agamben's 'ban and the wolf',[222] or Derrida's 'Beast and the Sovereign'.[223] Both the image as exception and the image of COBR , the emergency image and emergency response image exist inside and outside the standard visual field of reference. They are both the norm and the exception. As Schmitt states,

> '…the sovereign stands outside the judicial order, nevertheless, belongs to it, since it is up to him to decide if the constitution is to be suspended *in toto.*'[224] (italics in original).

Secrecy is undoubtedly a necessity for certain security operational responses, but it also generates an air of mystery and mystic that infuses the slow bureaucratic machinery of government with the air of the spectacular and dynamic.[225] However, images could still be released without revealing sensitive material.[226]

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[222] Agamben, *Homo Sacer.*
[223] Jacques Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington. *The Beast and the Sovereign*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
[224] Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 15.
[225] See Hayman, *Terrorist Hunters*, 304.
[226] This approach has been used in the United States since Ronald Regan was president. where images of the President in the situation room were produced and made public. This may have been due to the US president being commander in Chief of the US military.

Visual Convention 4: Staging Emergency Response Images

Figures 54: Prime Minister Gordon Brown talks with Home Secretary Jacqui Smith after a COBR meeting.

Despite the lack of consistent visual representation of actual COBR meetings, there have been two prime ministers who have attempted to harness the aesthetic power of the COBR meeting itself. In 2007, the Cabinet Office released clearly staged images of Gordon Brown in discussions with the Home Secretary Jacqui Smith and Home Office Minister for Security Admiral Alan West. These were following a COBR meeting in response to two car bombs found outside *Tiger Tiger* night club in London 29th June 2007 (See figure 54). This photoshoot displays Brown's attempt to make himself more visible via the framing of him holding a 'COBR meeting'. At the time of the emergency, Brown was publicly known as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I suggest, was using COBR to elevate his political stature and recognisability as a new prime minister. The new leader used the COBR emergency as a response to his low approval ratings,[227] to display 'quiet authority'[228] and leadership.

[227] Andrew Grice, "Poll: This is the least popular Labour government ever", accessed June 12 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/poll-this-is-the-least-popular-labour-government-ever-859096.html
[228] "Brown Shows 'quiet authority' in face of terror", Telegraph Newspaper, accessed July 1st, 2021, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1556144/Brown-shows-quiet-authority-in-face-of-terror.html

Figure 55 & 56: The first ever recorded COBR meeting, albeit held in the Cabinet Office room.

In a more experimental phase in the visualisation of COBR, Prime Minister David Cameron allowed cameras to film the beginning of a COBR meeting for the first time, in response to mass flooding across the United Kingdom in February 2014. However, the COBR meeting was not held in the COBR Committee room, but instead in the Cabinet Room within No.10 Downing Street (see figures 55 and 56). The unusual step of making the actual COBR Committee visible appears to be an attempt to visualise government response. The sequence of footage is worth examining; the Cabinet Room is full of ministers all sat round the large table in silence, waiting. Then Cameron enters, stage left, at speed, making a dramatic entrance and with this marks the beginning of the meeting. The visual performance denotes a strong leader taking control, as do the visual signifiers such as Major General Patrick Sanders, in his military fatigues, sitting beside Cameron and in full frame representing the alignment of Cameron with the image of security even though this was a COBR meeting in response to flooding.

We know that this is the Cabinet Room as there have been numerous occasions when the press has been allowed in to film the start of a cabinet meeting, often when a newly elected prime minister holds a meeting of their first cabinet. Figure 57 shows the COBR meeting chaired by Cameron in the Cabinet Room, 14th February 2014 while figure 58 shows the first cabinet meeting held by Theresa May's Premiership, 19th June 2016. This room is

distinctly different from the COBR room officially declared under a freedom of information request by Patrick Grundy, 11th December 2018 (see figure 59).

Figure 57 & 58: left: Cameron chairs first publicly visible COBR meeting. Right: Newly elected Theresa May holds her first Cabinet meeting.

Figure 59 & 60. Left: The empty COBR Committee Room. Right: The U.S situation room full of senior government officials watching the live storming of Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan.

What this further confirms is that COBR acts as a symbol of government action rather than an actual place to meet. In fact, there are concerns that the COBR room might not actually exist at all. There is far more evidence of its name, and the images that surround it, than in its physical presence.[229] Moreover, I suggest that Cameron's staging of a COBR meeting might have been an attempt at echoing the carefully crafted and now iconic image of President Obama watching the storming of Osama Bin Laden's complex in 2011(see figure 60).

The decision to hold a COBR meeting in the Cabinet Office not only visualises the COBR room and displays government action, it visually subsumes the emergency and its

[229] This was further compounded by Dominic Cummings, who said that COBR meetings had to be held in the Cabinet Office as the COBR room was a 'strap three' security environment. No mobile phones or laptops are allowed, making the study of live health data during the ongoing pandemic counter-productive to the management of the crisis.

response into the normal operations and the visual cultures of everyday aesthetics of recognisable governance.

Visual Convention 5: The post-COBR statement to the public

As a choregraphed sequence with separate acts, the post-COBR meeting statement continues the visual thread established by the COBR announcement and the images of minister arriving at the COBR meeting, as discussed in the previous section. The post-COBR meeting statement to the public is the central aesthetic process through which the government draws full public attention and acts as the primary opportunity to offer a detailed narrative of the civil emergency event. Between 2005 and 2017 this visual statement was carefully developed from a chaotic and random set of images to a concise, framed and highly polished display of visual power. The post-COBR statement usually begins with the words, "I have just chaired a COBR meeting…" and acts as a symbolic and temporal continuation of the images of ministers arriving at the COBR meeting as discussed in the previous section.

It was Prime Minister David Cameron who most drastically altered the visual appearance of the post-COBR statement, formalising it with the addition of a newly built lectern and always delivering the statement in front of No.10 Downing Street. Through continued repetition and continuity, this process became a set of ritualised images and text through which the State can now rely upon to reaffirm its authority and control when faced with the uncertainty of emergency images.

Charles Clarke. '7/7' 2005.

Tony Blair '7/7' 2005.

Gordon Brown 'Flooding' 2007

Gordon Brown 'Tidal Surge' 2007.

Gordon Brown 'Mumbai Attack' 2008

Theresa May 'UPS Bomb Plot' 2010

David Cameron 'London Riots' 2011.

David Cameron 'Lee Rigby attack' 2013

David Cameron 'Libya no fly zone'

Figures 61 : Prime Ministers and Home Secretaries publicly announce having just chaired a COBR meeting.

As can be seen in figure 61, the visual display of these post-COBR statements evolved between 1997 and 2017. At the start of the period, the official statements were not always made by the Prime Minister, as can be seen following 7/7 bomb with the Home Secretary Charles Clarke delivering a rushed and obviously shaken statement outside Downing Street and naming COBR publicly for the first time, "I chaired a meeting of our COBR senior ministers committee earlier today".[230] (see figure 61). The image and delivery of that statement gave the impression the bombings had caught the government off-guard and that it was ill prepared to respond. Later that evening, Blair gave a statement from inside Downing

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[230] "7/7 bombing Home Secretary Charles Clarke Home Secretary", still from video, accessed June 5th 2020, 2005 https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/video/charles-clarke-press-conference-itn-audio-track-1-fx-news-footage/697148070?adppopup=true

Street which was a far more polished performance where again he said he had just attended, “a meeting of the government’s emergency committee”.[231] For a government trying to regain a sense of control and order, these images gave an inconsistent message.

Since 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron established a consistent and recognisable set of visual conventions for his post-COBR statements.[232] With No.10 Downing Street as a backdrop, and standing behind the newly constructed prime ministerial lectern, the aesthetic consistency of the government’s emergency response image symbolised stability and control. The emergency response image has now become so regimented and uniform, that when Theresa May became prime minister, the post-COBR statement images became almost indistinguishable from one another, as can be seen in figure 59 following the London Bridge terror terrorist attack, the Manchester Arena Bombing, Finsbury Park Mosque attack and the Westminster terrorist attack. The consistency of these images acts in direct opposition to the blurred and disjointed visual quality of the emergency image; if the emergency image is the exception, then the emergency response image acts as the reestablishment of the rule. As detailed in Chapter 4, these standardised emergency response images become the equivalent of flags that are highly recognisable and visually standardised symbols that demarcate territory and power.

[231] “7/7 bombing, Prime Minister Tony Blair”, 2005, accessed June 5th 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WOH5fuDJTQ
[232] Aided by Craig Oliver – head of communication for No.10 between 2011-2016.

Figure 62: Prime Minister Theresa May announces her attendance at a COBR meeting following a series of civil emergency events. From left to right and top to bottom: Westminster terrorist attack, 22nd March 2017; Manchester Arena terrorist attack, 23rd May 2017; London Bridge terrorist attack, 4th June 2017; Finsbury Park Mosque terrorist attack, 19th June 2017.

The emergency response image should be viewed as a choregraphed and publicly recognisable sequence of images, of which the post-COBR meeting statement is the most substantial component. As Anderson has outlined, this sequential process of shepherding the emergency event attempts to smooth over the fragments of the ‘interval’ that emergency events create, into an ordered and coherent whole which can be better managed,

> ‘…the cycle of activities is a codification of how to act that embeds the punctual interval in a structure. In doing so, the interval is no longer an intensified now-time in which exceptions open up. It becomes one phase in a sequence to be orderly passed through on the way to ending an emergency or the threat of a future emergency.’ [233]

[233] Anderson. “Governing Emergencies”, 29.

This new mode of giving a post-COBR meeting statement uses the most established and publicly recognisable icons of British State power: the Downing Street door, the prime minister themselves and the government crest on top of the lectern. This State power is alluded to more subtly in the clothes the prime minister wears - or in Theresa May's example the statement necklace which in itself replicates the bold dress sense of Margaret Thatcher (see figure 62). These all add up to form a coherent set of images that help to represent stable and effective government in the face of destabilising emergency events and their images. As Dan Schill suggest, 'Images do not function independently; rather, they tap into existing cultural and historical knowledge within the audience'.[234] It is the repetition of these icons and their images that form the consistency and regulatory power of the emergency response image.

These images have now become icons within the visual culture of emergency politics, and act as restorative rituals in the reconfirmation of State power and social order. The post-COBR statement uses the iconography of State symbols to reaffirm its power and legitimacy. In what Buck-Morss has termed the 'iconocrats' of politics within an 'iconomy',[235] State power has always been renewed and upheld through iconic rituals and images. The management and regulation of those symbols is tightly controlled, both during emergency and non-emergency periods, forming a central process of continually legitimating and affirming State power. Although rituals can give life meaning and structure they also serve to discipline, regulate and order society in what Foucault termed, 'Conducting the conduct of men' as a form of governmentality.[236] The emergency response image not only narrates the emergency event but helps to orchestrate how the public responds.

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[234] Schill, "The Visual Image and the Political Image", 122.
[235] Buck-Morss. "Visual Empire", 183.
[236] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78* (London: Picador, 2004): 193.

Figure 63: The progression of the different types of lectern developed by No.10 Downing street to make public announcements between 1997-2010.

To reiterate the attention to the visual culture of political leaders, each new prime minister now appears behind a newly built, personalised lectern to represent their physical appearance and possibly their political brand of politics. Following the election of David Cameron as prime minister in 2010, any announcements of national interest, including: general elections, resignations of prime ministers and COBR meetings, were made from a government crested lectern directly outside No.10 Downing Street.[237] Figure 63 shows there is not a standard lectern and no government crest, while the lectern is also positioned slightly to the left of the No.10 Downing Street door. However, by 2013 (Figure 63, bottom right image) there is a new lectern adorned with government crest and the microphone is smaller, allowing a better, unobscured view of the speaker. The lectern is also situated directly outside No.10 Downing Street, visually merging the human prime minister within the iconic edifice of No.10 Downing Street.

[237] "Theresa May Manchester attack", accessed December 3rd 2019, https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/videos/theresa-may-manchester-attack?phrase=Theresa%20may%20manchester%20attack&sort=mostpopular#license

This is in direct comparison to the hurried press briefing that Home Secretary Charles Clarke made after 7/7 in 2005 (see figure 63), where Clarke is filmed delivering his post-COBR statement from beside a parked grey car with his head obscuring the globally recognisable Downing Street door. During this period, Blair and Brown used standard, off the shelf media lecterns with oversized microphones (see figure 63) while David Cameron had a personal lectern made with curved edges and sweeping lines, denoting a contemporary, dynamic approach, visually representing his branding as a young, dynamic leader (see figure 64). Theresa May's personal lectern was basic and not unlike a lectern in a small church, possibly denoting her religious upbringing and trying to convey honesty and authenticity when often she was accused of being too 'robotic' in her delivery (see figure 64). Boris Johnson's has echoes of the US presidential lectern, but also the Churchillian motifs from World War Two he's continually attempting to reference (see figure 64). These alterations reiterate the attention to visual detail the government's communication department began to make after the election of David Cameron.

Figure 64: Three consecutive Prime Minsters with their personally created lecterns that are not only used outside Downing Street, but travel the country to offer consistent framing of the Prime Minister in almost any setting.

The lecterns go everywhere the Prime Minister must speak to the media. The lecterns become a physical extension of the Prime Minister, helping to consistently frame their appearance and offer visual consistency. Moreover, as we can see in comparison to the images of Blair and Brown in figure 61, the new lectern frames the upper half of the body, removing the less clear lower half. It also places the speaker into the same powerful physical posture as a lecturer or, as Foucault suggested, the sovereign as pastor,[238] whereas the single microphone for Blair makes his appearance closer to a musician or stand-up comic, and Brown appears weak behind a stand that looks as if it might be blown over or roll away (see figure 63).

[238] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population,* 137.

Visual Convention 6: COBR follow-up statement.

The final key visual convention in the assemblage of emergency response images is the COBR follow-up statement. These statements are usually delivered a day after the main post-COBR statement or following a second COBR meeting, and offer a different image of government response, one that appears more intimate, softer and more personal. This is achieved by filming the prime minister in the cabinet office room, without the official lectern and with them physically closer to the camera.

Fuel Crisis 2012.

British citizen trapped in Egypt 2015.

Brussels Attack 2016

Manchester Arena attack 2017.

Manchester Arena attack 2017.

London Bridge attack 2017

Figure 65: Still images form footage of statements following more COBR meetings.

These images (see figure 65) are staged to appear as mainstream journalistic interviews, displaying a process of external scrutiny. However, they are often produced by the Cabinet Office media team and released to the mainstream media for content in daily news reports.[239] The images allow the prime minister to reinsert fresh images and information of the government's response within the daily news cycle, following the emergency while updating

[239] There is one video on the No.10 YouTube channel, which appears like a rehearsal for the main speech. "PM statement following second COBR meeting on Manchester attack", Youtube.com, accessed July 12 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3LMgJSwYkY

their own display of a softer and more caring form of power. Displaying a certain amount of resolution and reassurance, these images offer a post-event concluding narrative arc of the emergency response images. The framing of the subject, the close-up camera angle, and the empty room as backdrop represent a more intimate, conversational tone with the prime minster, not unlike a therapist or a pastor, having a quiet word to reassure. Like a pastor shepherding their lost flock, the prime minister attempts to gently guide the population through the emergency event in what Rose (2010) and Cross (2016) have termed a 'politics of sentiment'.[240]

This statement responds and appeals to the visuality of suffering as inspired by the extreme nature of the emergency images in circulation. These events are no longer geographically or visually distant, they are firmly within the virtual public domain as the population witness, in close proximity, highly distressing emergency images. I suggest that this prompts the government to become more active and visible in its response to civil emergency events, especially those whose effects are violent. The images of suffering cause the immediate governmental response to condemn the violence. Announcing a COBR meeting in the same press conference attempts to enact a condition of nurture and protection to acknowledge the loss of life that has been collectively witnessed. This approach becomes a central component in the statecraft after emergency events, where both hard and soft governance are deployed.

[240] The politics of sentiment refers to the use of sentimentality within the process and practices of political power. In relation to emergency events, it is the adoption of a caring and empathetic prime minister showing sympathy and care to the public following traumatic events. I suggest that this politics of sentiment is now more acute due to the often graphic visual content circulating within the public realm during and following an emergency event. The government must acknowledge the psychological impact that may arise within the general public, having witnessed disturbing and distressing images of the emergency. See: G. Rose Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, The Public and The Politics of Sentiment (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Cross, "Memory, Guardianship and the Witnessing Amateur in the Emergence of Citizen Journalism", 225-238.

Exhibition video

As part of the practice-based research of this inquiry, during the *Emergency State: The COBR Committee between 1997-2017* exhibition as detailed in Chapter 5 and Appendix A, I created a montage of video clips of ministers' statements immediately following COBR meetings and displayed them on a monitor that was on top of a replica governmental lectern (see figure 67). Using footage that was found within stock image websites such as Getty.com or Alamy.com enabled me to show only the initial section of footage that would have been edited out from the main broadcast. This is can be seen in figure 66 as the normal outtake shows Home Secretary Theresa May wondering, slightly lost on her way to giving a post-COBR statement.

Figure 66: Stills from video showing Home Secretary Theresa May appearing lost and dazed by the media presence and unsure where she is meant to be giving her statement. Off-screen we hear a cameraman or advisor say "That side Theresa, down here".

Figure 67: The replica lectern as used by Prime Minister Theresa May displayed in the practice -research output *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017.*

This moment includes the prime minister arriving at the lectern, as well as the brief uncertainties that often accompany a senior minister uncomfortable with talking to the media – most notably Gordon Brown and Theresa May (figure 66). By displaying the discrepancies that are usually edited out before the final presentation of the statement on the news, the new video montage undoes the uniform appearance and intended visual stability of the post-COBR statement. In displaying it in this way, the myth of strong and decisive government action is momentarily debunked as human fallibility is exposed.

These clear and formulaic images, alongside the associated fixed naming of “COBR”, act as governing practices within the visual culture of emergency politics. In this way, the sequential ordering of the visual conventions outlined above, and the event’s spatial and temporal elements created by the post-COBR statement, act as codification and reordering of the event within a clearly defined government discourse. This process of standardised and consistent emergency response images, and textual registrations, form a practice of containing the emergency image, as the government attempts to shepherd the nation back towards a normative condition. This staging of political power is built upon actively and explicitly repeating and reiterating the visual symbols where the frame, composition and costume offer continuity in the continued legitimacy of power. This aesthetic condition of power is continually updated and reiterated by other standard visual codes and conventions: including the crowns of the monarch, the ceremonies of State Opening of Parliament, the Queens Speech and flags, official buildings, portraits on currency and dress codes. The careful engineering of the visual culture of emergency politics is now closely tied to the wider visual culture of political power.

The COBR Committee does not only convene ministers but also indirectly convenes *images*. In this way, the naming of COBR acts as a centrifugal force pulling the attention of the country towards it. Through the establishment and repetition of visual codes, the symbolic power of the prime minister and the State’s inanimate symbols (No.10 Downing Street door backdrop, lectern, crest and empty cabinet meeting room backdrop) merge to form a discursive assemblage of the emergency response image. The emergency response images form a controllable and visible modality of governmental response to emergency events. In this way, these images evidence this inquiry’s main research objective, to locate and analyse the key components that make up the visual culture of emergency politics.

As I have demonstrated above, the visual culture of emergency politics is located within practices of image-making and image-aggregating as much as in the images themselves. It is how they are framed, and presented together, both emergency image and emergency response image, that give them their power within and following the emergency event. The emergency response image's main operation is to communicate but also to regulate the appearances of power during, before and after a civil emergency event. In regulating its own appearance through consistent visual conventions, it increasingly regulates the viewer and their response placing the chaotic and disruptive emergency event into an ordered and familiar narrative arc.

As stated above, the increasing consistency of emergency response images is becoming as equally fixed and rigid as any other of the State's symbols and rituals such as flags or performative rituals of State. This means the visual culture of emergency politics not only supports the States authority and legitimacy during crisis, but upholds the wider visual edifice of State power and authority when the emergency interval has ended. In effect, by exposing these image structures, their repetition and standardisation, I attempt to open up the potential for them to lose their aesthetic power.

The visual culture of emergency politics is something that evolves and adapts to the changing technological and media landscape. The research period highlights an intense moment when new media emerges and distributes the power to produce and disseminate images. As noted in Chapter 2, social media and camera phones are highly suited to quick, urgent moments such as emergency events. However, as Chapter 4 demonstrates, aesthetic responses to emergency claims have been in existence within Britain since at least the fourteenth-century.

4 Dynamics of Emergency Images

The preceding two chapters outlined the specific visual conventions and aesthetic qualities of British emergency politics via the introduction to, and analysis of, the emergency image and the emergency response image. These sets of images embody a new space of political contestation surrounding the claiming of civil emergency events within the emergent territories of social media. Where once there was only top-down, State orchestrated claims for events to be defined as national emergencies, now claims are emergent via bottom-up citizen witness images. These images and their emergency claims can often work in a symbiotic relationship where the emergency image claims the emergency event and the State formalises the claim via the announcement of the COBR Committee and the assemblage of emergency response images. However, it is when these two sets of images claim different frames and narratives for the same emergency event, where they act in *opposition* to one another, that a new strand of image-based emergency politics emerges. These image-based claims and counter-claims act to open the space in which who decides on the emergency event can be contested.

Emergency claims assert that an emergency event or occurrence has or is taking place and requires urgent attention. The State's claims are always heard having direct access to mainstream global media, whereas the emergency claim by ordinary members of the public is far harder to amplify. With wide accessibility to image making tools such as camera phones and social media, this process has become easier. There still remain obstructive barriers to wide exposure of alternative claims and therefore many claims often lack the increased public support that would apply pressure on the government or authority to recognise the emergency.

The literature on emergency claims has focused on their use for amplifying 'slow emergences', emergencies that have been in existence for a long period of time but have remained underacknowledged. Ariella Azoulay has examined the role of photography in producing emergency claims for Palestine in the occupied territories.[241] Jennifer Rubenstein asks that scholars focus more on emergency claims rather than traditional 'quick' emergencies, as slow emergences can provide a vehicle for a wider engagement with democratic politics. I approach emergency claims as a form of resisting State or sovereign power, in which the dissemination of the means of producing an emergency image allows for certain official narratives to be contested. This is examined in the final section of this chapter, via an analysis of the emergency image generated during and after Grenfell Tower fire in 2017.

In the context of this study, I consider the dynamics of the emergency image as a set of processes, pressures and forces that have changed the nature of the emergency image and how we understand it. I argue that the dynamics of emergency images are not fixed but constantly evolving over time. What is most important in relation to the wider aims and objectives of this inquiry, is how the dynamics of the visual culture of emergency opens up a new space for political contestation. This chapter examines the visual culture of emergency politics via an historical and theoretical contextual analysis of the emergency claim and counter-claim. I argue that the first aesthetic-based emergency claim took place during the fourteenth-century. Following a civil uprising, the sovereign ordered the unfurled the Royal Banner to declare martial law and in doing so attempted to reclaim sovereign authority. I also outline how the proclamation via the reading of the Riot Act in the eighteenth-century was a performative act of declaring the exception based on an emergency claim that an event was unlawful. Both examples above changed the law via their emergency claim. However, since

[241] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*.

2004 and the royal assent of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA), the contemporary image-based proclamation of a COBR Committee meeting does not invoke a change in law but *symbolically* demarcates the exception from the norm within the territory of new digital media.

I use this separation between COBR, the official Civil Contingencies Committee and the legal framework of the CCA to further evidence how the State's emergency claim now often relies upon an exploitation of the visual culture of emergency politics to necessitate its own decisions on the exception. I outline that it is not the law that can be invoked that is most important here (the CCA has never been invoked since its inception[242]) but the mechanism under which such law *can* be invoked, namely the CCA's removal of the requirement for the government to seek approval for the declaration of emergency from the privy council and/or to gain an Order in Council.[243] In this way, the contemporary democratic state adopts the practices of the previously historical sovereign prerogative, as the CCA replaced the need for a declaration of a state of emergency with a more subjective, politically malleable and aesthetic-based announcement via COBR.

Unlike the declaration of a state of emergency, the announcement of a COBR meeting became a visual representation *of* emergency law, but without the necessity to implement emergency law itself. This is compounded by the purposefully vague legal definition of what constitutes a civil emergency within the CCA itself. This has allowed the COBR Committee to be deployed as a contemporary form of a sovereign prerogative based on images as necessity and not by the objective definition of law.

I further suggest that it is due to the visual culture of emergency politics that the government can now manipulate the claim for the necessity of government action in response

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[242] See: Walker, "The Governance of Emergency Arrangements",) 211-227.

[243] 'Orders in Council are made by the Queen acting on the advice of the Privy Council and are approved in person by the monarch.' "Orders in Council", accessed July 2021, https://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/orders-in-council/

to marginal emergency events, and in doing so create its own emergency images. This allows the definition of what constitutes the difference between an everyday minor emergency and a national emergency to be exploited. This is evidenced via the exploitation of the visual culture of emergency politics via three examples of British prime minister's claiming emergency events within two weeks of being appointed, not elected, to office, and how their visual association with COBR was used to amplify their public profile within a frame of crisis leadership. To demonstrate this, I draw on examples of emergency events that would have previously existed outside the threshold of civil emergency definition but are now increasingly granted a formal COBR Committee response due to their aesthetic and political value to the government.

The final section of this chapter will use the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 as a key case study to examine what happens when citizen witness images claim an emergency but the government does not. I use the case of Grenfell Tower fire to show how local people attempted to keep the 'interval'[244] of the emergency moment open for longer, resisting its closure by the government by disrupting the standard visual conventions often deployed to mark the end of an event by the prime minister visiting the site of the disaster/emergency. I argue that by not convening COBR in response to the images of the Grenfell Tower fire, the government inadvertently created a void in the visual space normally occupied by its own emergency response images and the visual conventions that COBR meeting generates, as discussed in Chapter 3. This void of standardised aesthetic-based response to the Grenfell Tower fire, with the intensity of the national and international media gaze upon it, created an opportunity in which the local population, supported by emergency images already in circulation, made an emergency claim by creating a new set of emergency images as protesters occupied local council buildings and heckled Prime Minister Theresa May while

[244] Anderson, "Governing Emergencies",14-26.

she visited the site of the fire. These images acted as a series of counter-claims and disrupted the ability for the government to create its own controlling set of images.

Historical Dynamics

Figure 68: Left: The unfurling of the Royal Banner during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Right: Prime Minister announces her attendance at four separate COBR meeting over four separate emergency events.

The emergency response image, which visually announces a COBR meeting in the twenty-first century, contains an historical echo of the unfurling of the Royal Banner in the fourteenth-century (see figure 68); both deploy publicly recognisable visual symbols to formally claim a separation between the norm and the exception. As discussed in Chapter 3, the increasing rigidity of the visual conventions of the COBR statement combine to form a standardisation of visual codes of government response: the background of No.10 Downing Street, the consistent and individual lectern, the government crest and the words spoken, "I have just attended a COBR meeting…" (see figure 68). I use these as evidence to show that today's emergency response images form a dynamic Royal Banner which helps to regulate the exception and bring it back under State control.

In the fourteenth-century, the visual display of the unfurling of the Royal Banner invoked martial law.[245] Martial law, the original and first official British emergency law, meant 'no law at all'.[246] This allowed it to accommodate a wide range of applications, including unpredictable emergency events.[247] Martial law was initially only invoked to supress violent uprisings or war under *tempus belli*, but as Capua makes clear, its definition became a, 'penal device for the control of the lower classes'.[248] By the late seventeenth-century, martial law was being deployed within civil space and was framed as a 'peacekeeping process', increasingly used to control and supress the 'lower classes'.[249]

The aesthetic act of unfurling the Royal Banner formed a symbolic representation of the physically absent sovereign, and was a legal extension of their power. [250] The unfurling of the banner allowed the sovereign to declare and claim an exception anywhere within their territory without the need of the sovereign to be physically present. Once martial law was declared, the common law courts would close and state soldiers would enact the law often via the use of violence. The territory the Royal Banner demarcated under sovereign rule was fixed and bounded by geographic locale and denoted that extra-judicial law now applied, 'within the verge of the banner'[251] (equivalent to a twelve-mile circumference).[252] In essence, to be effective, the Royal Banner needed to be *visible* within the territory it wished to control. The unfurling of the Royal Banner to declare martial law can be seen as the origin of the public announcement to convene COBR. The territory for the emergency image is unbounded

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[245] In France the state of emergency has its origins in the *State of Siege* and in Germany the *State of Exception*.
[246] Neocleous, Mark, Critique of Security. (Edinburgh University Press 2008):44.
[247] In 1914, martial law became the Defence of the Realm Act (commonly known as DORA), which then became a variety of emergency acts including: the Emergency Act 1920, Emergency Powers Act 1964 and Civil Protection in Peacetime Act 1986 and finally these emergency laws were subsumed into the Civil Contingency Act 2004.
[248] Capua, J. V. "The Early History of Martial Law in England from the Fourteenth Century to the Petition of Right." *The Cambridge Law Journal*, vol. 36, no. 1, (Cambridge University Press, 1977):168.
[249] As Capua has noted, those with land or titles who revolted against the sovereign often avoided being charged, whereas those of no property or public standing were. See: Capua, J. V. "The Early History of Martial Law in England from the Fourteenth Century to the Petition of Right." *The Cambridge Law Journal*, vol. 36, no. 1, Cambridge University Press, 1977): 168.
[250]Collins, John. *Martial Law and English Law, c.1500-c.1700*, (Cambridge 2016):19.
[251] Collins, *Martial Law and English Law*, 156.
[252] Collins, *Martial Law and English Law*, 45.

geographically and exists within the expansive territory of social media and its wider global media network. I suggest that we have moved from the fourteenth-century's aesthetic-based control of a civil emergency within the physical territory to an aesthetic-based symbol of control within the expansive and dynamic territory of social and new media in the twenty-first.

Like the Royal Banner, the use of COBR to formally claim an emergency of national importance defines not only what is exceptional but also what is considered normal. The alternative term for the Royal Banner is 'Royal Standard*'.* The 'Standard', deriving from *stand hard*, but also to *set a standard*, signifies a centralised and officially recognised calibration in the quantity of measurement and the quality of its substance, from which other measurements can accurately be set. Standards both as flags and as measurements form publicly recognisable regulatory codes. In addition, the royal standard retained the power to regulate life via standardising the economy by setting the values of weights and measurements, something known in medieval England as *The King's Standard.* The image of COBR as a symbolic banner does not set the standard of measurements but does act to regulate the territory of the emergency image during and following an emergency event via the standardised visual assemblage of COBR emergency response images: the lectern outside No.10 Downing street and the consistency of symbols and words spoken within the emergency statement, for example. Where the royal flag of the fourteenth-century attempted to control and contain the disorderly and often rebellious bodies of its subjects, the emergency response image of the twenty-first century attempts to regulate and contain the disorderly and often rebellious 'body' of emergency images.

Although martial law remained in operation throughout the following centuries, it was supported by the Riot Act in 1714 [253] as 'a law to abolish law; a kind of modified martial law

[253] The Riot Act was also used during colonialism and has a history of violent massacre. M. Neocleous, Critique of Security (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 44. See also, Collins, *Martial Laws*, 273.

against rioters.'[254] The law '*1 Geo.1 St.2 c.5'*, commonly known as the Riot Act was passed as a way to spontaneously disperse crowds by reading aloud words during a public disturbance or riot, and could be seen, via emergent printing and books, as the 'new media' of the eighteenth-century (see figure 69).[255]

Figure 69: Engraving from the Illustrated London News, No 2544, January 21, 1888 showing the reading of the Riot Act at Aignish Farm, near Stornoway, Scotland.

The public reading of the Riot Act forms a proclamation that brings a law into being by its public announcement, meaning any person remaining within the location one hour after the proclamation would be deemed felonious and subject to arrest or hanging. At the moment of official utterance, the law was invoked and marked the shift from the norm to an exception under which new police violence could be legally enacted. As Richard Volgar has noted,

> 'In contrast to previous offenses of riot and unlawful assembly, it was not necessary to prove the specific act or intention; mere presence was enough to hang the accused'.[256]

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[254] Richard Vogler, *Reading the Riot Act: Magistracy, the Police and the Army in Civil Disorder*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 1991), 2.

[255] Lucien Febvre, Henri Jean Martin, David Gerard, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800* (London: Verso, 2010).

[256] Vogler, *Reading the Riot Act,*1.

In a similar way to the territory of the Royal Banner and martial law, the broad nature of the Riot Act meant those within a specific geographic location were under a separate rule of law, instigated by verbal claim that the disorder was breaching the law. This has echoes in the public naming of "COBR", which enacts an albeit symbolic and performative gesture of proclaiming an emergency within the networked territory of digital media. As outlined in Chapter 3, this is formed via an assemblage of outputs: the televised statement, press release and social media tweets.

Figure 70: The old and the new flags used to declare a civil emergency. From left to right, top to bottom: Unfurling of the Royal Banner; Reading the Riot Act; Consistent images announcing a COBR meeting;
Claiming a COBR emergency via Twitter.com

The subjective mode of claiming an emergency in contemporary British politics following the CCA in 2004 will now be examined in relation to the historical sovereign proclamation. A *proclamation* is a formal government declaration via public announcement.

Examples include the reading of the Riot Act or the invoking of a state of emergency via the Emergency Powers Act 1920.[257] A proclamation invokes law via its public verbal utterance and visual announcement. In contrast, *proclaiming* is a public announcement but contains an element of uncertainty in its authority, it *pro-claims* something as official but does not fix it in law. I suggest a shift took place within British emergency legal frameworks between the last *proclamation* of a state of emergency on 13th November 1973,[258] and the first public *proclaiming* of an emergency under the COBR Committee in 2005.

To expand this idea of the symbolic prerogative, I draw on John Locke's 1689 publication, *Two Treaties of Government.*[259] Locke's central principle is the distinction between an objective and subjective decision on the exception. In exceptional moments, the sovereign has the prerogative to suspend the normal rule of law; they decide, based on their subjective interpretation of necessity, to protect the public against an existential threat. Locke defines the prerogative as,

> 'This Power to act according to discretion, for the publick good, without the prescription of the law, and sometimes even against it…'[260] (sic)

In Locke's view, the emergency event, by its very nature of being exceptional and unforeseen, has too many variables and uncertainties to be covered by a fixed law. As emergencies often escalate too quickly for parliamentary debate or legislative adjustment, Locke endowed the sovereign with extra-legal authority to act *outside* of the law in the name of protecting the people.[261] In the same way, since the introduction of the CCA and severance

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[257] "PROCLAMATION OF STATE OF EMERGENCY"
HC Deb 23 May 1966 vol 729 cc34-42, accessed July 25th 2021, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1966/may/23/proclamation-of-state-of-emergency-1

[258] The state of emergency 13th November 1973 was announced in response to a strike by coal miners and electricity power workers.

[259] Although the prerogative was used earlier than Locke, it is Locke who popularised it within the political philosophy of governance, and especially within the U.S constitution.

[260] Neocleous, Critique of Security, 15.

[261] In a similar assessment by Agamben on the sovereign and the ban / wolf existing outside of the law, or Schmitt's sovereign as he who decides the exception, all three have their basis of power during an emergency as remaining outside the law so as to be able to suspend it.

with the necessity of Privy Council approval to declare a national emergency, the government uses the subjective practice of the Royal prerogative to name specific emergency events as warranting the convening of COBR.

This is in the tradition of Schmitt's statement that the 'Sovereign is he who decides the exception'.[262] As the decision is subjective and not bound by law, it is open to political manipulation and exploitation.[263] If we return to Locke's prerogative, he suggests that such claims will be judged on whether they promote public good,

> '…if there comes a question between executive power and the people, about a thing claimed as a prerogative; the tendency of the exercise of such prerogative to the good or hurt of the people, will easily decide that question.'[264]

However, under a condition of securitisation, every necessity is justified as a benefit to the public. As Anderson has stated,

> 'Governing through emergencies primarily hinges on draining an event of its eventfulness, by reducing its potentiality to disrupt, end, or overturn. On the other hand, liberal order governs through emergency in the sense that claims of an emergency – sometimes strategic declarations that an emergency has happened, is happening or will happen – can justify actions that (re)order bodies and relations for pre-existing reasons.'[265]

Emergency events are not easily defined in advance. Such a vague definition creates space for such decisions to be exploited for political gain based on the subjective necessity of political, rather than solely public, interest. As Agamben has stated,

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[262] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), 1.
[263] See Catherine Haddon "I didn't predict a riot", accessed June 20 2020, https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/i-didn't-predict-riot
[264] Gross and Ní Aoláin *Law in Times of Crisis,*120.
[265] Anderson ET AL., "Slow Emergencies", 624.

> '…far from occurring as an objective given, necessity clearly entails a subjective judgment, and that obviously the only circumstances that are necessary and objective are those that are declared to be so'.[266]

In this way, the necessity to protect the public acts as a central justification for almost any government action in response to civil emergency events.

Contemporary Dynamics

Since the royal assent of the CCA, wide ranging emergency powers can be invoked without the convening of COBR, and more importantly COBR can be convened without invoking the CCA. Up until the 1970s the British State would declare a state of emergency that would suspend normal law and invoke special emergency powers to the executive, most often to break industrial strikes. However, the proclamation of a state of emergency was last used in 1973, the same year that the new Civil Contingencies Unit (previous title of the Civil Contingencies Committee - COBR) was created. It was at this time that the State decided to govern emergency events in a different way, by not formally announcing the event as an emergency.[267] Between 1973 and the first public announcement of the Civil Contingencies Committee in 2000, the government simply responded to emergency events at an operational level rather than declaring the event. Although a secretive emergency committee was used, neither its existence nor its convening was ever publicly announced.[268] In this way, the events appeared to be subsumed within the normal operational capacity of everyday governance, the government actively avoided the instrumentalisation of emergency, the necessity of oversight of the Privy Council and Order in Council.

[266] Agamben,, *State of Exception*, 30.
[267] For a more detailed account of this shift see: Anderson, "Scenes of Emergency", 1356–74.
[268] As mentioned in the introduction, there were two televised civil emergency events that were neither declared as a state of emergency in this period:. Then Iran embassy hostage crisis in 1980 and the miners' strike in 1984.

During the early 2000s, the legal framework for dealing with emergency events was altered in light of the issues faced by the Blair government during the fuel duty protests in 2000, and the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001. Following these events, the government, for the first time, began once again to publicly announce the emergency committee via the naming of the "Civil Contingencies Committee" or the 'emergency committee of senior ministers' as a symbol of government action. In the following section I argue that this separation from law, invoked during the CCA, is a crucial moment in the visible emergence of the COBR Committee and its renewed prerogative to make an emergency claim.

As Walker and Broderick state in their extensive analysis of the CCA, there is an over reliance on the subjective approach for interpreting both the seriousness of an emergency event and the necessity of response,

> '…neither the (CC) Act nor the accompanying documentation address where the thresholds lie on this 'spectrum of severity'. At which point will a 'local' emergency become a 'regional' or 'national' emergency? How are ministers to make such a judgement?
> Indeed, the purpose of Part II (of the CCA) is to 'enable' Ministers to respond to an emergency, but the framework proposed appears to assume that information and a comprehensive understanding of the substantive essence of the problem they face. Yet, during periods of crisis, decision-makers are subject to severe limitations, asymmetries, and distortions of information as well as being subject to highly stressful, threatening, and surprising events requiring rapid response.'[269]

It is via the prerogative of the image-based necessity that the government can decide its own emergency and create its own emergency response images. As Foucault has noted,

> 'Politics, therefore, is not something that has to fall within form of legality or a system of laws. Politics is convened with something else, although at times, when it needs them, it uses laws as an instrument. Politics is concerned with necessity.'[270]

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[269] Clive Walker and James Broderick, The *Civil Contingencies Act* 2004: Risk, Resilience and the Law in the United Kingdom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006),78.
[270] Foucault, *Security*, *Territory*, *Population*, 263.

The necessity is manufactured in the name of emergency response and has increased the number and frequency of COBR meetings held within the research period.

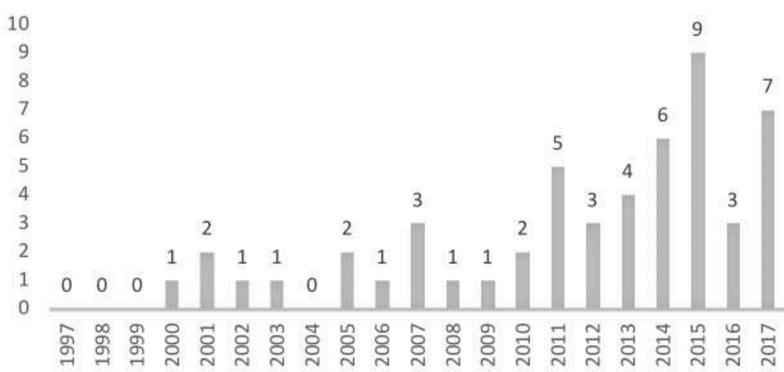

Figure 71: Total number of known COBR Committee meetings between 2nd May 1997 – 31st Dec 2016.

What can be clearly seen in figure 72, is that the number of publicly announced COBR meetings has increased between 1997 and 2017. This can be attributed to two key factors: firstly, the rise in Islamic terrorism and public awareness of climate change, and secondly, the rise in images of previously unseen emergency events being visually captured and disseminated via mobile phones, the internet and social media.

Between 2nd May 1997 and 31st December 2016 (exact twenty-year study period) there have been fifty-two publicly announced COBR meetings. On average, Tony Blair publicly announced a COBR meeting every 416 days compared with Gordon Brown averaging 149.7 days, with David Cameron averaging a COBR meeting every 93 days (see figure 73). David Cameron announced twenty-four COBR meetings in his six years as prime minister, far more than any other prime minister. It can be argued that Cameron had more emergencies to face, due to the rise in Islamic-based terrorism in the United Kingdom and the increased public awareness of climate change. However, calling these COBR meetings

helped support his narrative of security and ecological awareness that in turn attempted to bolster his profile for strong leadership.

Within the study period of 1997-2017, the government formally claimed five civil emergencies that I suggest exist outside of the pre-2005 threshold for being considered a *civil* emergency. These include: air strikes on Libya to enforce a no fly zone in 2011, Islamic State militants capturing parts of northern Iraq and southern Syria 2014, the potential for Greece to leave the European Union in 2015 and the failed military coup in Turkey in 2016. These events appear to sit more within the remit of foreign policy than British civil emergency. Moreover, there are six events which stand out as being within the threshold of the definition of civil emergency event but were not formally claimed to be so, meaning COBR was not convened: the transatlantic aircraft plot 2006, storm Kyrill in 2007 in which nine people died, foot-and-mouth outbreak 2007, terrorist related stabbing at Leytonstone Underground station 2015, the murder of MP Jo Cox 2016 and the Grenfell Tower Fire 2017. These events demonstrate the subjective and political nature of the claiming of an event as a civil emergency and worthy of a COBR meeting or not.

Another key example of the State's ability to 'construct' civil emergency events is the announcing of a COBR meeting to promote a new prime minister's leadership credentials. This is most notable in the immediate period after an appointed, but unelected, prime minister takes office. COBR defined emergency events draw public attention and offer a malleable platform for the representation of a new prime minister. This is evidenced by three recent prime ministers who became so after the previous prime minister had resigned and before a general election was held. Each publicly announced a COBR meeting within ten days of becoming prime minister: Gordon Brown (three days), Theresa May (three days) and Boris Johnson (nine days). By comparison, previous elected prime ministers on average convened COBR at least one hundred days after being elected (see figure 71, column one).

Figure 72: Newly appointed not elected Prime Ministers call COBR meeting within two week of taking office. From left to right: Gordon Brown convened COBR in response to a car crashing into Glasgow airport and catching fire. Theresa May convened COBR due to the failed military coup in Turkey and Boris Johnson convened COBR due to a dam in Yorkshire potentially failing and flooding a village downstream.

Prime Minister **(Dates in office)**	No. of days between first day as PM and first COBR announcement	Frequency of COBR meetings per no. of days.	Total no. of days in office	Total no. of publicly known COBR meetings
Tony Blair **(2nd May 1997 - 27th June 2007)**	1230	416	3744	9
Gordon Brown **(27th June 2007 - 11th May 2010)**	3	149.7	1048	7
David Cameron **(11th May 2010 - 13th July 2016)**	175	93	2255	24
Theresa May **(13th July 2016 - 1st Jan 2018)** **(study concludes)**	3	89.5	537	6
Boris Johnson **(24th July 2019 - ongoing)**	9		ongoing	1

Figure 73: Graph showing prime minister’s announcement of COBR meetings by average of number of days in office.

Gordon Brown convened COBR in response to a car crashing into Glasgow airport and catching fire, Theresa May convened COBR due to the failed military coup in Turkey, and Boris Johnson convened COBR due to a dam in Yorkshire potentially failing (figure 72). It seems the Glasgow airport crash was a random and possibly legitimate event for a COBR meeting, however it is far less clear how a failed militarily coup in Turkey concerned a British civil emergency committee. In addition, the dam in Yorkshire that Boris Johnson declared COBR in response to was equally questionable as a national rather than locally-led emergency. (Note how in figure 72 Johnson is photographed next to a uniformed person, further repeating and conditioning his own image in relation to the established crisis rituals as outlined in Chapter 3). All three cases created a context through which a once senior minister could now be visually presented as a prime minister by creating images of them dealing with an emergency via their association with COBR.

Distributed Dynamics

As shown above, the State can decide on a COBR emergency itself, and thus creates its own emergency response images without there being an emergency image. However, the inversion of this is far less common, where the emergency image demands a COBR meeting but the government does not recognise the event as an emergency. The Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 acts a clear example of this rare but pivotal occurrence. Whilst the emergency images of the fire declared the exception, the government did not announce a COBR meeting in response. The lack of government response resulted in the local public attempting to reclaim the event as an emergency by creating new emergency images *and* their own emergency response images. As shown in more detail below, this was achieved by creating additional emergency images by protesting in the street, heckling Theresa May during her visit and

occupying the local Chelsea and Westminster council offices. In addition, images of the general public supporting the survivors of the fire can be seen as community-led emergency response images. These events created counter-emergency response images that disrupted the hegemonic visual order of the State and opened up a new paradigm of public resistance in the visual culture of emergency politics.

Figure 74: Images of the Grenfell Tower fire taken on mobile phones.

On 14th June 2017, the residential Grenfell Tower in west London was engulfed by flames as the external cladding caught fire, killing seventy-two people and displacing hundreds more. The citizen witness images of the fire, and the ensuing chaos, *were* emergency images as they were posted instantly onto social media and announced the emergency to the wider public (see figure 74). These images were then picked up by the mainstream media and formed a process of global remediation as the social media images became international news. The British government, led by Prime Minister Theresa May, did not declare the event as a civil emergency and so did not convene the COBR Committee. It is assumed that the government defined the event as a disaster, in that its happening had already passed and so required no action to resolve it. But the government failed to realise the power of the images in

circulation, and the concern of thousands of residents in other high-rise blocks throughout the United Kingdom with the same combustible cladding.

When considering whether a COBR meeting should have been convened, it is useful to briefly adopt a comparative approach by placing the Grenfell Tower fire next to emergency events that *had* warranted COBR meetings in previous years. These included the following: the military coup in Turkey, air strikes on Libya, ash tree dieback disease and the threat of Greece exiting the European Union. As detailed above, the State retains the power of the prerogative to declare any event that exists within the boundaries of the emergency thresholds as a national emergency by convening COBR. The government could have declared the fire an emergency, and in doing so would have released the support and central government infrastructure that comes with such a declaration, while publicly acknowledging the seriousness of the event and its images.

Theresa May visited the site of the fire the day after it happened but did not initially meet with survivors, only the firemen. After criticism in the media, May returned the following day to meet survivors only to be heckled and forced to call-short her trip and quickly leave after an angry crowd formed at the church where she was meeting survivors and local residents. What emerged was not a set of uniform emergency response images regulating the image economy of the emergency event, as discussed in Chapter 3, but instead a set of disrupted images of a noticeably shaken prime minister almost running to a waiting Land Rover, to the backdrop of an angry crowd jeering and shouting (see figure 75).

Figure 75: Prime Minister Theresa May hurries to a waiting car as she is heckled by a crowd at the site of the Grenfell Tower fire.

The public anger aimed at May disrupted the government's attempts to make an orderly set of response images that could contain the event within its own specific narrative of tragedy or disaster, but not emergency. Instead, the images of May created more emergency images that were blurred, pixelated and chaotic (see figure 75). The images' aesthetic quality were more in keeping with an emergency image and in effect visually portrayed the State as having its own crisis.

As the government lost control of the narrative, the local people took hold of the images and created their own emergency response images. These were associative of previous political crisis rituals but rather than State sanctioned images, they tied in with standard image forms of protests, civil disobedience and occupation of civic structure of power, as well as community support and mutual aid (see figures 76 and 77).

What the Grenfell Tower fire exposed was the culmination of slow emergencies. In comparison to 'quick' emergencies, slow emergencies do not have clear peaks where their condition breaks through the surface and gains wide public attention. Slow emergencies bubble away, often for years, under the surface. Anderson et al. define slow emergency as,

> '…situations of harm or suffering that question what forms of life can and should be secured by Emergency governance.'[271]

Such conditions of harm or suffering are usually associated with health, housing or employment, and due to the extended temporality can become ingrained within the fabric of society, meaning the State is either unaware or unwilling to address the issues in the same way that it does with a COBR led quick emergency. [272] Fundamentally, many slow emergencies are based on long-term, often generational, structural inequalities that Galtung termed 'structural violence'.[273] As Coopper and Wytel have suggested, the fire at Grenfell was a direct result of the government's policy of austerity which ushered in a wave of deregulation within council run residential buildings, among other areas.[274] As Anderson et al. have highlighted,

> '…slow emergencies points to those situations of harm and suffering that question which forms of life can and should be secured by Emergency governance…A slow emergency is thus marked by the disjuncture between an emergency claim and the racializing assemblage's that structure which subjects may claim a future in need of protection'.[275]

Moreover, as Rob Nixon states, many of these slow emergencies are slow due to their lack of *visibility*.[276] In the context of this study, the Grenfell public's claim for an emergency was a claim not only for the victims and survivors of the fire but for visual recognition. The

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[271] Anderson et al., *Slow Emergencies,* 623.

[272] Structural violence, slow emergency or slow violence suggests a violence that is not simply a short-term event or action, but takes the form of long-term, systemic inequalities that lead to the degradation of human welfare resulting in an accumulative form of structural violence such as: poor living conditions, low wages, inadequate health care, debt or institutional racism and sexism. Moreover, structural or slow violence may be inter-generational, in that it has been in place and part of the very structures of society for decades or even centuries. See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) :10.; Ben Anderson, Kevin Grove, Lauren Rickards, and Matthew Kearnes, "Slow Emergencies: Temporality and The Racialized Biopolitics of Emergency Governance", *Progress in Human Geography*44 no.4 (2020): 621-639; Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research* 6 no.3 (1969): 167–91; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[273] Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", 167–91.

[274] In relation to the Grenfell Tower fire and slow emergency via austerity and institutional violence, see: Vickie Cooper, and David Whyte, "Grenfell, Austerity, and Institutional Violence". *Sociological Research Online*. 27 no.1 (2022): 207-216.

[275] Anderson et al., *Slow Emergencies*, 632.

[276] Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 3.

spectacular and speedy 'crisis machines' of social media and their algorithms are only interested in newness, in metaphorical and literal fires, in the spectacular attention-grabbing events which increases user interaction and wider legitimation of social media networks as providing the best content. They are far less interested in longer-term slow emergencies. In this way, we can add another visual condition to the visual culture of emergency politics, that of the slow, non-visible emergency event.

Figure 76: Protestors enter and occupy the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Council offices.

Figure 77: Local community groups and members of the public form a distributed emergency response committee by sorting through donations and offering free food and support to the survivors of the fire.

Following the fire, there were continual protests around the local area, directed towards the council building itself. However, it is the moment the public broke into and briefly occupied the local council offices that forms a clear visual representation of the momentary redistribution of aesthetic power within an anomic moment of a civil emergency event (see figure 76). The public were creating their own emergency response images in this space, in direct response to the emergency image of the burning tower itself and lack of government response images. These new images occupied both the physical space of the council building and the space usually inhabited within the image economy for the government's emergency

response images. The images of the Grenfell Tower fire and the protests afterwards showed the two positions of aesthetic power (emergency image and emergency response image) colliding.

In this moment of disparity between the emergency image and government's emergency response image, the public made the decision that the event was an exception and one that needed to be recognised by the State. The indecision of the government opened a disjuncture between the government's perspective of what constitutes an emergency and that of the public. As Castell notes,

> '…the greater the autonomy of the communicating subjects vis-à-vis the controllers of societal communication nodes, the higher the chances of the introduction of messages challenging dominant values and interests in communication networks. This is why the rise of mass cell communication… provides new opportunities for social change in society that is organised, in all domains of activity, around the meta-network of electronic communication networks.'[277]

The local people of Grenfell and its surrounding area felt forced to extend the interval of the emergency by making their own emergency claim to gain further media, and ultimately political, attention and support.

Bottom-up emergency claims are often deployed by activists, artists or publics to raise an issue in need of an urgent response. As Anderson et al. have outlined,

> 'These claims transvalue 'emergency' into a resource affected groups use to intervene in the uneven distribution of temporalities that structure existing situations of harm or damage.'[278]

It may not have been the collective intention of the protesters at the time, but the public outpouring and anger that manifested was an attempt to utilise the well-rehearsed image-

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[277] Castell, *Communication Power*, 413.
[278] Anderson et al., "Slow Emergencies", 633.

based 'crisis machines' of social media and mainstream media, to continue and amplify their emergency claim.

Social media and the event's images provided the necessity for the public to act; both validating and promoting public action. In doing so, a temporary public inadvertently emerges and finds itself at the front of contestation against the State's hegemony of emergency, and how emergencies are framed. As Brent Steele has noted,

> '…the citizen has a role in creating the image, and the image at the same time transforms the citizen.'[279]

Rather than social media simply making public an event, citizen media is active in the *making of publics.* This is not true of the majority of emergency images, which are quickly appropriated and controlled by the government. As we saw with Grenfell, there remain moments where the visual culture of emergency politics can challenge the State apparatus rather than support it. I would however contend that these processes are often accidental and result from poor governmental judgment rather than active political engagement.

Bonnie Honig suggests that this process of contesting government hegemony on claiming emergency is a process of 'democratising emergency' where the public seek, 'not to resist sovereignty but to claim it.'[280] I disagree. The democratising of the emergency during Grenfell was not a democratic moment but a desperate appeal *for recognition* of the slow systemic emergency that created the condition for the fast spectacular emergency image of the fire. Instead, I suggest it is the access to images and their dissemination which offer the democratising effects, where suddenly the visual culture of emergency politics becomes a level playing field for anyone who can take images and disseminate to a public platform.

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[279] Brent J. Steele, *Defacing Power: The Aesthetics of Insecurity in Global Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010) 46.
[280] Bonnie Honig, "Three Models of Emergency Politics", *Boundary 2,* 41 no. 2, (May 2014): 48.

Ariella Azoulay has termed this use of image making as emergency claim as the 'civil contract of photography'.[281] She defines is as,

> 'The relation between the three parties involved in the photographic act – the photographed person, the photographer and the spectator – are not mediated through sovereign power and are not limited to the boundaries of the nation-state or an economic contract. The users of photography thus remerge as people who are not totally identified with the powers that govern them and who have new means to look at and show its deeds, as well, and eventually to address this power and negotiate with it – citizen and noncitizen alike.'[282]

What Azoulay fails to acknowledge is that the new social media hubs that carry the images are a new form of sovereignty, a new form of control where the algorithm dictates what is visible and what is not.[283] In this sense, such political spaces are and can be controlled in the long-term. Although the emergency image breaks through this due to a sudden influx of attention, overall, the networks of social media can be used for emergency claims while their use for long-term political emancipation appears limited.[284]

In this way, the images of the Grenfell Tower fire became counter-flags that declared their own martial law, or no law as Collins suggested. It was an attempt by the public to unfurl their own Royal Banner, their own set of emergency response images. Here the British people can be seen to have produced their own counter-flags of emergency, in the form of social media images of the Grenfell Tower fire and in the resulting public response.

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[281] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography.*
[282] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography,* 24.
[283] See: Antonia Majaca and Luciana Parisi, *The Incomputable and Instrumental Possibility*, efflux, accessed July 28th 2021, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/77/76322/the-incomputable-and-instrumental-possibility/
[284] See project by artist Jonas Staal to 'Collectivise Facebook', accessed July 12th 2021, http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/collectivize-facebook/

Practice Research Output: Re-enactment of COBR Meeting.

Within this chapter, the restaged COBR meeting that features in the *Emergency State* exhibition presents a juxtaposition between the urgency of the Grenfell Tower fire and the sleeping COBR meeting attendees (see figure 78). This work imagines the non-visible fictional COBR committee as a place of permanent emergency, where a committee sits in continued readiness, waiting for the next crisis to emerge. In the context of the Grenfell Tower fire, the work can be read as an image of the COBR Committee missing the emergency due to emergency fatigue or lack of awareness. Moreover, the slowness and lack of action demonstrated by the sleeping COBR Committee members reflects the slowness of slow violence, as if the structural emergency which caused the Grenfell Tower fire (deregulation on council housing building standards, amongst others) is reflected in the slowness of the COBR Committee's own daily functioning.

Figure 78: Images from the re-enactment performance of the COBR meeting from the *Emergency State* exhibition.

This chapter outlined the dynamics of the emergency image and how it is instrumentalised by differing elements in claiming an emergency. The early use of the Royal Banner used a visible and publicly recognisable flag to claim the exception and declare martial law, while the reading of the Riot Act enacted a performative approach to claiming an emergency in a

similar vein as the naming of COBR. I suggested that this naming is a contemporary form of prerogative that became operational following the separation of CCA from the Privy Council or Order in Council. I went on to suggest that this subjectivity to claim and produce emergency events via visual framing of certain civil emergencies over others by the State has been exploited by both the government and newly appointed leaders.

In section two, I used the example of the lack of a COBR meeting in response to the Grenfell Tower fire as leaving a void in the visual and operational space of emergency response. This space was filled with images of local people occupying Kensington and Chelsea council offices, and of images of the *community emergency response* of people sorting donations and distributing food and offering support. Moreover, I suggest that the Grenfell Tower fire is also a good example of how certain emergency events that are long-term and systemic, such as housing crisis, deregulation, poor health conditions, employment, disability rights etc, are never dealt with by COBR. What the Grenfell Tower fire tragically demonstrates is the necessity for images of the emergency to be dramatic enough as to gainer public attention and force the government to acknowledge and recognise the event as an emergency. In this way, the visual culture of emergency politics allows for not only the framing and representation of emergency events but their actual political contestation.

5 Reassembling COBR

As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, the visual culture of British civil emergency events and its detailed set of visual conventions have evolved via the establishment of the *emergency image* and *emergency response* image over a twenty-year period between 1997-2017. This new category of the visual culture of emergency politics is formed via a redistribution of who can claim an emergency event -essentially anyone with a camera phone and internet connectivity. As outlined in Chapter 2, the increased visibility of civil emergency events have caused the government to redefine its own visual authority within the new political territory of social media and the internet by deploying an assemblage of emergency response images. These images form an aesthetic-based technique of governmentality, where populations are governed and regulated through images in relation to past, future and present emergencies. Both Chapter 2 and 3 set out the development of these new visual conventions within the context of a selection of civil emergency events. In Chapter 4, I drew on historical examples of the use of aesthetics as an instrument of sovereign power, examining the visual power displayed in the unfurling of the Royal Banner and the reading of the Riot Act. I argued that since the advent of the CCA in 2004, the State have retained the capacity to enact a new prerogative to frame certain events as COBR worthy emergencies over others. I then examined how images of the Grenfell Tower fire and the following protests formed a set of counter-claims that resisted the government's attempts to classify, regulate, and subsume the event within its own frame as not being a civil emergency. I suggested that this inaction and indecision was a miscalculation by the government, and opened a space for new political contestation.

This chapter will now detail the practice-based research component of this inquiry by firstly contextualising my own practiced-based research outputs in relation other such

projects within a similar field of visual culture of emergency. This area will expand to include references from popular culture that have used the COBR Committee as a frame for political drama or satire. These practice-based research examples will outline my overarching methodical and contextual frame of investigative aesthetics, its history and current forms. These include: an exhibition titled: *The Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* which was held between 23rd June 2021 and 3rd July 2021, detailed below and in Appendix A, the online COBR Committee Archives consisting of all the publicly announced COBR meetings and their images between 1997-2017 are detailed below and in Appendix B, a dataset submission to the UK Data Archive of all publicly announced COBR meetings between 1997-2017 in Appendix C, and the performative restaging of the a COBR meeting and its visual intervention within the image economy as detailed below and in Appendix D.

Visual Representation of the COBR Committee in Popular Culture

The fictionalised dramatic representations of the COBR Committee are part of a wider cultural phenomena that was established during the Cold War. Fictional representation of the non-visible British government's security apparatus has had a powerful influence on the public imaginary of the governance of emergencies. Films such as the *James Bond*, *Tinker Sailor Soldier Spy*, *Dr Strangelove*, *Six Days* or *Kingsman: The Secret Service* have all reimagined the internal workings of secretive governance. Each film 'imagines' a COBR style central command situation room where the response to national crisis is portrayed as time sensitive, dynamic and often heroic. The more recent representations of the COBR Committee continues this pattern, where the sensationalism of fiction fills the visual void of sites like COBR or GCHQ that are not visible to the general public.

Since 2003, the COBR Committee has been directly represented in a number of films and television series, namely *6 Days* about the Iran Embassy hostage crisis,[285] the television series *Spooks*,[286] *Bodyguard* (see figures 80 and 81),[287] and the Sky television series *COBRA* (see figure 79).

Figure 79: Popular cultural representations of the COBR Committee in television dramas. From left to right, top to bottom: *Spooks*, *The Bodyguard, COBRA.*

This cultural reimagining of the central workings of the COBR Committee fosters a popular acceptance, and normalisation, of unseen modes of governance during periods of civil emergency. The operational procedures and appearance of COBR is distorted by the dramatised representations, leading to a public acceptance that a COBR meeting is an appropriate response or that this mode of governance is highly dynamic or even sexy, when the opposite has been claimed, that COBR meetings are actually slow and bureaucratic in practice.[288]

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[285] *6 Days*, directed by Toa Fraser, 2017, New Zealand Film Commission, accessed June 21st 2022, https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/80178280
[286] *Spooks,* directed by David Wolstencroft, BBC One, Series 2, episode one 2003, accessed June 21st 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00cg8zy/spooks-series-2-episode-1
[287] *Bodyguard*, directed by Thomas Vincent and John Strickland, 2018, BBC One, accessed June 21st 2022, https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/80235864
[288] Haymen, *The Terrorist Hunters,* 305

Figure 80: Left image is taken from the television drama *The Bodyguard* (BBC 2018), centred around the relationship between a Home Secretary and her bodyguard. *The Bodyguard* was the most watched BBC drama since 2008, with approximately eleven million people watching. Right image: Home Secretary Amber Rudd arrives for a COBR meeting.

Figure 81: Left image is taken from the television drama *The Bodyguard* (BBC 2018). Here we see the prime minister played by actor David Westhead delivering a statement on a terrorist attack. Right image: Theresa May give delivers a statement following a COBR meeting on the London Bridge terror attack 2017.

Figure 82: Cartoon by David Bell satirising the COBR Committee's response to the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich, May 2013.

In a more satirical representation, the long history of political cartoons also attempts to show inside the non-visible COBR Committee (see figure 82). It is interesting to note that due to the increased number of COBR meetings in 2013, COBR was prevalent enough in the public consciousness to feature in a cartoon. This might not have been the case in 2000 when COBR was not promoted by the government. This, along with representations in television, becomes emblematic of the popularisation and increased public awareness of COBR.

The examples cited above are all existing visual representations of how the COBR Committee is represented within popular culture. These images exist alongside more formalised representations of COBR via: the emergency response image, the single official image of the COBR room itself and numerous other restaging attempts alongside the broader

visual representation.[289] In this context, the cultural representations of COBR reflect the blurred definition of what constitutes a 'civil' emergency, as the physical room becomes multiplied into an amalgamation of fictional representations under the banner of 'situation rooms', 'bunkers', 'cabinet office rooms' and 'war rooms'. Moreover, as I demonstrated in Chapter 2, the term 'COBR' represents government *action* rather than a fixed locatable room.[290] This interchangeability more acutely reflects the definition used by the British Government as discussed in Chapter 4, whereby certain events that might be considered as taking place under the remit of the Foreign office or National Security Council (missile strikes to enforce no fly zone in Libya, attamed military coup in Turkey, Sinjar massacre in Iraq), are cast within the civil emergency frame of COBR due to its wide public recognition and symbolism for government action. In this way, the visual culture of emergency politics, both fictional (popular culture) and real (COBR Committee), allows for a mixing of symbols and definitions depending on the necessity of the government's response narrative or a dramatised plot line. Therefore, the visual culture of emergency politics includes the representations of emergency both within government and wider popular culture, and helps to foster public support for COBR-led emergency response and the condition of a permanent state of emergency.

Contextual Art Project Review

What follows is a brief contextual review of artistic projects that use emergency as their research material for artistic practice. I have not restricted my examples to those emanating from Britain, as many of the emergency events have resonance within Europe and the wider

[289] Examples can be found in Chapter 3. See Gordon Brown's images of his post-COBR meeting (figure 52) and David Cameron allowing the filming of the start of a COBR meeting (figures 55 and 56).
[290] The exact location of the COBR room within the Cabinet Office building, No.70 Whitehall, has not been made public for obvious security reasons.

globe. However, I have chosen not to include the numerous examples that use 'emergency' or make 'emergency claims' especially in relation to climate change or humanitarian emergencies. These areas are vast and rapidly expanding within a contemporary condition of the permanent (slow) emergency and there is limited scope in this inquiry to give them the focus they deserve. Instead, I have only included projects and wider popular cultural references that specifically use civil emergency, or the COBR Committee itself, as their main subject matter and engage with an aesthetic-based process of investigating emergency politics.

Practices of Investigative Aesthetics

I now outline what I define as practices of investigative aesthetics. Investigative aesthetics blurs the boundary between artistic project, activism and journalism, practices that use images as evidence to visually reveal or reassemble previously obscured political events or modes of operating.

The term 'investigatory aesthetics' was recently coined by Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman, in their book of the same name.[291] They term investigatory aesthetics as,

> '…a process of collectively assembling accounts of incidents from media flotsam. It involves turning into and interpreting weak signals and noticing unintentional evidence registered visual, audio and data files or in the material composition of our environment. It also refers to the use of aesthetic sensibilities in assembling cases, in editing material in to effective film and video or installations. In these constructions, each found element is not a piece of evidence in itself but rather an entry point to find connections with others, a part in a heterogenous assemblage that allows for navigation across and the weaving together of disparate elements – a process of nest-building, perhaps.'[292]

[291] Fuller and Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics.*
[292] Fuller and Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, 13.

They refer to this aesthetic process as a form of 'sensemaking',[293] something that bears similarity to the approach I took during my practice research in which I use the process of collecting disparate elements which *already* reside in the world, and combine them within a specific frame of reference to produce new knowledge.

Although the term 'investigative aesthetics' was coined by Weizman and Fuller in their book of the same name, its definition in relation to my own practice can be defined as something slightly removed from their own understanding of the term. All the information on COBR and public responses to each emergency event, were previously siloed and needed to be located and collated, making this an investigative project. This primary material on COBR existed within files on early versions of the Civil Contingencies Unit held within the National Archive, press releases released by No.10 Downing Street and biographies and memoirs of politicians and senior civil servants. The aesthetics of the emergency events themselves were located within the social media accounts of people who had witnessed them, news media websites, and in print newspapers held in the British Library archive. In the context of this research, I thus define investigate aesthetics as a process of aesthetic-based investigation into the visual culture of emergency events, and the political context and response by both official government actors and the witnessing public.

This definition of investigative aesthetics is separate from that assumed by Weizman and Fuller. Their translation of investigative aesthetics is framed within a broader practice conducted by Forensic Architecture and is often used for specific single events, where the material of collected images and testimony from citizen witnesses are used to form a comprehensive counter-narrative of an event. This information and new visual data is then often used within legal proceedings and/or to produce an alternative, yet seemingly objective

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[293] Fuller and Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, 33.

truth of a situation. My approach to investigative aesthetics is based on examining not a single event but an aesthetic condition of emergency via an examination of the historical multitude of events which are anchored via the COBR committee's announcement.

Investigatory aesthetics within an art context has a history prior to Weizman and Fullers. Before the internet, a cruder version of engaging with and disrupting hidden State power was to literally break in and release the information. Within the United Kingdom, the history of such practices can be said to have begun with the artist and activist group, *Spies for Peace*. In 1963 the group broke into Regional Seat of Government 6 (RSG 6), a secret bunker from which, following a nuclear attack, the government could retreat to and continue to govern from. The anonymous *Spies for Peace* group produced hand drawn maps of the location of the site and published a leaflet detailing what they found with accompanying photos. It could be argued that this formed an early analogue version of investigative aesthetics.[294]

In the immediate decades that followed there was a move towards 'institutional critique' that used similar ideas of making public systems of power and control.[295] During the 1990s and early 2000s, before the ubiquity of search engines and relation databases, there was a move towards practices of counter-mapping[296] and critical archives,[297] where again systems of information and power were visually traced and exposed. Post-2005 and following the advent of social media and camera phones, new forms of *active* archival investigations

[294] For a brief account see Natasha Walter, "Protest in an Age of Optimism: the 60s anarchists who spilled nuclear secrets", accessed July 22 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/13/protest-optimism-anarchists-nuclear-beans
[295] For a selection of art projects broadly examining the process of institutional critique see: Hans Hacke's oeuvre more broadly; *This is Not an Atlas*, accessed July 4th 2021, https://notanatlas.org/book/, Gregory Sholette, *Repohistory*, accessed November 23rd 2021, http://www.gregorysholette.com/repohistory/.
[296] For literature on counter-mapping see: Andre Mesquita, "Counter-cartography: Mapping power as collective practice" in(ed), Graham, M. *The Routledge Companion To Media* And Activism (1st ed.). Routledge 2018); Toscano, Alberto, and Jeff Kinkle. *Cartographies of the absolute*. (Winchester, UK: Zero Books 2015)..
[297] Jeremy Deller, *Folk Archive, 2005 (with Alan Kane),* accessed July 7 2021, https://www.jeremydeller.org/FolkArchive/FolkArchive.php; Trevor Pagalen, *Image Net*, accessed July 7 2021, https://paglen.studio/2020/04/29/imagenet-roulette/

formed through the vast amount of 'opensource' visual data uploaded to social media.[298] Most recently, modes of investigation as a form of activism or social action aimed at 'institutional liberation' rather than simply representation of that institution or its associative issues.[299] These projects use the infrastructure, platform and often free physical spaces of contemporary art to house and make public overtly political projects. In this way, my practice research, like the projects that I have discussed here, sits in a space of investigative aesthetics whose aim is to use aesthetics and research to expose previously hidden or siloed information.

In piecing together the fragments of images and information surrounding emergency events, a more comprehensive picture of COBR and the visual culture of emergency politics began to emerge. I developed this by firstly collating all British emergency events between 1997 and 2017 where COBR was named as a response. I then placed the visual material within two separate categories: images of the event itself and images of governmental response. I would later define and formalise these categories as the 'emergency image' and 'emergency response image' as outlined in this thesis. Once this primary research material was in place, I examined it as a single body of information. At this point I was able to view certain patterns which began to evidence my claim that a visual culture of emergency politics did exist, and moreover, could be curated. Through the curatorial process I was able to note when these patterns began to emerge and how they were facilitated by the rapid evolution of new technologies during the same period.

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[298] *Witness NYC,* accessed May 1st 2021, www.witness.org; *Forensic Architecture* , accessed May 1st 2021, www.forensic-architecture.org; *bellingcat*, accessed May 1st 2021, www.bellingcat.com; *Amnesty International Citizen Evidence Lab*, accessed May 1st 2021, www.citizenevidence.org.

[299] For a selection of art projects broadly examining the process of institutional liberation see: Liberate Tate accessed May 23rd 2022, https://liberatetate.wordpress.com; Art Not Oil, accessed May 23rd 2022, https://www.artnotoil.org.uk; Jonas Staal's work generally but specifically his 'Collectivise Facebook' project, accessed May 23rd 2022, http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/collectivize-facebook/; COBRA RES, accessed May 23rd 2022, https://www.cobra-res.info

The research spanned a twenty-year period, and so a curatorial strategy was chosen to most clearly display the large volume of visual information and data to the public. The strategy's central component, featuring in both the exhibition and web archive, is its timeline. Once I began to place the information within this timeline, it became visually apparent that the growth of a visible COBR was extremely prominent, progressing from a small number of COBR meetings at the beginning of the research period (1997) to a far larger number towards the end (2017). I was able to use the timeline to display detailed visual information for each emergency event, while its overall appearance visualised the increase of COBR meetings in a format suggestive of a large bar chart (see figure 95). This core information was established as the central component of the exhibition, while the additional elements formed broader contextual information. In this way, the exhibition places the timeline as the central data driven curatorial frame through which the surrounding contextual information can be hung.

The core research data was also curated within the web archive, using an interactive timeline with direct links to the source material. The process of placing the visual data into an online platform did create certain obstacles, as not all the images could be included due to copyright restrictions on many of the images themselves. The curatorial decision was made, therefore, to only include visual information that directly related to an emergency event within the twenty-year research period, alongside the inclusion of URL links to specific primary research material in the form of YouTube videos, historical newspaper websites, image databases and social media pages. As it was not possible to include this within the public exhibition, this excess material acts as an additional level of publicly available material on COBR. In attempting to solidify and fix COBR in a permanent public location, the core metadata of all COBR meetings was submitted to the UK Data Archive. Again, the broader contextual information is further reduced as the only submissible element to the Data Archive is the raw data of the COBR meetings themselves. Once in the Data Archive, the

data is attributed an open access user agreement whereby anyone can access and use it for their own research. In this way, each curatorial node acts within a broader network offering its own distinct attributes while forming a comprehensive picture of COBR and the visual culture of emergency politics.

Critical Art Practices

A number of art projects that have dealt specifically with the notion of emergency, or the spaces that emergency governance take place. Following each project summary I will detail a specific practice research output of the wider investigation. These include the following: the public exhibition I curated, titled: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017*. The exhibition was held in a shopping centre in Croydon, south London between 23rd June 2021 and 3rd July 2021 (see figures 89 - 98); the online COBR Committee Archives, consisting of all the publicly announced COBR meetings and their images between 1997-2017; a dataset submission to the UK Data Archive of all publicly announced COBR meetings between 1997-2017; the performative restaging of the a COBR meeting and its images, acting as a visual intervention within the image economy. The following section demonstrates the contextual frame for such practice methodologies and their original contribution to that field.

The Danish artist Thierry Geoffroy's *Emergency Room* took the temporal frame of emergency to invite members of the public and artists to produce artworks as a response to ongoing and current news or political events.[300] New art works were produced by 12:30pm every day. While *COBRA RES* was a curatorial art project that I led between 2013-2016. The project invited artists, writers and academics to creatively respond each and every time the COBR Committee was publicly announced.[301] The contributors were given approximately

[300] "The Emergency Room Format", accessed May 23rd 2022, http://www.emergencyrooms.org/short.html
[301] "COBRA RES", accessed May 23rd 2021, https://www.cobra-res.info

nine days to produce new works which examined the event that COBR was responding to, and/or the existence of COBR itself. The pieces submitted were then publicly exhibited via a series of different formats: public art exhibitions and film screenings, alongside the production of card games, books and DVDs. The project offered a critical response to the increase in the number of publicly announced COBR meetings that I saw taking place. The COBRA RES project ultimately led me to this current practice-research project and the investigation of images in relation to emergency events.

Figure 83: Screening for COBRA 1.3. DVD of artist films in response to mass flooding 2013.

Practice Research Output 1: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017*

Figure 84: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017,* north view.

Figure 85: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017,* south view.

The space is part of a larger building run by the arts collective Turf Projects.[302] It had a double fronted window onto one of the main entrances to the Whitgift Shopping Centre meaning there was a constant flow of people moving past the exhibition (see figure 91). Due to the location of the exhibition in a non-art context and with a potential audience of non-

[302] Turf Projects, accessed June 6th 2022, https://turf-projects.com

traditional art gallery viewers, it needed to both explain what COBR was and offer the image-based analysis in a comprehensive and accessible format. To do this, the exhibition was set up as part-public information display, part-contemporary art exhibition.

Figure 86: View of *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* exhibition from outside but within the Whitgift shopping Centre.

Figure 87: Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017 exhibition.

The exhibition began with a history of the visual culture of British emergency politics via images of the unfurling of the Royal Banner, the reading of the Riot Act and images of David Cameron announcing a COBR meeting via Twitter.com (see figure 92). Under each image was a small description outlining the image and its relation to emergency law and the COBR Committee. As explained in Chapter 4, the relation of the Royal Banner and the reading of the Riot Act to the announcement of COBR, is central to the visual culture of emergency

politics, as it describes the change in territory and law that aesthetic symbolic actions by sovereign or the State ushered in. To the right of the images, I hung a large replica flag of the Royal Banner from the fourteenth-century, to which I added the Twitter.com logo to make the connection between the two historical modes of political communication and power: to underline the emergency Tweet as an emergency flag.

Figure 88: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* exhibition view.

'The Culture of Emergency' section displayed example images and representations of COBR that have appeared within in popular culture as mentioned in section one above (see figure 93). There was a large poster of the Sky series *COBRA*, and images of the BBC one series *The Bodyguard*, which directly replicated images of ministers arriving at COBR meetings and of the prime minister making a statement following a COBR meeting (see figure 80 and 81). Political cartoons from newspapers that had mocked the COBR Committee's response to certain civil emergency events were also included. I included a large picture of a COBRA snake, not simply as it shares the same name as the COBR Committee, but to highlight how this species of snake is also known as a *King Cobra* or the *Sovereign Cobra*. This alludes to

my research in Chapter 3 on the aesthetic power in naming “COBR” within theories of the political exception and sovereignty.

Figure 89: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* exhibition view.

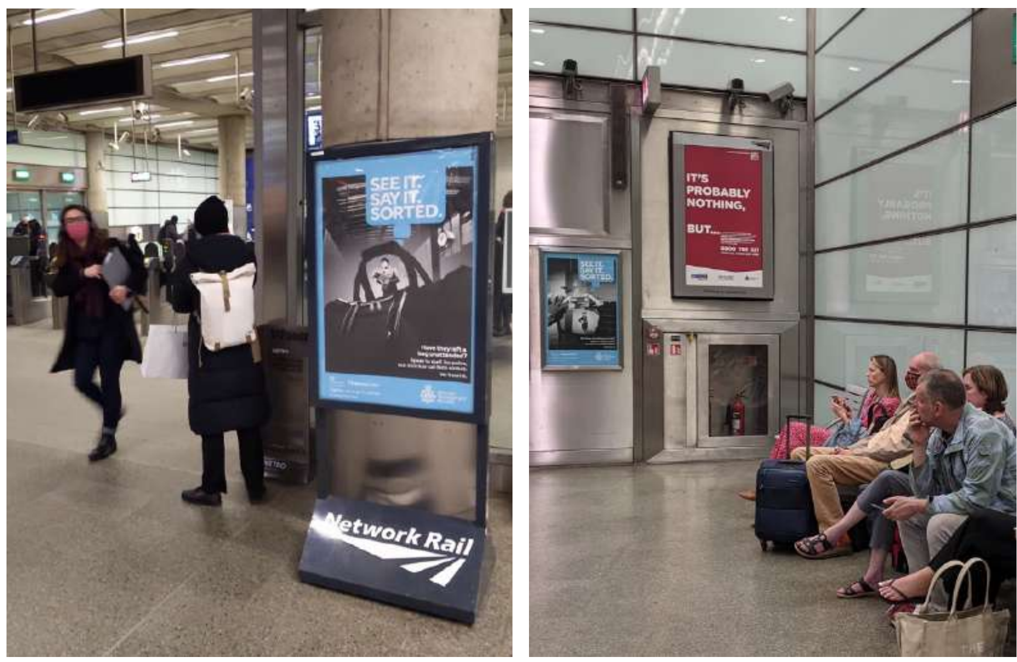

Figure 90: Anti-terrorism campaign posters in Kings Cross Railway Station, London, 2022.

The following section of the exhibition displayed British Transport Police anti-terrorism posters between 2004-2017 (see figures 94 and 95). Three posters from the current ‘See it. Say it. Sorted’ campaign hang from the wall, while on the floor beneath them are rolled up and discarded posters from previous anti-terror campaigns. The three current posters hang loosely with clips suggesting they too are soon to fall to the ground with the arrival of a new campaign and new set of posters. These posters begin to map a pictorial timeline of the visual culture of permanent state of emergency, where each new set of posters contains more images than the pervious. These posters allude to the continual state of emergency, where even before, during and after the emergency event, the presence of the potentiality of emergency is ever present.

The longer-term permeance of emergency as a political condition that inhabits the everyday, has been visually established by the British government under the necessity of security. It has done this via anti-terror awareness campaigns, automated audio

announcements on public transport, anti-terror street furniture in key locations,[303] more visible armed police and increased CCTV cameras. These run alongside other anti-terror mechanisms such as the 'PREVENT, CONTEST' and the 'Run Hide Tell' training videos and anti-terror campaigns, also shown in Key Stage 3 and 4 educational classes.[304]

This aesthetic-based security apparatus influences public perception and behaviour in expectation rather than actuality of an emergency event. The public are conditioned, and their conduct subtly aligned, to the continual *potentiality* of emergency, which in turn produces increased public receptivity to such events and an acceptance of their governance via COBR when they do actually happen. Although this study does not have the scope to examine all of these in detail, it remains key to demonstrating the constant background visual 'noise' of security and potentiality of crisis that surrounds us. Peter Adey has termed this, 'atmospheres of security',[305] while Massumi suggests threat is now always a background condition[306] which engenders the permanence of emergency in everyday life. This environment promotes the COBR Committee and government as the legitimate and only form of response.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the design and consistency of the lecterns for each new prime minister only came into being during Cameron's premiership. It is only through placing these podiums and their respective prime minister within a group that revealing and patterns emerge (see figure 97). Displayed alongside these images was a hand built replica of Theresa May's ministerial podium. A monitor affixed to the top played footage and audio from the

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[303] This is guided by the government's National Vehicle Threat Mitigation Unit, responsible for installing security street furniture. "National Vehicle Threat Mitigation Unit", accessed July 15th 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-vehicle-threat-mitigation-unit

[304] "Resources for Schools and Youth Organisations", accessed July 15th 2021, https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/resources/. There is also now a course that citizens can take in counter terrorism that advertises, 'undertaking counter terrorism training from their kitchen tables', "*CT Training at your Kitchen Table"*, accessed July 15th 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ct-training-at-your-kitchen-table

[305] Peter Adey "Security Atmospheres or the Crystallisation of Worlds", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 32. (2014): 834-851.

[306] Massumi, "National Enterprise Emergency", 160.

post-COBR meeting statements outlined in Chapter 3 (see figure 97). I edited each sequence to include the beginning of the statement and then cut it as soon as the prime ministers had said COBR. What emerges is a series of footage the spans a twenty-year period but which last no more than six minutes in duration. As each statement, 'I have just chaired a COBR meeting' has its contextual information removed, the intensification of COBR and its constant meetings becomes a stream of meaningless words, allowing the political performativity to become more pronounced and lose its usual impact.

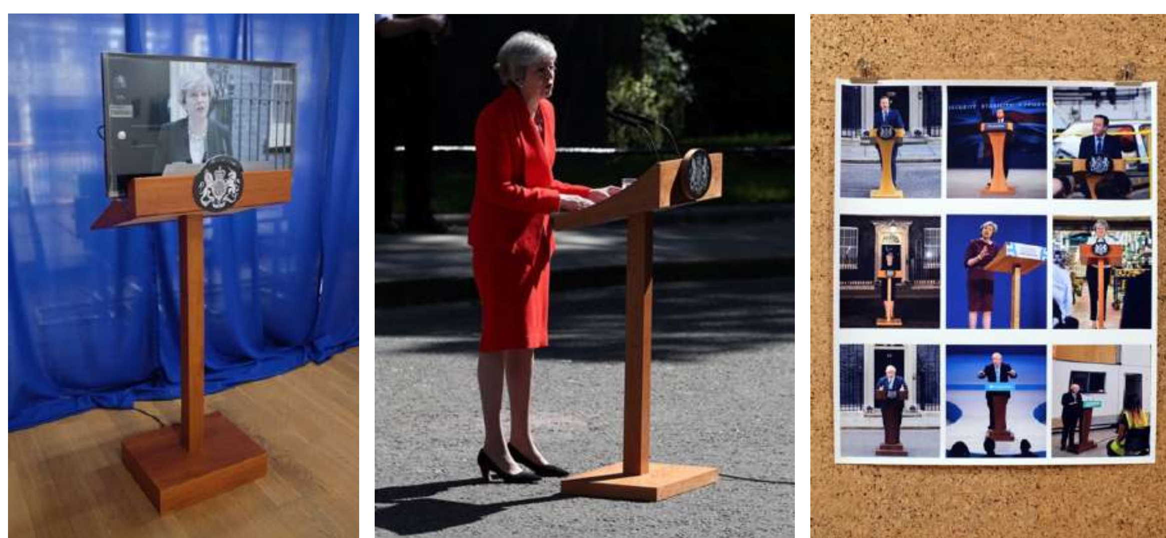

Figure 91: From left to right: Replica lectern modelled on Theresa May's own podium, with monitor attached to top showing video footage of COBR statements. The final image is a collection of lecterns used by prime ministers as seen in the *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* exhibition.

On the opposing wall I projected footage of ministers and senior advisors arriving and leaving a COBR meeting at the Cabinet Office building, No.70 Whitehall Hall, that houses the COBR facility (see figure 98). The footage is slowed down to a fractional pace to create a jarred and glitched sequence, deconstructing the usual presentation of urgency and dynamism of ministers arriving at a COBR meeting. Like the COBR timeline mentioned above, this process slows down the urgency associated with emergencies and their political response and allows for further reflection on the visual culture of emergency politics, unobstructed by the intensity and excitement of the live emergency event itself.

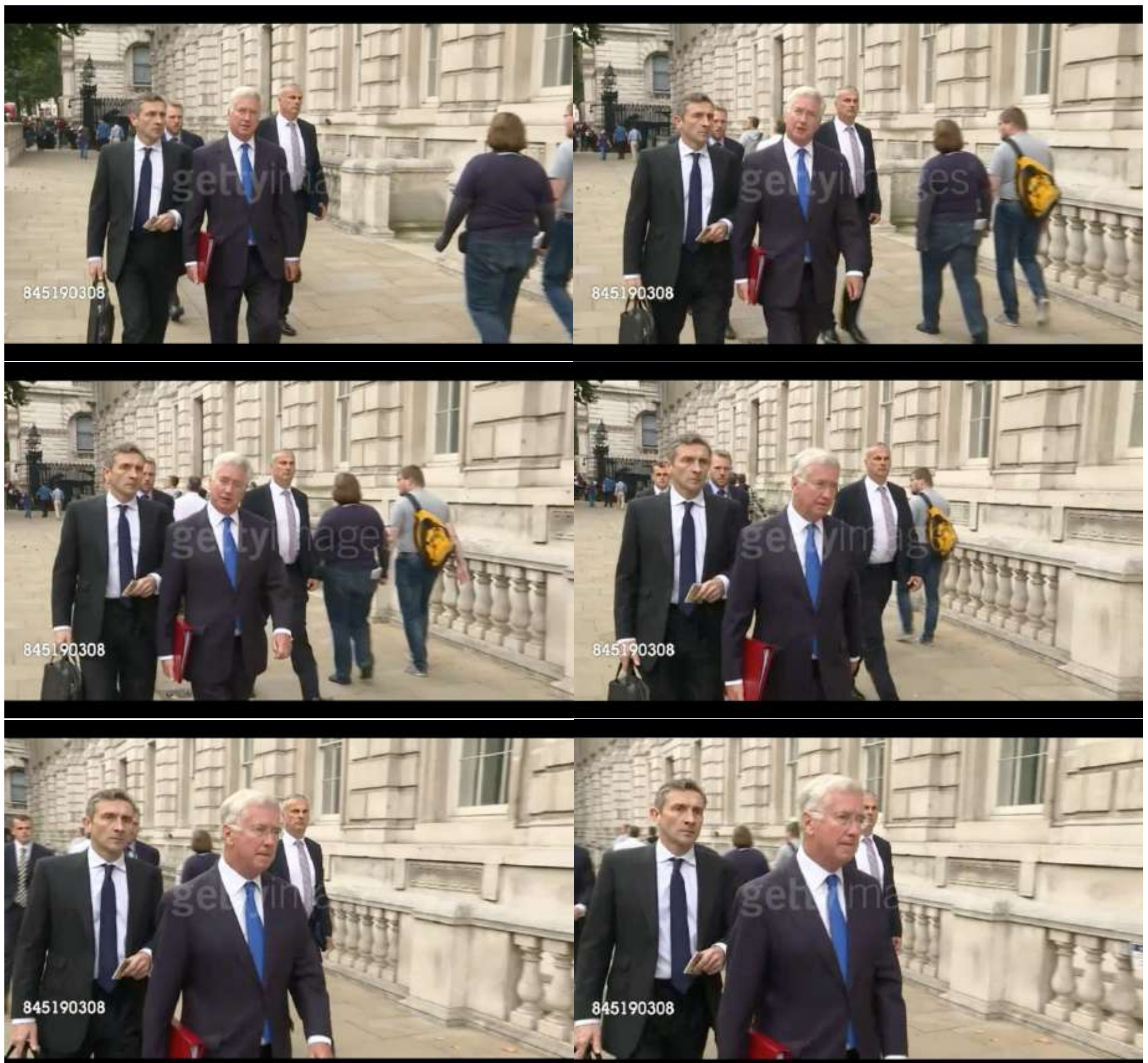

Figure 92: Still images from slowed down footage of defence secretary Michael Fallon arriving at a COBR meeting in response to hurricane Irma, 2017. This footage was used in the *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* exhibition.

Critical Timelines

Timelines have traditionally been used within museums to chronologically describe important changes in history within a given context.[307] Increasingly, however, timelines are used within contemporary art exhibitions as visual devices in the representation of data that

[307] Also see works by artist Hans Haacke including: *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971, 1971*; *Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (Small Version), 1888-1975.*

emerges during the process of investigative aesthetics. This allows dense and wide temporal and spatial condition to be set out in a clear and readable fashion.

An early example of a timeline concerned with announcing an emergency image used within the gallery space, can be found in the work of the American artist collective *Group Material*. In 1989 *Group Material* curated an exhibition titled *AIDS Timeline* at the MATRIX Gallery at the Berkeley University Art Museum.[308] The work was made in solidarity with the group *AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power* (ACT UP) who were calling for AIDS to be seen as an emergency that needed urgent government action. Prior to that moment, there had been minimal discussion of the facts and elements surrounding the AIDS crisis, especially not in art galleries. The exhibition used the timeline to literally pin objects, images and texts to illustrate the progression and media representation of the crisis (see figure 82). The *AIDS Timeline* made visible an underreported and underacknowledged emergency and demanded a response.

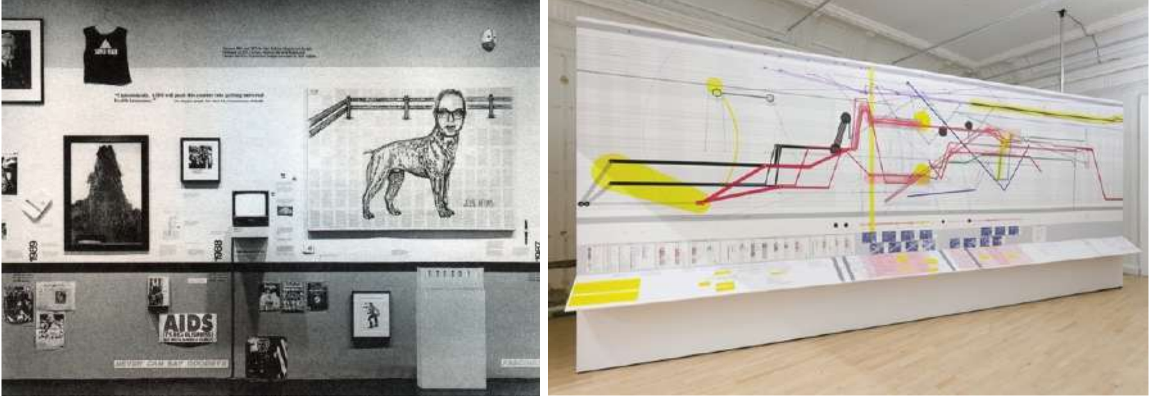

Figure 93 Left: Group Material, *AIDS Timeline,* Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, United States of America, 1989-90. Right: Forensic Architecture, *Counter Investigations* timeline, ICA, London, 2018.

[308] Julie Ault, *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group* Material. (London: Four Corners Books, 2010).

Figure 94: Roger Hiorns' timeline of the media and government response to the BSE/vCJD outbreak in Britain over a twenty-year period between the late 1980s and the early 2000s. '*History is Now: 7 Artists Take on Britain'* Hayward Gallery, London, 2015.

Using a different approach but still highlighting an emergency through a timeline is Alfredo Jaar's *Untitled (Newsweek), 1994.* The work is comprised of Newsweek magazine covers that are placed in a line displaying the start of the Rwandan Genocide in April 1994, to when the story finally adorned the cover the Newsweek seventeen weeks later in August 1994.[309] Jaar uses time and the lack of a front cover image as his structure from which to display the disparity between, as we now know, a major humanitarian emergency, but which initially drew minimal media interest. It is the retrospective approach to emergency, the hindsight and thus awareness of lost time to act that provides the work with its emotive and political power.

An example of using a clearly defined timeline in relation to a British emergency was exhibited by Roger Hiorns as part of the *History is Now: 7 Artists Take on Britain* show at the Hayward Gallery, London in 2015 (see figure 85). Hiorns created a detailed timeline of the media and government response to the BSE/vCJD (mad cow disease) outbreak in Britain over a twenty-year period between the late 1980s and the early 2000s. Using images, government reports and scientific documents, Hiorns set out the government's response and in doing so allowed the audience to gauge their own feeling for the success or failure of the response to the public health emergency.[310]

[309] Alfredo Jaar and Nicole Schweizer, *Alfredo Jaar: The Politics of Images*. (Zurich: JRP Ringier 2007).
[310] *History is Now: 7 Artists Take on Britain*. Hayward Gallery, London,2015.

The group Forensic Architecture approached this process in a similar way with their exhibition *Counter Investigations: Forensic Architecture* at the ICA, London in 2018 by exhibiting the timeline of one of their investigations (see figure 84).[311] These timelines and the video evidence they show are also used as evidence for criminal proceedings.

Although all of these examples differ in content and design from the *Emergency State* exhibition detailed below, the process of offering historical contextual information to draw public attention to political events that were previously non-visible is clearly a vital tactic for practices of investigative aesthetics. In such exhibitions, the information displayed becomes an object in its own right, where the reordering of time via its image markers offers a broader and slower viewpoint. In the case of Forensic Architecture, it is gathered via extensive analysis of crowd-sourced images and oral testimony, for Group Material it is a form of archival and documentary process, while for Horins it is the collation of publicly available documents into a singular whole. There is a political agency to this work, an advocacy of sorts in bringing to the public questions of national or international importance that were not previously visible. The *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* exhibition and timeline offers a slightly different approach. Rather than examining one event, it surveys a longer period and the structural shifts within it.

The central feature of the exhibition, stretching over seven meters, is the timeline of all publicly announced COBR meetings between 1997-2017. It details all the events, their key attributes, causes and their iconic images. The timeline marks the civil emergency event into clearly defined areas and years so they can be viewed in their entirety. Above the main timeline are contextual events such as the election of a prime minister or the invasion of Iraq, alongside key events that were not deemed COBR worthy such as floods, the 'shoe bomber'

[311] *Counter Investigations: Forensic Architecture*, accessed ICA, London, 2018, accessed May 3rd 2020, https://www.ica.art/exhibitions/forensic-architecture-counter-investigations

or the Grenfell Tower fire. Together they formed a comprehensive visual map of emergency events and their images between 1997-2017.

By using the timeline format, new patterns emerge and the increased number of COBR emergency events and their themes can be easily viewed. Along the bottom of the timeline, I added contextual information detailing certain patterns and trends that help guide the viewer in understanding the information displayed. As previously stated in Chapter 3, the dispersed images of COBR, its political communication and its naming *is* how the COBR Committee exists within the public realm because we cannot see inside the COBR Committee itself. In doing so, this timeline makes COBR visible by reassembling its constitute parts into an ordered and easily readable format.

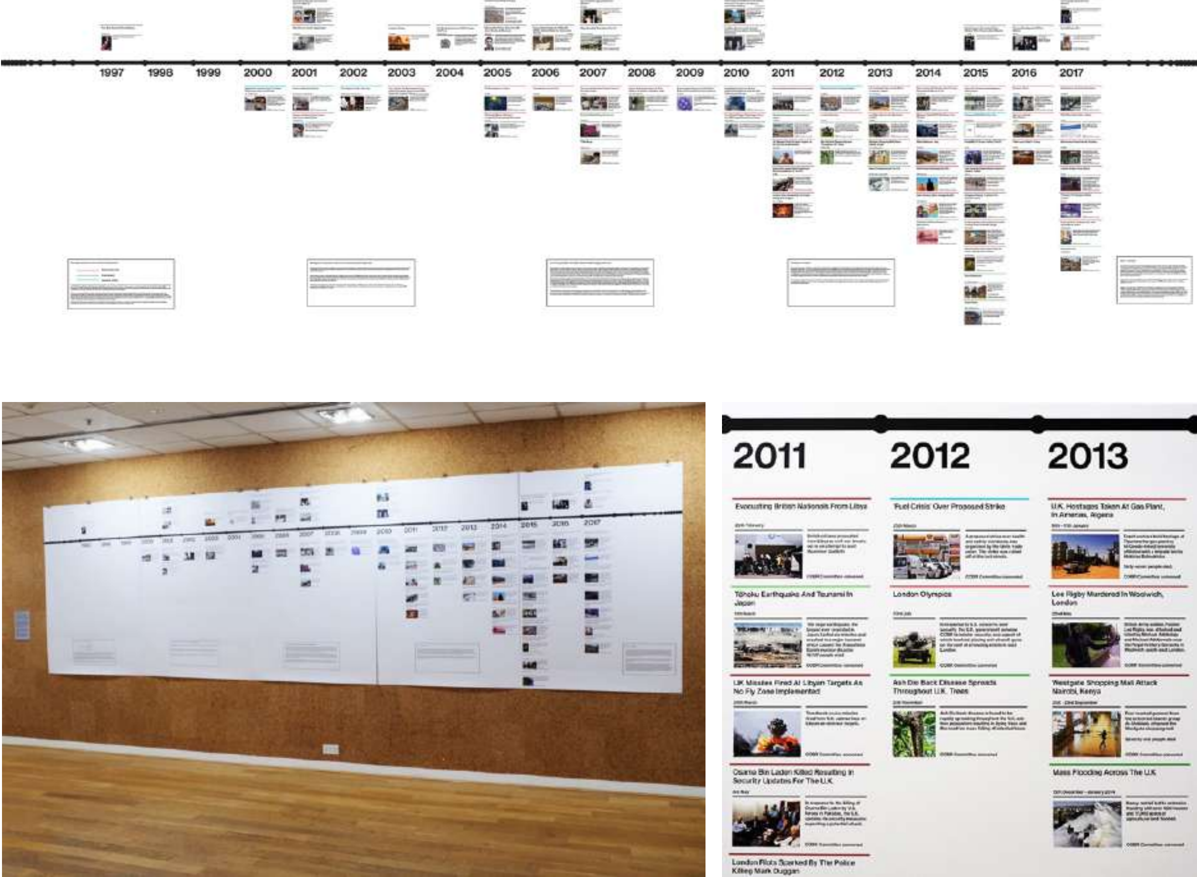

Figure 95: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* exhibition timeline.

Critical Archives and Data Sets

Critical archives are a strand of investigatory aesthetics, one where the collation of material is the construction and formalisation of new knowledge. The archive as artistic practice is used to gather and curate a wide range of already existing material into one accessible location.[312] Examples include *The Museum of Cruel Designs* which displayed objects and their design processes used to control certain aspects of society; from the design of anti-homeless spikes outside newly built corporate architecture, to security fencing on European borders, to the type of plastic used in riot police clothing.[313] Artistic practices such as Jeremy Deller & Alan Kane's *Folk Archive*[314] use archival processes to bring previously overlooked and peripheral material to the centre. The work of Walid Raad and the Atlas Group question the authenticity such processes of formal documentation have in the production of certain types of knowledge.[315] Jonas Staal's *Propaganda Retrospective* explored the physical space of the archive as politically active by documenting and archiving the 'works' of former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon.[316]

[312] See also *Black Audio Film Collective*; Susan Hiller, *Street Signs*; The Atlas Group; Christian Boltanski; *Enthusiasts: Archive* - a project by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska; Anonymous project; Thomas Hirshhorn.
[313] Gavin Grindon, *The Museum of Cruel Designs at Banksy's Dismaland,* accessed June 22 2020, http://repository.essex.ac.uk/14927/1/Gavin-Grindon-Cruel-Designs-at-Dismaland.pdf
[314] Jeremy Deller, *Folk Archive, 2005 (with Alan Kane),* accessed July 7 2021, https://www.jeremydeller.org/FolkArchive/FolkArchive.php
[315] *The Atlas Group (1989-2004),* accessed July 7 2021, https://www.theatlasgroup1989.org
[316] Jonas Staal *Propaganda Retrospective*, accessed July 7 2021, http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/steve-bannon-a-propaganda-retrospective/

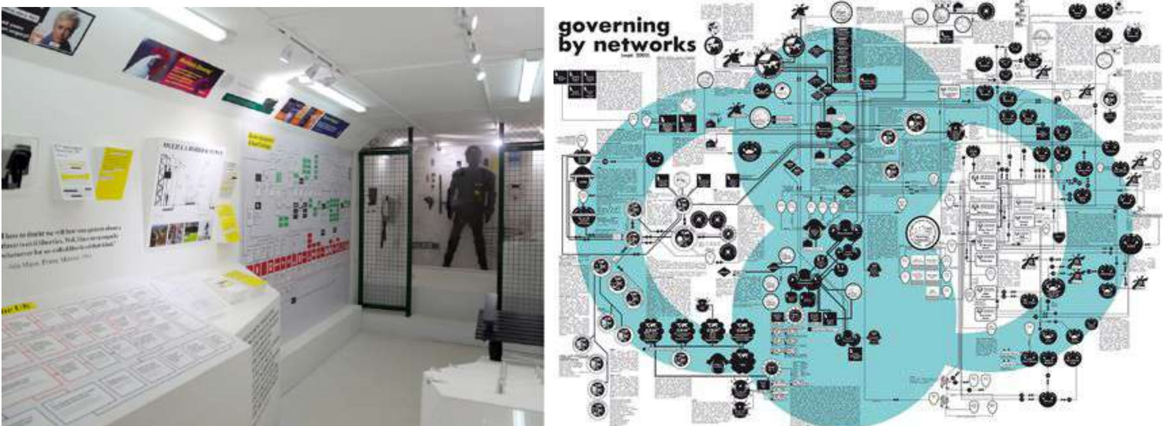

Figure 96: Left: Exhibition view of *Museum of Cruel Designs*. Right: *Governing. By Networks, Bureau D'Etudes.*

Other archives act to offer counter-knowledge of political events and processes by making permanent the material of political action and protest such as the *May Day Rooms* in London or the *Interference Archive* in New York.[317] *Bureau D'Etudes* take data as their primary material in producing vast and labyrinth-like data visualisations that counter-map structures of power from *The Geopolitics of the Artic* to the *Crisis Complex*.[318] Like the practice research projects outlined below, all the above aim to reassemble and organise previously disparate material into new collections, archives, data maps and exhibitions where the new configuration and framing can produce new, and often counter, knowledge of specific political systems and processes.

Practice Research Output 2: Dataset to UK Data Archive [319]

The dataset formally archives, for the first time, the COBR meetings between 1997-2017. Within the confines of the ReShare depository process, and via the UK Data Service the data

[317] *May Day Rooms*, accessed July 7 2021, https://maydayrooms.org
[318] Brian Holmes and Freek Lomme. *Atlas of agendas: mapping the power, mapping the commons*. (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019).
[319] Price, Theodore. W (2022). *UK Government's Publicly Announced Emergency Response Committee Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms Meetings, 1997-2017.* [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Service. 10.5255/UKDA-SN-855344, https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=855344

is checked, peer-reviewed and then made publicly accessible via the UK Data Archive. The raw data for the COBR dataset and web archive was inexistence already but its location was disparate, incomplete and incomprehensible as a whole. The data set that I created has allowed for COBR and its emergencies between 1997-2017 to be viewed for the first time in a single, coherent and systematic whole. The dataset comprises of information that made up the timeline within the *Emergency State* exhibition but has been broken down into its constitute parts, evidenced and peer reviewed before permanent acceptance to the data archive. The dataset is therefore a process of formalising new knowledge surrounding the emergency politics. Anyone wishing to access the data can do so without needing to access my own web archive or having missed the exhibition in summer 2021. In formalising the data, I aimed to permanently reassemble COBR where anyone can now examine the emergence of the COBR Committee between 1997-2017. Since its formal acceptance to the UK Data Archive in May 2022, the dataset has so far been downloaded four times. I am not able to trace who downloads the data but it demonstrates there is an interest in this material beyond the confines of this study.

However, this process of formalisation by placing the data in the national archive would appear to make the information objective. The dataset only includes data of emergency events formally recognised by announcing COBR. It does not include those marginal emergency events that did not become COBR led, including the Grenfell Tower fire or the murder of MP Joe Cox. In this way, formalising the dataset risks making the COBR meetings all appear legitimate responses to ongoing emergency events, rather than often being instrumentalised for political gain, as I outlined in Chapter 3. Moreover, in making a text-based dataset I have inadvertently removed the images, the very instruments that I have argued now constitute emergency events and how we read them. To mitigate against this, in addition to the dataset, I also created a web archive that took the dataset and added the

aesthetic information including the images and links to video footage discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. I also added the civil emergency events that did not receive a COBR Committee meeting in response. That web archive is detailed in the following section.

Practice research output 3: COBR Committee Archives (www.cobr-committee-archives.uk)

The web archive forms a different approach to the exhibition in that it is not restricted by geographic location nor by the constraints of an exhibition space, allowing anyone to view the information via the internet. The web archive acts as a publicly accessible database of British civil emergency events between 1997-2017 (see figure 99 and 100), mapping a network through a collection of previously disparate material. In this way, I have archived the visual culture of emergency politics within a permanent and public space. As with the dataset I outlined above, the web archive is an ongoing and active space in which to begin to house the more recent COBR history and its changing visual culture. The web archive dynamic timeline animates the two-dimensional timeline exhibited in the exhibition, making it interactive by adding contextual information in the form of URL links and video files (see figure 99 and 100). As viewers scroll along the timeline, each new emergency event and its COBR meeting comes towards them at ever increasing regularity. This allows the increased volume of COBR meetings to be viewed not simply as a static graph, distanced and clinical, but rather as a mass of emergency events that have the potential to unsettle the viewer.

Within a broader context of critical-framing or counter-mapping, the web archive acts as a counter-map of the COBR Committee. Like the dataset, the web archive is an ongoing process that will continue to document COBR after this current phase of the research has been completed. I hope the web archive will become a depository for all information related to the COBR Committee. In this way, there will exist a comprehensive alternative frame

through which to examine the COBR Committee and the visual culture of emergency politics.

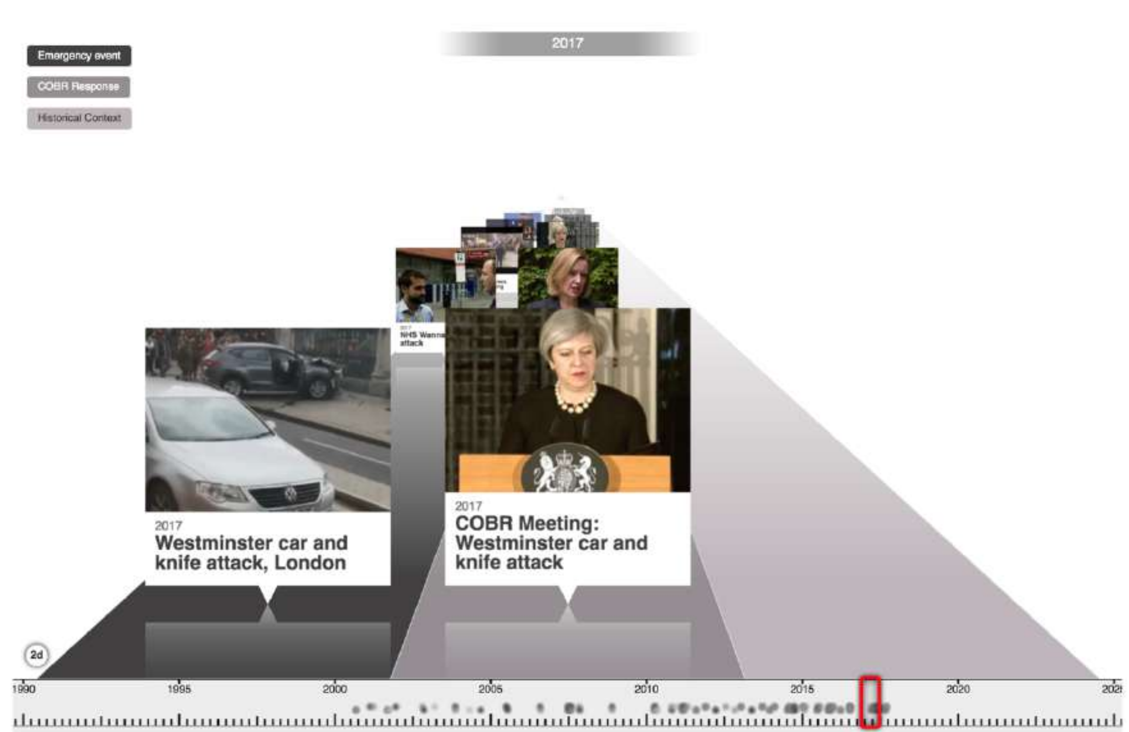

Figure 97: image of the COBR Committee Archives timeline, www.cobr-committee-archives.uk

Figure 98: Detail from the COBR Committee Archives timeline, www.cobr-committee-archives.uk./

Critical Re-enactment

The idea of the situation or war room has also been explored in the art film George Drivas *Laboratory of Dilemmas* (see figure 87) and in painting by Husni-Bey's painting *The Sleepers'* (see figure 86) which depicts ministers and advisors either asleep or drugged in what looks like a select committee meeting.[320] The approach of re-enactment or verbatim theatrical performances[321] are demonstrated in Rod Dickinson's *Closed Circuit* 2010 (see figure 88)[322] and in Goshka Macuga's *The Nature of the Beast* (see figure 88).[323] Both artists use visual references to State power and the aesthetic stagecraft of the official political statement, distorting their form to produce new questions about their existence, functioning and legitimacy.

Figure 99: Artistic representation of governmental-type committees. Left: Husni-Bey's painting *The Sleepers*. Right: George Drivas, *Laboratory of Dilemmas.*

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[320] Adelita Husni-Bey, *The Sleepers*, 2011, Laveronica, accessed May 20 2021, https://www.gallerialaveronica.it/artworks/adelita-husni-bey-123-the-sleepers/

[321] See also Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave*, *2001*, accessed May 20 2021, https://www.jeremydeller.org/TheBattleOfOrgreave/TheBattleOfOrgreave_Video.php. For reenactment within contemporary art practice see Sven Lütticken,. *Life, Once More Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*. (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2005); Wolfgang Ernst, *The Delayed Present: Media-Induced Tempor(e)alities & Techno-Traumatic Irritations of 'the Contemporary'* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017): 9–10; Vanessa Agnew, "History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present", *Rethinking History*, 11 no 3 (2007): 299– 312.

[322] Rod Dickinson, *Who, What, Where, When, Why and How*, 2009, accessed May 20 2021, https://www.roddickinson.net/pages/whowhatwhere/project-pr.php

[323] Goshka Macuga, *The Nature of the Beast*, 2010, Whitechapel Gallery, London, accessed June 21st 2022, https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/the-bloomberg-commission-goshka-macuga/

Figure 100: Artist re-enactments or recreations of political speech or institutions. Left: Rod Dickinson, *Who, What, Where, When, Why and How*, 2009. Right: Goshka Macuga, *The Nature of the Beast*, 2010, Whitechapel Gallery, London.

Practice research output 4: Re-enacting COBR and intervention in the image economy.

The final research output of this inquiry was to recreate an active COBR meeting. The exhibition performance re-enacted what a COBR meeting might look like if the COBR room was occupied at all times during the continual state of emergency. The performance space replicated the bank of screens and the Cabinet Office crest, plus the blue fabric that adorns the No.10 Downing Street press briefing room. The barrel table and high backed, angled chairs were selected for their close resemblance in style to the original COBR room as depicted via the only image available (see figure 1). The performance relocated COBR to a Croydon shopping centre, and was visible to any shopper walking by.

Figure 101: Still images from the *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* performance.

By reactivating a COBR meeting for an emergency event which is not visible, the performance creates new images that can fill the image-void left by the lack of images of COBR meetings themselves. The images of the COBR room performance are not fully discernible as a re-enactment, due to the lack of images or information emanating from COBR meetings themselves, therefore their authenticity cannot be either validated or invalidated. The performance can therefore be classed as fictional re-enactment, resembling a truth that has not yet been revealed.

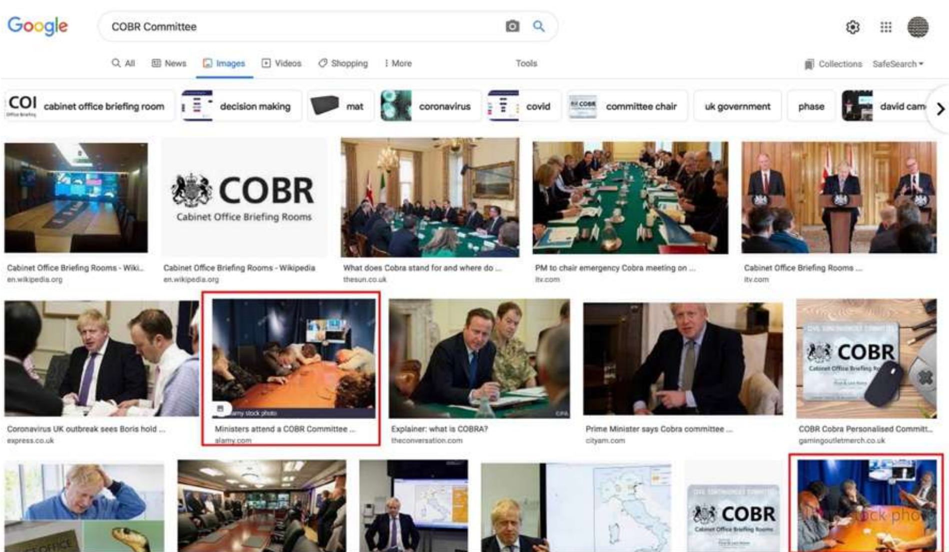

Figure 102: Images (outlined in red) from the *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* exhibition performance uploaded to Almy.com appear in a Google.com image search for ‘COBR Committee’.

In attempting to open up the visual space of the COBR Committee to new images and processes, the photographs of the performance were uploaded into the Alamy.com stock photography website where they have been Search-Engine-Optimisation ‘tagged’ for search engine recognition under such tags as ‘COBR’ ‘COBR Committee’ and ‘emergency meeting’(see figure 102). These images are now searchable online alongside real images of the COBR Committee (see figure 102) and can now also be bought and sold. In the same way that popular culture can reimagine COBR, so too these new images of COBR infiltrate and disrupt the dynamic appearance of the COBR meeting, presenting a committee seemingly

based on apathy rather than action. What begins as a re-enactment enters the world, via images, as something possibly authentic. Taken out of context of the exhibition frame, these images no longer portray a re-enactment but actually represent a potential reality of a COBR meeting, albeit one where the ministers are playing cards, reading books or asleep.

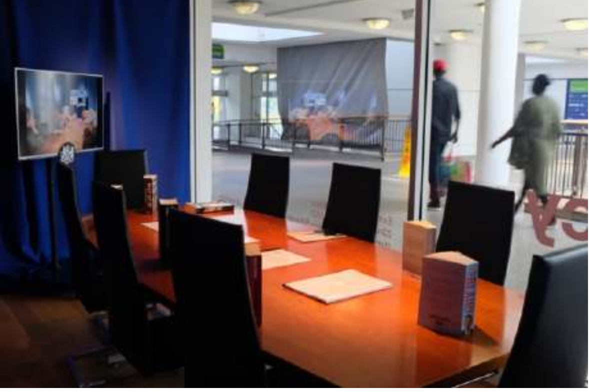

Figure 103: Display of the performance space when the performance was not live. The autobiography books of senior cabinet ministers were placed on the table, along with documents detailing the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Bellwin Fund and the Emergency Planning Framework 2018.

This final research output is divergent from the previous three in that it does not aim to only document COBR and its visual culture, but begins to experiment with the next stage of research by creatively engaging with the material, its patterns and the performativity of the visual culture of COBR. This output was put into effect by re-enacting a COBR meeting and then placing images of the fictional event into the wider image economy. Although seemingly at odds with the primary research objective of defining the visual culture of emergency politics, the re-enactment of a COBR meeting and its images signals the next phase of this research – to use the archived visual material and metadata as a departure point for future creative engagement and intervention with the material and archives generated during this study.

This final phase of the practice-based research output highlights my realisation following the completion of the project, that while making COBR permanently public I have inadvertently provided a new element of legitimacy to COBR. It ceases to exist only in the

shadows, instead now able to be viewed as somewhat transparent, ordered and justified by this research project.

The primary research objective of this study was to prove a visual culture of emergency politics by examining its materiality. Phase two engages with this material and offers a critical and reflective space for its visual culture to be explored within the wider practice and visual language of artistic intervention. The next phase of this investigation into COBR and the aesthetics of emergency politics will aim to invite artists, writers and academics to both engage with and respond to the COBR archive and collected data created by this first phase. This may then form the content for a new exhibition and publication.

The practice-based research outputs outlined above act as evidence in the definitive visual emergence of the COBR Committee between 1997-2017. My practice-based research allowed me to answer a key research objective, to assemble a comprehensive set of images that comprise the visual culture of emergency politics and that begin to make COBR permanently visible. The exhibition, web archive and data set are the first set of images, documents and data to document and make public not only the COBR Committee itself, but how its own visual culture and response processes have changed within the twenty-year research period. The use of timelines allowed a distanced and overarching perspective that offered new image-event patterns and visually demonstrated the increase of COBR's own visibility within the public domain. Holding the exhibition in a Croydon shopping centre allowed the critical frame of COBR to be accessed by a non-art audience. This built on the access of the web archive and dataset, accessible to anyone who wishes to examine this important period in British politics.

Throughout this chapter, I have referred to the practice-research as a process of *reassembling*. This key word defines the continual process of gathering elements that were

already in existence and reforming them into a contingent whole. It was through the practice-based research that I was able to not only reassemble COBR, but to think around emergency politics through an active process of artistic practice. This new visual knowledge is equally as important as this thesis in detailing how we might begin to approach and process the power of emergency images and COBR Committee itself. However, this is an ongoing process, the reassembling will continue after the study ends. The web archive and dataset are not complete but in progression. The post-2017 period when this study ended has been littered with new emergency events, none more prominent than the COVID-19 pandemic. As I have mentioned, the COBR Committee was used as a defining symbol of the government's response to the pandemic, even if its rooms were not used. My hope is that with some additional research time and support, this study can be used as the foundation upon which the period between 2017 and now can be visually mapped and archived.

6 Conclusion

This final chapter will conclude the thesis by first rearticulating its central claims and outlining how these have been answered by this thesis and practice-based research. After covering the main arguments from each chapter, I conclude by making a case for the continuation of this study beyond its initial research period.

This thesis and the wider practice-based research outputs have interrogated, reassembled and made public the British Government's emergency response committee COBR. The study argued that a new categorisation of emergency images became prominent between 1997 and 2017 and that these images now largely constitute emergency events. I suggested that this was facilitated by the advancement and increasing ubiquity of social media and camera mobile phone technologies during the same period.

In response to this shift in the widespread appearance of emergency images, the British government itself became more visually present in response to civil emergency events by increasing the number and visibility of publicly announced COBR meetings. The definition of a civil emergency at the same time became broader, including events that could be considered as existing more within the remit of the Foreign Office, or simply being dealt within via the normal channels of non-emergency governance. In addition, the public announcement of "COBR" became the symbolic declaration of a state of emergency but without the legislative framework and legislative implementation such a declaration incurred. This allowed the decision on what defined an emergency to be instrumentalised in support of specific political framing of security, while also being deployed to frame newly appointed prime ministers as decisive leaders.

This process of establishing a visual culture of COBR and emergency politics more broadly began under Tony Blair in 2000. He was the first British Prime Minister to publicly announce an emergency committee meeting since its first inception in 1919. The process of publicly announcing the COBR Committee progressed through the Gordon Brown premiership and was heavily employed by David Cameron, who implemented the most experimental and ultimately comprehensive set of emergency images, both by calling more COBR meetings and expanding its remit to include foreign policy events, and moulding the COBR response into a publicly recognisable set of images rituals. COBR's visual status was further confirmed by the total standardisation of emergency response images as demonstrated by Theresa May in 2017.

In parallel to this visual development of emergency politics, the first citizen witness images began to emerge. These were facilitated in 2005 by social media and camera phones. These networked images would go onto announce emergency events *before* the government, so prompting government action. A notable example of this can be found in 2013, with the images of the murder of Lee Rigby announcing the emergency event to the public. David Cameron's reaction to this was a social media announcement. As the first prime minister to announce a COBR meeting on Twitter.com he began to develop a more comprehensive visual presence for the government within the new political territory of social media. In 2017, the emergency event became interactive. The London Bridge and Borough Market terror attack was captured on a series of different image-making devices from mobile phones, to CCTV and dashcam footage. In response, the Metropolitan Police issued its own warnings and advice, using Twitter.com to post its newly conceived, 'Run, Hide, Tell' campaign. I argued that this demonstrates the new image-based territory of social media as increasingly governed and policed during civil emergency events.

As the emergency image and emergency response image were becoming more established visual conventions, patterns of dissemination could be appropriated to contest the official framing of emergency events. This was most apparent after the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017 with local people creating their own set of emergency images and emergency response images as no COBR meeting was held.

It was also between 1997-2017 that COBR became visible within popular culture, appearing in a number of television dramas, in political cartoons and finally having its own dedicated televised drama programme *COBRA*. This tapped into previously popular post-war fictional depictions of the secretive government. The popular culture of COBR and its recognisable name further helped to establish COBR as a clear visual symbol of government action and decision, despite its meetings and operational capacity remaining hidden.

It is via these images of COBR and the emergency image to which it is responding, that I have answered the central research objective of this study. Firstly, to locate and analyse the emergence of a visual culture of emergency politics in Britain between 1997-2017, secondly to demonstrate how emergency images have influenced how emergency events are claimed and by whom, and thirdly, to *reassemble* and make public the visual culture of COBR and emergency politics by actively collating, documenting and analysing the previously siloed visual elements and fragments. By fulfilling these research objectives, I have argued that a visual culture of emergency politics can be traced and mapped as emerging between 1997-2017, and within this visual culture there exists a new categorisation of images, the emergency image and the emergency response image. Specifically, I have evidenced how the COBR Committee has a larger and more comprehensive multiplicity of images and visual codes that go far beyond the single official image of the COBR Committee room released in 2010, as shown in Figure 1 at the beginning of this thesis.

I have argued that the new categorisation of images has facilitated a new condition where the claiming of civil emergency events is now more malleable, opening up a new seam in the potential of bottom-up political contestation and top-down exploitation. In detailing the public response to the Grenfell Tower fire and the ways in which the local population produced new emergency images and their own set of emergency response images, I demonstrated how this new political contestation is formed within British civil emergency. In addition, I detailed how the CCA in 2004 altered the government's legal position, allowing them to envelope a practice of State prerogative to declare an emergency without the necessity of Privy Council or Order in Council approval. This has been further developed by the creation of emergency images by the government themselves, images that exploit the public's habitual receptivity to emergency for political gain. The visual culture of emergency politics has allowed newly appointed politicians to position themselves within an immediately authoritative frame.

Ultimately, this study suggests that emergency events and their images exist in a highly malleable space in which how we view and inhabit the world is increasingly constituted via images. Consistent claims of emergency produce threat and fear and can, I have suggested in Chapter 3, produce a platform for control and renewed authority for government and its leaders. Moreover, there remains minimal critique of neither the COBR Committee nor the government's strategy of responding to emergency events. By publicly archiving and documenting the twenty-year period, this study and its research practice outputs begin to open up that space. It is hoped that those wishing to engage with COBR in the future can access a body of data and knowledge on which to further build a comprehensive critique of the visual culture of emergency politics, and the COBR Committee more specifically.

Two key elements which form the basis of the visual culture of emergency politics are the emergency image and emergency response image. Chapter 2: *The Birth of Emergency Images*, outlined the initial arrival and establishment of the new category of image via the emergency image. I drew on three case studies, the 7/7 bombing in 2005, the Murder of Lee Rugby in 2013 and the attack on London Bridge and Borough market in 2017, to detail its development and changes in its formation and public interaction. What these three examples demonstrated was a clear progression not only of the ability of the emergency image to declare the emergency event, but how the process tied into the habitual and domestic functioning of social media ecologies, built upon the viewing and participation of domestic exceptional moments. I argued that it was in the habitual process of social media, described by Chun as 'crisis machines' that emergency events gained far wider dissemination. I explained how this imagery had more effect on emergency events than the infotainment of the 2000s, as it built an *interactive engagement*, where the active participation of the citizen witness was combined within a habitual process of sharing, liking and commenting. I claimed that this element of the visual culture of emergency politics helped to foster a wider condition of what Frosh and Pinchevski called 'crisis-readiness'. The potential for an emergency to take place encouraged users of social media to retain a preparedness for the next set of emergency images.

Chapter 3: *Crisis Rituals: Image Acts of Emergency Response*, laid out a new set of emergency response images enacted by the State, in response to the growing visualisation of emergency images. These image-based crisis rituals were established within the public domain by the following six visual conventions: the public naming of COBR, images of ministers arriving at a COBR meeting, the non-visibility of the COBR meeting itself, the restaging of CORR meetings, the post-COBR statement and finally the post-COBR follow-up statement. I argued that these conventions comprise the key visual elements in the

government's emergency response images. I further demonstrated the establishment of these visual conventions by comparing images of Theresa May's COBR-led response to four separate civil emergency events in the summer of 2017, where the visual convention of the post-COBR statement is almost indistinguishable from the next.

Chapter 4: *Dynamics of Emergency Images*, argued that the use of aesthetics to claim the civil emergency event has been in effect since the fourteenth-century, with the unfurling of the Royal Banner to declare martial law, and the performative reading of the Riot Act in the eighteenth-century. I suggested that the COBR emergency response image is the contemporary version of the unfurling Royal Banner to demarcate the exception.

I then argued that the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 was a key legislative moment impacting the shift from an objective claim to a subjective claim of emergency. Although the CCA has not been used since its inception, its implementation means that the declaration of an emergency does not require Privy Council or Order in Council permission. With their removal, the government could now claim any event as an emergency by naming it under the banner of COBR.

The separation, enacted by the establishment of the CCA, allowed certain emergency events to be defined by central government and partly on a subjective basis. David Cameron, and indeed Gordon Brown, broadened the definitions of what constituted a national emergency, convening COBR over a number of questionable events, most of which would normally be dealt with by the National Security Council or the Foreign Office. These included the attack on the Mumbai hotel, the implementation of a no fly zone over Syria, and ash die-back, among others. By comparison there were events which did not seem to fit in with the definition of a COBR-led civil emergency event, such as the murder of MP Jo Cox or the Grenfell Tower fire. I argued that this new use of COBR forms a contemporary prerogative, but where the production of emergency images by the State offers justification. I

argued that it is this separation between an operational Civil Contingencies Committee and the symbolic and visual 'COBR Committee' that has allowed civil emergency events to be manipulated and instrumentalised by politicians, most notably by newly appointed prime ministers. In this instance, emergency events that might have previously been considered marginal were brought into sharp focus under the emergency claim of the COBR Committee to support the elevation of a newly appointed, not elected, prime minister.

However, my final case study of the images surrounding the Grenfell Tower fire showed the power of images to facilitate the claiming of a national emergency form the bottom-up. The images created following the Grenfell Tower fire contested the government's lack of an official emergency claim. This created a void of image-control and allowed the space to be occupied by images of a momentary popular uprising, which demanded recognition and official acknowledgement that the event *was* a national emergency. This is not to say that popular uprisings must rely upon the COBR Committee failing to act, but more that when the conventions of the visual culture of emergency politics are not followed, there leaves an obvious void that can be filled with counter-images.

Chapter 5: *Reassembling the COBR Committee* outlined the practice-based research project via the methodological frame of reassembling COBR. Using techniques and processes outlined as investigative aesthetics, I have reassembled COBR between 1997-2017 from the fragmented parts that were already littering the public domain. This practice-based research was made public via four research outputs, the *Emergency State: The COBR Committee between 1997-2017* held in July 2021, the online COBR Committee Archives (www.COBR-Commitee.uk), the formal entry of a dataset of all publicly held COBR meetings between 1997-2017 to the UK Data Archive and a performance reenactment and documentation of a COBR meeting. In this way, there now exists a permanent and publicly accessible set of

visual material, data and information detailing the COBR Committee and the visual culture of emergency politics.

Limits of study and further area for exploration.

A question of central importance to this study is who decides the definition of a national emergency. I still contend that the emergency image has the potential to claim an emergency outside the parameters of the state sanctioned naming of emergency events. The key term here is *potential*. Emergency images do not always hold the ability to contest power via a counter claim of emergency. However with the advent of social media, that *potentiality* remains viable. The Grenfell Tower fire demonstrated this within a British context. Although there are other events which could initially be viewed as offering contention to the government - such as the London riots in 2011, or minor terror events, these are usually recuperated within the state narrative as further justifying the state apparatus and indeed the COBR Committee itself. The Grenfell Tower fire represents an anomaly. Due to the state's own failure to call a COBR meeting, a space of contention based on emergency images became possible. This is why the Grenfell Tower protests were so remarkable; they momentarily inverted the power and technique of the visual culture of emergency politics as a political device. Whether other spaces or moments of political contention can be created without re-enforcing the COBR Committee itself remains a challenge for future research.

In the process of achieving my research objectives by making COBR permanently public and visible, I have inadvertently made COBR appear as a legitimate form of response to all emergency events. That is not to say that such research should not be conducted for fear of legitimising state apparatus, but that it has highlighted that further work needs to be done in using this study as a departure point for a more critical and creative engagement with

COBR and the visual culture of emergency politics. This research topic therefore requires a second phase of practice-based research which engages with this new material and its broader enforcement of securitisation through visual culture. This was partially explored via the practice-research output of recreating a COBR meeting and distributing its images within the image economy. However, future such engagement via practice-based research and differing curatorial methods should begin to use the establishment of a permanently visible COBR as a departure point to open up critical dialogue on the value, importance and issues inherent with a centralised, highly mediated emergency response apparatus like COBR.

In light of this, the thesis and practice-based research project outlined here are the beginning of a larger and more long-term process to continually investigate, archive and counter-map the COBR Committee and its images and actions. The web archive and dataset will be updated to include the COBR led emergency events between 2017 and the present day. Although these will not document the emergence of emergency image as a condition, it will use the tools and technologies discovered during the project to collate and continually reassemble the COBR Committee within the public domain.

As the study was limited to a twenty-year period and stopped in 2017, it was not able to examine the government response to the COVID-19 pandemic, nor to the Streatham terror attack of 2020, which did not produce a COBR meeting. As Boris Johnson became Prime Minister a new set of approaches to the governance of emergency politics appeared to make another shift. One key development is in the establishment of a new emergency situation room that can process and handle live data more efferently than the COBR room itself.

Figure 104: The newly opened National Situation Centre (Sit/Cen).

As mentioned above, this new room is called the National Situation Centre (aka SitCen). The naming is different, aligned more with the ‘NATO situation centre’ than the drama of COBR, and demonstrates that the COBR name and dramatic feel is now somewhat outdated. This room has already had images publicly released and has the potential to mark a shift in the visibility of the emergency response mechanism (see figure 104). Although this is not a room where ministers meet and so appears less politically charged, it is used for data gathering, which must also include visual data in the form of images of live and ongoing emergency events from social media, among other sources. In this way, this room requires a central place in any future analysis of the ongoing developments in the visual culture of British emergency politics post-2017. With the advent of this new room and the centrality of COBR as a symbol during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to continue my current research by starting in 2017 and working up until the present day. I suggest this next phase of research may demonstrate a shift from the centrality of images in political decision making to that of data.

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Appendix: A

Practice-based Research Output: Public Exhibition.

Title: *Emergency State: the COBR Committee 1997-2017*

Website link: https://www.cobr-committee.uk/

Description: *Emergency State: The COBR Committee 1997-2017* and was held in a disused shopping centre in Croydon, south London between 23rd June 2021 and 3rd July 2021 was a public exhibition held in a disused shopping centre in Croydon, south London between 23rd June 2021 and 3rd July 2021.

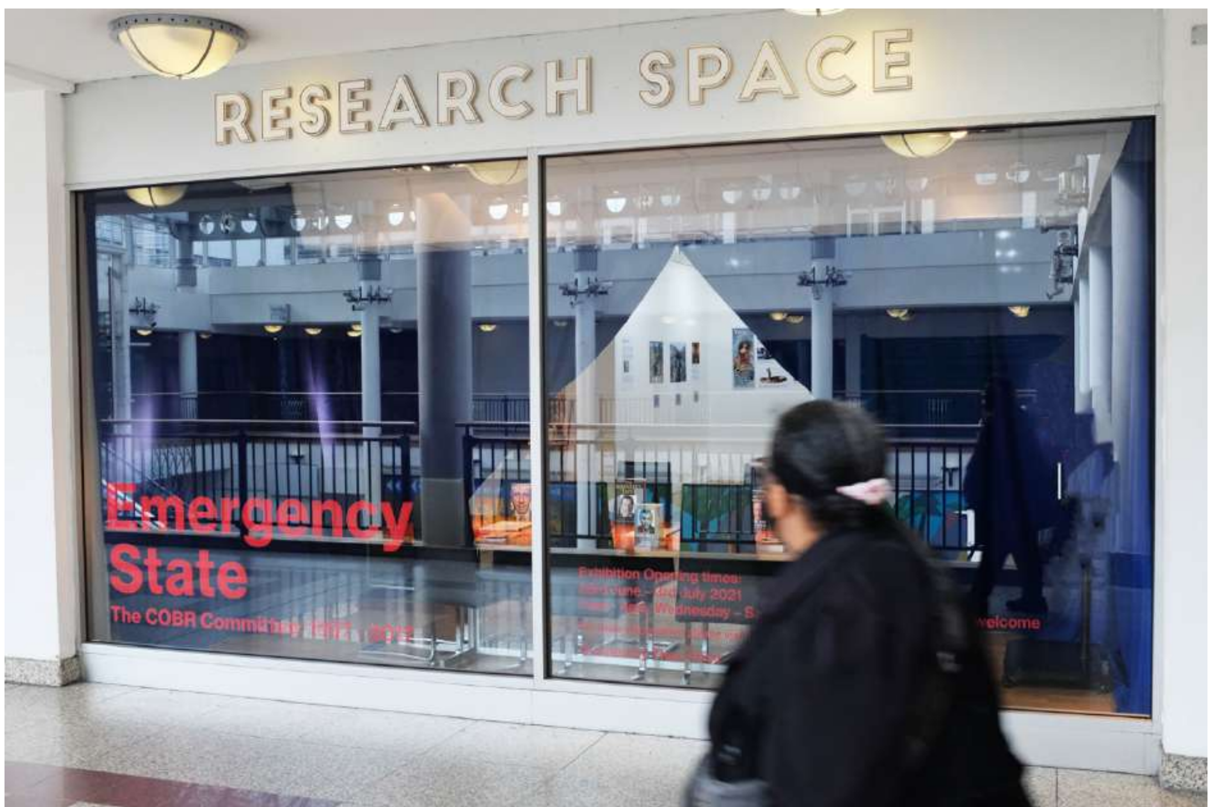


Image 1: Outside view of exhibition.

Image 2: Outside view of exhibition showing the Whitgift shopping centre location.

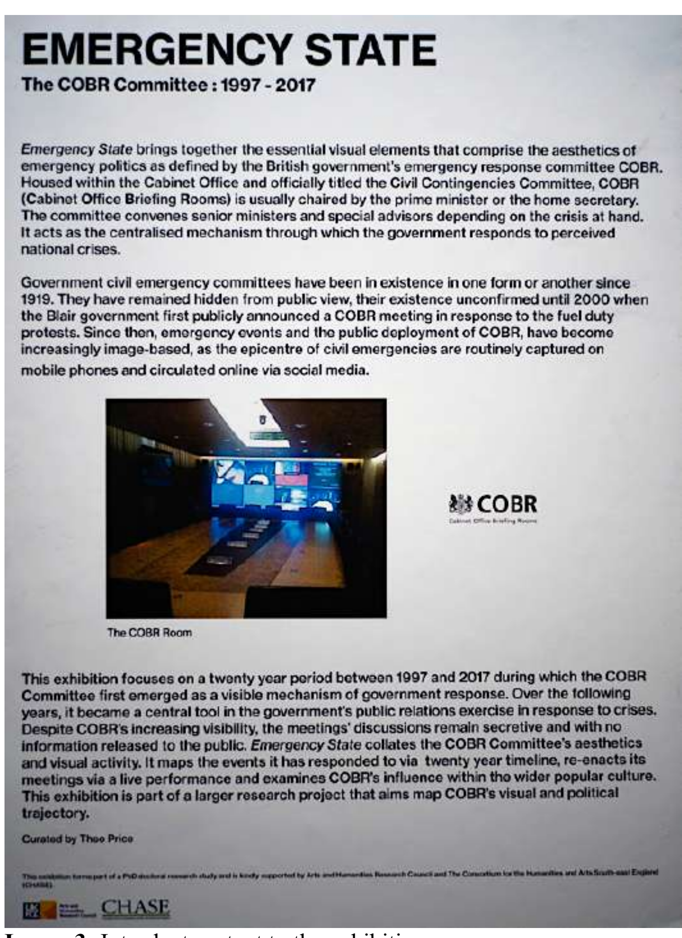


Image 3: Introductory text to the exhibition.

Image 4: North view of exhibition.

Image 5: South view of exhibition.

Image 6: Images of Royal Banner, Reading the Riot Act and a series of tweets mentioning COBR by Prime Minister David Cameron.

Royal Banner. (14th century)

In the 14th Century, the raising of a royal banner declared martial law. This visual act forms the origins of the aesthetics of today's emergency law. When martial law was enacted, the public courts closed and the force of the law was enacted by military violence. Those within twelve miles of the raised banner were considered under its jurisdiction, which legally allowed acts of violence and suppression in the name of the king against the civilian population. This was used most often against local uprisings and rebellions. The visible public announcement of the COBR committee in response to an emergency, can be seen as a direct descendant of the raising of the royal banner.

Image 7: Close-up of the descriptive text placed beneath the image of the Royal Banner

Riot Act. (18th century)

The reading of the Riot Act was also an aesthetic gesture of emergency law. A police or military person would read out the Riot Act, often during tumultuous events such as riots or uprisings, and those who were within earshot, were subjected to its authority. This performative act echoes that of the visual announcement of a COBR meeting, whereby an exception has been officially declared. Although the utterance of "COBR" does not bring in extra legal powers, it makes the emergency official, which in turn gives legal evidence for the use of the executive powers granted under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Image 8: Close-up of the descriptive text placed beneath the image of the reading the Riot Act.

The Tweet. (21st century)

The tweet and the images of COBR meetings, now become the royal banner and the reading of the Riot Act but with a global reach. They visually signify the declaration of an official exception. David Cameron was the first UK prime minister to announce his convening of COBR via Twitter. As most of the emergency events post-2005 were captured and circulated on mobile phones and social media, the placing of the COBR announcement within the same space, namely Twitter, asserts government action within the very space where the images of the emergency have emerged.

Image 9: Close-up of the descriptive text placed beneath the image of the tweets.

Image 10: Exhibition view.

Image 11: Close-up of Royal Banner with the addition of the Twitter.com logo sewn on.

Image 12: ‘The Culture of Emergency’ section.

The Culture of Emergency

Since the COBR Committee's emergence as a public response mechanism in 2000, it has become increasingly represented within the wider popular visual culture. From cartoons of emergency events displayed in newspapers, to television dramas centred around the COBR room itself (ITV's '*COBRA*').

These cultural elements act to re-imagine the COBR Committee as dynamic, casting it in the same frame as the covert world of espionage epitomised in the James Bond franchise. These cultural elements help legitimatise COBR, and the permanent state of emergency.

Image 13: Close-up of the descriptive text for ‘The Culture of Emergency’ section.

Image 14: ‘Advertising Emergencies’ section.

Image 15: Close-up of posters in the 'Advertising Emergencies' section.

Advertising Emergencies

The posters on display here represent a visual element of the permanent emergency, keeping present the continued appeal to be on guard for the next crisis, to highlight the potential of threats, which in turn can foster a desire for protection from the state in the form of new legalisation and increased surveillance technologies.

These posters are police-led campaigns that often last several years until the next security-based campaign is launched, which in turn produces a new set of posters. They predominantly appear on public transport, in local newspapers, as leaflets and audio announcements.

One of the central reasons to investigate the aesthetics of emergency politics and the COBR Committee, is to look at the influence such imagery has on the growing condition of a permanent state of emergency. In this permanent state of emergency, risk, fear, threat and security become central tools through which to control and govern.

Image 16: Close-up of the descriptive text for 'Advertising Emergencies' section.

Timeline COBR 1997 - 2017

For the first time, this timeline details each COBR meeting between 1997-2017. As there is no official data on the exact number of COBR meetings, its attendees nor what was discussed, this timeline is comprised from media reports, government press statements and archived media videos. There are undoubtedly other COBR meetings that took place during this period, but there is no public information about them.

It is easy to see a steady increase in COBR meetings, where, during the early 2000's, there was usually only one publicly announced COBR meeting per year. By 2015 there were, on average, a COBR meeting announced every six weeks. This can be attributed to the rise in Islamic terrorism and climate change. It is also evidence of the increased visibility of events captured on mobile phones and circulated online, so the government is often responding to the images in the public domain as much to the event itself.

The text boxes at the bottom, offer small observations, connections and patterns that have emerged over the twenty year period. Each event is colour coded to highlight patterns in the different type of emergencies that have dominated the period, namely industrial action, security and the environment.

The timeline displays both the emergency events that COBR responded to (below the date line) and those it did not such as the Grenfell Fire tragedy (above the date line). It also offers contextual information such as the election of different prime ministers or a major political event.

Image 17: Close-up of the descriptive text for 'Timeline COBR 1997-2017'

Image 18: 'Timeline COBR 1997-2017' wall display.

Image 19: Prime Minister's Podiums display.

Prime Minister's Podiums

Many COBR statements are delivered from behind a podium adorned with a government crest. As if to reiterate the attention to visual aesthetics of political leaders, each new prime minister receives a new style of podium to represent their physical appearance and possibly their political ambitions. This process of new podiums for each new prime minister was introduced at the start of David Cameron's term.

David Cameron's podium of choice had curved edges and sweeping lines denoting a contemporary, dynamic approach.

Theresa May's podium was basic and not unlike a lectern in a church, denoting her religious upbringing while trying to convey honesty and authenticity.

Boris Johnson's podium has echoes of the US presidential lectern, narrow at the base and expanding upwards in a 'V' shape. It has a Churchillian style from World War Two, as he continually attempts to resurrect the 'V For Victory' motto when dealing with domestic issues.

These physical props reiterate the attention to visual detail the government's communication department began to make after the election of David Cameron in 2010. The podiums travel to wherever the prime minister must make a speech or statement. The lecterns become a physical extension of the prime minister, helping to consistently frame their appearance.

Image 20: Close-up of the descriptive text for Prime Minister's Podiums display.

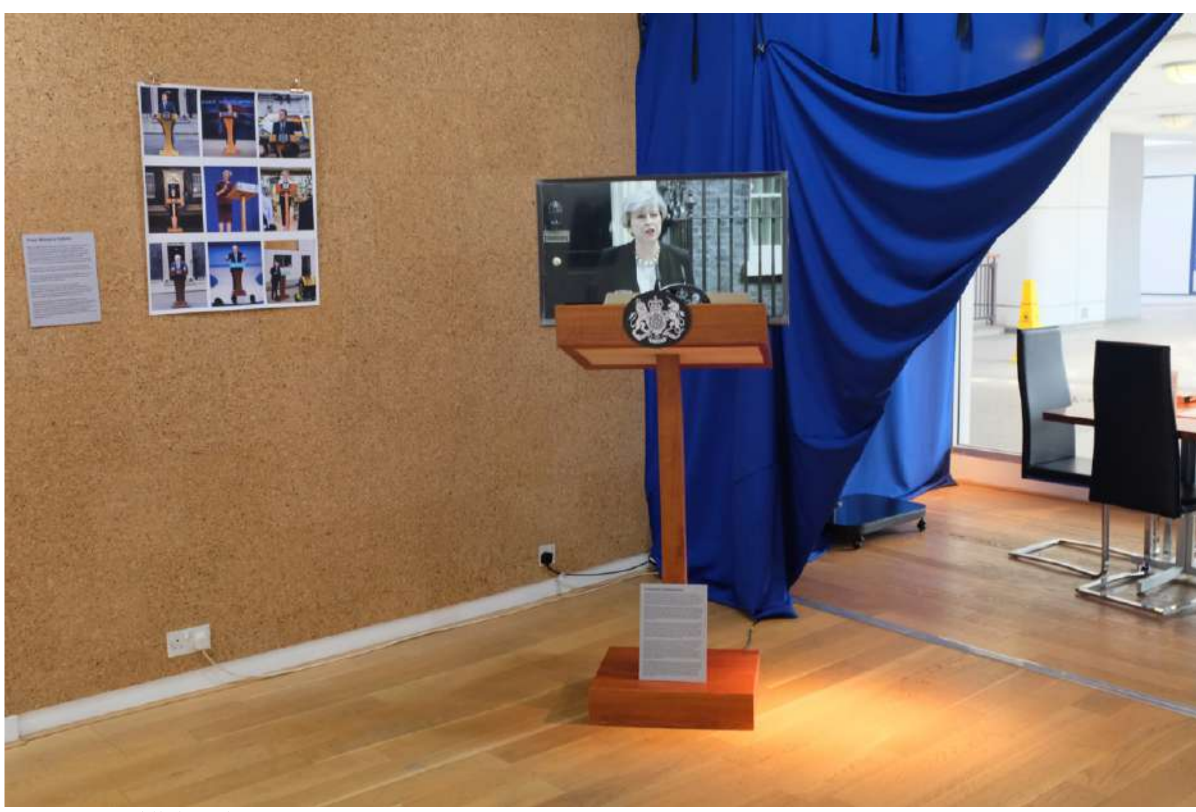


Image 21: Exhibtion view.

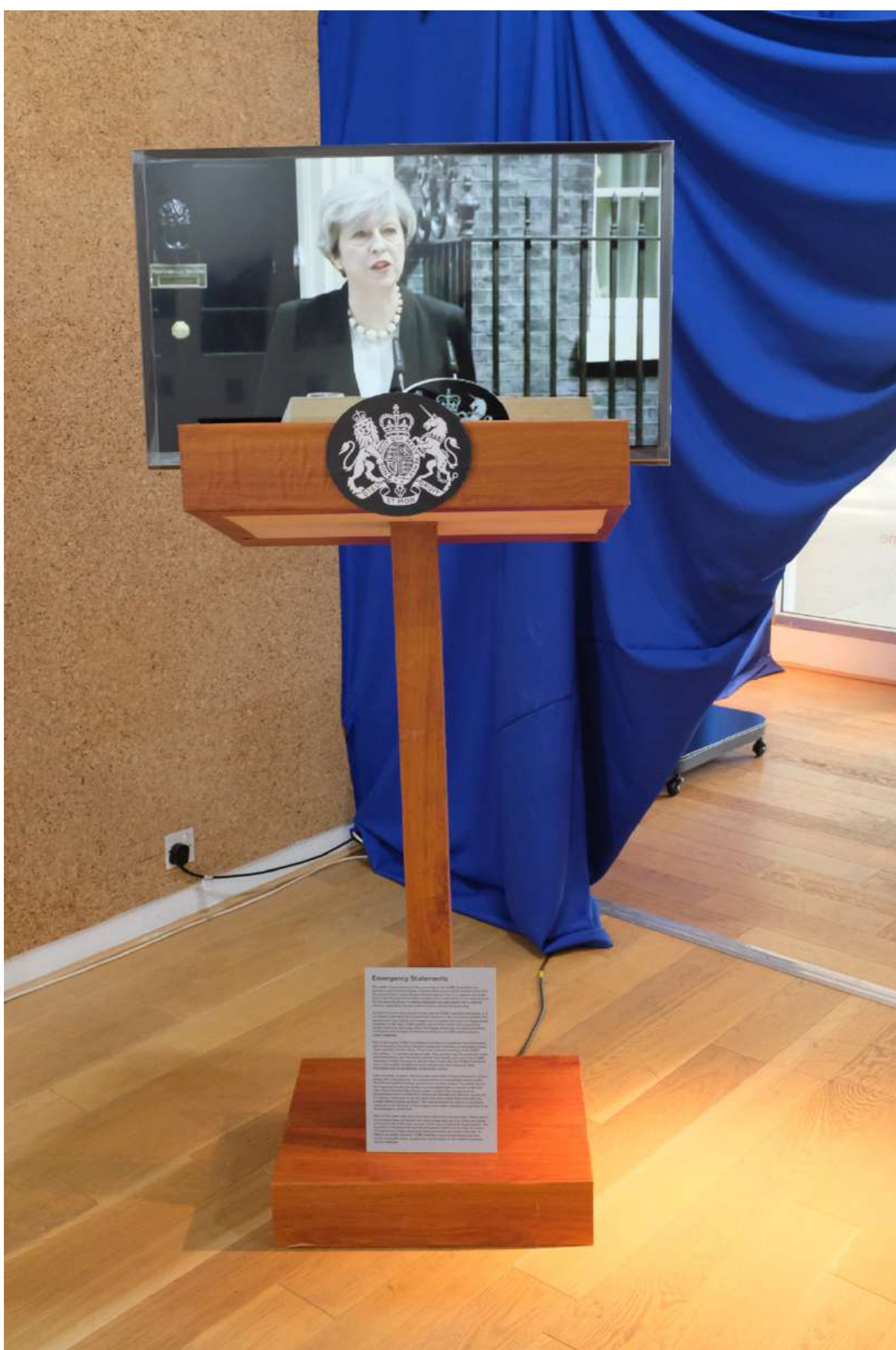


Image 22: ‘Emergency Statements’ video installation.

Image 23: ‘Emergency Statements’ video installation.

Emergency Statements

The public announcement of the convening of the COBR Committee has become a performative display of government action which publicly marks that the government is responding to the emergency. This is to reassure the public and to buy the government time to gather more information. It can also be used for the opposite effect, in making seemingly low level events into a national crisis by supporting the perception of prime ministerial leadership.

As there are never any records of the internal COBR meetings themselves, it is not always clear what the government response is. So to increase visibility, the government must add its own images into circulation as a form of image-based response. In this way, COBR signifies government action and response by simply stating its convening, while the images generated via announcements, statements and footage of ministers arriving for a COBR meeting denote urgent response.

Part of the recent COBR Committee's function is to legitimise the information delivered during the prime minister's statement following an emergency event. There opening remark states, “I have just chaired a meeting of the COBR Committee...” or another similar phrase. This conveys that the statement is the latest information, as if the prime minister has literally just come from COBR, whereas in reality this may not be the case. In this way, the COBR Committee acts as the symbol of legitimate and official truth that trumps all other information and re-establishes government control.

Over a number of years, what becomes noticeable in these statements, is how similar they have become. The announcement is increasingly made outside No.10 Downing Street using a government crested podium. The uniformity of the response echoes the words of a re-establishment of control, order and calm. Since Theresa May became prime minister, this has become so standardised that it is difficult to distinguish between the different events she is making a statement on as she wears the same black dress and with only a slight differing large necklace. This representation of order is an aesthetic response to the disorder of the images from citizen witnesses emanating from the emergency event itself.

Many of the video clips seen here have watermarks across them. This is due to them having been extracted from stock image sites such as Getty and Alamy as they are one of the only sources of this type of historical visual content. The economy of images profits during emergency events, so too after the event has passed as images displaying historical events are bought and sold. As there is no public record of COBR meetings, stock image databases have proven invaluable when mapping the visual history of the COBR Committee and its meetings.

Image 24: Close-up of the descriptive text for ‘Emergency Statements’.

Image 25: Exhibtion view.

Image 26: ‘Emergency Entrance/Exit’ video projection.

Emergency Entrance / Exit

A key visual aid in announcing government action, is the arriving and leaving of ministers attending, or having attended, a COBR Committee meeting. As no images exist of the meeting itself, these images act as a central visual reference (after the announcement itself) that a COBR meeting is taking place. They are therefore used widely by the mainstream media and have come to visually represent government action in response to emergency events.

Image 27: Close-up of the descriptive text for 'Emergency Entrance/Exit'.

Image 28: Recreated COBR Room. This is how the room was left when there was no performnace. The performnace played on the monitor in the background.

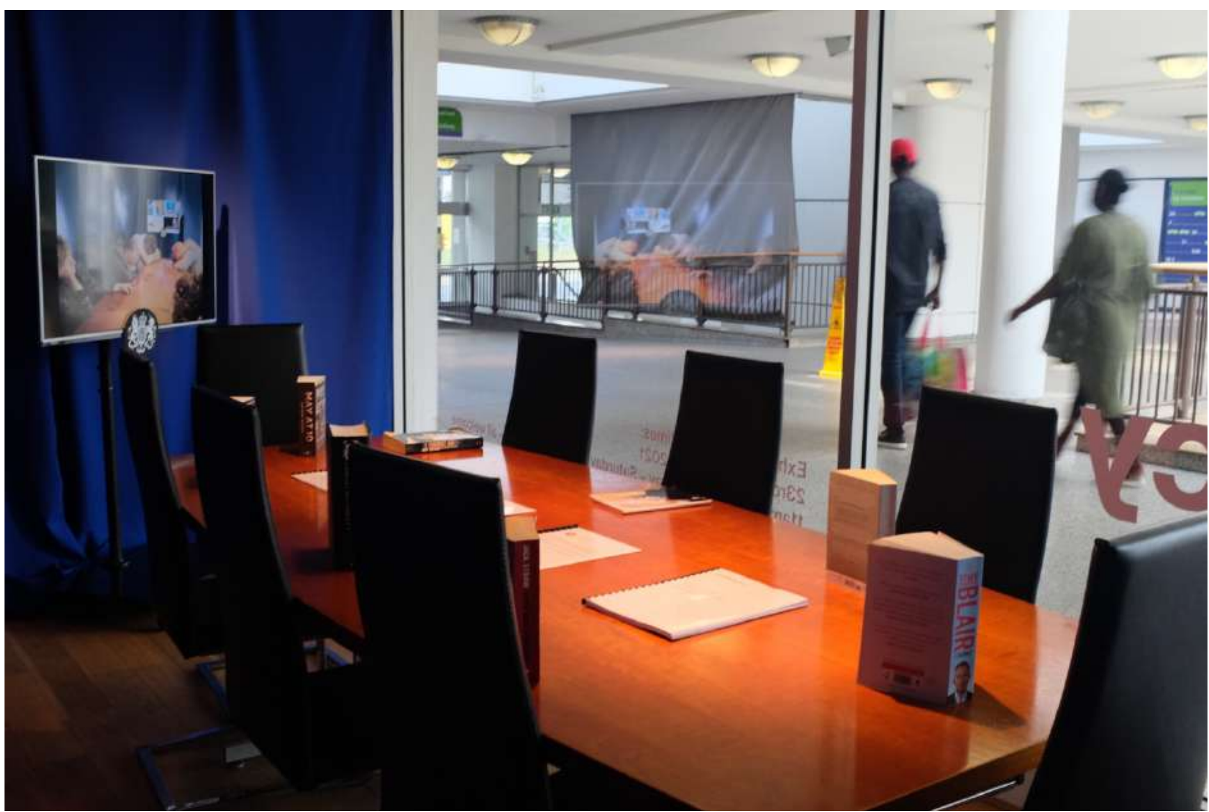


Image 29: Exhibition view out onto Whitgift Shopping Centre.

Appendix: B

Practice-based Research Output: Web Archive.

Title: COBR Committee Archives

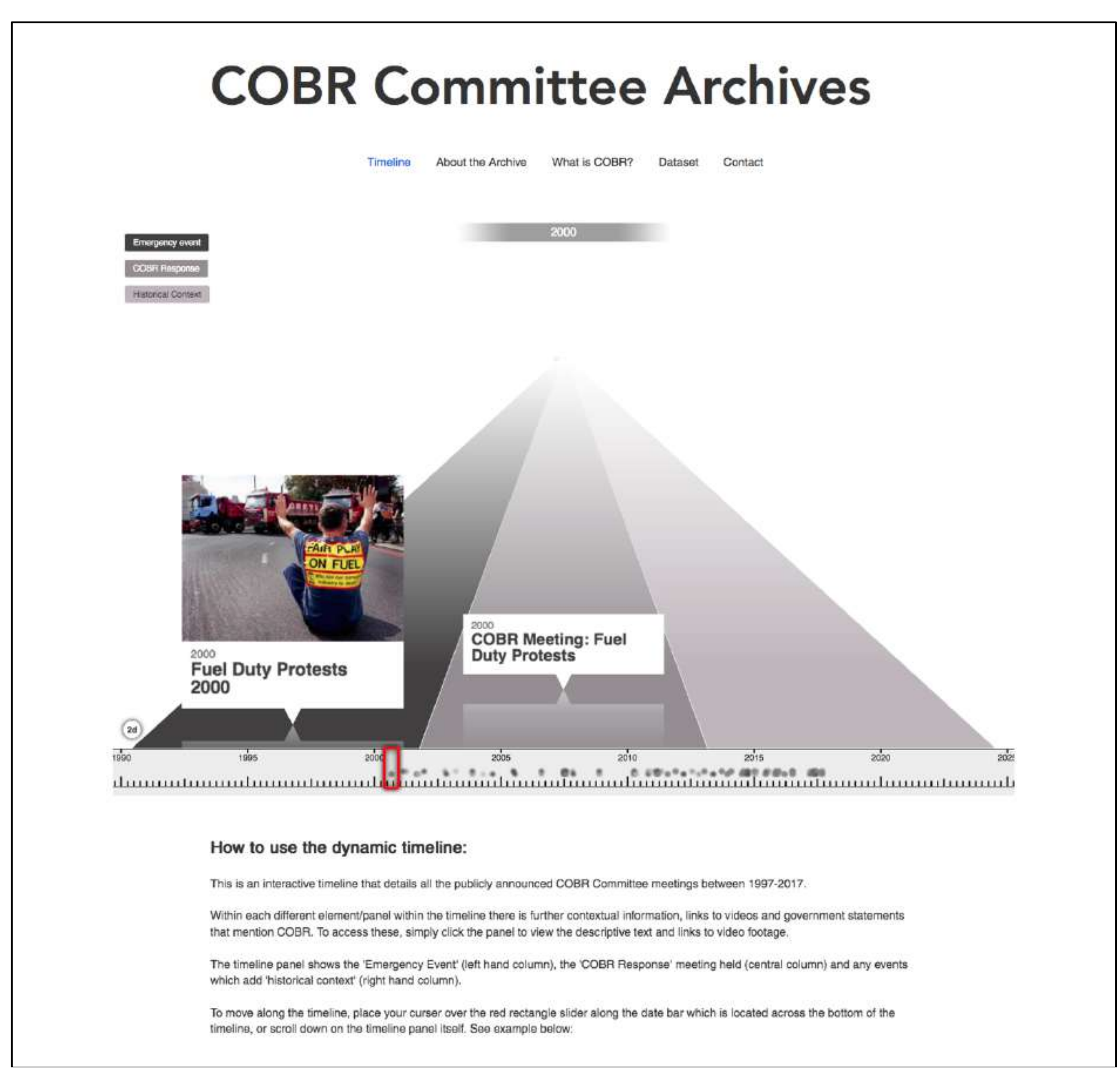
Website link: www.cobr-committee-archives.uk

Description:

Website can interactive and dynamic timeline detailing all COBR Committee meetings between 19970-2017. The website also includes a link to download the dataset submitted to the UK Data Archive.

Below are the screen grabs of the website pages as they appear online.

Website page 1: Timeline



Website page 2: About the Archive

COBR Committee Archives

Timeline About the Archive What is COBR? Dataset Contact

About the COBRA Commiteee Archives

The COBR Committee archives currently document the period between 1997-2017. During this period the United Kingdom's emergency response committee COBR became publicly visible for the first time. This archive visually maps the first COBR meetings from 2000 up until 2017. This web archive forms part of a larger doctorial research study on the COBR Committee and the visual culture of emergency politics within the United Kingdom.

The only official image of the COBR Committee room released in 2010 under a freedom of information request. This remains the only official image of the COBR facility.

This single above is the only official image of the COBR Committee room and acts as a departure point for this archive. This image fails to fully represent the extensive visual culture that I argue now surrounds the COBR Committee during and following British civil emergency events between 1997-2017. As is demonstrated in the timeline, an extensive range of primary image-based material directly associated with the COBR Committee, either by name or location, does exist.

In effect, this research reassembles a new picture of the COBR Committee from the disparate visual elements already in existence within the public domain. In doing so, it will create a more comprehensive, interactive and publicly accessible representation of the COBR Committee.

Why 1997-2017 ?

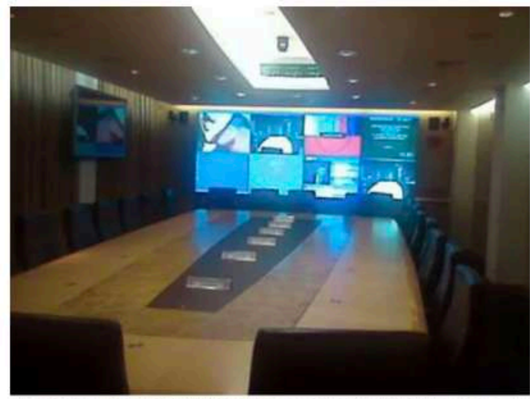
Between 1919 – 2001, the British government's emergency response committees had never been publicly acknowledged and remained secretive. (see 'What is COBR?' page on this website for more details on the history of COBR). In the early 2000s the COBR Committee was elevated from a non-visible operational emergency response mechanism, to a publicly visible, and increasingly choregraphed, visual response apparatus.

Website page 3: What is COBR?

COBR Committee Archives

Timeline About the Archive What is COBR? Dataset Contact

What is COBR?



The only official image of the COBR Committee room released in 2010 under a freedom of information request. The image appears to have been taken on a mobile phone. This remains the only official image of the COBR facility.

The COBR (Cabinet Office Brief Room) is the unofficial name for the Civil Contingencies Committee. Publicly established in 2000, it is led by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and guided by the Cabinet Office Secretary, with legislative backing via the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This infrastructure supports the government's ability to plan for, and respond to, perceived national civil emergency events. The COBR Committee is usually chaired by the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary, although it can also be chaired by a cabinet minister, and is attended by senior ministers and representatives from respective governmental departments under whose jurisdiction the emergency event falls.

Since 2000, the COBR Committee's convening has been publicly announced in response to a diverse set of civil emergency events, from large scale flooding to terrorist attacks (see the timeline in the archive for all emergency events). Despite the increasing public announcements of COBR meetings in response to major and minor civil emergency events, there is no public record containing the exact information on who attends its meetings, how many meetings have been held or what decisions have been made - this web archive begins the process of filling that gap.

The Civil Contingencies Committee (CCC) was established in 2000 following the "three F's": fuel-duty protests, foot and mouth disease, and wide scale flooding. While the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) is a permanent position, and helps to facilitate the everyday running of the CCC, the CCS is also tasked with contingency planning and horizon scanning for potential future emergency events. The CCS manages the 'Resilience Capabilities Programme' and is a department under the guidance of the Cabinet Office. For more information see the British Government website here.

[For terrorism related events, the Home Secretary will usually chair the meeting, with senior representatives of the police and intelligence services also attending. While for flooding, the Environment Secretary would be a key attendee or chair, alongside senior ministers and members of Department for Environment and Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). In addition to senior ministers and officials from specific agencies or departments there are also senior advisors and civil servants present. If it is a nation-wide emergency, such as Brexit or the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders from the devolved administrations are also invited to attend.

Website page 4: Dataset

COBR Committee Archives

Timeline About the Archive What is COBR? Dataset Contact

Dataset for all publicly announced COBR meetings between 1997-2017

This dataset formally archives, for the first time, the COBR meetings between 1997-2017.

The data set comprises of information that made up the timeline within the COBR Commitee Archives but has been broken down into its constitute parts, evidenced and peer reviewed before permanent acceptance to the UK Data Service. Within the confines of the ReShare depository process at the UK Data Archive, the data is checked, peer-reviewed and then made publicly accessible.

The raw data for the COBR dataset was inexistence already but its location was disparate, incomplete and incomprehensible as a whole. This dataset, alongside the timeline, has allowed for COBR and its emergencies between 1997-2017 to be viewed for the first time in a single, coherent and systematic whole. The data set is therefore a process of formalising new knowledge surrounding emergency politics.

Link to UK Data Service dataset

Downloadable PDF of the dataset.

Website page 5: Contact

COBR Committee Archives

Timeline About the Archive What is COBR? Dataset Contact

Contact the COBR Committee Archives

If you would like to contact the archive please use the form below..

Contributing to the COBR Committee Archives:

If you have material or information relating to the COBR Committee that you wish to have included in the archive please use the form below, detailing the type of material, its source and relation to the COBR Committee.

We welcome contributions and hope for this archive to be a hub for future content to help document the COBR Committee.

Contact the archive:

First Name

Last Name

Email *

Write a message

Submit

Appendix: C

Practice-based Research Output: Dataset deposited with UK Data Archive.

Title: UK Government's Publicly Announced Emergency Response Committee Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms Meetings, 1997-2017.

Website link: https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=855344

Description:

Data set of all COBR Committee meetings publicly announced between 1997-2017 deposited with *UK Data Archive*.

Data persistent identifier: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-855344.

Study Number: 855344.

Appendix: D

Practice-based Research Output: Performance and intervention in the image economy.

Title: 'COBR Meeting 26.6.21 11:04am'

Description:

Documentation of the live re-enactment of the COBR Committee meeting held in the reconstructed COBR room during the exhibition: *Emergency State: COBR Committee between 1997-2017.* Stills from the performance were uploaded to stock image website Alamy.com and became searchable within the internet alongside images of the COBR Committee.

Website links:

Video of live performance
'COBR Meeting 26.6.21 11:04am'
Youtube.com

URL link: https://youtu.be/Mn7Iy0Z7IlU

Images on Alamy.com
'Ministers attend a COBR Committee meeting'
Alamy.com

URL link: https://www.alamy.com/ministers-attend-a-cobr-committee-meeting-image436256940.html

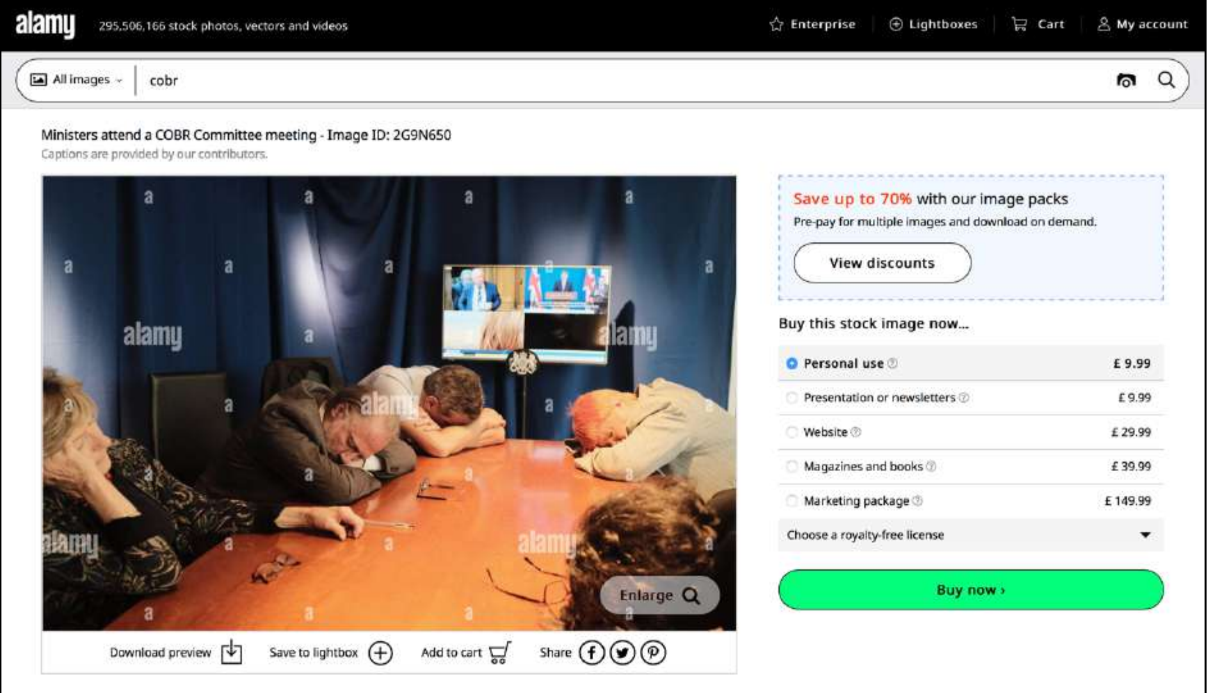


Image 1: Stills from the live performance on the Almay.com site.

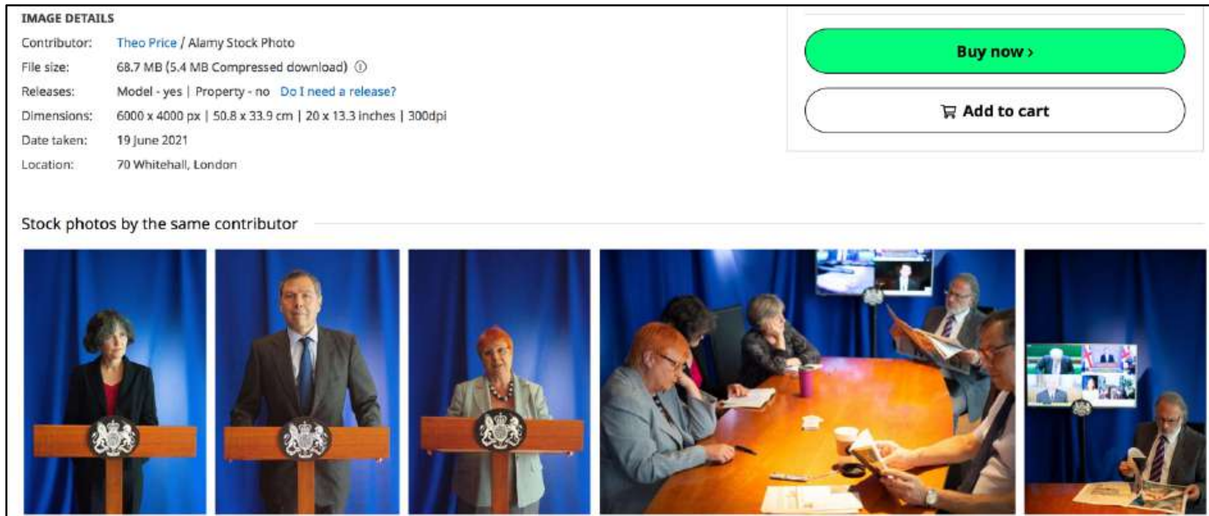


Image 2: Images of actors playing senior government ministers on the Almay.com site.

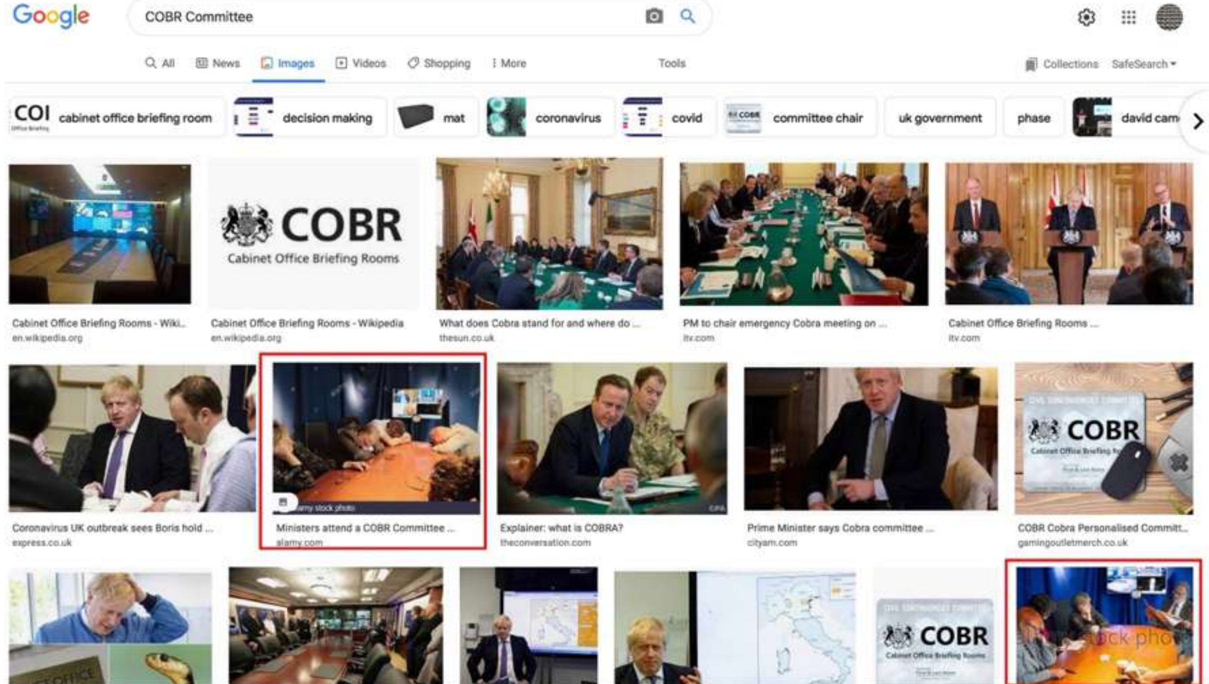


Image 3: Images of the COBR performance alongside 'official' images of the COBR Committee during a Google image search for 'COBR Committee'.