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A total performance

Invisibility, respectability and resistance in corporate capitalism

Jill Gibbon

We recognize each other in the coffee queue, behind the long-range missiles. I have seen her in previous arms fairs. There are not many women our age in the arms industry so we stand out, at least to each other. Over the years the differences between us have become more apparent. As I grow older, she seems to get younger, her skin tighter, more contoured. Her shoes are higher, the toes more pointed, and her suit drapes with a quality that my polyester version lacks. She gives me a troubled look, as if she thinks she should know me but can't remember where from. Then she is distracted by a colleague who passes her a coffee. Thankfully, he doesn't notice me; he is gazing at a young woman giving out sweets.

This is not a story of visual activism, but invisibility, of my attempt to sneak through the cracks of one of the world's most elusive, yet dangerous industries. Since 2007, I have visited arms fairs and company Annual General Meetings by masquerading as a defence consultant. I am not the only one pretending – the arms industry is based on deception. Arms companies talk of 'products' instead of missiles, and 'defence' instead of destruction. They masquerade as respectable while selling weapons to repressive regimes, and lobbying governments to increase military spending.

Women, traditionally defined in patriarchal society by their 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 1975) notoriously become less visible as they age (Hofmeier et al. 2017). This invisibility has become more nuanced as companies face pressure to improve diversity, particularly in senior positions. The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) has asked companies to take 'due regard for the benefits of diversity on the board, including gender' when appointing new directors (2012: 12). Since then, the arms corporation BAE Systems has increased the number of women on its board to three out of eleven directors (2021b). They have expensive suits, coiffured hair and tasteful makeup, yet remain in the background. They sit in silence in the company's AGMs, hands folded, eyes down. This elegant discretion mirrors the public face of the industry. The arms trade is everywhere, yet unseen.

Judith Butler describes political activism largely in terms of visibility. Writing in the wake of the 2011 uprisings in Tahrir Square, she emphasizes the political significance of public assemblies



FIGURE 2.1 IDEX 2017, *Tank Ammunition*. Photo credit: Tom Fisher.

'when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other public venues is the exercise – one might call it performative – of the right to appear, a bodily demand for a more livable set of lives' (2015: 24, 25). Certainly, 'the right to appear' is a pressing political issue. However, in globalized capitalism power is increasingly invisible, taking place outside official channels. Tahrir Square is an important example. The UK publicly supported the pro-democracy movements that spread across the Middle East in 2011, while privately issuing export licenses for the sale of the military and surveillance equipment that suppressed them. Bahrain used UK made tear gas and armored vehicles to put down protests in 2011, and the sales continue despite a rapid deterioration of human rights (Gallagher 2016). Indeed, British arms companies have sold weapons to two thirds of the countries that the Foreign Office has listed as 'Human Rights Priority Countries' (Sharman 2017). In one of his last books, John Berger warned that power has shifted from elected governments to multinational corporations and financiers, 'politics have been superseded by the global dictatorship of speculative capitalism with its traders and banking lobbies' (Berger 2016: 137). This 'global dictatorship' meets away from of the public eye in board rooms, hotel suites, and trade fairs where alliances and deals evade scrutiny. The problem is particularly acute in the arms trade. In *Shadow World*, Andrew Feinstein describes 'the all-encompassing secrecy that often characterizes arms deals, hides corruption, conflicts of interest, poor decision-making and inappropriate national security choices' (2011: xxv).

In this chapter, I will discuss a method of performance I have developed to slip inside this secretive industry, mimicking the duplicity of arms companies, and using my invisibility as an older woman. I begin by explaining the manipulative relationship between arms companies and the UK government, and how this is hidden by a performance of respectability. Then, I will describe my attempt to mimic and draw this performance, making it visible (see Figures 2.1 and 2.3 and Plates 1–5).

A duplicitous industry

Arms manufacturing is based on a central deception. Arms companies claim they are producing weapons for 'defence', while driven by a logic of profit. The arms industry is interwoven with the history of capitalism and colonialism. Kehinde Andrews argues that capitalism has been fueled by the theft of people, resources and lands (2021: 32). This required weapons. The British arms industry emerged in the seventeenth century to facilitate colonialism. It soon became clear that weapons were also a profitable commodity in themselves. Guns and ammunition were produced both to impose British rule around the world, and as currency, one of the main commodities used to 'buy' slaves in West Africa (Satia 2018: 29). The colonial heritage of the industry remains. Weapons are now produced by Western multinationals to facilitate Western wars, and, increasingly, as products for an international arms trade. The impact of the industry is mainly felt by **Black** populations. The arms industry fuels wars and repression in Black parts of the world, displaces Black populations, and diverts money for development in countries devastated by colonialism. Arms production also drains money from health, education and sustainable energy in the West.

Yet, because arms companies are regarded as important for defence, they exert considerable influence over governments. Since the nineteenth century, arms traders have encouraged governments to increase military spending, and go to war (Feinstein 2011: 4). For most of the twentieth century, weapons were produced by companies based in specific countries – Vickers and Armstrong in the UK, Nordenfelt in Sweden, Krupps in Germany, the Lockheed Corporation in the US. Deals were facilitated by contractors and traders. The notorious Basil Kaharoff worked for Nordenfelt and later Vickers and sold weapons to all sides in the Boer War, the Russo-Japanese conflict and the First World War. A close advisor to Lloyd George, Kaharoff justified international arms sales as a way to understand opponents military and naval arsenal. When a peace settlement was imminent in the First World War, he urged the UK to continue the war 'to the bitter end' (Feinstein 2011: 6). Feinstein suggests this led to 'very real fears, especially among some British politicians that the arms companies in general and Zaharoff in particular were setting their own foreign policy' (ibid.: 6). President Eisenhower gave a similar warning in 1961 when he used the phrase 'military-industrial complex' (MIC) to describe a network of arms dealers, manufacturers, politicians, and the military with a vested interest in war, and unwarranted influence on government policy (Eisenhower 1961). Since then, these networks have grown, becoming more diffuse, internationally connected and secretive. Arms industry analysts, Paul Dunne and Elisabeth Sköns argue, 'The concerns of Eisenhower are certainly still relevant as the post-war restructuring may well have left an MIC that is just as pervasive and powerful, more varied, more internationally linked and less visible' (2010: 289).

When the Cold War ended, military budgets were cut in the West, and there was a brief opportunity to shift military production to civil uses. Instead, arms companies merged into vast

'mega defence corporations' (Bitzinger 2010: 208). In the UK, BAE Systems formed from a merger between British Aerospace and Marconi, later acquiring Vickers and more than twelve US arms companies. In 2019, armaments totalled 95 per cent of BAE Systems' sales, making it one of the most military intensive manufacturers in the world (da Silva et al. 2020: 25). Products include machine guns, tanks, surveillance, and war planes, while the joint venture MBDA makes missiles for its jets. BAE Systems has kept its headquarters in the UK but has a similar workforce in the US, and employees around the world. Sales are dominated by the US, UK and Saudi Arabia (BAE Systems 2021c). The company's involvement in Saudi Arabia is set to increase. In 2017 Saudi Arabia announced a plan to manufacture more weapons locally, and BAE and other corporations responded by proposing joint arms manufacturing ventures with the regime (da Silva et al. 2020: 21). At the 2018 BAE Annual General Meeting, the Chair Roger Carr emphasized the international reach of the company, 'We have a terrific international footprint. We are truly global company'. The change of name from British Aerospace signaled the global reorientation of the company. When asked what BAE stands for, he said, 'You can decide in whatever way you wish. Answers on a postcard' (Carr 2018).

Although BAE is a global company, the company continues to influence the UK government. A freedom of information request by *The Guardian* in 2020 revealed that BAE Systems, MBDA and other arms companies have staff seconded onto UK government departments including the Department for International Trade with roles including 'developing country strategies for industry markets' (Quinn 2020). So, it is perhaps not surprising that the UK government has such a lenient policy towards arms exports. The influence is more discrete than in the early twentieth century, no longer exerted by notorious arms dealers like Zaharoff, but by shifting groups executives. Corporations are expected to regularly change their chair and board. The FRC emphasizes, 'The value of ensuring that committee membership is refreshed and that undue reliance is not placed on particular individuals' (2012:11). However, this means that no one is ultimately responsible for the actions of a company. The board is accountable to another changing group – shareholders and 'other providers of capital' (ibid.: 13). This places accountability and responsibility in the hands of a suited corporate financial elite. Berger describes their characteristics, 'Study the faces of the new tyrants. I hesitate to call them plutocrats for the term is too historical and these men belong to a phenomenon which is unprecedented. Let's settle for profiteers [. . .] They are impeccably dressed and their tailoring is reassuring like the silhouette of high-security delivery vans. Armor Mobile Security' (2011: 146).

Globalization has made the arms industry invisible in another way. Weapons are now produced primarily as commodities. To an extent this is not new – weapons have been produced for export since the seventeenth century. However, when arms companies were based in specific countries, military production had to be justified in terms of that country's perceived needs, however spurious this might have been. Now, as arms production has become disconnected from any one country, it is justified in terms of a share price. With this shift, 'use value' has been eclipsed by 'exchange value'. This has had a strange effect on the meaning and status of weapons. As Marx (1867) noted, a commodity is a curious thing, 'as soon as it steps out as a commodity, it metamorphoses itself into a sensually supersensual thing. It does not only stand with its feet on the ground, but it confronts all other commodities on its head, and develops out of its wooden head caprices which are much more wondrous than if it all of a sudden began to dance.' Benjamin Meiches argues that weapons incite desire – they 'enchant, glimmer, and terrify' (2017: 15). As weapons are treated as

commodities, these seductive properties have been accentuated. Nowhere is this more evident than in an arms fair.

Arms fairs were set up in the 1990s as part of the globalization of the industry to provide international venues to promote the latest weapon ranges. Two of the largest fairs, DSEI (the Defence Security Exhibition International) and Eurosatory take place on alternate years in London and Paris. Guests include repressive regimes, countries involved in aggressive wars, and unstable states (CAAT 2017). Tanks, bombs, missiles, war ships, and armed drones are all on show. Helicopters are open for viewing, bullets and shells are arranged under spotlights. As populations flee war zones, there is also equipment to keep them out – razor wire, surveillance systems, security services. And as the lines blur between the military and police, there are riot shields, rubber bullets, teargas, boots, batons and knives. Alongside a teargas stall, tables are laid with white linen, a side of ham and rounds of brie, while waiting staff circulate with wine, beer and champagne. There are also gifts – pens, keyrings, stress balls in the shape of bombs, and sweets wrapped in slogans (Gibbon 2020). Weapons have names that imply they are an act of God or nature – Brimstone, Meteor, Storm Shadow and Peregrine missiles; Tornado, Typhoon, Tempest, Raptor and Falcon warplanes; Cuttlefish camouflage, Condor tear gas. Brochures present weapons as feats of engineering, innovation and mastery. Under the headline, *Mastering the Skies*, Raytheon describes its fighter jets as ‘robust technologies’ that ‘give pilots a toolkit for air dominance’ (2021). The missile manufacturer MBDA (2021) suggests that ‘Innovation and creativity are part of everything that is done every day within every part of our business’. There is no mention of killing.

While weapons are promoted as desirable commodities inside arms fairs, outside they wreak havoc. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations warned, ‘The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded [. . .] More weapons are being produced. They are flooding markets around the world. They are destabilizing societies. They feed the flames of civil wars and terror’ (UN 2009). Achille Mbembe writes, ‘Nearly everywhere the political order is reconstituting itself as a form of organization for death’ (2019: 17). The impact of the arms trade is brutally clear in the war in Yemen where over 100,000 people have been killed, including 12,000 civilians, since Saudi Arabia and its coalition allies joined the conflict in 2015. Two thirds of civilian deaths were caused by Saudi-led airstrikes (ACLEED 2019). Infrastructure has been destroyed including schools, markets and hospitals triggering a humanitarian disaster with widespread malnutrition and disease. According to Unicef (2021), ‘More than five years of fighting has already pushed Yemen and its health system to the brink of collapse. Millions of children lack access to clean water and sanitation facilities and are in desperate need of basic healthcare. Malnutrition is also at an all-time high.’ A United Nations report documents ‘serious international humanitarian law violations’ and warned that countries selling arms for use in the conflict could be ‘aiding and assisting’ war crimes (HRC 2020). The US and UK are the largest suppliers of weapons to Saudi Arabia. In 2018 Saudi Arabia received 22 per cent of US and 44 per cent of UK arms exports (Wezeman et al. 2019: 2). Amnesty International (2018, 2019) has established that US- and UK-made missiles have been used in Saudi-led airstrikes on civilian sites.

There is a pretence of regulation in the industry. The Arms Trade Treaty came into force in 2014, negotiated by the United Nations to control international weapons sales. However, Anna Stavrianakis argues it is an exercise in dissimulation. The treaty has no external enforcement mechanisms, allowing individual states to define legitimate sales themselves, while creating ‘the impression of responsibility and morality’ (Stavrianakis 2016: 2). The UK has additional export



FIGURE 2.2 Eurosatory 2015, *Pearls*. Photo credit: Tom Fisher.

controls which the government repeatedly invokes as proof of regulation, while continuing to sell weapons to countries involved in human rights abuses (ibid. 2017: 3). Research by Action on Armed Violence shows that Britain has approved arms exports to 80 per cent of the countries on its own embargoed or sanctioned trade list (Jones 2021). Western arms sales are frequently justified with appeals to liberal values and ethics. In a particularly surreal example, the UK foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt suggested it would 'be morally bankrupt' to end arms sales to Saudi Arabia. He explained:

We could halt our military exports and sever the ties that British governments of all parties have carefully preserved for decades, as critics are urging. But in doing so we would also surrender our influence and make ourselves irrelevant to the course of events in Yemen. Our policy would be simply to leave the parties to fight it out, while denouncing them impotently from the sidelines. That would be morally bankrupt and the people of Yemen would be the biggest losers.

Hunt 2019

Claims of morality are not only made with words, but performed through displays of manners and corporate ethics (Figure 2.2).

A total performance

In 2009, the arms corporation BAE Systems announced it was cultivating a 'Total Performance culture' (2009: 6). The company had been entangled in a series of bribery and corruption scandals in the late 20th century in deals with South Africa, Tanzania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Saudi Arabia (Feinstein 2011: 127, 224). The Serious Fraud Office attempted to investigate the company but was forced to abandon the case after pressure from the UK government. Instead, BAE set up its own review, the Woolf Report which tactfully concluded that the company had 'failed to pay sufficient attention to ethical standards' (Gray et al 2008). The following year, BAE Systems described a new 'Total Performance culture' in its annual report (2009: 6). The chief executive, Ian King, explained, 'Total Performance focuses not just on what we do but also how we do it. It is about every aspect of the way we do business: Customer Focus, Financial Performance, Programme Execution and Responsible Behaviour. Delivery of the Group's Corporate Responsibility agenda is an essential part of embedding a Total Performance culture across the Group (ibid. 2009: 6).

'Performance' is a complex word with three overlapping strands of meaning. The first strand refers to something enacted, the second to a quality of action, the third to acting or a theatrical display. It stems from Old French *parfornir* meaning to do, carry out, finish or accomplish. The verb *performen* was used in English from 1300 to describe the action of fulfilling a task. The noun 'performance' emerged in the late sixteenth century to describe that which is enacted with the more specific sense acting on a stage used from the seventeenth century, and a theatrical production from the eighteenth century (etymonline 2021). The noun 'performance' has developed an additional sense in relation to the quality of an action particularly in music, technology or sport. From the late twentieth century, this sense was extended to employment for instance in 'performance reviews' and 'performance related pay'. BAE Systems uses the word 'performance' a lot. It is scattered throughout its annual reports. However, until 2009 the company primarily used the word to refer to technology or accounts, for instance the performance of a fighter jet or share price. The phrase 'Total Performance culture' indicated the extension of the term to business ethics or 'Corporate Responsibility' (BAE Systems 2009: 6).

Yet, ironically, there is an alternative interpretation. A 'Total Performance' could be interpreted through the third strand of meaning to refer to a theatrical display. The company's new interest in ethics could be understood as a total act. The chief executive's phrase, 'how we do it' is curious (ibid.). Ethics usually concerns principles of behaviour. Yet, the Wolff Report did not consider what the company produces, or where it is sold, but only how this is done. This suggests that in the arms trade ethics is mainly for show. Here, 'Corporate Responsibility' is just another term for respectability, a display of manners (Figure 2.3).

Inside DSEI

I visit arms fairs by taking part in the performance. I wear a suit, heels, and simulated pearls, with a pass that describes me as the director of a sham defence consultancy company. When I first used this cover ten years ago, I was sick with fear. DSEI is surrounded by intense security. It takes place in the Excel exhibition centre, a windowless concrete edifice in Docklands. Anna Minton suggests the building is designed to act as a fortress; it can be protected by 'a ring of steel' when



FIGURE 2.3 Eurosatory 2018, *Tank*. Photo credit: Tom Fisher.

necessary making it 'a completely secure site' (2009: 13). The Docklands Light Railway, Thames and A1020 encircle it like a moat. The only pedestrian access is by two footbridges, and when DSEI is on they are guarded by security guards and armed police. Protestors are kept away from the venue behind police lines. Inside the halls, CCTV scan the crowds of visitors looking for unusual activity. In the early years, I was questioned several times by security guards, and twice told to leave. I am not sure what marked me out, whether it was something in my dress, manner, or movements. Since then, I have learned to act the part of an arms trader more carefully.

A year after being thrown out of DSEI, I visited Eurosatory with a new name, new passport and new business identity. The train to the venue was crowded with arms traders. My legs were shaking so much I feared they would give me away. Then, I noticed a young arms trader sitting opposite, face red, forehead beaded with sweat, feet shuffling, and I realized he was similarly afflicted. I saw him later in the fair negotiating a deal with perfect composure, smiling, adjusting his tie, and consulting a brochure. Irving Goffman suggested that most professions have a set of postures and mannerisms that convey credibility: 'Thus one finds that service personnel, whether in profession, bureaucracy, business, or craft, enliven their manner with movements which express proficiency and integrity, but, whatever this manner conveys about them, often its major purpose is to establish a favourable definition of their service or product' ([1959] 1990: 83). This seems particularly important in an industry where legitimacy depends on the way things are done.

In arms fairs sales staff use the gestures, expressions and manners of a luxury fashion house. They stand hands on hips or clasped at the waist, occasionally dusting merchandise and rearranging brochures into neat rows. They greet potential clients with a polite bow, one palm tilted towards the goods on display. Brecht used the Latin term *gestus* to describe a movement with social and political significance, 'the gest relevant to society the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances' ([1957] 2001:104). Whereas a sales gesture might be trivial in a shopping mall, in DSEI it is significant because it presents weapons as products.

Some staff are professional actors. Many arms companies employ exhibition hosts to stand on the front of stands for the duration of a fair, handing out gifts and leaflets; directing clients to reps at the back if they are interested in a deal. Exhibition hosts have no connection to the industry but offer a set of rehearsed postures and expressions that connote sales and hospitality – a manicured hand to show the features of a product, a porcelain smile to mask internal reactions. On one stall, a young woman stands in cropped shorts and fishnet tights, holding a teargas gun while business men line up to take selfies alongside her. She stands like this for the duration of the fair, her face emotionless. This requires skills in dissembling. The agency, 'Exhibition Girls', explains 'Many of our staff are also working actors and performers from an entertainment background which works well in exhibition and event environments' (Exhibition Girls 2021). Clothes and speech are also an important part of the act. A sign at the entrance to DSEI says visitors must wear business dress. Reps wear polished shoes, discrete suits and silk ties conveying taste and quality. With a lanyard around the neck, they speak for the company rather than themselves, with memorized lines from product brochures.

Once I realized that most people in an arms fair are acting a part, I felt less of a fraud. I began to use my cover more deliberately to mimic the performances in the industry. Here, my age and gender have become useful props. Arms companies are dominated by men. Only 22 per cent of BAE Systems' employees are women (BAE Systems 2021b). Temporary exhibition staff are usually women, as the name 'Exhibition Girls' implies, however they are young. Exhibition Girls has a catalogue where clients can choose from rows of photographs of women, and a very few men. They are uniformly young, slim, with blow-dried hair, and a garment occasionally falling off one shoulder. There are some ethnic minorities. In contrast, in line with its colonialist heritage, the Western arms industry is almost entirely White. This means that arms fairs are mainly populated by White men, and young women. Being White helps me to slip unnoticed into the fairs, but apart from this I fit neither category. However, the arms industry is keen to change its image. BAE Systems 'total performance' includes a commitment to improving diversity. The company explains, 'Creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce helps us to achieve our goal of total performance' (ibid. 2021a). BAE is explicit about the reason, 'creating an inclusive work environment is consistent with high standards of business conduct and helps protect our reputation' (ibid.). A diverse workforce helps the company to appear reputable. By visiting arms fairs as an older woman, with a fake business identity, I take part in the pretence of respectability. I mimic the gestures of the industry, strolling up and down the aisles, gazing at tanks, pausing to inspect ammunition. Even so, my performance is too discrete to be described as parody.

There is a long tradition of parody in political art, often using business dress, however this usually involves exaggeration. George Grosz walked through Berlin as 'Dada Death' in 1918 wearing a formal coat, cane and skull, parodying the polite rituals that allowed the First World War, while showing what lay beneath the civilized veneer. Andrea Fraser wore a suit in *Museum*

Highlights in 1989, leading a tour around the Philadelphia Museum of Art satirizing the text of art catalogues. Describing the gallery collection, as well as features of the toilets, cloakroom and shop, her act was both convincing and surreal (Martin 2014). Grosz and Fraser both use formal, business dress as a kind of drag, cross-dressing as polite culture.

Judith Butler argues that drag is subversive because it is clearly an act, thus drawing attention to the performativity of gender, and undermining the myth that gendered roles are natural. She emphasizes the point with italics, '*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*' (1990: 187). By adopting gendered motifs, dress, gestures, and rituals, a drag artist shows that gender is performed. Similarly, Grosz and Fraser show that 'high culture' is a performance by parodying its dress, rhetoric, and behavior. However, in each of these examples the act is revealed with a twist, an element of excess. For Butler, parodies of gender 'in their very exaggeration reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status' (ibid.: 200). Grosz's formal coat and cane, and Fraser's suit might imply cultural status, but this is undermined by the skull, and references to the gallery toilets. In contrast, there is no exaggeration in my act. Like the arms traders around me, I am just trying to appear credible. There is no reveal. It is a 'total performance'.

My method is similar to Augusto Boal's 'invisible theatre'. In both cases, the performance takes place outside a formal theatre to unwitting passersby who 'must not have the slightest idea that it is a "spectacle"' (Boal [1974] 2019:122). However, there is a key difference. Though Boal's theatre is invisible, the performers make provocative statements to draw attention to social injustices. In contrast, I try to avoid attention in order to stay in the event. Instead of intervening, I attempt to make the arms industry visible by drawing its characteristic poses and gestures. This is partly informed by my own performance as a defence consultant. Berger suggests that drawing is visceral, guided by the body as much as the eye (2011: 149). I have come to know many of the gestures of the arms industry by taking part in them – an obsequious nod, a shopping-mall gaze. Drawing has long been associated with gesture but mainly in relation to the sense of performance as a quality of action. The Museum of Modern Art held an exhibition, 'Performance into Drawing' in 2007, with work by artists, including Jackson Pollock, Joseph Beuys and John Cage. The press release explained that the exhibition explored the ways that drawing has been used 'to map and prepare actions, record actions, and as an action in itself' (MOMA 2007). The repetition of 'action' and non-representational emphasis of the work implied an idea of performance as a raw physical movement. This is also evident in the contemporary genre of drawing performance where artists use charcoal, ink and other materials to record the movements of their bodies. The artist Ram Samocha explains, 'Mark making in drawing performance is often a result of powerful physical gesture and body movement that connects the elements of line, movement, space and time' (2021). The political and social are notably absent from this list. Samocha uses performance and gesture in a formalist sense as pure movement. I am also using drawing to convey performance, but conceived as acting instead of an action.

This leads to a different method of drawing. Instead of directly recording movements, I use drawing conventions to interpret the gestures I see and take part in – diagrammatic figures reminiscent of 1950's etiquette manuals to convey ritualized manners, a classical profile to suggest pretensions of refinement, caricature to imply what lies underneath. And it is here that an element of parody enters the project. By parodying these drawing conventions, I attempt to reveal 'the imitative structure' of respectability in the arms industry, to show that it is constructed (Butler 1990:187).

With globalization, the arms trade has become more pervasive, and less visible. Tanks, bombs, machine guns and tear gas are produced as commodities, and sold to an international clientele. Deals are negotiated in windowless buildings by anonymous corporate executives, contractors and politicians. Wearing formal dress and speaking advertising copy, they shroud the industry in a polite veneer. Agency staff use sales gestures to present weapons as products, reps shake hands with new clients, waiting staff refill plates and glasses. In contrast to the polite interior, arms events are surrounded security guards, police and surveillance cameras. The only way inside is to take part in the performance. By mimicking and drawing the polite gestures of the industry it is perhaps possible to show the pretence. The man from the coffee queue has lipstick on his cheek. Oblivious, he wipes his face and leaves a blood-red smear.

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