

The bad Good Book

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It was when photographers [Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin](#) stumbled upon a copy of Bertold Brecht's personal bible with a picture of a racing car stuck to the front, that the idea for their most recent work was born. Brecht would paste press images and scribble notes in his copy when he ran out of notebooks, and so the UK-based photographers had the idea to delve into The Archive of Modern Conflict to collate images to paste over excerpts from the original King James Bible – all graphic illustrations of the calamities of modern warfare at its most inhuman. Centering around the Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir's theories on evils (Ophir has further disseminated his ideas in the book's epilogue), Broomberg and Chanarin, who took home the 2013 Deutsche Börse Photography Prize for their publication [War Primer 2](#) last night, have underlined particular words and sentences in their Holy Bible with red ink, in a powerful commentary on dubious visual representation of war and readily accepted criteria for evidence of conflict. Here they go head to head to talk about the ideas and influences behind their controversial new book.

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ADAM BROOMBERG AND OLIVER CHANARIN SPOKEN IN UNISON FOR DAZED DIGITAL

"Right from the start, almost every appearance he made was catastrophic. In the beginning, he who laid the foundations of the heaven and the earth, divided the waters from the land, set the stars in motion, and gave nature its laws, emerged into the world he had created only to wreak havoc, either alone or through his emissaries. Each catastrophic event was taken as proof of his might, sometimes even as a revelation of his being, and always provided him with a setting in which to act. So it has been since the genesis..."

If one day you sit down and read the Bible you'll notice very quickly that God reveals himself mostly through catastrophe, through violence. Terrible things keep happening, a flood that almost wipes out everything he's created, the Tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah – we witness death on an epic scale while the victims hardly ever know what they have done to deserve such retribution.

We've always been interested in the representation of human suffering, particularly in relation to photography. The camera has always been drawn to sites of human pain and since its inception has been used to record and also participate in catastrophic events. One very quickly gets the sense that the Photographic project in capital letters thinks of itself in biblical proportions. It wants to take in all manifestations of humanity, birth, death, tooth decay... It is easy to get lost.

If you have never seen the book EVIDENCE by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel you should. They worked together like us, and were pioneers of a particular mode of making art, by re-purposing found photographs. Their book, culled from photographic archives of corporate America during the 1970's shows a catalogue of "human activity with unknown purpose" as curator Charlotte Cotton so succinctly expressed it. In making our most recent book, HOLY BIBLE, we were drawn to similar visual oddities; but in our case the images came from a single source, the Archive of Modern Conflict in London. Paging through this book is a weird experience. It reflects the strangeness that permeates the archive, which despite its name, is not at all a straightforward account of war. It is personal, unofficial and extremely idiosyncratic. As a result there are themes that carry through into our book; a pre-occupation with Nazi's at war and play; physical deformity and explicit sexuality; Newsreel images adrift from their original editorials; Car crashes recorded for insurance purposes and the vernacular-family holiday Kodachromes, soldiers albums, police records etc....

Adi Ophir, who wrote the appendix to our book showed us the way through this disturbing record of humanity:

"One may think that when everyday life is acutely disrupted and one's world seems to come to an end, a god is called for, not only to save the innocent but also to give meaning to meaningless events and to give sense to the incomprehensible. But if this is true, one can also think that such a god, who benefits from disruptions, may even need them in order to reveal himself, to be imagined, to make sense."

Holy Bible is published by [MACK](#).