

Chapter One

Introduction

Laid out during the middle of the nineteenth century, London's Trafalgar Square embodies and displays geopolitical power. At its centre is a massive stone column supporting a statue of Admiral Horatio Nelson, to many, Britain's foremost naval commander. Overlooking the Square from the north side is the National Gallery, an institution that contains one of the greatest collections of European art, while on other sides are located the High Commissions of former British imperial territories that are now independent states. A short walk away down Whitehall lie the main offices of government and state. In close proximity are many other leading cultural institutions, including the National Portrait Gallery, Tate Britain and Tate Modern, each of which has historically tended to focus on European and North American art. The British Museum, which holds one of the world's foremost collections of ancient artefacts, is located a short distance away.¹ At the same time, the Square has also always invited appropriation and subversion. Constructed to assert the grandeur and authority of the British state, military and empire at a time of wars and revolutions, and often hosting officially-endorsed events of national significance, the Square has periodically been taken over by protests and demonstrations, including, in the recent past, protests against British participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

At three corners of the Square are located plinths supporting statues of military and political leaders, but the fourth plinth, in the north west corner, was left vacant after a subscription campaign failed to raise sufficient funds to pay for a statue to go there. Since 1998, this 'Fourth Plinth' has hosted a series of installations by

prominent contemporary artists, who are periodically selected by commission and whose proposed work is then installed there for a few months at a time (de Vasconcellos 2016). The Plinth has offered selected artists an opportunity to introduce something different into public space, something that might be more, less or other than a protest, and which might engage the public and enter into conversation with its surroundings (Sumartojo 2013).

In 2008, the British artist Jeremy Deller was among those invited to propose a work. Troubled by what he saw as the restricted ways in which the ongoing war in Iraq was being represented and debated, Deller proposed that an object such as a damaged car should be relocated from Iraq and exhibited on the Plinth with the title *The Spoils of War*, a harshly ironic reference to the imperial practice of displaying objects taken from conquered lands. The appearance of an actual object from Iraq, destroyed in a conflict in which British forces continued to be engaged, might, the artist hoped, disrupt public discourse about the war. While Deller constructed a photomontage to illustrate his idea (Figure 1.1) and a maquette for the work was displayed for a few weeks along with other proposals in a small anteroom to the National Gallery, his idea was not adopted having been judged unsuitable, or at least not the most suitable. Deller did subsequently succeed in



Figure 1.1 *The Spoils of War*, Jeremy Deller (2008). Image courtesy of the artist.

having a wrecked car from Iraq exhibited in the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London, but only after British forces had officially withdrawn from the country.²

In late 2017, nearly ten years on and several commissions later, it was announced that a work in the series *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist* by Michael Rakowitz (an American artist of Iraqi Jewish heritage) had been selected to appear on the Plinth. The proposed object would be a reproduction of a *lamassu*, a protective deity in the hybrid form of a winged bull with a human head. The original had stood at the gates of the Assyrian city of Nineveh in northern Iraq, from around 700 BCE until it was destroyed by Islamic State (IS) militants after they took over the area in 2015 (Greater London Authority 2018).³

The *lamassu* (Figure 1.2) was unveiled in March 2018, and the work can readily be interpreted as an act of resistance and affirmation in the face of the



Figure 1.2 *The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist*, Michael Rakowitz (2018). A Mayor of London Fourth Plinth Commission. Photo by author, courtesy of the artist.

brutal iconoclasm of IS. The sculpture also evoked the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq by the United States and Britain, which created the conditions in which a movement like IS could emerge and thrive, and, more specifically, the fact that, while they had defeated the Iraqi military and occupied the country's cities in a matter of weeks, American and British forces had failed to protect Iraq's museums, galleries, archives and libraries, which were subject to extensive looting, vandalism and destruction (Bahrani 2003; see also Bogdanos 2005). The sculpture would serve as a reproduction of a lost object, while bearing a complex relation to the original and carrying wider symbolic and material resonances. As Rakowitz stated, 'I see this work as a ghost of the original, and as a placeholder for those human lives that cannot be reconstructed, that are still searching for sanctuary' (Elbaor 2017). In emphasising its ghostliness, Rakowitz evoked questions of spectrality, of what can be seen and what cannot, of appearance and liminality (Pilar Blanco and Peeren 2013, p.1). Like Deller's proposal for the wrecked car, the *lamassu* conjures up bodies both corporeal and geopolitical, staging a haunting return for people and objects that have been lost through war.

As with other objects in the *Invisible Enemy* series, the *lamassu* was fabricated out of materials used to package and sell groceries produced in Iraq and exported beyond the country, in this case date syrup cans. Through the use of everyday objects, the work would, in the words of the artist, further embody Iraq's 'former economic power, now destroyed by war' (Elbaor 2017), as well as the conditions of displacement, exile and diaspora experienced by millions of Iraqi people. The location of the work was also highly significant. While previous exhibitions of works in the series had taken place in museums and galleries, here the sculpture appeared not just in a major public space, but at a site of huge material and symbolic importance to Britain's military and colonial past, and to its ongoing political and cultural life. On the Fourth Plinth, the *lamassu* provided a dramatic contrast with the other statues in the Square, while seeming to form a strange alliance with several original *lamassu* taken from Iraq by nineteenth-century colonial archaeologists and which continue to be displayed in the British Museum.

The appearance of the *lamassu* was an event in its own right, but one implicated in many other events, which it might be said to have embodied and activated in a variety of ways. Its appearance was especially significant in a situation where, as with so much of the country's colonial history, many of Britain's political and cultural institutions have struggled, or simply failed to recognise or comprehend, the scope, nature and implications of the 2003 Iraq war. While several major public inquiries into aspects of the war have made sporadic reference to the harms suffered by Iraqi people, they have focused principally on Britain, being concerned primarily with British politicians, civil servants, spies, generals, soldiers and administrators; with what they did, what they did wrong, what they did not do, and what they might have done differently. Iraq and Iraqi people, for whom the war was in many ways a quite different kind of event, hardly appear. The *lamassu*,

by contrast, offers a different way into the event. As this book argues, artworks like the *lamassu* expand and complicate what is often taken to be the event of the 2003 Iraq war and point towards the multiple nature, or multiplicity, of geopolitical events more generally.

Official inquiries into the 2003 war have not been tasked with investigating the effects of British colonial influence on Iraq, or of recurring intervention in the country, but such exclusions reflect nonetheless a broader situation in which the appearance and participation of ‘other’ people and places in British public life are heavily conditioned and circumscribed. Jacques Rancière (2006) conceptualises this process of determining what and whom can appear and be recognised in the public sphere as *le partage du sensible*: the distribution, sharing or division of that which is sensible, or available to sense perception (see also Dikeç 2005; 2013; Dixon 2009; Dixon 2015). Rancière (2006) further argues that the issue of who and what can appear and be seen, and of who can speak and be heard in public, is prior to most definitions of politics. The ‘distribution of the sensible’, he argues, represents a ‘primary aesthetics’ that conditions the political realm and the ways in which events can appear as matters for public experience, deliberation and debate (Rancière 2006, pp.12–13). This idea can be linked with the argument advanced by Edward Said (1978) that Europeans have, over an extended period, represented the people and places of the Middle East in ways that systematically diminish their agency, diversity and voice, and ultimately their humanity, a phenomenon he called Orientalism. To the extent that people and places subject to Orientalism appear in Western public life, they do so in a limited and prejudicial manner. As Gregory (2004a, p.253) writes, building on Said, ‘colonial modernity is intrinsically *territorializing*, forever installing partitions between “them” and “us”’. One consequence of this is to inhibit the extent to which events might be encountered and apprehended as taking place within a common world.

The *lamassu* brought what were described in its caption as ‘the Iraq wars’ into public space in Britain in a new and arresting manner, complicating existing distributions and configurations, and appearing to pose the possibility of a common world linking the two countries. This would, however, be a curiously limited intervention, which people would be free to ignore, and its ghostly presence would only appear for a fixed period of time, while the three other plinths and Nelson himself would remain in place long after it had departed. However, as this book explores, we can also approach the Iraq wars, and the 2003 war in particular, via dozens upon dozens of other artworks and exhibitions that have taken place in Britain. The book is based on a study of many of these works and exhibitions, which, it argues, both express and reassemble Britain’s Iraq war, resisting, challenging and moving beyond the kinds of accounts offered by broadcast media, politicians, journalists, soldiers, lawyers and campaigners and by official inquiries. As the book shows, the 2003 Iraq war has given rise to numerous examples of critical, creative and imaginative works that in many cases can be said to oppose the war, but which all concentrate

attention on how the event of war is conducted and experienced aesthetically: on how it is embodied, how it is sensed and made sense of, on how it resists sense-making and fails to make sense, and on how war both constitutes, and is brought into, the public sphere. Because such processes are intrinsic to how people experience the world and conduct politics in it, the book argues, an exploration of works like the wrecked car and the *lamassu* offers distinct insights into what we understand geopolitical events to be.

The 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq by the United States, Britain and their allies led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, the displacement of millions, the collapse of public order and the emergence of new forms of authoritarianism and extremism. Urban infrastructures and public services were devastated and much of Iraq's cultural heritage was destroyed, damaged or stolen. The 'Iraq war', as it is commonly called, is widely regarded as one of the greatest foreign policy disasters of modern times and a major violation of international law. Its consequences continue to reverberate throughout the country, the region and beyond.⁴

While the political, legal, diplomatic and military dimensions of the war have been the subject of numerous academic, journalistic and judicial inquiries, this book offers a new perspective by exploring how this event has been encountered, appropriated and reworked in art.⁵ The invasion and occupation caused severe damage to the cultural heritage and cultural life of Iraq, but they also prompted the creation of many artworks within Iraq and beyond, which form alternative expressions and accounts of the event out of which they have emerged. Focusing critically on Britain as a central actor in the war and the former colonial power in Iraq, the book looks at the diverse ways in which artists experienced this event, the works they created, and the ways in which these works have been curated, exhibited or otherwise brought into the public sphere in Britain, thereby taking part in broader struggles and debates while often retaining a strange distance from them.⁶ This provides a complement to other accounts of the war, showing how it was played out in the cultural as well as political sphere, but the broader argument of the book is that artistic enactments of the war not only challenge a straightforward understanding of it as 'an' event, but push us to rethink the nature of geopolitical events more generally, as multiple as well as singular things.

The book argues that a consideration of art has much to contribute to the genealogical analysis of geopolitics, that is, to a form of analysis that seeks to question the apparent self-evidence of events and to consider the possibility of understanding and enacting them in different ways. Borrowing an idea from Gilles Deleuze (2015) and building on the work of Jill Bennett (2012), the book interprets artworks in terms of the 'counter-actualisation' of the event, a process in which artworks can be understood as appropriating events and enacting them otherwise. In so doing, they allow people to enter into and go through the event in ways that differ from other ways of encountering it, thereby offering a

counterpoint to ordinary experience. As the book argues, approaching the Iraq war in terms of its counter-actualisation in art reveals a field of creative resistance to the event, but also enhances our ability to understand it – and by extension other geopolitical events – as being both composed of, and situated in relation to, many other events, as well as being experienced and enacted in often radically different ways by different people, and, while not absolving people of their specific responsibility for the event, as taking place beyond the grasp of any one individual or group.

In pursuing a genealogical analysis, the book builds on other studies of the Iraq war and of contemporary geopolitics, but seeks to go beyond them in a number of ways. One key reference point is Derek Gregory's *The Colonial Present*, a book that was completed in the early months of the occupation and which analysed the resurgence of colonial imaginaries in the context of the war on terror. As that book concludes,

for us to cease turning on the treadmill of the colonial present ... it will be necessary to explore other spatializations and other topologies, and to turn our imaginative geographies into geographical imaginations that can enlarge and enhance our sense of the world and enable us to situate ourselves within it with care, concern and humility. (Gregory 2004a, p.262)

Over the course of the last decade or so, academics working in political geography, international relations (IR) and related fields have indeed paid growing attention to the alternative spatialisations, topologies and imaginaries enacted by artworks engaging with war, militarism and security (e.g. Bleiker 2009; Graham 2010; Danchev 2011; Shapiro 2012; Amoores 2013). Their work can be related to a broader interdisciplinary movement in which art is seen as being not just reflective of historical, political and geographical developments, or as subordinate to, or illustrative of, conceptual inquiry, but as a productive field of experimentation and critique in its own right (e.g. van Alphen 2005; Jill Bennett 2005, 2012; Thompson and Independent Curators International 2009; Dear *et al.* 2011). Where critical discussion has touched upon art related to the 2003 Iraq war, however, this has often been fleeting (e.g. Sylvester 2009; Berlant 2011), and has, beyond isolated examples (e.g. Gregory 2010a; Platt 2011), largely failed to engage with the work of artists, curators and academics of Iraqi heritage within and beyond Iraq, many of whom have come to be based in Britain, have worked here, or whose work bears on Britain's role in relation to Iraq. A fuller consideration of their work underscores the multiplicity of the 2003 Iraq war and poses the question of how we might, via an appreciation of this multiplicity, still understand it as being 'an' event.

A deeper issue with existing literature in political geography and international relations is that it has, with few exceptions (e.g. Bleiker 2009; Sylvester 2009; Danchev 2011), tended not to think very genealogically about art, at least in the

sense that I develop here. At one level, there has sometimes been limited art historical contextualisation of particular artworks or art forms, and limited recognition of their ontological complexity. As a result, artworks have sometimes been thought of as resisting geopolitical power (or criticised for failing to resist it) in an overly straightforward way. Still more fundamentally, there has been insufficient recognition of the extent to which the field of art has itself been implicated and invested in the forms of geopolitical power that artworks may be held to critique, resist and move beyond. As the book argues, it is necessary to recognise more fully that the idea of art as a singular, quasi-autonomous form of practice and experience that is typically at work in critical accounts – and which nationalist and anti-colonial movements have often tried to mobilise in the service of self-determination – emerged in the context of the modern Western European nation state and the forms of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism associated with it, and that, while it may offer critical potential, this form of art has also long been used to assert, define and justify the superior status of some kinds of people over others (Stoler 2008). Any appeal to the critical potential of art must therefore be alive to its ongoing as well as historical entanglement with geopolitical power.

The book is centrally concerned with what artworks are and what they do, with how they get made and with how they come to acquire public existence, reflecting, participating in and contributing to broader struggles and debates, while not being reducible to them. In order to think about how art can be said to counter-actualise geopolitical events, the book conceptualises art works as evental assemblages, or heterogeneous constellations of things that emerge in relation to events, which are themselves events, and which may engender and participate in further events. If artworks are able to counter-actualise events, it is because they are themselves particular kinds of events.

The approach and arguments of the book can further be located in relation to three broad streams of thought in which ideas of art, aesthetics and geopolitics are being reworked. These streams of thought inform the book as a whole and serve as important reference points in the chapters that follow.

The first line of thinking emerges from what has come to be known as the decolonial project, a set of epistemic and political interventions that challenge what Mignolo (2009, p.162) calls the ‘colonial matrix of power’. Seeking to go beyond perceived limits in postcolonial critique and practice, the decolonial project aims to enable the production of knowledge against and beyond this matrix, and to engage in the direct decolonisation of institutions and relationships (see for example Esson *et al.* 2017). This project has fundamental implications for ideas of geopolitics on the one hand, and art, aesthetics and the humanities on the other, the dominant meaning of each having emerged out of modern European nation-, state- and empire-building. It also has implications for how we think about events.

Approaching the Iraq war in terms of its coloniality requires an acknowledgment not just of how Britain, as a colonial power, ‘made’ Iraq, but of how ‘Britain’

has in some ways itself been constituted through its colonisation of Iraq, and of how this process has been aesthetic as well as political. This process becomes apparent if one is able to visit the British Museum, an institution founded in the nineteenth century upon the use of artefacts taken from other countries and displayed in order to foster not just understanding of the world, but a sense of British scientific, aesthetic and racial primacy.⁷ The Museum's Mesopotamian Galleries display many beautiful and impressive objects taken from the region, including the *lamassu* mentioned earlier, which were relegated by nineteenth-century museum managers from the category of 'art' to that of 'artefact' (Bohrer 1998; Bahrani 2001; Sylvester 2009). While this distinction has often been challenged in recent museological, curatorial and artistic practices, the deeply sedimented material, institutional, discursive and aesthetic traces of colonialism and contemporary manifestations of colonality continue to shape how 'Iraq' can appear in Britain. Approaching *Britain's* Iraq war through art takes us beyond invocations of colonality as condition, towards a critique of a specific geopolitical culture (Toal 2008) and the associated institutions, discourses, sites and practices through which Iraq has been constituted as a concern and problem for Britain.

Such considerations indicate a degree of alignment between genealogical analyses of geopolitics, which question singular accounts of nation, state and empire, and the decolonial project, but this book cannot be said to engage directly in decolonial work. As Vazquez and Mignolo (2013, unpaginated) state, 'The decolonial option operates from the margins and beyond the margins of the modern/colonial'. This is not where I am coming from. As a white, English-speaking, British academic who has grown up, lived and worked in Britain, has never visited Iraq, does not speak Arabic and has not experienced war directly, I am not working from the margins or from beyond them, but from a geopolitical culture that is centrally implicated in the event. In this book, however, I do not aim or claim to represent Iraq or Iraqi experience directly, or in an ethnographic or sociological way. Rather, in much of what follows, I have taken cues from the extensive body of work through which artists, curators, academics and writers of Iraqi heritage have already framed and presented their experiences, thought and creative practice, in English.⁸ I do not claim that the book enacts a decolonial intervention, but examine colonality and a specific geopolitical culture in terms of how they have been questioned, resisted and reworked through art, and consider what the limits to this process might be.

The book is also written in light of feminist scholarship on geopolitics, war and peace, which has been of fundamental importance in opening up ways of thinking about power and aesthetics beyond the state. Drawing in part on feminist approaches to international relations, early feminist scholarship on geopolitics examined the gendered nature of geopolitical discourse and highlighted the body as a site through which geopolitical power was exercised, and in relation to which it could be critiqued (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Hyndman 2004). Feminist approaches to geopolitics have developed and diversified in a number of ways, including recognising the

intersectional nature of patriarchal and colonial power (Dixon and Marston 2013; Massaro and Williams 2013). Particularly relevant to the approach and arguments of this book is a continued questioning not just of the epistemology and practice of geopolitics but of its ontology, in particular its framing of state and territory as central categories of concern, seeing these rather as being ‘enrolled’ in particular kinds of practices and materialities not conventionally thought to be geopolitical (Dixon 2015; also Dixon *et al.* 2012; Yusoff 2015). In attending to the transnational dimensions of geopolitical events, the book also chimes with moves in feminist IR arguing for a reorientation in the study of war away from the state, and towards ‘a set of experiences that everyday people [as well as] elites have emotionally, physically, and socio-ethically, depending on their locations inside and even far beyond war zones’ (Sylvester 2013, p.65, emphasis added; also, for example, Hörschelmann 2008; Hörschelmann and Refaie 2014). In focusing on art, the book’s concerns also chime with feminist work (e.g. Dowler and Sharp 2001; Koopman 2011) exploring how geopolitics might be enacted differently. To develop its arguments the book also draws on feminist critiques of aesthetics (e.g. Armstrong 2000) and feminist theorisations of art (e.g. Pollock 2013a, 2013b). To the extent that feminist work and feminist geopolitics in particular are premised upon certain kinds of embodiment and experience, however, the book, again, does not claim to enact a feminist intervention but rather works in alignment and conversation with certain strands of feminist argument and analysis.

The third stream of critical thought informing the book concerns the idea of the anthropocene as a new geological epoch in which humans, or at least certain groups of humans, have come to act as a fundamental influence on earth system processes, necessitating a fundamental rethinking of the meaning of geopolitics, of the human and also of the event (e.g. Dalby 2007; Clark 2014; Dixon 2015; Yusoff 2016; Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017; Davis and Todd 2017). In light of these developments, and, prompted especially by the many artworks emerging from the war that deal with matters of oil, I approach the 2003 Iraq war as an *anthropocenic* war in the following ways. As has been widely discussed and debated, the war can be regarded as a war ‘for’ oil, coming at a peak in concerns about ‘peak oil’ and American hegemony after the end of the Cold War (Harvey 2003; Gregory 2004a). As a geopolitical enterprise, the invasion and occupation – as well as the ‘war on terror’ more widely – themselves consumed vast quantities of petroleum and petroleum-based resources (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017): this has been a war *of* oil as well as a war *for* oil. Furthermore, in invading and occupying Iraq, US and British forces went into a country that not only forms one of the heartlands of the modern oil industry but a region where oil has been at the centre of social, cultural and political practices for centuries, if not millennia. Finally, since 2003 the role of oil companies in supporting arts institutions in Britain has increasingly been politicised, with the Tate ending its relationship with one of its major donors as a result, and the British Museum and other institutions coming under increasing pressure to do the same (Miller 2015; Ingram 2017). While many artworks emerging from the war have involved oil

and the forms of geopolitics associated with it, the institutions within and around which they have often emerged should also be understood as being implicated in the production of the anthropocene as contemporary condition and problem.

The book advances three main arguments. It argues, first, for approaching Britain's Iraq war through art as a way of rethinking one of the most contentious and consequential geopolitical events of recent decades, and for doing so via a sustained consideration of diverse artworks and exhibitions, over an extended period of time. This provides new, critical perspective on an event that continues to affect political life in Britain as well as Iraq, and with which British public and political culture struggles to reckon. This implies a second, broader argument, that an engagement with art is instructive for the analysis of geopolitical events, but the book argues more specifically that a rethinking of how exactly art and geopolitics might be said to enact each other is required. The book develops this argument by thinking about art as a *dispositif* (Foucault 2000; Rancière 2009a) and by conceptualising artworks as eventual assemblages, or as particular kinds of events that are bound up with geopolitics in complex, eventual, ways via the process of counter-actualisation. The third, broadest, argument of the book is for developing the event as a central category for critical work on geopolitics, in that this can extend our thinking on some of the fundamental questions of ontology and epistemology with which the field is concerned.

The following chapters develop and exemplify these arguments, themes and concerns in different ways. Prompted by my own experience of, and research on, artworks, exhibitions and other events through which the war has been engaged and addressed in Britain and beyond, they trace diverse trajectories and pathways through the event and seek to question, enrich and expand the ways in which it might be understood and encountered, while still being somehow comprehensible as 'an' event.

Chapter Two works through the problem of the event in light of longstanding interest in this concept across the social sciences and humanities and recent discussions in political geography. Considering the often troubling, paradoxical and confounding nature of events, and echoing other recent interventions (e.g. Clark 2014; Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017), it conceptualises a geopolitical event as a disruptive transformation of the world and of the ability to sense and make sense of it. Engaging with the influential accounts of the event offered by a select group of French philosophers since the Second World War, the chapter also makes connections with feminist, postcolonial and decolonial thought and with critical work on the anthropocene in order to develop, through a series of propositions, a sense of geopolitical events as multiple as well as singular things, and a consideration of how, in the face of their violence and their confounding nature, geopolitical events might be approached and appropriated in a critical manner. The discussion begins to formulate the idea of Britain's Iraq war as a complex, multiple event and points towards the ways in which artworks might be said to counter-actualise events.

Chapter Three critiques existing literature on art and geopolitics and develops the idea of artworks as eventual assemblages, or heterogeneous constellations of elements that emerge from events, which themselves constitute events and which are capable of eliciting and engendering further events. In order to think more about how it is that artworks are able to do this, the chapter develops Rancière's (2009a) idea of art as a *dispositif*. It works through debates on affect, posthumanism and sense-making, and turns to Raymond Williams' (1997) idea of structures of feeling as simultaneously affective, semantic, and embedded in practices. It then works Rancière's account of the *dispositif* of art through decolonial, Marxist and feminist critiques of aesthetics before reconsidering the Deleuzian idea of counter-actualisation, building on the work of Jill Bennett (2005, 2012) to argue for tracking the counter-actualisation of an ostensible event across multiple artworks, communities of sense and structures of feeling.

Chapter Four begins to map artistic enactments of the war in Britain, tracing the diverse pathways whereby artworks and exhibitions emerged in relation to the shifting politics of the war and exploring the important roles played by the British Museum, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Imperial War Museum and National Army Museum in mediating this process. The chapter develops the idea of museums as geopolitical institutions and explores how the distinction between art and artefact that is enacted by museums, a distinction in which objects extracted from Iraq have played a central role, comes to constitute a geopolitical division of the world. Building on postcolonial and decolonial critiques, it shows how artistic and curatorial enactments of the war have been both enabled and framed by museum institutions, demonstrating how the ability of artworks to counter-actualise geopolitical events is contingent upon a *dispositif* of art that is itself implicated in the ongoing breaking and making of the world.

While artworks and exhibitions created by artists and curators of Iraqi heritage within and beyond Iraq are discussed throughout the book, Chapter Five focuses on several artists of Iraqi heritage and artworks created by them relating directly to the war. While approaching artworks in terms of their political contexts and framings risks becoming reductive, the chapter notes how questions of national identity, autonomy, freedom and political conflict have, along with the aesthetics of ancient civilisations, formed an important and enduring reference point for many Iraqi artists since the emergence of modern Iraqi art in the middle of the twentieth century, and how these questions have acquired further layers with the development of diverse Iraqi diaspora communities. After considering the relationship of Iraqi art to modernism, the chapter focuses on the work of artists embodying distinct personal, aesthetic and political trajectories and concerns. The chapter both reconnects with themes raised by Rakowitz's *lamassu* and demonstrates the diverse ways in which the event of war has been encountered, appropriated and enacted, further illustrating how an engagement with art contributes to a sense of geopolitical events as multiple as well as singular things and how events may be counter-actualised in artworks.⁹

Chapter Six considers how the materialities and politics of oil have been appropriated and mobilised in artworks responding to the war in relation to questions of the anthropocene, coloniality and embodiment. After a brief survey of oil-related artworks, the chapter centres on a discussion of three sculptural installations that use oil or oil-related materials to configure an exhibition space as a whole: *Souvenir from the Ministry of Justice* by Rashad Selim, *20:50* by Richard Wilson and *Black Smoke Rising* by Tim Shaw. While *20:50*, a work first created in London, gained new geopolitical resonances as a result of its installation in a former regime prison in Iraqi Kurdistan, *Souvenir...* and *Black Smoke Rising* address oil-related geopolitical violence within the works themselves. The chapter argues that the use of oil in these works not only resonates with the idea of the 2003 war as a war for and of oil, but suggests an idea of art as an event that, like geopolitical violence and ultimately the anthropocene itself, places the human body and its relation to the world profoundly in question.

Chapter Seven considers how the 2003 war has been engaged through a specific art form, photomontage, and provides an account of how one photomontage in particular, kennardphillipps' *Photo Op*, has come to function as a definitive artwork of Britain's Iraq war. The chapter first rethinks photomontage via a critique of the reception of the photomontage work of the American artist Martha Rosler in writing on geopolitics, drawing out the multiple ways in which photomontage is entangled with events. It then explores the work of kennardphillipps and *Photo Op* in particular in relation to this revised account, exploring the complex implication of photomontages in the ongoing events of which they are counter-actualisations.

Chapter Eight draws on feminist and feminist-materialist thinking and reconnects with themes of embodiment, coloniality and the anthropocene to consider further how the figure of the body has appeared in artistic responses to the war and how those responses push our understandings of what a geopolitical body might be. The chapter considers how a series of artworks and exhibitions have registered and addressed the violence of the Iraq war, and explores the complicated ethical and political questions they suggest, through and beyond human embodiment. The later parts of the chapter consider how artworks created by people of Iraqi heritage have started to explore ways of living with, through and potentially beyond disaster via a variety of human and more-than-human bodies, and, reaching beyond Britain, the ways in which the Iraq National Pavilion at the Venice Biennale has come to form an important but also contested site at which the event of the war continues to be appropriated and explored. In considering debates surrounding the Pavilion, the chapter returns to consider how the capacity of artworks to operate as eventual assemblages remains contingent upon a *dispositif* of art that continues to be implicated in geopolitical power.

The concluding chapter revisits the arguments of the book and considers some of the implications of the analysis. The book ends by revisiting the *lamassu* in Trafalgar Square.

Notes

- 1 Whitehead *et al.* (2014) open their introduction to political geography with a vignette that also considers Trafalgar Square as a site of geopolitical power.
- 2 Deller has explained his thinking on the car project on many occasions, including at discussion events at the National Gallery in early 2008, at IWM London in September 2010, and at the Hayward Gallery in October 2012. The displaying of the car at IWM London is discussed in Chapter 4.
- 3 In 2016, a scaled-down, 3D printed replica of an ancient arch destroyed by ISIS in Syria the previous year was installed in the Square, triggering critiques and debates about the politics of such acts (Burch 2017).
- 4 The Costs of War project based at Brown University in the United States has since 2011 aimed to assess 'the costs of the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the related violence in Pakistan and Syria' (Costs of War 2018). In March 2013 it assessed recorded violent civilian deaths in Iraq since 2003 at 134,000, but noted that the actual figure could be double this (Crawford 2013). In April 2018, following the rise and apparent fall of the Islamic State (IS) movement, the Iraq Body Count project had assessed documented violent civilian deaths in Iraq since 2003 to be between 181,113 and 203,136; when combatants were included the estimate came to 288,000 (Iraq Body Count 2018). The number of people seriously injured is typically estimated as being a similar number to those killed; writing for the Costs of War, Crawford (2013, p.1) also notes that, 'many times the number killed by direct violence have likely died due to the effects of the destruction of Iraq's infrastructure'. I discuss the politics of body counts further in Chapter 4.
- 5 A brief list would include, among academic works: Harvey (2003); Gregory (2004a); Boal *et al.* (2005); Herring and Rangwala (2006); Fawn and Hinnebusch (2006); Al-Ali and Pratt (2009); Rappert (2012); Dodge (2012); Bailey *et al.* (2014); journalistic analysis: Keegan (2005); Chandrasekaran (2007); Cockburn (2006); Ricks (2006); Steele (2009); Fairweather (2011); memoirs and personal accounts: Pax (2003); Riverbend (2006); Stewart (2006); Allawi (2007); activist/policy analysis: Ledwidge (2011); Muttitt (2011). The report of the Iraq Inquiry, the third major inquiry connected with the war commissioned by the British government, was published on 6 July 2016. See <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123122743/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/the-report/> (accessed 3 April 2018).
- 6 The book does not aim or claim to represent the effect of the war on people or cultural life in Iraq directly, but it does consider how artists and others working and living in Britain and beyond have addressed these issues via their own experiences and practices.
- 7 As I explore in Chapter 4, the emergence of extractive colonial interests in Iraq's petroleum reserves in the twentieth century was foreshadowed by the development of extractive archaeological and museological practices in the nineteenth.
- 8 In conducting interviews for the project I aimed to be open about my positionality and modest about my experience, inviting participants whose work was already in the public domain to help me understand their experience and work. Participants expressed informed consent and have had the opportunity to review how they have been quoted and how their work has been discussed, in some cases suggesting amendments. I do

not claim that this can or does circumvent issues of positionality and power in research, however. The territorial nation state, the art world and the invitation to participate in academic research each induce, invite and sometimes compel people to present themselves and their work in certain ways. While seeking to mitigate this and to work with respect, fairness and accuracy, academic analysis and writing necessarily involves the exercise of certain kinds of analytical sovereignty and privilege, for which I take responsibility.

- 9 The term 'ancient' is loaded; in this context it by no means implies primitive; as Zainab Bahrani's (2001, 2008, 2014) work has demonstrated, these civilisations developed sophisticated aesthetic forms.