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# Have You Played the War on Terror?

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*The media paradigm by which we understand war is increasingly the video game. These changes are not only reflected in the real-time television war, but also an increased collusion between military and commercial uses of video games. The essay charts the border-crossing of video games between military and civilian spheres alongside attendant discourses of war. Of particular interest are the ways that war has been coded as an object of consumer play and how official productions aimed at training and recruitment have cast video games as players themselves in the War on Terror. The essay argues that this crossover has initialized a "third sphere" of militarized civic space where the citizen is supplanted by the figure of the virtual citizen-soldier.*

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In March of 2000, the release of Sony's new PlayStation2 hit a minor snag. The Japanese government classified the game console as a "general purpose product related to conventional weapons" on the grounds that it was powerful enough to be used as an actual missile guidance system. Accordingly, the government applied export controls on PlayStation2 requiring that a special license be obtained by distributors. This was the first time the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Control law had been used to regulate a game console ("Export controls," 2000; "Military fears," 2000). Meanwhile, the U.S. military was in the process of designing the "Dragon Runner," a small, unmanned, remote control, reconnaissance truck whose controller was modeled after the PlayStation2. This design decision was reached under the practical assumption that incoming soldiers would already be partially trained to use it (Hamilton, 2000). The uneasy relationship between war and video games has been an issue at least since the first Gulf War. At a press conference in February, 1991 General Norman Schwartzkopf felt compelled to remind Americans that "This [Operation Desert Storm] is not a video game" (quoted in Herz, 1997, p. 197). A decade later, however, the metaphor had all but naturalized. As Janice Kennedy of the *Ottawa Citizen* reflects:

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> When we first saw those small crosshairs etched on to an eerie green nighttime sky
> – that would be 12 years ago now, in much the same sky – there was much bleating
> and wringing of hands about war, video games, and the convergence of the twain.
> War, they said wisely, is not a game. Except that it is, soldier. Get used to it.
> (Kennedy, 2003, p. E5)

Indeed, strange technological marriages, the mediated presentation of war, and the language of describing the experience on the home front have all but conspired to prove Schwartzkopf wrong.

In addressing her reader as "soldier," Kennedy highlights a crucial aspect of the video game war: a blurred distinction between the soldier and the citizen. The arcade or home console no longer projects only a distant mock-up of military matters. War games are part and parcel of information-age warfare, merging the home front and the battlefield through multiple channels. As such, I argue that war-themed games represent a nexus for the militarization of cultural space. This essay examines three fields in the larger economy of militarization, beginning with the field of military simulation, where training technologies flow freely between military and commercial spheres. Second we explore the merging of television news and video games in the real-time presentation of war. Finally, this essay examines military outreach and recruiting, particularly the Army's newly inaugurated recruiting game, *America's Army*.[1] The purpose here is not to provide an exhaustive treatment of any one of these fields. Rather, the three—training, battle, and recruitment—help triangulate broader trends in the screen logics of war. These fields share a common architectural theme that effaces the discursive boundary between soldier and citizen. This process produces a third identity I call the *virtual citizen-soldier*. This new identity is a symptom of information-age warfare or "Netwar."

## Netwar Citizens

"War" can be counted among the most fluid words in the English language, and its usage is largely tethered both to the state of technology and technologies of state, an example of what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call an assemblage of content and expression. War's technological and rhetorical trajectory in the twentieth century can be thought of as a long process of integration of the home front and battlefield. The Great War that began that century was largely a product of technologies of mass conscription that swept first through Europe and eventually the United States. Here, the home front and battlefield were relatively distinguishable. As air power (not only the airplane, but also radio) assumed a dominant technological role in World War II, this distinction would geo-spatially erode. Sociologist Harold Lasswell recognized this erosion at the time as the beginnings of the militarization of civic space, which he called the "garrison state" (1941). The post-WWII nuclear threat brought forth a "cold war" that would further implicate the civilian population ideologically and through threat of annihilation. Here, the collapse of physical space would give way to the collapse of psychic space. Television made possible the idea of the "living room war" during the Vietnam conflict, coupled with a domestic "war for public opinion"

(Hallin, 1989). Pentagon media management, at home and abroad, continued to gain in military importance through various U.S. excursions in Granada, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, and the Persian Gulf, when Americans began to associate Central Command (CENTCOM) not with logistics, but with the wartime organization of journalists and press briefings (Carruthers, 2000). The managed televised spectacle of Desert Storm would pave the way for new lexicons of "war" that would finally take shape as the so-called "War on Terror." In this never-ending, metaphorical war every aspect of civilian life takes the appearance of a battlefield and every tool the appearance of a weapon.[2] The centrality of media in this new kind of war is reflected in a rhetoric that borrows the language of the new communication technologies—of terrorist "networks" and "cells."

The emergence of the Internet as war's organizing principle was anticipated in 1993 by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, fellows of the RAND Institute, in an influential defense planning brief entitled "Cyberwar is Coming!" They argued that war in the cyber-age challenges modern centralized military institutions and eventually replaces them with diffuse and decentralized networks. Deception outpaces destruction as a means of dominance. Emphasis on artillery and manpower is replaced by an emphasis on reconnaissance and intelligence. The methods by which these strategies are deployed are not necessarily "military" in the traditional sense. They increasingly work within economies of trade and information exchange, including a particular focus on psychological tactics and media management. In short, Netwar, as Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1993) called it, is even more "total" than total war, since it involves controlling diffuse populations at home and abroad and turning the "balance of information" in one's favor. In May of 2000, the Defense Department reconceptualized this philosophy in the term "full spectrum dominance."[3] Political theorists Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri in their landmark book *Multitude* summarize the situation: "[W]ar seems to have seeped back and flooded the entire social field," such that "all wars today tend to be netwars" (2004, pp. 55, 7).

The position of the Netwar citizen can be understood in two main ways. The first is as the *object* of war. Militarily, this means that the home front or the "entire social field" is a battleground. In his provocative discussion of war in *Cyborg Citizen*, Chris Hables Gray notes that the new paradigm does indeed move the locus of warfare (2001). Localized, low-intensity warfare becomes the norm as war cybernetically diffuses through populations. Casualties also shift from soldiers to civilians (as they have, exponentially, from WWII forward). Not only is the citizen the object of increased physical violence, as in the increased presence of police and militia, the citizen is the simultaneous object of immaterial measures of control. Guy Debord famously described the "spectacle" as the means by which the political power of the masses is defused in the modern state. Debord suggests that coercion and diversion, far from being competing modes of social control, complement one another: "Wherever the concentrated spectacle rules, so does the police" (1983, sec. 64). Critics such as Douglas Kellner (1992) and Jean Baudrillard (1995), for example, largely view the televised depiction of Operation Desert Storm of 1991 as a palliative media spectacle. Dana Cloud (1994) argues that the media environment of Desert Storm

went beyond spectacle to positioning the citizen as object of therapy. According to Cloud, this mass mediated therapy took the form of repeated human interest stories about families making peace with their relatives' military deployments. In this view, one of the main functions of mass media during wartime is the channeling of wartime anxiety away from dissent and toward coping.

More recent media trends have produced another kind of citizen, this time as *subject* of Netwar. This citizen not only inhabits the sphere of Netwar but is now productively integrated into Netwar's cyber-infrastructure. Here interactivity is the primary media mode, and this mode is attended by a new visual logic. The difference between television war coverage of Desert Storm in 1991 and Operation Iraq Freedom in 2003, for example, illustrates this logic. Desert Storm was largely a spectacle for both journalists and viewers at home. In contrast, the embedded reporting system of Iraqi Freedom positioned journalists—and, by extension, viewers—within the fighting ranks themselves. The practice indicated a change in kind rather than degree. That is to say, a significant boundary was breached as the spectacle gave way to interactivity. Though Netwar positions the citizen as interactive participant rather than passive consumer, this does not mean that the citizen plays a more "participatory" role in the democratic sense. Like the embedded reporter, militarization means that citizen participation is overcoded with an identity that sublates processes of critical distance, dissent, and debate. Television war coverage is a symptom of this paradigm shift, but an examination of the developing hegemony of video games, in both military and commercial spheres, provides a more thorough picture of the changing relationship between soldier and citizen.

## Training

In October of 2001, shortly after the attacks on New York and the Pentagon, movie critic Michael Medved asked, "Will computer games win the war on terrorism?" (2001, p. 15A). Indeed, Medved was correct in identifying a major weapon in the post-industrial arsenal of war. Since the Cold War, the military use of soldier training simulators has undergone a revolution.[4] Whereas computer training used to be limited to large and expensive shooting range, flight, or tank simulators (some costing up to a quarter of a million dollars), now simulators have penetrated almost every aspect of training with the help of PCs. *New York Times* reporter Amy Harmon notes, "What is new is both the way the games are filtering down through the ranks to the lowest level of infantry soldiers, and the broader vision that is being contemplated for them at the highest levels of the Pentagon" (2003, p. G1). The idea is presaged in dystopian films like *Toys* (1992), which portrays a misanthropic general who gathers an army of children to fight distant wars using virtual consoles. Orson Scott Card's 1977 sci-fi novel *Ender's Game* explores a similar theme, albeit from the opposite angle, where a group of teenagers battles aliens in a computer game only to find out they have in reality saved the Earth.[5] According to Michael Macedonia, director of the Army's simulation center in Orlando, Florida, "'*Ender's Game*' has had a lot of influence on our thinking" (quoted in Harmon, 2003, p. G1).

In the interim between Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom, games and game technology regularly crossed the boundary from military to commercial applications. The result is what J. C. Herz (1997) calls the "military-entertainment complex" and what James Der Derian (2001) expands to the "military-industrial-entertainment network." In the 1990s, for example, Sega game systems developed simulator software for Lockheed Martin. Lockheed returned the favor by manufacturing chips for Sega game modules. During this period, too, Sega adapted Lockheed simulators such as *Desert Tank* (1994) for commercial release. The commercial helicopter simulator *Apache* (1995) was first developed, according to Herz, "in the heart of North Carolina contractor country, right down the road from Fort Bragg" with the meticulous help of McDonnell Douglas (1997, p. 209). The trend continued through the decade. In 1997, defense contractor OC, Inc. developed a military strategy simulation game entitled *Joint Force Employment* for the Joint Chiefs of Staff designed to teach "joint doctrine" or the coordination of military branches. The simulator was prophetically set for commercial release on September 11, 2001 under the name *Real War*, but was delayed until September 27. *Real War* and its sequel *Real War: Rogue States* are real-time strategy (RTS) games that feature "god's eye" control of military forces in the field. *Real War* is premised on the hypothetical existence of the Independent Liberation Army (ILA), a terrorist group with access to a Russian-style arsenal. Players, who can take the role of the U.S. or the ILA, engage in conventional warfare as well as psychological operations (leaflet-dropping), propaganda, and media campaigns. A spokesman for Simon and Schuster Interactive, the game's distribution outlet, says that the game was received well after 9/11, "You get to blow terrorists up. Some people think it's a good release" (quoted in Saltzman, 2001, p. 3D).

Alongside *Real War*, the Pentagon commissioned the design of another simulator to train foot soldiers. The result was *Full Spectrum Warrior*, a "tactical decision-making trainer" involving the fictitious Middle-Eastern nation of Zekistan and the overthrow of the character Mohammad Jabbour Al-Afad, a supposed former Mujahideen leader and current dictator and his band of "Taliban and Iraqi loyalists." Working with the Pentagon, private game designers THQ considered releasing the training simulator commercially (O'Hagen, 2004). In April of 2003 and the midst of the initial U.S. invasion of Iraq, THQ investigated public sensitivities to a possible Gulf War-themed video game. The research seemed to indicate that such a game would be very popular, with only eight percent responding that it would be "tacky and exploitative" (Walker, 2003). THQ released *Full Spectrum Warrior* in the Xbox commercial market in 2004, and one year later THQ released the game's sequel, *Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers*. Following the lead of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, the Marines developed a Beirut-based ground training game called *Close Combat: First to Fight* with the assistance of the private software company Destineer. The game was commercially released on Xbox and PC in 2005 as an installment of the *Close Combat* series, which had been out since 1996 (Rogers, 2005). The life cycle of these games illustrates the increasing institutional collusion between military and commercial gamemakers in the context of current events.

One might assume that cooperation between military and commercial entities would normally follow a path from cutting-edge military use to the home. This is the standard course for many civilian technologies. During the 1990s, although many games did travel this route, the opposite was the norm. As the commercial gaming market exploded, the military commissioned modified commercial games (mods) as quickly as they could be developed. The most visible of these is the Marines' modification of the popular first-person shooter *Doom*. The mod, *Marine Doom*, was developed by Marine Lieutenant Scott Barnett and Sergeant Dan Snyder, who were asked to comb the civilian war game market for something that could be used for soldier training. Barnett recounts that after finishing technical school he was assigned a position in the Modeling and Simulation office at the Quantico, Virginia base. He was initially reprimanded for having a copy of *Doom* on his office computer. Barnett recalls, "They read us the riot act. Now, I'm institutionalizing *Doom* in the Marine Corps" (quoted in Riddell, 1997, paragraph 47). Since the game was found to be successful in teaching repetitive decision-making on the ground, its 1997 introduction served as a prototype for the further military use of commercial first-person shooters. In 1999, the Navy used the commercial release of *Fleet Command* by Jane's Combat Simulations. In 2001, the Army commissioned Ubi Soft Entertainment's *Tom Clancy's Rogue Spear: Black Thorn* for help in training soldiers to fight terrorists on urban terrain (Saltzman, 2001). The Secret Service, CIA, FBI, and other law enforcement agencies have expressed interest in similar ventures (Snider, 2005). The British Ministry of Defence has also used a mod of the sci-fi shooter *Half-Life* in a project known as DIVE (Dismounted Infantry Virtual Environment) (Crace, 2002).

In 2000 the Defense Department devised an institution to facilitate collaboration between the military and the entertainment industries. The result was the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT). Founded with a $45 million Defense Department grant, ICT has amassed a motley collection of Hollywood talent, academics, toymakers, and game industry insiders to assist the military. Toy manufacturers help in generating ideas for futuristic weapons. Hollywood screenwriters brainstorm about potential terrorist plots. Academics suggest strategies for urban combat and psychological operations. Gamemakers devise new methods for soldier training. Set designers help build virtual environments. ICT's Entertainment Technology Center is the locus for much of the collaboration required for military simulation. The partnership does not just benefit the military. Entertainment giants such as Sony and others have donated to the center in the hopes that participation in the center will aid software development (Waxman, 2003). Such partnerships allow commercial game developers access to up-to-the-minute details of new weapons systems the public is hungry to test drive. ICT is a microcosm of much broader trends in military and game industry collaboration, reflecting the mobilization of information-age warfare across an entire spectrum of media.

Debates about such activities are manifold. Though the use of training simulators has been instituted on a mass scale, many question their relevance and efficacy. The games are a social phenomenon; there are perennial debates about whether

war-themed games desensitize players or teach how to kill. Though these questions are important, our purpose here is the investigation of how the economy of war-themed games restructures the civic field. There are many ways of killing that do not necessarily involve pulling a trigger oneself, such as the collective condoning of state violence. These are the rarest questions: In the "how" of killing, what do video games reveal or conceal about the "why" of killing? This is an especially urgent question given the manner in which war games are increasingly aligning with real-time news coverage of war.

## Battle

September 11, 2001 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ushered in a boom in sales of war-themed video games for the commercial market. *Wired* magazine notes that the popularity of these and other war games reached new heights during the Christmas 2003 season (Ratan, 2003). Among these were titles like *Prisoner of War* and the highly successful sequel *Medal of Honor: Frontline*, both of which feature action in WWII (Oldenburg, 2002). Others play with more recent military interventions. *Conflict: Desert Storm* gives players the chance to re-enact the first Gulf War. Spurred by the Jerry Bruckheimer film of the same name, *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* takes us on a tour of Mogadishu, Somalia in search of warlords. The War on Terror, with its increasing reliance on police forces and special operations, has generated a slew of what might be called insurgent hunting games. The two most visible names in this genre are the Tom Clancy series (*Splinter Cell*, *Rainbow Six*, *Ghost Recon*, *Raven Shield*) and *SOCOM: Navy Seals*. *SOCOM* earned its popularity by implementing voice recognition software for use with the player's headset so that team members can communicate in much the same way as real soldiers. Players of *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* become part of a secret National Security Agency team called "black ops," which is military lingo for covert operations. The appearance of such themes plays a part in the naturalization of the U.S. military's ongoing self-transformation to a global police force that functions secretly with small rapid deployment teams in a context of low-intensity warfare.[6] Gamemakers are aware of the public uneasiness regarding the convergence of games and the political realities of war. Jeff Brown, spokesman for Electronic Arts, which publishes titles like *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* and *Command and Conquer: Generals*, goes out of his way to emphasize the "considerable physical and psychological distance between our games and the reality of current events" (quoted in "Gamemakers," 2001, paragraph 1).

Regardless, many of the new war-themed games mobilize rhetorics consistent with the War on Terror. A dominant recurring theme is a strong disdain for diplomacy and preference for force, which can be heard in the Bush administration's mantra, "We will not negotiate with terrorists." The War on Terror, in contrast with the Cold War, is especially suited for such rhetoric. The U.S. relationship with the Soviet Bloc, while hostile, did not preclude negotiation. The new enemy, the rogue state, is often coded as "insane" and thus beyond the reach of reason. The public face of many games, in the form of promotions and advertisements, tells a similar tale. The subtitle to

*Conflict: Desert Storm* in both ads and on game boxes is "No Diplomats. No Negotiation. No Surrender." Ads for *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* series offer a more complex version of this theme. A series of magazine ads for *Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield* begins at the top with faux newspaper clippings whose headlines read "Foreign Ambassadors Report Peaceful Face-to-Face Negotiations with Terrorists in Venezuela" and "Diplomacy is Primary Weapon in America's Quest to End Indonesian Crisis." The clippings are torn away to reveal the real situation under the press veneer: troops of armed special operations soldiers doing business by force. The ads read like a kind of joke, revealing a disarming cynicism about the nature of the fourth estate. Prospects for peace are played off as unrealistic and naïve lip service, while the true role of the state is to conduct secret missions out of sight and out of mind. While this may have been the reality of many of the covert U.S. military interventions since WWII (including, incidentally, both Indonesia and Venezuela) the games naturalize the fact. The bumper sticker slogan "Freedom Isn't Free" that frames the ad suggests that secret wars beyond public view are necessary to preserve "freedom" and thus beyond criticism. A television ad for *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* features black-clad soldiers, both live-action and computer-generated, sneaking through a building and blowing one another up. The ad's soundtrack is a young child singing "America, My Country 'Tis of Thee." Again at its close the viewer is told "Freedom Isn't Free." Another ad in the series aired during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This time the child recites the Pledge of Allegiance. The juxtaposition of the child's voice alongside scenes of violence is unsettling enough. Perhaps more importantly, this ad presents a new patriotism, one where uncritical play, the inevitability of violence, and signs of citizenship are neatly melded. The slogan "Freedom Isn't Free" implies many costs: the cost of soldiers' lives, the cost of innocence, the cost of a critical sense (for the freedom to continue with a certain way of life), and lastly, the cost of the game itself (for the freedom to play it). A print advertisement for Deus Ex's *Invisible War* displays the obsolescence of citizenship in a "future war on terror." The ad describes this new kind of war as "Unseen, Unauthorized, Unstoppable."

To understand the role of video games in post-industrial war, one must not only look to the themes that frame them, but also to their temporal appearance. Theorist Patrick Crogan provides an initial way to approach the temporality of war games. Crogan first recognizes the militarizing of social life brought on by war games and their "expansion into the domestic sphere" (2003, p. 280). The closing of this cultural gap is accompanied by a closing of a temporal gap that refigures the experience of history by way of an "anticipatory impulse." Crogan calls this way of habitating history "gametime." Gametime is an expression of the hegemony of the video game, a temporal aesthetic that favors a discourse of constant action. Gametime, in a sense, overcomes the temporal space of ethical reflection. For Crogan, this aesthetic informs the 2001 "historical" film *Pearl Harbor*, which reads much like a video game. I propose to extend Crogan's assessment here by arguing that the hegemony of gametime tends toward the closing of the history gap itself. That is, gametime collapses the temporal space between real world events and the ability to "play" them, fostering a news environment that approaches real-time interactivity. The rhetorics of

Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 illustrate this temporal collapse. In the lead up to war, for example, the Bush administration preempted continued UN weapons inspections on the grounds that we were "running out of time." Simultaneously, countdown clocks multiplied on the 24-hour television networks. Embedded reporters in the field went to lengths to prove they were in the *now*. A decade earlier, scholars such as George Gerbner (1992) referred to the manufacture of "instant history" by way of televised media spectacle in Operation Desert Storm. The interactive mode of 2003's Operation Iraqi Freedom, in contrast, was less about manufacturing history than annihilating it. In this way, the sedative of the spectacle is transformed into the stimulant of gametime.

Indeed, war games have caught up with the wars themselves.[7] The lag time between the conflict as it plays out on the news and the mobilization of the game has gradually disappeared. Operation Desert Storm of 1991 taught gamemakers lessons about the kind of consumer demand created by a well-orchestrated television war. Although a few games appeared as early as 1992, such as *Desert Strike* (with the chance to fly the new Apache helicopter) and *LHX Attack Chopper* (in which Libya was the last unconquered state), most of the Desert Storm-themed games arrived later. These included *Super Battletank I* and *II* (1994) as well as various military simulators adapted to the commercial market. Gamemakers were well prepared for the March 20, 2003 kickoff of Operation Iraqi Freedom, however. Take for example one of the most popular desert war games to hit the market, *Conflict: Desert Storm*, released in late 2002 as the U.S. made clear its intentions to invade and overthrow Iraq. Flipping through the TV dial, one could see sandwiched between deadline clocks and stories of troop mobilization an ad for the game that featured what looked to be the mustached face of Saddam Hussein in the crosshairs. (In the game, this character is named Gen. Aziz, an apparent reference to Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister under Hussein.) The sequel *Conflict Desert Storm II: Back to Baghdad* was released in October 2003, while massive numbers of U.S. troops were fighting to install a U.S.-friendly government in Iraq. The slogan for the sequel, "Freedom Will Endure," acknowledged that the game was intended to appear in the midst of battle. In December, 2002, the software company Rtzen modified the popular WWII game *Battlefield 1942* in anticipation of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The result was *Desert Combat*, which was downloaded 250,000 times by April of 2003 ("The Games People Slay," 2003). In another attempt to capitalize on the war, PlayStation manufacturer Sony attempted to trademark the phrase "Shock and Awe" on March 21, 2003, the day the U.S. military's so-called Shock and Awe strategy was unleashed over Baghdad. Sony, by far the largest of the thirty-odd companies that attempted such patents, had planned to use the slogan to market video games. Sony dropped the rights a month later, presumably to avoid public criticism that the company was "turning the war into a video game."[8]

Games like *Kuma/War* will likely become more prevalent as the trend to approximate war in real time continues. *Kuma/War* is the name for a first-person shooter and a website (http://www.kumawar.com) managed by Kuma, LLC, an independent New York-based commercial company begun in 2004 by a group of

retired military officers. The game's target demographic is the tech- and media-savvy adult, and one may become a subscriber for ten dollars a month. *Kuma/War* gives players a chance to re-enact dramatic military scenes just weeks after they play out on television news. CEO Keith Halper explains, "What we are trying to do is be a news organization" (quoted in Crecente, 2004, p. 29D). Players are briefed with newswire articles, television clips, interviews, satellite imagery, and weapons specifications. The field of play for a specific mission is researched and painstakingly re-created in 3-D. For example, one of the first missions was the U.S. siege of the Iraqi city of Mosul, where Saddam Hussein's sons Uday and Qusay were eventually killed. The neighborhood where this drama of urban warfare took place is simulated down to the detail of staircases and balconies. Players are invited to play the part of airborne squad members whose job it was to flush the brothers from hiding while eliminating defending Ba'athist soldiers. Before going in, players view actual news video of the battle, an interview with a retired Marine Corps general, and tips for play from a pre-game analyst. Not all news battles make good gaming fodder. The 2004 U.S.-assisted coup of Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide, for example, was deemed not game-able by the designers at *Kuma/War*. "It just didn't seem that there was anything going on of any tactical importance," explained Halper, revealing the marketing limits of this new kind of interactive news (quoted in Bray, 2004, p. C1).

As *Kuma/War* evolves through its ever-tightening "broadcast cycles," the pressure to keep up with current events is enormous. According to Halper, the company has "a team of researchers which does nothing but pore through information related to the war on terrorism." The goal is an elusive simultaneity that matches real-time network news. "We're starting to get a very specialized knowledge which helps us guess the next thing that's going to occur" (quoted in Bray, 2004, p. C1). The game is a logical extension of the idiom of the embedded reporter, satisfying an embeddedness even the reporter cannot offer. In doing so, the myopia of embedded journalism is compounded. According to Halper, "[T]he idea is that we go very deep on just a few events, rather than shallow over the broad news agenda like other news sources" (quoted in Sims, 2004, p. 5). In this case, "going deep" means that logistics, not history or context, are relayed in depth. As a result, *The Independent* aptly calls *Kuma/War* "CNN with an itchier trigger finger" (Sims, 2004, p. 4). The game further collapses the distance between home front and battlefield by posting supposed letters from soldiers in the field, some of whom are alleged to play *Kuma/War* in their spare time. The embedded reporter is thus fed back through the figure of the soldier. As such, the core logic of embeddedness is fulfilled.

*Kuma/War*'s itchy finger sometimes causes it to shoot first and ask questions later. In late 2005, for example, the game released a scenario where Special Forces infiltrate Iran to destroy uranium production facilities. At the time, the U.S. was officially and publicly in the process of negotiating with Iran. Unofficially, as Seymour Hersch (2005) revealed in *The New Yorker*, the U.S. had been secretly conducting reconnaissance missions inside Iran since the summer of 2004, though the bombs had yet to fall. *Kuma/War* thus betrays the "anticipatory impulse" of gametime, filling in probable future events, such as the bombing of Iran, before they occur.

During 1991's Desert Storm, CNN's real-time reporting resulted in what was commonly called the "CNN effect," where news representations preceded and thereby affected action on the ground. *Kuma/War* exceeds even "real time" by anticipating the event and pre-creating its execution, all while borrowing from journalism a rhetoric of authenticity. Like mainstream news, however, *Kuma/War* would compromise its own profit potential if it were to become "too authentic." That is, so long as *Kuma/War* is to be consumed, it cannot betray its own absurdity. As game critic Suneel Ratan notes, *Kuma/War* "will have to be a fun game too for people to use it, which may sound an odd thing to say about something dealing with war ... " (quoted in Sims, 2004, p. 5).[9]

## Recruitment

In May 2003, two weeks after George W. Bush triumphantly declared the invasion of Iraq had been a "mission accomplished" aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, the Army made a showing at the Los Angeles Electronic Entertainment Exposition, the E3. More than thirty soldiers were present. Members of a Stryker brigade manned an armored vehicle. National Guard soldiers rappelled down zip-ropes from a helicopter hovering outside the Staples Center and down from walls inside. Green Beret soldiers hung from a Humvee. This was not a raid on a possible terrorist sleeper cell but rather a massive $500,000 spectacle designed to draw attention to *America's Army*, a video game developed by the Army for recruiting purposes. The game had enjoyed the limelight since its initial unveiling at the E3 in 2002 (Miller, 2003). At that time, the game featured two parts, one training simulation entitled *Soldiers*, which includes boot camp, and another more traditional first-person shooter game called *Operations*, in which players work in online teams to carry out missions.

*America's Army* represents a monumental step into twenty-first-century military-consumer culture. The game initially cost $7.5 million over three years to produce, about three times the average for games of its type, and is a permanent, albeit evolving, fixture in the Army's advertising arsenal. Monetarily, *America's Army* is a sliver of the Pentagon's ballooning $700 million advertising budget, of which the Army spent $75 million in 2004.[10] As new "operations" are added to the initial platform, the Army anticipates a yearly maintenance cost of $4 million. "We're going to be pushing out new versions of the game as fast as we can build them," notes game director Lt. Col. Casey Wardynski (quoted in Hodes & Ruby-Sachs, 2002, paragraph 15). The money goes to both game development ($2.5m) and a nationwide server network that can host 5,000–6,000 online players at a time ($1.5m). *America's Army* was initially promoted in conjunction with television ads and the GoArmy.com website, from which the game could be downloaded for free. In 2005, the game gained its own website, AmericasArmy.com. Several million freely distributed game CDs have left the desks of military recruiters, appeared in gaming magazines, and been included as extras in store-bought software packages. In 2005, the Army began mass distributing the game for the Xbox and PlayStation2 home consoles (O'Hagen, 2004).

*America's Army* was an immediate and resounding success in terms of exposure. The July Fourth debut saw 50,000 downloads alone, and in one year the game had 1.3 million registered players. As promised, the Army introduced a new version in 2003 called *Special Forces*, which had more than 200,000 people playing in its first week (Jeffords, 2003). By September 2003, the game had two million players. This increased by December to 2.4 million, thus making the list of popular games for the Christmas season (Odelius, 2003; Susman, 2003). Major Chris Chambers, deputy director of the game, was clearly enthusiastic: "Experts told us before we started that a runaway hit in this space is 250,000 registered users in a year. We beat that in the first two months" (quoted in Woolley, 2003, p. 26). In 2003 *America's Army* was consistently in the top five action games played worldwide on the Internet (Kennedy, 2003). By 2005, *America's Army* had six million registered users.

*America's Army* is a part of the larger military strategy to move from television ads to more cost-effective methods of recruiting, such as games and NASCAR sponsorship (Edwards, 2004). Because the Pentagon spends around $15,000 on average wooing each recruit, the game needs only to result in 300 enlistments per year to recoup costs. The available data suggest that the game has more than met that objective. According to military research as of May 2003, the game ranked fourth among things creating "favorable awareness" of the Army, behind the war in Iraq, homeland security, and tensions with Korea (Miller, 2003). Forty percent of enlistees in 2005 had previously played the game (Barnes, 2005). Also, there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence that the game puts recruiters in contact with prospective recruits through public gaming events and recruiting office walk-ins (White, 2005). For example, in January 2003, while troops were running through readiness exercises on the Iraqi border, the Kansas City Recruiting Battalion hosted gatherings at a technical college. Some 120 high school students broke into teams to play one another at *America's Army*. According to the Army, programs like this have been some of the most successful experiments in recruiting history (Woolley, 2003).

One reason for the tremendous popularity of the game is its cutting-edge design. Dan Morris, a game reviewer for *PC Gamer* magazine, commented that the game is of "Triple-A quality," that it is "ahead of the technology curve," and that it would display a high-end price tag of $60–70 if sold in stores: "I wish more civilian development shops would display the kind of ambition realized in this game" (quoted in Woolley, 2003, p. E7). The *America's Army* section of the GoArmy.com site boasted that "No one gets the Army like the Army" and the gamemakers have gone to pains to deliver "realism." Some of the missions are hypothetical, such as defending (or capturing) prisoners of war or the Alaskan oil pipeline. Other missions deal with current events such as one in the initial release of *Operations* that was modeled after a raid conducted in Afghanistan. Military realities of low strategic sensitivity are reproduced in detail. Grenade explosions vary by grenade type. Target ranges and obstacle courses at Ft. Benning, Georgia are meticulously recreated. When firing a weapon, one's breathing and rate of fire affect accuracy. If a soldier breaks the rules of engagement by firing on his own men, he is likely to wind up at Ft. Leavenworth for a 10-minute prison sentence, listening to the lonesome drone of his cellmate's

harmonica. In the integrative spirit of *Kuma/War*, the Army has also embarked on a project called "Real Heroes" that will make game characters, as well as plastic action figures, out of nine medal-winning, real-life soldiers (Barnes, 2005).

The realism does not extend to include the gruesome realities of war, however. The game has earned a "T" rating, indicating it is suitable for players thirteen years of age and up. When humans are hit with gunfire, they crumple noiselessly to the ground. Sometimes a mist of blood escapes an invisible wound, but the victims neither flail nor cry. Bodies tend to disappear as if raptured up to heaven. On its face, the level of violence appears to be a positive attribute of the game, and it is predictably cited by its promoters as proof of legitimacy. The point is "not to promote violence," says Army Major Bret Wilson, one of the game's developers, "it is to promote the jobs that are done by the Army" (quoted in Susman, 2003, p. A7). In the same language used by the Pentagon to praise the virtues of precision-guided weapons, Major Chris Chambers, the game's deputy director, notes, "The game is about achieving objectives with the least loss of life. It doesn't reward abhorrent behavior" (quoted in Woolley, 2003, p. 26). Game promoters are also quick to point out the parental control feature that turns all gun fighting into laser tag.

The question of the game's depiction of violence is complicated. The Army is apparently responding to multiple concerns. A gory game where limbs are blown off would not only rouse the easiest kind of reactionary criticism, it would also limit the audience for the game by virtue of a stricter rating. Moreover, a game that seriously approached the horrors of battle would undermine the recruitment effort. Thus, the game finds its equilibrium in a sanitized vision that approximates mainstream American news coverage of the desert wars. Though the embedded news coverage during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 sold itself as an unvarnished and direct view of war, reporters exercised strict self-censorship by not airing or printing images of soldier or civilian casualties. In the very rare cases where images of casualties did appear in the news media, their very visibility was vilified by the administration, competing press, and often the public as an anti-war statement. The Bush administration even engaged in overt censorship when it banned the press from photographing the coffins of returning U.S. soldiers on all military bases on the eve of war (Milbank, 2003). *America's Army*, too, must follow the spirit of these directives even as its "realism," like that of embedded news, is emphatically extolled.

The game's stated goals are perhaps most interesting. *America's Army* is the brainchild of Lt. Col. Casey Wardynski, director of the Army's Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis, who hatched the idea in 1999, the year when recruitment hit a low mark. Wardynski recognized both the significance of video games in his own sons' lives and the need to tap the market for technologically savvy recruits. Despite this impetus, Wardynski insists that the game is "definitely not" a recruiting tool. "Essentially, *America's Army* is a communication tool designed to show players what the army is – a high-tech, exciting organization with lots to do" (quoted in Saltzman, 2002). In describing the game's function as "education" and "communication," Wardynski draws attention to the fact that the game differs from campaigns past in that it makes neither offers nor arguments.

Instead the game represents what has come to be known as "lifestyle marketing," the creation of an immersive cultural universe that surrounds a brand name. The use of interactive technologies to craft and market this universe—the video game as advertisement or "adver-game"—can be counted among the military's many firsts. In fact, the success of *America's Army* has been noticed by corporations such as Coca Cola and Daimler-Chrysler, who hope to promote their brands in a similar way (Oser, 2005). *America's Army* has transformed the rhetoric of "recruitment" as well, initiating a new language that has been adopted in the realm of commercial war games. A television ad for *Conflict: Desert Storm* tells us, "All Americans Pledge Allegiance. A Select Few Show It." A print advertisement for the WWII game *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* features an enlistment card and the slogan, "You don't play. You volunteer." In this new war gaming environment, recruitment has taken on a logic that is entirely harmonious with the brand, a kind of brand loyalty. *America's Army*, far from being a cultural anomaly, has become one brand among many. Col. Wardynski brags that the game has "achieved the objective of putting the Army in pop culture" (quoted in Oser, 2005, p. 83).

## Virtual Citizen-Soldiers

This essay sought to explore a constellation of various media as they re-map traditional lines between battlefield and home front. In the process, we see that various genres once thought to be discrete are forging new and strange alliances. Wartime news looks like a video game; video games restage the news. Official military training simulators cross over into the commercial entertainment markets; commercial video games are made useful for military training exercises. Advertisements sell video games with patriotic rhetorics; video games are mobilized to advertise patriotism. The business of play works closely with the military to replicate the tools of state violence; the business of state violence in turn capitalizes on playtime for institutional ends.

The blurring of the lines between citizen and soldier initiates a "third sphere" of cultural production. This third sphere is a symptom of the larger social militarization, of the recoding of the social field with military values and ideals. The new discursive universe gives birth to a hybrid identity, what I call the *virtual citizen-soldier*. The virtual citizen-soldier is produced by the changing configurations of electronic media, social institutions, and world events. This new figure is distinct from the citizen in important ways. The very efficacy of the citizen in participatory democracy resides in a critical space that allows for public deliberation about important political matters. Perhaps the ultimate object of civic deliberation is the deployment of state violence. The conditions for this deliberation depend on a clear demarcation between the political role of the citizen and the apolitical role of the soldier. While the citizen's role is to deliberate, the soldier's role is to take orders. The figure of the virtual citizen-soldier, on the other hand, forecloses this critical space. In one sense, the virtual citizen-soldier represents a depoliticization of the public sphere. More accurately, this new figure represents a reprogramming of the citizen subject in

accordance with the logics of Netwar. As it floods the social field, Netwar takes citizen identity to be a primary battleground. Netwar reproduces the social field in its own image, progressively redefining the citizen as a member of the ranks.

New technologies of interactivity also challenge the primacy of the spectacle as the mode by which critical citizenship is defused. The spectacle is the offspring of broadcast technologies, of television and film, and tends toward the deactivation of the citizen. In contrast, the new paradigm of the video game is interactive and engaging, channeling one's desires through its architectures. The new generation of war-themed games thus provides a particular way of habitating the political world dissolved in the aesthetic of "gametime." Gametime moves quickly, subordinating critical and ethical questions to movement and action. Historically, the spectacle of war emerged to shift emphasis from the rational question of "why we fight" to the dazzling display of "that we fight." Gametime integrates the citizen, however virtually, into the mechanics and pleasures of "how we fight."

Finally, changes in the media environment provoke questions about the oxymoron of "war as video game" and the politics of play. What allows the one to play at war is not only the fact that war is presented in the guise of a game, but also that the presentation is absent the horrors a high-tech military machine can effect. The virtual citizen-soldier, whether playing *Kuma/War* or following an embedded reporter on MSNBC, fights a war largely without human consequence. The virtual citizen-soldier has intimate knowledge of the whir that the $3,000 night vision goggles make when he or she virtually flips the switch, as this was meticulously reproduced for *America's Army*, but he or she does not see through those goggles "little girls with smashed up faces," as one commentator from the *Ottawa Citizen* observes (Kennedy, 2003, p. E3). The virtual citizen-soldier's integration into a sanitized fantasy of war is a seduction whose pleasures are felt at the expense of the capacity for critical engagement in matters of military might.

Media effects scholar Arthur Asa Berger writes, "Games aren't models of reality and don't claim to be; what they do is represent an emotional reality that generates the desired fantasies in the minds of players. Thus, criticizing games for not being real or realistic misses the point" (2002, p. 14). This is a wise suggestion on one level. The litmus test for what ought to be subjected to "the reality principle" should depend on what the art form "claims to be." When a war-themed commercial game begins to make claims about authenticity, or better yet, when a state institution like the Pentagon begins to make claims about authenticity (and what is *America's Army* without this claim?), then the culture has enlisted in another reality altogether. War-themed video games, armed with this newfound legitimacy, gain a certain rhetorical force. What was once a fantastical and entertaining sidebar becomes the very presentation of war. Insofar as video games are integrative, they articulate a very real subject position, the virtual citizen-soldier, as a primary character in Netwar.

The crossover between military and civic uses of war-themed video games has closed into a feedback loop of technological development and the presentation of political events. This loop is tightening and accelerating. In his investigation of

high-tech military training, *Virtuous Wars*, James Der Derian argues that the apparent virtue of war is facilitated by, and is in large part inseparable from, its virtuality.[11] He admonishes us: "[L]ike reality's most intimate counterpart, the dream, virtuous war requires a critical awakening if we are not to sleepwalk through the manifold travesties of war, whether between states or tribes, classes or castes, genders or generations" (2001, p. xvii). Whether or not we will enjoy this critical awakening, the premise remains: the video game is increasingly both medium and metaphor by which war invades our hearts and minds.

## Notes

[1] As a survey, the purpose of this essay is not to examine the mechanics of any given game in depth. The author, however, has played all of the major games discussed and enjoyed the job.

[2] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri begin their influential 2001 book *Empire* with an epitaph by folk-punk singer Ani Difranco: "Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right."

[3] See the series of policy papers of the Joint Chiefs of Staff online at http://www.dtic.mil/futurejointwarfare/ and also Mahajan (2003).

[4] The most comprehensive treatment of military simulation is James Der Derian's *Virtuous War* (2001), a walk-through of what he calls the military-industrial-media-entertainment network.

[5] The distance between simulation and combat can short circuit. On January 21, 2003, a gunman fired on a Toyota SUV near a U.S. camp in Doha, Kuwait, killing Michael R. Pouliot, executive vice president of Tapestry Solutions Corporation, a company that produces combat simulators for the military (Johnson, 2004).

[6] "Black ops" may be a reference to the Blackwater USA corporation, one of the largest of the private mercenary forces hired by the Pentagon. The skyrocketing use of private corporate mercenary forces by the U.S. as security forces and in battle is documented extensively by Peter W. Singer (2003). See also Chalmers Johnson (2004). *Kuma/War* has developed a mission where one can play at being a soldier of the famed Blackwater USA corporation.

[7] Apart from the examples discussed here are numerous other war games with themes to match current events. Dozens of crude anti-Saddam Hussein and anti-Osama bin Laden games were distributed through the Internet in the years following September 11, 2001.

[8] A search for "Shock and Awe" was conducted of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office database at http://www.uspto.gov. "Shock and Awe" has been trademarked for products ranging from "The Shock and Awe Tour" for music promotion to sportswear, mugs, umbrellas, and greeting cards (Day, 2003; "No 'Shock,'" 2003; "Sony drops," 2003).

[9] What "fun" means and what kind of violence games are likely to adopt in the future is an open question. Eidos Games introduced *ShellShock: 'Nam 67* in the summer of 2004, which "dares to go where no other war game has gone before" to deliver an "uncensored depiction of the Vietnam experience" (Crecente, 2004, p. 29D). Given Vietnam's distance and the growing market for gaming gore, this should not be surprising, but it begs the question of how the level of tolerance for gore will evolve in the future and how this will affect the appearance of more recent conflicts in games.

[10] In 1999, the military hit a low water mark in recruiting. Because of this, the Department of Defense recruiting budget was nearly doubled from $299 to $592 million from 1998–2003 according to the General Accounting Office ("Military recruiting," 2003). Compared to private corporate ad expenditures, the U.S. military ranks 34th, right behind McDonald's (Edwards, 2004).

[11]    A detailed analysis of the concept of technological fetishism and its relationship to virtue and barbarism in the Persian Gulf War can be found in Asu Askoy and Kevin Robins (1992).

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