Full Spectrum Propaganda: The U.S. Military, Video Games, and the Genre of the Military-Themed Shooter

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The path leading to this dissertation has been long and circuitous. It started in 1998 in Montreal, with enrolment at McGill's Graduate Program in Communications (which later became the Department of Art History and Communications Studies after a departmental merger) and continued with a teaching appointment commencing in 2001 at the Department of New Media in the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Lethbridge. This path, and the fact that a final draft would not emerge until August of 2005, meant that many individuals have influenced this dissertation. At McGill, I would like to thank Will Straw (AHCS) and Berkeley Kaite (Department of English) for their guidance and patience throughout this process, as well as Charles Levin, Yehudi Lindeman, David Crowley, and Gertrude Robinson for their knowledge and inspiration. At McLennan Library (McGill), I need to acknowledge David McKnight and a warm 'thank you' goes to Marilyn Berger and Bozena Latincic at the Blackader-Lauterman Library of Architecture and Art. Friends and fellow students in Montreal were integral. I would like to thank Brennan Wauters, Christopher Hills-Wright, 'Jessica Rabbit,' and Allain Julfayan for endless and immensely enjoyable discussions of film, history, media and 'point of view.' To Crystal Beliveau, Anita Slominska, Jennifer Varkonyi, Tammy Schachter, Joya Balfour, Geoff Stahl, Bianca Hook, Kim Diggins, and Ingrid Bejerman: I thank you for your inspiration and diverse knowledge of the world. For their friendship and knowledge of libraries as well as reference and research expertise, I would like to sincerely thank Robin Canuel and Carl Reglar.

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Abstract

Full Spectrum Propaganda: The U.S. Military, Video Games, and the Genre of the Military-Themed Shooter

This dissertation explores the emerging relationship between the U.S. military and the commercial video game market. Specifically, this study situates this relationship in terms of the U.S. military's evolving role in a variety of media—such as Hollywood feature films, television, and television news—for the purposes of propaganda and the influencing of public opinion. Consequently, an analysis and critique of the U.S. military's production and commissioning of commercial video games will be advanced that takes into account contemporary analyses and media critiques with respect to war and representation. Since these games are also a part of the larger field of entertainment and cultural production, this study will attempt to understand these products for the complex ways they combine cultural expression, modern spectatorship and the desire to influence or mediate popular conceptions of war. Consideration will also be given to situating these products within the emerging field of video game studies and aesthetics, as well as questions concerning genre, realism, historical revisionism, and the ethics of simulation.

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La propagande « Full Spectrum » : L'armée américaine, les jeux vidéo et le genre du tireur militaire

La présente dissertation explore la relation naissante entre l'armée américaine et le marché du jeu vidéo. Plus précisément, elle situe cette relation en fonction de l'évolution du rôle de l'armée américaine dans une variété de médias, tel les films hollywoodiens, la télévision et les nouvelles, dans le but d'influencer l'opinion publique par le biais de la propagande. Par conséquent, nous présenterons une analyse et une critique de la production et de la commande par l'armée américaine de jeux vidéo, en tenant compte des analyses et des critiques de médias actuelles sur la guerre et sa représentation. Étant donné que ces jeux font également partie du domaine plus large du divertissement et des produits culturels, cette étude tentera de comprendre la manière complexe dont ces produits allient expression culturelle, spectacle moderne et désir d'influencer la conception populaire de la guerre. Nous tâcherons également d'identifier la place qu'occupent ces produits dans les théories récentes sur les jeux vidéo et leur esthétique, et nous nous questionnerons sur le genre, le réalisme, le révisionnisme historique et l'éthique de la simulation.

Preface

> Cokie Roberts (ABC): *You see a building in a sight—it looks more like a video game than anything else. Is there any sort of danger that we don't have any sense of the horrors of war—that it's all a game?*
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> General Norman Schwarzkopf: *You don't see me treating it like a game. And you didn't see me laughing and joking while it was going on. There are human lives being lost, and at this stage of the game this is not a time for frivolity on the part of anybody.*
>
> *This Week with David Brinkley*[1]

At the beginning of his book, *War and Cinema*, Paul Virilio offers the reader a Japanese proverb: 'war is the art of embellishing death.' While the reader may perceive a certain element of truth in that statement, it also shows how it can be exceedingly difficult to understand something as vast and, at times, abstract as war. But there is no denying the fascination that the subject of war continues to exert. As Daniel Hallin and Todd Gitlin argue:

> People care about war because the lives of their neighbors or loved ones could be at stake. But something else, less rational, is also involved: imagination is as important as interest. War is an enormously appealing symbolic terrain, a source of images and stories that can be extremely seductive to its audience—and certainly also to those who are in the business of selling images and stories.[2]

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[1] Quoted in: Simon Chesterman, "Ordering the New World: Violence and its Re/Presentation in the Gulf War and Beyond, " *Postmodern Culture* (electronic version) 8, no. 3 (May 1998), para. 8.

[2] Daniel C. Hallin and Todd Gitlin, "Agon and Ritual: The Gulf War as Popular Culture and as Television Drama," *Political Communication*, 10 (1993): 412.

From toys to Blockbuster films, war is present in a vast array of products in popular culture. Yet, for something that occupies the public imagination to such a degree as it does, war is something that few people (especially in North America) have ever experienced first-hand. That, in itself, is likely a part of what forms this fascination. But such a relation also proves to be extremely problematic. Because of the fact that most people do not have first-hand experience of war, we necessarily rely of various representations of it. Video games are one such example, but as a relatively recent entertainment phenomenon, video games are the inheritor of a long and varied cultural legacy. Video games, then, are the latest installment in a vast array of media technologies that have offered civilians new ways of both witnessing and experiencing war. But 'witnessing' and 'experiencing' are complex and loaded terms and, as many commentators have argued, representations of war in the twentieth century—especially those broadly understood as entertainment— have been subject to a variety of different influences and interests. Such influences and interests would include: the evolving characteristics of modern warfare itself, propaganda and the desire (or necessity) of affecting public opinion, economic and other concerns within entertainment industries, the development and characteristics of media technology, and the necessity to create national myths and to serve cultural expression.

The specific subject of this dissertation is a particular genre of military-themed shooters and the continuing involvement of the U.S. military in the commercial video game market. My interest ultimately revolves around the effect of that involvement, how it affects the design and experience of these

games, the issues surrounding this involvement and—as a representation of war—how it might affect or reinforce popular perceptions of war and the military itself. Such a concern would naturally suggest an approach that is informed by propaganda models and political economy of media industries since the U.S. military exerts a great deal of influence over these popular representations of war.

The nature of this influence is complex. As the subject of popular representations of national and international history, militaries generally garner a certain amount of interest from historians, filmmakers, or video game designers and it is natural that attention would be focused on current as well as past military exploits since these exploits are intimately tied to a nation's history and cultural identity. But militaries around the world also actively cultivate their image and part of this image cultivation is itself historical and commemorative. But because the military is a volunteer and professional force in most modern nation states today, there is also the need to cultivate a positive awareness among potential recruits. Similarly, the opinion of the public and their political representatives is also important since military funding and its general orientation is—theoretically—a matter of public policy decision-making. The image-making, then, is not just directed at the past but is very much caught up in the present.

As one of the world's pre-eminent armed forces (in terms of numbers of regular soldiers and reserves, it is surpassed only by China), the U.S. military devotes considerable resources to its image. It has an extensive public relations apparatus that is spread throughout its services and branches and can be seen

through print and television advertising, the sponsorship of sporting activities and events (NASCAR, football) and its liaison with entertainment industries such as film and video games. Throughout the last century, the U.S. military has taken considerable interest in its filmic image and has developed a close working relationship with Hollywood filmmakers and producers, something that the military historian Lawrence Suid has described as a "symbiotic relationship between two of the most powerful organizations in the world."[3]

It is not surprising then that the U.S. military would also take interest in the video game industry. While the video game industry is not as established or mature as the film industry, the industry is enormous. In all major international markets, revenues from the sale of video and computer games often surpass those of other media. In 2002, sales of video games in the U.S. created a stir when it was reported that they reached $9.4 billion, a figure that exceeded previous sales records and even surpassed Hollywood box office revenue by $1 billion.[4] That same year, the U.S. Army released *America's Army*, a free online video game which received acclaim by both players and the press; rivaling some of the most popular and respected games and franchises of commercial developers. This game, however, was by no means the first example of the U.S. military's involvement with the commercial video game sector but due to its prominence it focused a great deal of attention on the relationship. As such, an analysis of this institutional relationship is important to understand, especially for the ways that it is similar to the already established relationship between the U.S. military and Hollywood.

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[3] Lawrence Suid, *Guts & Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film*, revised edition, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), xiii.
[4] James Newman, *Videogames* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

Video games, however, are a relatively nascent medium and not only borrow heavily from other media—especially film and television—but are also informed by the larger cultural imagination surrounding war. As previously mentioned, Hallin and Gitlin point out that 'war is an enormously appealing symbolic terrain' and they continue their argument by saying that: "From the point of view of cultural analysis... we have explained little until we know what the war means to those who support or oppose it and how its meanings are interpreted and circulated by the media."[5] This would point to the importance of understanding how media representations of war are informed by larger cultural meanings and historical understandings of war, something that is often not well suited to an investigation framed solely through propaganda analysis or the analysis of institutional relationships. Such an approach would recognize that cultural understandings of war are themselves rooted in war as a general social phenomenon; one that, to an extent, exists independently of state or military propaganda.

In a review of the literature pertaining to media and war, Hallin has argued that while the literature is extensive and evolving, it has historically neglected broader intellectual questions:

> Much of the work, even the best work, lacks connection to general social theory: it does not address, or only begins to address, the impact of war and wartime communication on the relation of state and civil society, the structure of the public sphere, or political culture and social ideology, though it seems likely that war plays a profound role in shaping all of these. The field in its present state also lacks coherence: much of the work makes little reference to other literature on the media and war or to the broader literature on war and society. One important manifestation of the fragmented state of the field is the fact that

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[5] Hallin and Gitlin, "Agon and Ritual," 412.

very few works deal in any systematic way with more than one war.[6]

Later in his discussion, Hallin argues that there is "a particular need for cross-fertilization" between studies of entertainment and fictional representations of war and other areas of social and media theory.[7]

Such an approach seems well suited to the study of military-themed video games. As I mentioned, the video game industry borrows heavily from the surrounding culture and—since it often conceives of its work as being on the cutting edge of technology and representation—it often jumps headfirst into exploration and portrayal of social meanings and taboos. But such an approach is also useful in understanding the U.S. military's role generally in popular culture. The military's conscious or intentional use or manipulation (depending on one's point of view) of media exists alongside its presence *in* the media and *in* popular culture. This goes beyond the military's presence in the news or to recognize that the military is an institution with a rich and long-standing tradition, although both of these are significant. As is generally understood, the research and development of military technology is at times intimately related to the development of technology in other sectors of the economy. Most significant perhaps have been developments in the areas of communications technology and technologies of visualization, which have lead to, as Paul Virilio argues, the logistics of military 'perception' permeating other

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[6] Daniel C. Hallin, "The Media and War," in *International Media Research: A Critical Survey*, John Corner, Philip Schlesinger and Roger Silverstone, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 206.
[7] Hallin, "The Media and War," 222.

areas of culture.[8] Perhaps nowhere was this more evident than in the view of the war offered to civilians by cameras mounted onto 'smart bombs' in the Persian Gulf War in 1990-1991.

My approach here is also personally motivated and at the risk of doing away with any semblance of objectivity, I feel that such motivations should be at least mentioned. First, as a fan of video games and as someone who teaches in a department of new media that prepares students to enter into some aspect of the industry, I look upon video games as an exciting and worthwhile medium. Even though I understand them to be entertainment products, I am apprehensive about arguments that attempt to separate them from social or media critique by arguing that they are simply 'pure entertainment.' Such a view, I believe, does a disservice to the medium and the industry specifically as well as to the importance and significance of popular culture generally. Video games are objects situated in a cultural and social field and, as Mieke Bal puts it, cultural objects are "not... isolated jewels, but... things always-already engaged, as interlocutors, within the larger culture from which they have emerged."[9]

Video games, like other cultural objects, are caught up within and contribute to the discursive, political and ideological meanings that circulate within the larger culture and considering the direct and indirect influence of the U.S. military becomes an important question. As such, approaching the U.S. military's involvement in the videogame industry through established

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[8] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989).

[9] Mieke Bal, "From Cultural Studies to Cultural Analysis: 'A Controlled Reflection on the Formation of Method," in *Interrogating Cultural Studies: Theory, Politics, and Practice*, Paul Bowman, ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 33.

definitions of propaganda would be a useful approach since these games are—

in a variety of ways—meant to influence public opinion. However, simply citing

these video games and others in the genre of the military-themed shooter as

elements of propaganda only reveals part of the story. As entertainment

products that advance various cultural meanings, video games simultaneously

serve other social functions; something that a strict propaganda analysis

traditionally leaves out. "Making sweeping statements about [cultural]

objects," Bal says, "or citing them as examples, renders them dumb."[10] Bal

advises researchers to allow objects to 'speak back' and as someone with a

great deal of interest in the medium, I believe that video games have much to

say. As such, I hope this study is not read as an indictment of the video game

industry nor of the genre of the military-themed shooter. Consequently, my

approach will attempt to make room for the cultural and social functions these

objects serve and to approach them on their own terms by considering them as

aesthetic objects in their own right; allowing these game to, as Bal says, speak

back. At the same time, however, neither video games nor the industry

'speaks' in a unified voice and an important aspect of their study should

include who influences such 'utterances' and why.

In a similar fashion, my attitudes toward war and the military are

equally divergent. While I recognize the social importance and significance of

the military as an institution—not to mention those who serve in it—I am, at

times, at a loss for words when it comes to the cavalier and celebratory way

that war is often treated. Likewise, I find it potentially troubling to consider

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[10] Bal, "From Cultural Studies to Cultural Analysis," 37.

the role that militaries—and specifically the U.S. military—play in shaping or attempting to shape public opinion. It is of course understandable that the U.S. military or any military should take an interest in maintaining its public image, but considering the resources at its disposal and its extremely close relations with some of the most prominent entertainment industries should, at the very least, necessitate questions being asked.

In the preface to *Guts & Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film*, Lawrence Suid makes some interesting statements that I would like to quote at some length:

> To the extent that the book has a thesis, it postulates that Hollywood's creations of the image of all-powerful, always victorious armed services through the late 1950s contributed to the ease with which Lyndon Johnson and the best and brightest people in government took the United States into the quagmire of Vietnam. The thesis certainly does not provide a complete explanation of how the country found itself in Vietnam.... Nevertheless, the research on which I have based this book suggests that without the consistently positive image of the American armed services on movie screens, the nation would very possibly have become more skeptical, sooner of General Westmoreland's claim that the light was at the end of the tunnel and he needed only another 100,000 troops to defeat the North Vietnamese peasant army.[11]

To me, this statement was interesting because Suid is, himself, a military historian and considers the book to be a work of military history rather than film history or a study of military propaganda.[12] Unlike Suid, I cannot claim that this study will show that particular media representations helped lead a nation or its leaders into a specific war. Instead, I hope to build on the work of Suid and others and advance the thesis that media representations of war— including those found in video games—can and do provide interesting and

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[11] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, xii.
[12] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, xiii.

useful ways for viewers to witness and experience war. At the same time, however, the various needs and interests involved in producing such representations—including those of the U.S. military—often confound our understanding of war, its necessity, and usefulness.

The overall structure of this study will attempt to balance various approaches to the U.S. military's involvement with the video game industry. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 will present an historical overview of the relationship between media and war in the twentieth century and will be restricted largely to an Anglo-American context. Chapter 1 will attempt to outline how war became a mass cultural phenomenon over the course of the century, the role played by entertainment media (specifically cinema) in wartime propaganda, and the interesting ways that film has been used to guide or influence public opinion. Here, government involvement in the film industry during World War II and the U.S. military's involvement throughout the century will receive specific attention. Chapter 2 will consider the rise of other visual and entertainment media in the representation of war (especially in terms of the Vietnam conflict and the two Iraq conflicts), as well as provide an outline of the various issues and critiques that have been advanced in terms of media representations dealing with war, media management by the military, and the notions of 'witnessing' and 'experiencing' war.

Chapter 3 will provide a brief synopsis of the video game industry, including a short history and a discussion of audience, the varied role of players, the video game market, and other concepts that will be important for

my discussion in later chapters. Chapter 4 will provide an outline of the U.S. military's evolving relationship with the video game industry; first with the use and modification of commercial off-the-shelf games, the development of custom commercial games, as well as the military's support and interest in research for training simulations, computer graphics and distributed network technology. The chapter will also provide a theoretical discussion of how such involvement can be understood as propaganda and how it compares with the U.S. military's historical involvement with the film industry.

Chapter 5 will focus on questions of genre in video games and the specific difficulty in defining genre within the medium. While most of the chapter will be devoted to establishing the military-themed shooter as a specific genre, it will also put questions of genre into a larger context by exploring the emerging theories surrounding videogame studies, especially those that have a direct bearing on genre definition. The ludology (gameplay) and narrative debate will be considered as well as specific issues that are germane to my overall topic, including questions concerned with game analysis and methodology.

A section containing images that are referred to in Chapter 6 precedes the chapter itself. Chapter 6 is concerned with providing an overview of the military-themed shooter genre, including discussion of specific titles and general tendencies relating to game structure, story and narrative, types of game play, characters, and point of view.

Chapters 7 and 8 represent an attempt to synthesize much of the discussion in previous chapters by looking at select game titles in relation to

some of the most pertinent issues surrounding war, representation, and 'experience.' These will include: realism and authenticity; the focus upon—and fetishization of—military technology and weapons; video games and specific issues relating to war and representation (violence, gore, and representation of enemies); the notion of immersion and the structuring of 'experience' (with emphasis on the portrayal of soldiers); the politics surrounding gameplay, including ethical questions and simulations; and questions concerning historical re-creation and historical fact.

In the Conclusion, I will offer my own thoughts on the possible effects of the U.S. military's involvement in the genre of military-themed games by contextualizing my previous discussion with respect to questions concerning 'militainment' and the notion of the military-industrial-entertainment complex, simulation, and the politics continually surrounding the representation of soldiers.

Chapter 1

20th Century War, Media, and Popular Culture

Modern Warfare, the Concept of Total War, and the Media

As many historians insist, the twentieth century cannot be understood without

considering the varying effects of armed conflict. Eric Hobsbawn, for instance,

argues that the century "was marked by war. It lived and thought in terms of

world war, even when the guns were silent and the bombs were not

exploding."[1] And while the base principles of warfare have essentially

remained the same, warfare in the first half of the twentieth century is notable

for its unprecedented scale. Generally, previous wars were fought by small

groups of largely professional armies and were often limited geographically

and away from civilian populations. War in the first half of the twentieth

century drew many different countries into armed conflict and drew a large

percentage of domestic populations into armed service (as much as twenty

percent in the case of France and eighteen percent for Germany during the First

World War).[2] Due to its unprecedented technological nature, the waging of

war required vast increases in industrial output and a reorganization of

domestic economies. Consequently, the phrase 'home front' came into usage

during World War I to describe the mobilization of the domestic economy

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[1] Eric Hobsbawn, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914 – 1991* (London: Abacus Press, 1995), 22.
[2] Gwynne Dyer, *War* (Toronto: Stoddard, 1985), 83.

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and—because the normal workforce was disrupted—the civilian population. More significantly, since civilian populations and domestic production would become integral to the total war effort, civilians and their economic output would increasingly become legitimate targets of military aggression.[3]

The term 'Total war' has come to describe the changing face of armed conflict in the first half of the twentieth century, especially with regard to the two World Wars. And while the concept of total war was not solely the product of this period,[4] it has come to define the way modern conflict is not only waged but also how it is understood by civilian populations. Total War is also indicative of a series of related changes within modern society that has served to turn modern warfare into a mass phenomenon. The mobilization of the 'home front' required an unprecedented and centralized coordination of the domestic economy. But as a source of 'manpower' and also as a political constituency, this inevitably led to, as Daniel Hallin states, an "unprecedented concern" with the morale of civilians and "the systematic management of public opinion and of the media."[5]

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[3] Dyer, *War*, 75-99. Also see: Arthur Marwick, ed., *Total War and Social Change* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988) and Gordon Wright, "The Broadening Scope of War: The Psychological Dimension," in *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 66-78.

[4] Historians point out that some features of 'total war' were already in place before the twentieth century. The French Revolution is often held to be a turning point for the way it involved a massive mobilization of society as a whole for war and how it combined service in armed conflict with the idea of citizenship in a nation state. Other conflicts, such as the American Civil War, were notable for the way that the industrial economies were mobilized for the support of each side. See: Dyer, *War*, 42-44.

[5] Daniel C. Hallin, "The Media and War," in *International Media Research: A Critical Survey*, John Corner, Philip Schlesinger and Roger Silverstone, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 208.

The role that state-sponsored propaganda would play in the First World

War would become well known and the subject of considerable debate in the

interwar period. As Harold Lasswell would write in 1938:

> A word has appeared, which has come to have an ominous clang
> in many minds—Propaganda. We live among more people than
> ever, who are puzzled, uneasy, or vexed at the unknown cunning
> which seems to have duped and degraded them.[6]

Lasswell, like many others, came to believe that the significant propaganda

activities undertaken by all sides during the war served to convince domestic

populations of the righteousness of their cause and largely drew countries into

a conflict that they didn't understand and that, in some cases, their

populations didn't want. After the cessation of hostilities, the general public

was given the opportunity to see behind the scenes of the mobilization effort—

including propaganda aimed at both domestic and foreign populations—in the

respective countries involved. As it turns out, the most successful propaganda

campaigns came from the two leading democracies that possessed very

advanced systems of international news and information gathering, a

sophisticated free press, as well as an extensive mass media system.[7] Even

though there were significant national differences, all nations involved in the

war had made mass media an integral part of their political and war-making

infrastructures and this seemed to explain the apparent power of propaganda's

success. The interest in and perhaps fear of this apparent power of mass

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[6] Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1938), 2.

[7] Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 2nd Edition (London: Sage Publications, 1992),162-165.

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communications in mobilizing public opinion resulted in a growing awareness

of propaganda and persuasion techniques in the interwar period.[8]

In the United States, an example of such management during the First

World War were the activities of a civilian agency—the Committee on Public

Information (CPI)—that was created to foster support for America's entry in

World War I. More commonly known as the 'Creel Committee' after its

chairman George Creel, the CPI was created by executive order of President

Woodrow Wilson in 1917 in order to "combat opposition to the war and to

persuade Americans that sacrifices were necessary if democracy was to

survive."[9] Generally, the U.S. population was not oriented toward involvement

in a large international conflict, but Creel had assembled a committee of

prominent individuals—including journalist Walter Lippmann and business

leaders like Edward Bernays (considered to be the 'grandfather' of public

relations)—who instigated an intense and varied campaign to focus attention

on the international conflict and turn public opinion in favor of participation.[10]

While the CPI was concerned with domestic public opinion, propaganda

activities were, of course, directed in all directions: at enemy militaries and

soldiers, and at foreign governments and foreign civilian populations in both

enemy and allied nations. Despite official denials, the British government

maintained an extensive—and largely successful—propaganda campaign

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[8] J. Michael Sproule, "Progressive Propaganda Critics and the Magic Bullet Theory," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 3 (1989), 225-246.

[9] Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 3.

[10] For a history of the Creel Committee, see: Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). For an account that places the work of the committee in the field of advertising, see Stuart Ewen, "The House of Truth," in *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 102-127.

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coordinated through Wellington House, a secret information bureau that was

created to help shape attitudes toward the war in both neutral and Allied

countries.[11] British propaganda efforts were, especially in the early years of the

war, directed toward the U.S. press and opinion makers in order to counter

anti-intervention sentiments. British and other interventionist propaganda

would magnify such events as the German sinking of RMS Lusitania on 7 May

1915 and the loss of American passengers in order to provoke public and

diplomatic anger within the U.S.

The general concern in the interwar period was that persuasion and

propaganda had come to exert pressures on democratic principles because

various interests—and sometimes very powerful ones—were dominating public

discourse through the mass media.[12] While forms of propaganda that are

directed from above are often the most conspicuous and widely recognized

form, the fact that war became a mass phenomenon in the first half of the

twentieth century also indicates that it often sets in motion social and cultural

forces that involves civilians in the process.

Creel published *How We Advertised America* in 1920, only two years

after the end of the war, describing the activities of the CPI during the war.[13]

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[11] See Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 30-38.

[12] In the U.S., for example, Clyde R. Miller—a professor at Columbia University and a former journalist during the first World War—started the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in 1937. Those involved with the institute were motivated by a belief that the American public was drawn into a futile European conflict in 1917 and that there was a danger it would be repeated with the growing turmoil in Europe. The Institute, including businessman and philanthropist Edward A. Filene, who provided initial grant monies, was not just concerned with war propaganda but also the volume of propaganda from numerous other sources—including advertising. See: Jowett and O'Donnel, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 182-185.

[13] As Harold Lasswell would note, Creel was joined by numerous counterparts from other countries in publishing memoirs of their propaganda activities during the war including Campbell

Creel was adamant that the success of the commission was due to the fact that they adopted techniques that Americans were most familiar with—advertising and salesmanship—and that they allowed ordinary citizens to become involved:

> ...there was no part of the great war machinery that we did not touch, no medium of appeal that we did not employ. The printed word, the spoken word, the motion picture, the telegraph, the cable, the wireless, the poster, the signboard—all these were used in our campaign to make our own people and other peoples understand the causes that compelled America to take arms. All that was fine and ardent in the civilian population came at our call until more than one hundred and fifty thousand men and women were devoting highly specialized abilities to the work of the Committee....[14]

More recently, the role of public participation has led to a modified approach to the study of war and the ways that propaganda can be—in addition to its traditional definitions—understood as a social and cultural phenomenon and the ways it both incorporates popular culture and simultaneously influences it.

'War as Society' or a cultural approach to understanding war takes a variety of forms and has been advanced by various authors. A central idea here is that war sets in motion a variety of political, economic, social and cultural processes. While government agencies (including the military) will act to reorganize economic organization and appropriate certain aspects of the media to provide information and to direct public opinion, the onset of war has a tendency to increase social cohesion and provides a forum for a variety of popular expression. In this sense, there is a certain celebratory aspect to war and, especially when a war is seen as being successful, the war will become a part of a nation's identity and will set expectations for future wars.

Stuart (England) and Johann Jacob Waitz and E. Tonnelet (France). See: Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1938), 1-2.
[14] George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1920): 5.

Daniel Hallin, for example, stresses the importance of the era of total war for the ways it would influence the understanding of wars in the latter half of the century, even though the defining elements of warfare would fundamentally change after World War II and the onset of the Cold War. As Hallin argues, several characteristics emerged in the U.S. and Britain in an era of total war, including a peculiar relation between the state and civil society. Hallin argues that this did not involve a suppression of civil society by the state but, instead, was defined more by "cooperation, co-optation and blurring of the lines" and one where "state functions were often taken on by institutions like the press, and vice versa."[15] For Hallin, this helps explain some of the apparent contradictions seen in times of war. For example, Hallin argues—echoing Creel's belief—that "the emerging culture of total war was a participatory culture, though one which involved a deep passion for unity which resulted in considerable curtailment of political pluralism and civil liberties."[16] As Hallin's own research interests are primarily concerned with the relations between government, the military, and news media in times of war, another dominant characteristic that he identifies is that in both the U.S. and Britain a style of news reporting would emerge that was heavily dependent on official sources (including disinformation) and that combined the centralized perspective of those officially in charge of the war effort with a populist stance that concentrated on and then celebrated the average soldier in the field and the ordinary family on the 'home front.'[17]

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[15] Hallin, "The Media and War," 209.
[16] Hallin, "The Media and War," 208.
[17] Hallin, "The Media and War," 209.

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Similarly, but taking a different approach, Susan Carruthers argues that a popular or cultural understanding of war must take into consideration the evolving ways that civilians are allowed to 'witness' or 'vicariously experience' war.[18] Especially important in this regard was the role that film—from newsreels and documentaries to feature films—would play throughout the century but especially during the Second World War. Again, the example set through the era of total war would influence the introduction of later media such as television and other visual technologies later in the century. Of course, such vicarious experience is certainly not unproblematic given the strong influences that state institutions would exert over such media—either through outright censorship or other forms of direct intervention—during times of war. And as John Whiteclay Chambers and David Culbert argue, such mediating effects should also be understood historically. "The public memory of war in the twentieth century," they state, "has been created less from a remembered past than from a manufactured past, one substantially shaped by images in documentaries, feature films, and television programs."[19]

Carruthers also makes the observation that: "Both mass warfare and mass media owe their modern forms to a particularly fertile period of 'invention' towards the end of the nineteenth century. In some cases, the technology which has enabled civilians to learn of, or even 'see,' events in a war zone has derived, more or less directly, from military research."[20] Here,

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[18] Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).
[19] John Whiteclay Chambers and David Culbert, "Introduction," in *World War II: Film and History*, John Whiteclay Chambers and David Culbert, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.
[20] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 2-3.

Carruthers is not only reiterating the argument that military technology has an important relation with the ways that civilians 'see' war, but that the military has played an integral role in developing a variety of communications technologies and often retains various forms of control over their infrastructures and use.[21]

Another important development within the 'war as society' approach is that any critical inquiry into the mediation of war through various media forms needs to take into account the historical situation that specific wars present. As Tarak Barkawi argues; "The core idea [behind the 'war as society' approach]... refers to how wars are shaped by the societies that wage them *and* how societies are shaped by the wars they wage."[22] For Barkawi, any war is both interactive and generative in that its historical situation presents specific developments and relations that often have to be incorporated into the discursive framing of the conflict and might have lasting effects for the framing of future conflicts.[23]

Such approaches are important when considering the workings of propaganda generally and the military influence over specific entertainment forms specifically. For as Jeanne Colleran points out: "Conspiratorial or simplistic charges of direct collusion between the military, the government, and the entertainment industry are more the plot of a Hollywood movie like *Wag*

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[21] Important here is the work of Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*; James Der Derian, *Virtuous War*; and Manuel de Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*.

[22] Tarak Barkawi, "Globalization, Culture, and War: On the Popular Mediation of 'Small Wars'," *Cultural Critique* 58 (Fall 2004): 125.

[23] For example, Barkawi argues that the lessons of the Vietnam conflict, especially what has come to be called the 'Vietnam Syndrome,' have had important effects for the ways later conflicts like the wars in the Persian Gulf were framed.

the Dog than of responsible social analyses...."[24] Colleran's argument is an

important one, even from the perspective that these institutions—the military,

government, and the media—certainly are not monolithic nor do they always

act in concert with each other or even individually. This is especially important

when considering entertainment media since other factors—economic

constraints or the needs of audiences and the attitudes of the public—also play

important roles.

Consideration of the social and cultural aspects of war is critical to

understanding the workings of media in times of military conflict and has also

led to a modification of traditional approaches to the study of propaganda. In

his discussion of propaganda, Jacques Ellul attempts to understand

propaganda and the very diverse forms it takes in terms of a highly mediated,

contemporary society. While maintaining older, more traditional notions of

propaganda, Ellul also makes room—and perceives the central importance of—

'softer' forms in modern entertainment products. Rather than exclusively

viewing propaganda as something that is made by state agencies for specific

purposes, Ellul also considers how propaganda can be viewed as a broad

sociological phenomenon that is inclusive and provides a means for individuals

(the 'propagandees' in his terminology) to express themselves and participate

in the social world.[25]

My main concern in this and the following chapter is to provide an

overview of the U.S. military's role in influencing popular conceptions and the

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[24] Jeanne Colleran, "Disposable Wars, Disappearing Acts: Theatrical Responses to the 1991 Gulf War," *Theatre Journal* 55 (2003), 617.

[25] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968). Of particular interest here is Ellul's discussion of 'sociological propaganda' and 'propaganda of integration.'

visualization of war. In doing so, my discussion will be largely structured

chronologically—beginning with the Second World War—and will focus

specifically on visual technologies such as film and television. This relationship

is an interesting one and has, of course, evolved over the course of the century

and alongside the influence of other government agencies. While the

relationship between the U.S. military and the media can be understood, in its

earliest stages at least, in a relatively straightforward fashion, the relationship

has become much more complex by the last decade of the century. As Paul

Patton argues, the Persian Gulf War in 1991 "witnessed the birth of a new kind

of military apparatus which incorporates the power to control the production

and circulation of images as well as the power to direct the actions of bodies

and machines."[26] Indeed, through the course of the century, the military has

increasingly incorporated the circulation of information via various media

channels as an integral part of its operational capabilities. In a planning

document prepared for the U.S. Department of Defense in 2000, the authors

state:

> In the Information Age, there is an increasing reliance on
> sophisticated, near-real time media dissemination. Information,
> and its denial, is power. The state or entity most able to
> effectively control or manage information, especially managing
> the perceptions of particular target audiences, will be the most
> influential.[27]

The U.S. military has not only embraced a wide spectrum of media technologies

and commercial media activities but has substantially altered its approach to

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[26] Paul Patton, "Introduction," in Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 6.
[27] Defense Science Board, U.S. Department of Defense, "The Creation and Dissemination of All
Forms of Information in Support of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Time of Military
Conflict," (May 2000, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C. 20301-3140),
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these technologies and institutions. The phrase that best encapsulates this new, overall approach of the U.S. military is 'Full Spectrum Dominance.' The phrase comes from the Pentagon's planning document, "Joint Vision 2020,"[28] and indicates an integrative approach to future military operations. In the words of the authors of the planning document: "The label full spectrum dominance implies that US forces are able to conduct prompt, sustained, and synchronized operations with combinations of forces tailored to specific situations and with access to and freedom to operate in all domains – space, sea, land, air, and information."[29] Such an approach to information does, of course, take on a variety of forms from psychological operations (directed at enemy forces), intelligence gathering and the need to retain control over information concerning military operations, as well as public affairs and ongoing relationships with commercial news organizations. This is indicative of the evolving role that the U.S. military has sought in relation to a variety of information sources and media channels throughout the century.

American Cinema and World War II

Along with radio, film would come of age as a form of mass communications in the 1930s but would also become the subject of heated debate. As a tool for propaganda and the building of morale, film only became recognized as such in the latter stages of World War I. All major powers involved in the First

[28] The entire 'Joint Vision' website is located at [http://www.dtic.mil/jointvision/] and the planning document can be accessed at: [http://www.dtic.mil/jointvision/jvpub2.htm]. For a discussion of the concept and propaganda, see: David Miller, "Information Dominance: The Philosophy of Total Propaganda Control" (Online), *ColdType* (January 2004), available at: [http://www.coldtype.net/Assets.04/Essays.04/Miller.pdf].
[29] Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Vision 2020 (JV 2020)" (U.S. Department of Defense, May 2000): 6.

World War would eventually recognize the apparent power of the medium and divert scarce resources to both production and exhibition. Even though Susan Carruthers says that the use of film was "perhaps the First World War's most significant propaganda innovation,"[30] she notes that it remained under-utilized until the very last stages of the war.[31] As a relatively new medium, it initially suffered from the attitudes of the political and military elites who were in charge of directing state propaganda. This was especially the case in Britain and Germany, where the medium was largely misunderstood and even approached with a sort of "snobbish disdain" since its dominant audience was understood to be drawn from the lower or working class.[32]

Despite such attitudes, the medium of film possessed powerful attributes. It commanded an extremely large and enthusiastic audience, it could be understood by those who might not possess high levels of literacy, international distribution networks were already in place and, significantly, film was capable of evoking a variety of emotional responses in its audiences.[33] In the Second World War, all major combatants would put film to good use as a propaganda tool directed at both foreign and domestic audiences. Newsreels and documentaries were, of course, important conduits for relaying information and state policies. But it is the most popular filmic form—feature films—that offers the most interesting case. Even though the degree of government supervision was very different in countries like Germany, Britain,

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[30] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 68.
[31] Also on this point, see: Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 90-95.
[32] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 69.
[33] Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 57. As Jowett and O'Donnell argue, the feature film has "the ability to evoke an immediate emotional response seldom found in the other mass media." Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 90.

and the U.S., no feature film could be released in any of those countries without some form of government approval.

The Nazi government established the *Reichsfilmkammer* in 1933 which allowed for the control over every aspect of filmmaking in the country.[34] However, in both the U.S. and in Britain, the state would—in a variety of direct and indirect ways—come to exert considerable influence over commercial filmmaking. In both countries, pre-war regulatory bodies maintained some degree of control over content but it was the wartime information ministries that would exert the most influence. In Britain, it was the Ministry of Information (MOI) and especially its Films Division that provided guidance and assistance to British studios. In the U.S., liaisons with the film industry in Hollywood were consolidated under the Office of War Information (OWI) and, specifically, the OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP).

In all countries, feature films—and entertainment more generally—came to be regarded as crucial to the war effort. Even though international markets were in disarray, feature films could still be utilized on a variety of public relations' fronts to communicate with foreign publics. Domestically, feature films were lauded as another method to disseminate information and therefore clarify international issues for the public. Equally important was morale boosting and their ability to offer simple—but crucial—escapism. But the efficacy of the feature film as a propaganda tool was that it would, it was believed, not be recognized as such. Elmer Davies, the Head of the OWI stated: "The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds... is to let it go

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[34] For a discussion of the structure of the film industry under National Socialism in Germany, see: David Welch, "The History and Organization of the Nazi Cinema," in *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2001), 5-32.

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through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized."[35] Likewise, a "Programme for Film Propaganda" published by the MOI in 1940 states: "Film propaganda will be most effective when it is least recognizable as such."[36] It is important to qualify such statements by saying that not everyone in the audience was, in all likelihood, so easily fooled. Indeed, film as propaganda was a subject that was openly discussed, which is not surprising given the debate over propaganda in the interwar years and the struggles between interventionists and anti-interventionists alike. The industry magazine *Photoplay* ran a monthly column indicating the genres of newly released films and for *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, released in 1939, the film was simply described as 'propaganda.'[37] This, in itself, is not surprising given the political climate of the period. Still, the effectiveness of entertainment-based propaganda could indeed still be useful even when it was recognized. As an anonymous German noted in 1938: "A really clever person might claim that even if there are no propaganda films, there is still propaganda tucked away beneath film's surface details. This person, though, will have a hard time finding examples to prove his point."[38]

While maintaining an official position of neutrality, the U.S. government had—for the eighteen months before the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor—been moving hesitantly toward the possible confrontation with both Germany and Japan. The mood of cautious preparedness also extended to the

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[35] Quoted in Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945," *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 1 (June 1977), 88.
[36] Quoted in Carruthers, *The Media At War*, 90, 91.
[37] Quoted in Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 14.
[38] Quoted in Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 91.

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administration's view of propaganda since the domestic situation was just as complex as the international one. The experience of World War I, coupled with the example of how 'total' or totalitarian states took over all aspects of public and private communications for the management of public opinion, created a wary and skeptical public. According to Richard Steele, for Roosevelt and his administration:

> The object was to steep the American people in a climate of information and images that illustrated the serious problems confronting the nation and that suggested that government leaders had them well in hand. Propaganda that stimulated public anxiety or demands for immediate action was inappropriate to a situation as unsettled as the one confronting the president. What was needed, and produced, was a dull, steady, pervasive drum of preparedness information emanating from every popular source of public education. [39]

Such persuasion or public relations would be the preserve of various government departments that had been active in promoting Roosevelt's New Deal policies and was directed at news agencies, newspapers, newsreels, radio and the major film studios.

Throughout the 1930s, however, Hollywood was increasingly critical of government-influenced film propaganda and, according to Steele, "had contributed little to the New Deal public relations effort."[40] Similarly, according to Koppes and Black, awareness of international issues and the political events in Europe "remained dim" in Hollywood's films throughout the 1930s.[41] However, by the end of the decade, this situation would begin to change. In 1939, Will H. Hays, head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of

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[39] Richard W. Steele, "The Great Debate: Roosevelt, the Media, and the Coming of War, 1940-1941," *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 1 (June 1984), 71.
[40] Steele, "The Great Debate," 73.
[41] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 90.

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America (MPPDA), announced the production of a large number of shorts and a few feature films dealing with "aspects of Americanism."[42] Steele reads this move as a dramatic departure from the studio's previous stance. Hollywood studios, mindful of their international market, were careful to not alienate the censors in foreign governments. As well, the regulatory arm of the MPPDA, had regularly blocked any tendency "to depart from the pleasant and profitable course of entertainment [in order] to engage in propaganda."[43] Indeed, after the release of *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* in 1939, Hays had placed a ban on anti-Nazi films that would not be lifted until early 1940.[44] Even though the studios would move to produce more films that dealt with the international crisis between 1939 and 1941—films that are often mentioned are *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak, 1939), *The Great Dictator* (Charlie Chaplin, 1940), and perhaps most significant, *Sergeant York* (Howard Hawk, 1941)—it remained gradual and uneven. No doubt, the complexities of the situation were difficult to navigate. On the one hand, the studios' reluctance to stray from 'pure entertainment' was fueled by a desire to maintain what was left of the international markets. It was also influenced by the politically conservative aims of the MPPDA's regulatory arm, as well as increasing accusations of pro-war propaganda by those who opposed U.S. involvement in European affairs.

On the other hand, the escalating events in Europe would begin to generate more sympathy for the dire situation of Allied countries. The situation

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[42] Steele, "The Great Debate," 73.

[43] Quoted in John E. Moser, "'Gigantic Engines of Propaganda': The 1941 Senate Investigation of Hollywood," *Historian* 63, no.4 (Summer 2001): 736.

[44] Moser, "'Gigantic Engines of Propaganda,'" 737. Lewis Jacobs points out that *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* was the first American feature that was set in Nazi Germany and the first film to identify Hitler by name. See: Lewis Jacobs, "World War II and the American Film," *Cinema Journal* 7 (Winter 1967-68), 4.

in Europe also made the international market for Hollywood film precarious

and, as Moser points out, the Central European market had virtually

disappeared by 1939.[45] Hollywood studios were also under very different

pressures at home. As the decade of the 1930s ended, there was increasing

pressure from interest groups and the government to regulate industry trade

practices and to investigate alleged violations of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act.

The U.S. State Department brought formal anti-trust charges against the eight

largest film studios in 1938. In August of 1940, the charges were dropped and

the case was settled by 'consent decree.' There is, of course, speculation that

the settlement was brokered through pressure from the White House; in effect,

for increasing cooperation from the studios in highlighting the aims of the

Roosevelt Administration.[46] Such an agreement seems likely for, as Steele

points out, in the summer of 1940 Hollywood's relationship to the

government's public relations needs would abruptly change once again. In

July, the Hays Office established the Motion Picture Committee Cooperating for

National Defense in order "to evaluate requests from government public

relations offices and to make the appropriate facilities and technical advice

available."[47] And in August, Steele contends, at least three of the major

Hollywood producers volunteered to directly assist the White House: Jack

Warner (Warner Bros.), Barney Balaban (Paramount Pictures) and Nicholas

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[45] Moser, "'Gigantic Engines of Propaganda,'" 737.
[46] See Moser, "'Gigantic Engines of Propaganda,'" 734-5 and Steele, "The Great Debate," 73-74. David Slocum provides a similar account but more in relation to regulations pertaining to screen violence. See J. David Slocum, "Cinema and the Civilizing Process: Rethinking Violence in the World War II Combat Film," *Cinema Journal* 44, no. 3 (Spring 2005), 35-63.
[47] Steele, "The Great Debate," 74.

Schenck (Loew's Incorporated, the parent company of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer).[48]

The OWI and the American Feature Film

While the performance of Hollywood during the Second World War has been well documented, the role played by state agencies—especially the Office of War Information (OWI) and the military—has received comparatively little attention even though these two institutions would come to play important roles in guiding Hollywood's output. Rick Worland argues that the OWI's influence has generally been underestimated, especially in genres that are not normally considered to directly represent the war.[49] As Worland notes, an important exception to this has been the work of Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black who have investigated the ongoing relationship between the OWI and Hollywood during the war. Koppes and Black note that while the OWI's general wartime roles have been explored by historians of the war, its relationship with Hollywood—and especially its Bureau of Motion Pictures—has received little attention.[50] And since the relations between Hollywood, the OWI, and the military during the Second World War reveal the complexities of incorporating an entertainment medium in wartime propaganda, in the next section I will provide a brief overview of this relationship.

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[48] Steele, "The Great Debate," 74.

[49] Worland examines the various effects of OWI policies on the Horror film during the war, see: Rick Worland, "OWI Meets the Monsters: Hollywood Horror Films and War Propaganda, 1942 to 1945," *Cinema Journal* 37, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 47-48.

[50] See Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 87.

The Office of War Information was created by executive order on 13

June 1942 to consolidate informational programs and propaganda activities

domestically and abroad. Elmer Davis, a 'liberal' and former radio

commentator, was appointed as its Director. Surrounding Davis were, as

Koppes and Black describe them, "a liberal staff" consisting of a large number

of "interventionist New Dealers."[51] The OWI itself was instructed by Roosevelt

to enhance public understanding of the war through the press, radio, and

motion pictures as well as to coordinate all the war-information activities of

federal agencies and to act as an intermediary between federal agencies and

the commercial communications industries. In addition to the administration's

view of entertainment as an important vehicle for propaganda, the film

industry itself had a very high profile domestically and because its international

presence was greater than the press or radio, Hollywood was seen as an

especially important asset. In fact, Hollywood was declared an 'Essential War

Industry' which, among other things, meant the industry was guaranteed pre-

war quantities of film stock and that its 'least dispensable' personnel would be

exempt from conscription.[52]

The OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) was headed by Lowell

Mellett, a former newspaper editor. Previously, Mellett was the head of the

Office of Government Reports (OGR) which acted as a government information

agency before the U.S. became directly involved in the war. During that time,

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[51] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 88. As Allen Winkler argues, the liberal and New Deal leanings would be reduced as the war progressed. See: Allan W. Winkler, "The Origins of the OWI," in *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 8-37.

[52] See: K.R.M. Short (ed.), "Hollywood: An Essential War Industry," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 5, no. 1 (1985): 90-99.

Mellett established a Hollywood office after the movie industry pledged its full

support to the government's cause in December 1941. The head of the

Hollywood office was Nelson Poynter and the office, itself, became a part of

OWI domestic operations in June 1942. According to Koppes and Black,

between May 1942 and August 1945, 1652 scripts were reviewed by the

Hollywood office and the BMP.[53]

As already mentioned, Hollywood had previously turned its attention to

the war before America's official entry. While some notable (and controversial)

films were produced, Hollywood's output was generally judged to be "naïve."[54]

In fact, as Koppes and Black argue, Hollywood's focus on 'pure

entertainment'—where stereotypes flourished and accuracy was often

incidental—did not lend itself to the complexities now facing the country:

> When [Nelson] Poynter arrived in the movie capitol he found the
> industry doing little to promote the larger issues of the war. In
> the summer of 1942 Hollywood had under consideration or in
> production 213 films that dealt with the war in some manner.
> Forty percent of those focused on the armed forces, usually in
> combat. Less than 20 percent dealt with the enemy, and most
> of those portrayed spies and saboteurs. Other categories—the
> war issues, the United Nations, and the home front—received
> minimal attention. Even more disturbing to OWI, Hollywood had
> simply grafted the war to conventional mystery and action plots
> or appropriated it as a backdrop for frothy musicals and flippant
> comedies. Interpretation of the war remained at a rudimentary
> level: the United States was fighting because it had been
> attacked, and it would win.[55]

The OWI and BMP had to balance a variety of complex issues. First, in addition

to its informational and propaganda services, it had to maintain a balance with

the needs and interests of the industry, especially its commercial viability and

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[53] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 103.
[54] Lewis Jacobs, "World War II and the American Film," *Cinema Journal* 7 (Winter 1967-68): 11.
[55] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 90-91.

the interests and sensibilities of both domestic and foreign audiences. While

the portrayal of the armed forces and the enemy were relevant, the importance

of the larger issues of the war, not to mention the sensitive portrayal of allies in

other countries, would need to be treated with respect. Also deemed of vital

importance were the 'production front' and the 'civilian front' which—if

treated properly—would convince the domestic audience of the vital role

played by industry as well as the responsibilities of civilians. The BMP seemed

to want to stray from the hysterical portraits of the enemy and 'atrocity' stories

characteristic of World War I[56] and instead inject a larger ideological dimension

where the conflict was not just a nation's struggle for survival but a war

between fascism and democracy.[57] Generally, the BMP wanted to emphasize

that the war was a people's struggle and not a national, class or—especially—

race war. This also had particular implications for the portrayal of race-

relations on the 'home front' and the racial and foreign stereotypes that often

arose in Hollywood films. In a related way, this also included representations

of government agencies and labour unions.[58]

To help the industry understand these issues, Poynter and his staff

produced a "Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry"

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[56] On this point, see the Prologue and Introduction in Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, 1-37.
[57] This is a very complex issue and one that would evolve during the course of the war. For a discussion of the various ways that the enemy and race were portrayed, see: Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993):122-148. For an interesting and more contemporary account, see: Dorothy B. Jones, "The Hollywood War Film: 1942-1944," *Hollywood Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1945), 1-19. Jones was part of the Film Analysis and Reviewing Section of the OWI during the war.
[58] This discussion comes from: Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 90-101; Jacobs, "World War II and the American Film," 8-12. Also see: Gregory D. Black and Clayton R. Koppes, "OWI Goes to the Movies: The Bureau of Intelligence's Criticism of Hollywood, 1942-1943," *Prologue* 6 (Spring 1974), 44-59.

in June 1942 which was widely circulated in Hollywood.[59] The OWI staunchly

believed that films in any genre—even those that might not deal with the war

in any specific way—would have significance for the war effort. In this regard,

the OWI asked the studios to consider seven pertinent questions when

considering film projects:

1. Will this picture help win the war?
2. What war information problem does it seek to clarify, dramatize or interpret?
3. If it is an 'escape' picture, will it harm the war effort by creating a false picture of America, her allies, or the world we live in?
4. Does it merely use the war as the basis for a profitable picture, contributing nothing of real significance to the war effort and possibly lessening the effect of other pictures of more importance?
5. Does it contribute something new to our understanding of the world conflict and various forces involved, or has the subject been adequately covered?
6. When the picture reaches its maximum circulation on the screen, will it reflect conditions as they are and fill a need current at that time, or will it be out-dated?
7. Does the picture tell the truth or will the young people of today have reason to say they were misled by propaganda?[60]

The last question is interesting. Undoubtedly, the OWI saw itself as a

propaganda agency but it largely conceived of its role as providing access to

'ideas' and 'information' rather than lies or outright fabrication. It might be

naïve idealism on the part of Poynter and OWI staff, but it is just as likely a

reflection of the fact that the crude propaganda techniques used in World War

I still lingered in the minds of many people. Nevertheless, some studios

reproduced the manual in its entirety for its various personnel and many writers

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[59] For an extended discussion of the manual, see: Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 65-72. Also see: K.R.M. Short (ed.), "Washington's Information Manual for Hollywood," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 3, no. 1 (1983): 171-180.
[60] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 66-67.

and other studio staff "welcomed the bureau's interpretation."[61] Even though

the OWI's domestic operations would be reduced in the summer of 1943 (the

result of anti-New Deal politicians consolidating power in Congress), Koppes

and Black maintain that the OWI and BMP exerted considerable influence on

Hollywood filmmaking throughout the war. In fact, such influence was felt

relatively early. "By the fall of 1942," Koppes and Black say, "films in all

categories were showing OWI's imprint, whether through script review or

application of the manual for the industry."[62]

That Hollywood would prove to be largely compliant with the war effort

is probably not surprising. The OWI helped Hollywood to eliminate or at least

tone down sensational material and stereotypes. By constantly asking how a

particular film might influence opinion of the U.S., its allies, and the war in

general, the OWI would also help studios navigate the constantly changing

stage of world events and foreign sentiments. It was in commercial terms,

however, that the OWI would prove to be most beneficial to Hollywood. No

studio would benefit from producing a film without the OWI's approval as that

would restrict it to domestic exhibition. But in addition to access to

international markets, the OWI also proved useful for domestic production:

> The studios let BMP know what stories they were considering for
> production—some of the hottest secrets in movieland—so that
> the bureau could steer them into less crowded areas and thus
> smooth out the picture cycle. OWI's international role was
> especially important. Hollywood films hit the beaches right
> behind the American troops, provided they had OWI approval;
> the agency charged admission and held the money in trust for
> the studios. United States film makers were planning a large-

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[61] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 92. Koppes and Black argue that, unlike the more conservative heads of the studios, the direction of the OWI was closer to the views of studio staff, especially screenwriters.

[62] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 95.

scale invasion of the foreign market after the war, and OWI established indispensable beachheads.[63]

Hollywood and the U.S. Military During World War II

The Office of War Information and the Bureau of Motion Pictures were not the only state agencies that had some determining control over feature films. The Department of War and the Department of the Navy—as well as other agencies—had already established relationships with Hollywood studios. When other formats—newsreels, documentaries, instructional films, and various other shorts—are considered, the situation becomes even more complex. The military exerted considerable influence over newsreel production through the censorship of filmed material as well as the fact that the studios' civilian camera operators were dependent on military authorities for such things as security and transportation.[64]

In terms of short subjects, those commonly known as 'Victory Films' were produced by a variety of government agencies and distributed either through the War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry (WAC) or through the studios' normal channels. A second series known as 'America Speaks' consisted of short films produced by the studios at the request of the War Department or the BMP and released in over 16,000 domestic theatres.[65] Primarily, these films provided instruction important to various aspects of the war effort. Subjects were extremely varied and included the importance of a

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[63] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 104.

[64] For an extensive discussion of newsreels and the military during World War II, see: Doherty, *Projections of War*, 227-264.

[65] Cedric Larson, "The Domestic Motion Picture Work of the Office of War Information," *Hollywood Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1948): 438.

balanced diet, the necessity to conserve or donate precious war materials, explanations of specific government policies as well as recruiting messages from various branches of the military.

The War Department also enlisted the support of various Hollywood studios in the production of training films (also known as 'nuts and bolt' films) that would serve various pedagogical functions directed at recruits and other military personnel. Such films were generally produced under a contract basis and necessitated a very close working relationship between studios and the military. Subjects included the mundane aspects of military life as well as the arcane expertise needed to use modern military equipment. The medium of animation was especially well-suited to such purposes since it could combine instructional information with entertainment as in the well-known series featuring the character Private Snafu. The first of the Private Snafu films appeared in 1943 and even though various studios would work on the series as it progressed, it was first the jurisdiction of Leon Schlesinger, the producer of Warner Bros' *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies*. The series itself originated in the film unit set up by the army and headed by Frank Capra.[66]

The Disney Studios were the most active, producing hundreds of instruction films and even designing insignias for over 16,000 military units.[67] Before the U.S. entered the war in 1941, Disney Studios had been creating instructional films for the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation (*Four Methods of Flush Riveting*, 1941) as well as four animated films for the National Film Board of

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[66] Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 501-503.
[67] Doherty, *Projections of War*, 68.

Canada to be used in selling war bonds.[68] By 1943, 94 per cent of Disney's

output was for the government, mostly for the army and the navy.[69] While

Hollywood animation studios would incorporate various military themes in

their theatrical shorts, most of the instructional films were designed for a

military audience. Another area of military filmmaking that was directed at

military personnel were the 'Orientation Films.' While the training films

explained the 'nuts and bolts,' the orientation films were largely indoctrination

films.[70] The most well known was the *Why We Fight* series produced by

veteran director Frank Capra. As an Army major, Capra was brought to Army

Chief of Staff George C. Marshall in early 1942 to supervise the 834th Photo

Signal Detachment. As well as other projects (like the *Private Sanfu* series),

Capra was directly involved in the seven-part *Why We Fight* series (1942-45)

that helped explain the events leading up to the war and provided accounts of

the conflicts in Russia and China. Capra also directed such films *Know Your

Ally: Britain* (1944), *The Negro Soldier* (1944), *Know Your Enemy: Germany*

(1945), and *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945). As Claudia Springer notes, the

Army was forced to take film seriously with the release of Leni Riefenstahl's

Triumph of the Will.[71] And in the *Why We Fight* series, Capra would

appropriate the moving imagery from the Nazi's own propaganda films (most

notably, Riefenstahl's films but also Ufa newsreels, captured enemy combat

reports, and *Reichsfilmkammer* propaganda films) in order to turn such

[68] Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons*, 368.
[69] Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons*, 372.
[70] David Culbert, "'Why We Fight': Social Engineering for a Democratic Society at War," in *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II*, K.R.M. Short, ed., (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 173-191.
[71] Claudia Springer, "Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam," *Cultural Critique* 3 (Spring 1986), 151.

imagery against itself.[72] The series itself served a variety of complex functions, as Doherty describes it:

> The textbook information fortified the inspirational, morale-building function. The title *Why We Fight* was a declaration, not a question. Over and over, the films say, this is not just a war *against* Axis villainy but *for* liberty, equality, and security. The series does not always live up to its own high-minded purposes. Jingoism and vitriol drip from sections of the commentary. The Germans are 'ruthless automatons' genetically predisposed to barbarity, the Japanese blood-thirsty simians bred to treachery. But to a degree remarkable given the wartime context, the films speak calmly and eloquently to the aspirations of a free people opposing the forces of evil, to the postwar hopes for a better world.[73]

The army, pleased with Capra's early results in the form of *Prelude to War*, sought to release the film (and the subsequent ones) to a wider civilian audience. This was a proposition that was met with apprehension from the OWI and the studios. The early films ran between 50 to 60 minutes each and would be difficult for commercial theatres to insert into already tight exhibition schedules. The OWI had been struggling with the military over feature-film production and became more troubled with the army's plans to release the "Why We Fight" series. The army's PR chief, Major Gen. Alexander Surles, had expressed his hope that the series would provide an opening that would enable the army to "introduce any Army film" into commercial distribution. The OWI was also worried that the army intended to take over 25 per cent of commercial screen time.[74]

As for the series itself, Lowell Mellett thought *Prelude to War* to be very effective and skillfully made but felt it ran counter to OWI themes in some

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[72] Doherty, *Projections of War*, 74.
[73] Doherty, *Projections of War*, 73.
[74] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 122.

ways. In a letter to Roosevelt (who was strongly in favour of the film being released)[75], Mellett told the President that he thought the film might leave audiences in a state of "nervous hysteria" and would not help in "making a saner world after the armistice."[76] If Mellett was trying to protect the OWI's interests, so were the studios. The War Activities Committee cautioned against the film's release, primarily because its principal subject matter—the events leading to the world war—had already been covered in previously released documentaries. Despite such protests, the film was released in May 1943 but failed to attract an audience.[77]

The OWI had already been at odds with the U.S. military over the military's ongoing relationship with feature film production. The OWI had wanted the BMP to be the sole liaison between the government and the studios because it felt that the military did not share many of OWI's objectives. When the branches of the military cooperated with the studios, they were mainly concerned with favourable portrayals of the military itself and that military decorum—uniforms, insignia, tactics, and tradition—were accurately represented. The OWI, however, was largely concerned with the larger ideological issues that the war presented.[78]

The Hollywood-military relationship began almost as soon as film became established as popular entertainment. According to Lawrence Suid,

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[75] After a screening of the film, Roosevelt declared: "Every man, woman, and child must see this film." Quoted in Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 2,4.
[76] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 122.
[77] The army had planned to also release the next two films in the series, *The Nazi's Strike* and *Divide and Conquer,* but the plans were abandoned. An edited version of *The Battle of Russia* (1943) was released as was *War Comes to America* (1945). See: Springer, "Military Propaganda: Defense Department Films from World War II and Vietnam," and Doherty, *Projections of War,* 79.
[78] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 113.

The U.S. Navy was the first to consistently develop a relationship with filmmakers, beginning as early as 1904 with newsreels and other shorts that were exhibited at expositions. The Army's relationship with film began in 1911 with *Military Air Scout* which featured Army biplanes (there was not a separate air force at the time). The film is of interest as well since it was the first time an active duty serviceman participated in a film. The pilot, Lt. 'Hap' Arnold would later go on to create the Army Air Corps and would command the Army Air Force during World War II.[79] The relationship would continue through the 1920s and 1930s, most notably in the production of *Wings* (1927), a film that would win the first Academy Award for Best Picture. And the relationship would become more important during the 1940s. As Koppes and Black point out, the cooperation of the military was vital and at times determined whether or not a particular film would be made. This was a situation that the studios did not want to see disrupted by the OWI.[80]

This was, of course, a mutually beneficial relationship. For the studios, the cooperation of the military saved a great deal of time and money and lent added realism and spectacle to their films. The military saw such films as providing positive public relations and gave civilians a glimpse into the sometimes arcane world of military life. During the war, it could also provide a general outline of military training as in *Flight Command* (1940) which was made with the cooperation of the U.S. Navy. *I Wanted Wings* (1941), made with the cooperation of the U.S. Army Air Force, also contained a behind-the-

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[79] Lawrence Suid, *Guts & Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film*, revised edition, (Lexington: University Press of Kentuky, 2002), 12-16.
[80] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 113-114.

scenes look at flight training but also featured much of the army's newest air combat equipment, including the first footage of the B-17 Flying Fortress.[81]

Such films would prove to be effective recruiting vehicles and often in quite specific ways. Thomas Doherty recounts a famous Hollywood anecdote of a conversation between Jack Warner and Army Air Force head General 'Hap' Arnold. After telling the General that Warner Bros. will do whatever it can to help with the war effort, Arnold replies:

> Well, there is something you can do. We are up to our necks in pilot applications, can get more than we will ever need. But gunners, navigators, crew chiefs, ground crews—there, we're in trouble. Every kid thinks he has to be a pilot or he's nothing. We need some way to put some glamour in these other jobs to put a flight team together. Maybe films would be the way to do it.[82]

Even though Doherty cautions that the anecdote is "too often told to be totally unreliable and too perfect to be totally unembellished,"[83] he goes on to describe a change in the studio's output from 1943 to 1945 that saw films stress the vital necessity of other members of the aircrew. But it would not end there. "Like each member of the crew," Doherty points out, "each model of aircraft got its place on the screen."[84]

Such a move would have dovetailed with the OWI's views on the combat genre. Koppes and Black state that in "the bureau's ideal combat movie an ethnically and geographically diverse group of Americans would articulate what they were fighting for, pay due regard to the role of the Allies,

[81] Jacobs, "World War II and the American Film," 8-9. The usefulness of the 'training' scenes for viewers and its dramatic impact is debatable; see Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen*, 124-125.
[82] Quoted in Doherty, *Projections of War*, 108.
[83] Doherty, *Projections of War*, 108.
[84] Doherty, *Projections of War*, 109.

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and battle an enemy who was formidable but not a superman."[85] Rather than

just feature the heroic feats of a single individual, the OWI wanted to also

stress the heroics and solidarity of a diverse group.[86] Such directives would

help establish the genre of the combat movie for many decades to come.

However, the OWI clashed with the military on many other points when it came

to feature films. One such area was the depiction of the enemy. "Properly

directed hatred" was the way Nelson Poynter put it in an interview with a

publication of the Hollywood Writers Mobilization in October, 1942:

> The Office of War Information wishes only to insure that hatred
> will not be directed either at Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo or a small
> group of Fascist leaders as personalized enemies on the one
> hand, or at the whole German, Japanese, or Italian people on the
> other hand. Hatred of the militaristic *system* which governs the
> Axis countries and of those responsible for its furtherance
> definitely should be promoted.[87]

Hatred of the "militaristic system" was a subtlety likely lost on the military and

one that often ran counter to the stereotypical and dramatic necessities of the

studio system. But at times, it also seemed contrary to official government

policy. Here, the film *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.* (1942) provides an interesting look

into the various issues that the studios, the military, and the OWI faced.

   Little Tokyo, U.S.A. was produced by Twentieth Century-Fox and dealt

with the internment of Japanese-Americans and was screened by the OWI in

July 1942. As Koppes and Black describe it:

> The film grafted a fifth-column theme to a conventional murder
> mystery and portrayed the Japanese-Americans—"this Oriental
> bund"—as bent on sabotage and trying to take over California.
> The hero-detective bullied his way into a home without a search

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[85] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 95.
[86] As Jeanine Basinger argues, featuring a group of soldiers from diverse backgrounds would become a defining element of the combat genre.
[87] Quoted in Doherty, *Projections of War*, 122.

warrant, and the police beat up Japanese "spies" they had
arrested and disarmed. These "Gestapo methods" dismayed the
reviewers, who asked, "Did somebody mention that we are
presumably fighting for the preservation of the Bill of Rights?"
By the end of the film, the Japanese-Americans were marched
off to detention camps; and the detective's sweetheart,
converted from isolationism, appeasement, and tolerance for
Japanese-Americans, implored patriots to save America.
"Invitation to the Witch Hunt," cried BMP.[88]

The OWI appealed to the studio to alter some aspects of the film. But the

studio argued that they had sent the script to the chief of the pictorial branch

of the War Department's Bureau of Public Relations for clearance and approval

had been granted. The studio believed this implied government approval. Not

only had they received approval from the army, they argued, but they had

rushed camera crews to 'Little Tokio' in Los Angeles to shoot footage of the

actual evacuation and the army cooperated in the filming.[89] What is more, the

film did not seem to contradict official government policy for the Executive

Order that forced the internship of Japanese-Americans had been decreed on

19 February 1942. *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.* was released and, as Bernard Dick points

out, some film reviewers reacted in a way similar to the OWI, arguing that it

trivialized the general war effort since the film goads viewers by arguing that

anyone who does not believe that an 'Oriental Bund' is operating is a fool.[90]

Still, the OWI-BMP would inevitably release its own Victory film, *Japanese*

Relocation, in November 1942 in order to explain and justify the internment

policy.[91]

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[88] Koppes and Black, "What to Show the World," 93.
[89] Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 72.
[90] Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen*, 237-238.
[91] Doherty, *Projections of War*, 146.

The work of mobilizing public opinion through the use of entertainment and specifically film during the Second World War would have lasting legacies in the post-war period. The Bureau of Motion Pictures of the OWI was closed in August 1945, effectively ending the government's formal relationship with Hollywood in terms of directing wartime propaganda but the relationship between the military and the film industry would continue well in to the second half of the century.

The Pentagon and Hollywood Liaison Offices

In the late 1990s, and especially after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001, a noticeable trend has been the sharp increase in war-related films emanating from Hollywood. Films such as *Black Hawk Down*, *Pearl Harbor*, *We Were Soldiers*, and *Windtalkers* are notable not only for their favorable portrayals of the military, soldiers and, generally, America's involvement in past wars but the fact that many of these films share formal and thematic properties that many have interpreted either as propaganda or 'pro-war.'[92] Describing these films as a new form of moral rearmament, Tom Doherty argues: "All of the war-minded films embrace a set of suddenly au courant values—a respect for public servants in uniform, a sympathy for military codes of conduct, and a celebration of the virtues forged

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[92] For example, see: John Bondar, "*Saving Private Ryan* and Postwar Memory in America," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (June 2001): 805-817; Tom Doherty, "The New War Movies as Moral Rearmament: *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers*," *Cineaste* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 4-8; Mark J. Lacy, "War, Cinema, and Moral Anxiety," *Alternatives* 28, no. 5 (Nov.-Dec. 2003): 611-636; Michael Valdez Moses, "Virtual Warriors: Nostalgia, the Battlefield, and Boomer Cinema," *Reason* 33, no. 8 (January 2002): 54-60; Tom Pollard, "The Hollywood War Machine," *New Political Science* 24, no. 1 (March 2002): 121-139; Marilyn B. Young, "In the Combat Zone," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003): 253-264; and Frank J. Wetta and Martin A. Novelli, "'Now a Major Motion Picture': War Films and Hollywood's New Patriotism," *Journal of Military History* 67, no. 3 (July 2003): 861-882.

in the crucible of combat."[93] Both John Bondar and Michael Moses Valdez

argue that the spate of recent films represent a certain moral nostalgia on the

part of various directors and producers who, as part of the 'boomer'

generation, grew up surrounded by the mythic status of the Second World

War.[94] Tom Pollard points out that the "1990s witnessed a dramatic

resurgence of conventional military films celebrating [a] rebirth of noble

warmaking;"[95] a development that Pollard views as a resurgence of the

'Hollywood War Machine.'[96]

An important aspect that many authors recognize is that by focusing

exclusively on the experience of U.S. soldiers, these films promote a very

narrowly defined point of identification for audiences. As Marilyn Young

writes: "The tight focus on the situation of the combat soldier is inherently

dramatic and, by screening out everything save the immediate context in which

he fights, recent war movies, wherever they are set, serve as all-purpose

propaganda instruments."[97] Dramatically, such a point of view makes sense

and is reinforced by the fact that many of these films offer themselves as

'authentic' portrayals of specific battles through the various marketing

materials surrounding their release. But as Young points out, by limiting the

point of view to the experience of the soldier, these films often pass over the

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[93] Tom Doherty, "The New War Movies as Moral Rearmament: *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers*," *Cineaste* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 4.
[94] Both Bondar and Moses argue that the work of Stephen Spielberg is especially notable. See: John Bondar, "*Saving Private Ryan* and Postwar Memory in America," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (June 2001): 805-817 and Michael Valdez Moses, "Virtual Warriors: Nostalgia, the Battlefield, and Boomer Cinema," *Reason* 33, no. 8 (January 2002): 54-60.
[95] Tom Pollard, "The Hollywood War Machine," *New Political Science* 24, no. 1 (March 2002): 132.
[96] Pollard defines the 'Hollywood War Machine' as "the production of studio films that depict and glorify wartime heroic exploits while embellishing the military experience itself...." (p. 121).
[97] Marilyn B. Young, "In the Combat Zone," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003): 255.

larger historical contexts of these conflicts. Building on this argument, Young

argues that:

> Ground combat proves much more satisfying. The camera
> always faces out against the enemy, or inward at the grievous
> wounds enemy fire causes. The individual soldier fighting for his
> life becomes the victim of war; those he kills, since they are so
> evidently bent on his destruction, are the perpetrators of
> violence. His innocence is ours.[98]

The structuring of point of view in such a manner is, as will become evident, a

recurring element in terms of the U.S. military's role in entertainment media

and is, perhaps, even more strictly defined in military-themed video games.

Interesting for its absence in many of the essays cited above, however, is the

interesting role that the U.S. military played in shaping some of these films.

Again, like the activities of the OWI during the Second World War, the ongoing

relationship between the military and Hollywood is a subject that is not well

understood. Such a relationship is, of course, acknowledged since the mention

of military assistance must appear in the credits of films, television programs,

or video games.[99] But the extent of the influence that the military can

potentially exert over the content is likely a little less well understood.

In 2001, an article appeared in the British newspaper, the *Guardian*,

that detailed the release of U.S. military documents that shed light on the

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[98] Young, "In the Combat Zone," 255. Also, in discussing many of these films, Wetta and Novelli argue that they represent a 'new patriotism;' one that is defined as "celebrat[ing]... loyalty to one's comrades in battle, the ability to survive the horrific face of modern hyper-lethal weaponry and warfare, and the shared experience of battle." They state that these films "do not revive patriotism so much as turn it inside out so that the private motivations and goals of the individual soldiers superceded any stated or understood national or public rationales for whatever war is being fought." Again, the larger context of the war is effaced by the necessity to focus on the soldier's point of view. Frank J. Wetta and Martin A. Novelli, "'Now a Major Motion Picture': War Films and Hollywood's New Patriotism," *Journal of Military History* 67, no. 3 (July 2003): 861.

[99] See the "Making Movies Guide" available from the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs (U.S. Army) website. Available at: [www4.army.mil/ocpa/community/makingmovies/index.html].

Pentagon's influence on Hollywood filmmaking.[100] The military documents

were secured by an investigative journalist named David L. Robb who would

later release a book in 2004. *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes

and Censors the Movies* would describe how the Department of Defense and

military services provide logistical support, military hardware, personnel, stock

footage and consulting expertise to Hollywood film projects. The book was

followed by a documentary of the same title directed by Emilio Pacull[101] and

even though the release of the book and the film created a great deal of

discussion (especially on internet blogs and alternative websites), the subject

has been treated in a much more comprehensive way by military historian

Lawrence Suid. The relationship between Hollywood and the military is, in

some ways, not surprising as many governmental organizations, including civic

governments, maintain liaison offices to assist filmmakers. The U.S. military

receives numerous requests each year for stock footage, the use of military

installations for location shooting, technical or historical advice, and the use of

military equipment and hardware. Perhaps what is surprising is the nature of

the influence that the military can exert over the content of the films.

As a part of this process, the military reviews each script and offers

advice to producers and the director. Many of the script changes suggested by

the military are to correct historical inaccuracies or discrepancies in military

protocols, including confusion over rank, insignias, or the responsibilities of the

various military branches. Since the military will review scripts in a variety of

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[100] Duncan Campbell, "Top Gun versus Sergeant Bilko? No Contest, Says Pentagon" (Online), *Guardian* (August 29, 2001).
[http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Guardian/0,4029,543821,00.html].
[101] *Operation Hollywood*, Emilio Pacull, dir. (ARTE France, Les Films d'Ici, 2004).

genres (from combat films to farcical comedies), the level of military-related

knowledge on the part of screenwriters varies accordingly and some of the

script changes suggested by the military undoubtedly improve some films. In

other ways, the interpretation of 'historical accuracy' in such script changes is

more interpretive.

As Suid shows, almost every military movie made up to the early 1960s

received assistance from the armed services as the military recognized the

public relations and recruiting potential of filmic and especially Hollywood

portrayals. But as Suid notes, "[b]eginning with *Dr. Strangelove*, *Fail Safe*, and

the other anti-bomb films of the mid-1960s and the growing protest

movement against the Vietnam War... the traditional relationship came to an

end and the armed services began to reject scripts which they believed

contained negative portrayals of their men and activities."[102] Two examples

from this period are *War Hunt* (1962) and *Beach Red* (1967). Recognizing that

both of these combat films were largely anti-war in tone and portrayed the

overall futility of combat, the various services involved modified their

assistance. With *War Hunt*, the Army withheld assistance because of the

overall tone and objected to the portrayal of a soldier as a coward and scenes

that it, as Suid mentions, "considered too gruesome to be in good taste."[103]

Instead, Suid says, "[t]he Army recommended that the producer 'explore other

avenues of approach to a new story line which would be acceptable.'"[104]

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[102] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, xii.
[103] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 202.
[104] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 202.

For *Beach Red*, the Marines recognized the anti-war message of the film and only allowed the use of combat footage from the Marine film archive.[105] The director of *Beach Red*, Cornel Wilde, had to take the production to the Philippines and to arrange for the use of its armed services to stage the action sequences. Withholding military assistance often increases the budget of a film but as Suid argues, it often affects the perception of the film by the audience:

> *War Hunt* is significant, however, because it illustrates the problems of making even a small-scale war movie without military cooperation. The movie has a valuable comment to make about war and killing, but it lacks the dramatic impact of *The Longest Day*, which has no plot and a known outcome. Unlike Zanuck's film, *War Hunt* did not have authentic military equipment, and it used extras instead of trained soldiers. To help disguise these physical deficiencies, [the producer Terry] Sanders shot much of the film at night. Despite noisy explosions, the film lacked a realistic atmosphere and authentic-looking battle sequences. The resulting 'back-lot' feel of the movie at a time when *The Longest Day* offered 'reality' continually intruded on the story. The audience cannot suspend disbelief, cannot pretend it is watching war, and so the message is weakened.[106]

The desire for authenticity and the desire to save production costs are the two major motivations for Hollywood studios to seek military assistance. In cases where large numbers of troops are needed or where the use of major military equipment is requested (such as aircraft, tanks, or even naval vessels), the production company must remunerate the military for basic costs. But even today, where post-production CGI can be utilized to re-create military hardware, securing military equipment and personnel saves considerable time

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[105] As Suid notes: "The Marines probably benefited more from this assistance than Wilde [the director and producer], since the footage deteriorated and he had it restored in the process of blowing it up to wide-screen dimensions." Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 203. Also, throughout Robb's discussion, it becomes evident that the Marines are consistently less demanding than other branches of the military when it comes to requests for script alterations.

[106] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 202-203.

and money in both production and post-production.[107] The Pentagon's own

guidelines stipulate that media productions that receive military assistance

must preserve historical accuracy and aid in the recruiting and retention of

military personnel. This is perhaps understandable given the considerable

assistance provided to productions and as Suid shows, the script changes

suggested or demanded by the military have definitely benefited some films in

terms of correcting those historical inaccuracies that often result from

scriptwriters' unfamiliarity with military history and protocol or to sometimes

tone down artistic license or dramatic necessity. In other cases, the

interpretation of 'historical accuracy' is more problematic.

In *Black Hawk Down*, for example, the events are seen through the eyes

of rookie Ranger Sergeant Matt Eversmann (played by Josh Hartnett) and

cohorts. And it was this that attracted and guaranteed the participation of the

Department of Defense. An article on the special effects used in the film states

this in no uncertain terms: "Despite the uncompromising and frequently grim

nature of [Mark] Bowden's book, the U.S. Army had embraced [the project] due

to the veracity of its account of modern combat from a soldier's point of

view."[108] In order to sell the military (and gain their involvement) on the film,

producer Jerry Bruckheimer commissioned a series of large-format line

drawings depicting the battle as it would appear on screen. As Bruckheimer

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[107] Ridley Scott, the director of *Black Hawk Down*, told Robb he could not have made the film without military assistance: "I'd have to call it 'Huey Down'" (p. 91). The producer, Jerry Bruckheimer, had a 'backup plan' to use Huey helicopters (vintage aircraft from the Vietnam era) located in Germany and to digitally alter them, but estimated the plan would have added an extra $1 million in production costs. Similarly, Penny Marshall—director of the 1994 comedy *Renaissance Man*—agreed to script changes in order to save over $1 million in production costs (p. 81).
[108] Joe Fordham, "Under Fire: Black Hawk Down," *CineFex* no. 89 (April 2002): 44.

recalls: "We showed them these illustrations of the men fast-roping in... and gave them a little dog-and-pony show that helped everyone to see how we felt about the book. They got very excited."[109]

However, before the full cooperation of the U.S. Army would be guaranteed, certain script changes would have to be made. One of the major changes demanded by the Pentagon's film liaison office was that the name of Ranger Specialist John Stebbins would be changed for the film. Stebbins was considered as one of the heroes of the battle of Mogadishu in 1993 and figured prominently in journalist Mark Bowden's book that served as the basis for the screenplay.[110] Stebbins received the Silver Star for his actions in Mogadishu but after the publication of Bowden's book and before the film went to production, Stebbins was court-martialed and sentenced to thirty years in a military prison for rape.[111] Another, more subtle, alteration was that the original rivalry between the Rangers and the Special Forces (both of which are prominent in the story) had to be eliminated.[112]

Similar changes were required for *Windtalkers*. The film is a fictionalized account of the 'code talkers:' Navajo Indians who were recruited by the U.S. Marines during the Second World War in order to use their native language for military communications which then, it was hoped, could not be

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[109] Fordham, "Under Fire: Black Hawk Down," 44. The military's excitement can also be explained since the way the story of the battle was treated by the screenplay would 'correct' the general (mis)understanding among the public that the battle was a military failure. See Young, "In the Combat Zone," for further discussion of this point and Susan Carruthers, "Bringing it all Back Home: Hollywood Returns to War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 172.

[110] Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Signet/Penguin, 2001).

[111] David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 91-92. Robb also interviews Mark Bowden, who states that the names of two or three other U.S. soldiers were changed because they were still active in the U.S. Special Forces.

[112] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 670.

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deciphered by the Japanese code-breakers. One of the major themes in the script involved the military directive that the code talkers would need to be killed if faced with capture. In a scene from the original script, Cpl. Joe Enders (played by Nicholas Cage) is given the order directly by a Marine Major. Even though the screenwriters—Joe Batteer and John Rice—insisted that the code talkers themselves were aware of the directive and that it had been officially recognized by Congress, the Marines said that it never happened.[113]

Both the Marines and the Pentagon film liaison office also reacted to a scene showing a character, 'the Dentist,' removing gold teeth from dead Japanese soldiers. In a memo from the Marine's film liaison office to the head of the Pentagon's film liaison office about the scene, the Marines state: "This has to go.... The activity is un-Marine, and more representative of a conscript force. The Marines were volunteers. I recommend these characters be looting the dead for intelligence, or military souvenirs—swords, field glasses. Loot is still not cool, but more realistic and less brutal."[114] Again, the screenwriters protested, arguing that such a scene was truthful and that the National Archives contained footage of a Marine removing gold teeth from dead Japanese soldiers. In the end, however, the script was altered. The 'dentist' scene was removed and for the scene depicting the order to kill the code talkers in face of capture—which the filmmakers thought was more crucial to the story—the scene was changed so that it was implied rather than mentioned directly.

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[113] Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, 63.
[114] Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, 59-60.

The major question becomes how such influence over film scripts should be understood. Some of these changes requested by the military are incidental. Robb documents many cases where minor military characters are—if they are initially shown in a less favourable light, such as acting in a traitorous manner—are changed so that they become members of foreign militaries, civilian agencies or politicians. Another, seemingly minor, demand that shows up in negotiations over scripts is that the military consistently objects to any depiction of the failure or malfunction of military equipment.[115] The military is, of course, interested in its portrayal and whether this accords with the 'idealized' view of itself and its activities. And when taken individually, many of these changes could be understood as harmless or even justified.

Such questions are a part of the larger debate over the effect of entertainment media such as film in the portrayal of history. Robert A. Rosenstone argues that film—and especially the dramatic, historical film—must be understood differently than traditional written history:

> We must, in short, stop expecting films to do what (we imagine)
> books to do. Stop expecting them to get the facts right, or to
> present several sides of an issue, or to give a fair hearing to all
> the evidence on a topic, or to all the characters or groups
> represented in a historical situation, or to provide a broad and
> detailed historical context for events. Stop, also, expecting them
> to be a mirror of a vanished reality that will show us the past as
> it really was. Dramatic films are not and will never be 'accurate'
> in the same ways as books (claim to be), no matter how many
> academic consultants work on a project.... How could they be
> the same (and who would want them to be) since it is precisely

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[115] Robb documents an interesting episode where the Pentagon's film liaison office convinced the producers of *Lassie* to alter a TV script that originally depicted a military aircraft crashing due to structural defects. In the revised script, the plane crashes due to "unpredictable icing conditions." See Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, 303-306.

the task of film to add movement, color, sound, and drama to
the past?[116]

Rosenstone is not arguing that filmic representations of history are debased

because they often sacrifice historical fact for entertainment drama but that

fictional representations operate on a different register from that of written

history. Again, to quote Rosenstone:

> Along with its powerful experiential quality, the feeling that
> while viewing the screen we are virtually living in the past, the
> contribution of the historical film lies precisely at the level of
> argument and metaphor, particularly as these engage the larger
> discourse of history. By which I mean how the films relate to,
> comment upon, and critique the already existing body of data,
> arguments, and debates about the topic at hand.[117]

For Rosenstone, the creation of, say, composite characters or events from a

group of historical ones is justifiable since dramatic forms must often condense

a range of historical materials and facts. And by pointing out that film exists

on a different register—experiential and metaphorical—then particular aspects

of the medium (mise-en-scene for example) become as important as historical

fact in conveying the sense and feel of history on the screen.

Rosenstone is surely correct in stating that we cannot expect a single

film to represent everyone involved or to satisfy everyone who has a degree of

investment in the subject being portrayed. As Charles Champlin, editor at the

Los Angeles Times and who wrote the introduction for the revised edition of

Suid's book *Guts & Glory*, recounts:

> Stanley Kramer once told me that he wanted desperately to
> make a Vietnam film. But as he well knew, movies are a mass
> medium, and a mainstream film almost requires a national

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[116] Robert A. Rosenstone, "Inventing Historical Truth on the Silver Screen," *Cineaste* 29, no. 2
(Spring 2004): 29.
[117] Rosenstone, "Inventing Historical Truth on the Silver Screen," 30.

consensus. Kramer could not conceive a story that would be acceptable to both the Hawks and Doves in society.[118]

The difficulty Stanley Kramer encountered indicates that rarely are portrayals of history only about the past and this is especially true of subject matter where politics and ideology are at stake. With war being so tied to a nation's sense of identity, filmic portrayals also serve other equally important functions: celebration and commemoration. This can be understood as the way any nation or community—in Benedict Anderson's conceptualization—necessarily memorializes certain aspects of its past while forgetting others.[119] The mythic status of the Vietnam war, of course, is much more complex and conflicted. But one film that Suid pays particular attention to, even though the producers—for reasons that will become obvious—did not seek military assistance, was *Casualties of War* (1989) directed by Brian De Palma. De Palma had wanted to make the film as early as 1969 (when a version of the events was published in the *New Yorker*) but the story had been optioned by another filmmaker. As Suid describes it:

> [N]ot until sixteen years after the United States withdrew from Vietnam did Hollywood finally provide a graphic portrayal of the true hell that the American military imparted to the Vietnamese civilians. Based on an actual 1966 incident and Daniel Lang's short 1969 book of the same name, *Casualties of War* detailed how a five-man Army reconnaissance patrol abduct, rape, and murder a Vietnamese peasant girl. One soldier, given the pseudonym Sven Eriksson in the book and the movie, refuses to join in the gang rape and reports his comrades' criminal actions to his superiors. When they choose not to follow up his report, Eriksson tells his story to a chaplain, who goes to the Army's Criminal Investigations Division. The resulting probe leads to a court-martial in March 1967 and the conviction of the four soldiers. The men ultimately have their sentences reduced or

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[118] Charles Champlin, "Introduction," in *Guts & Glory*, xvii.
[119] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991).

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dismissed, whereas Eriksson, still fearing retribution, lives under
an assumed name somewhere in the Midwest.[120]

In his book, Suid often discusses the way that particular films accord with or

deviate from the historical record (going against Rosenstone's belief in how

historical films should be approached), but with *Casualties of War* Suid defers

to the interpretations of others in the controversy that ensued, and especially

for the ways it could be read as a metaphor for the war itself. The journalist

and historian David Halberstam thought the country "badly needed" the film,

as it "tells what Vietnam did to some of the young men who fought there, and

what it does to the thin membrane which in any society separates decency

from indecency."[121] Others however read the film in a completely different

manner:

> John Wheeler, chairman of the committee that built the Vietnam
> Memorial, believed that "every dollar spent to see this film is a
> knife in the heart of some vet, his kids or others who love him."
> He told reporters at a press conference he called on August 23,
> 1989, that the film "depicts vets as morally insensitive, barely
> competent soldiers with cynical and cowardly officers." Wheeler
> claimed that *Casualties of War* "is a lie about what we were
> really like in Vietnam. By focusing on a rape, De Palma declines
> to tell the greater truth, that in Vietnam the overwhelming
> number of us were decent, (and) built orphanages, roads,
> hospitals and schools."[122]

Considering the way that soldiers were publicly treated after returning to the

U.S. in the latter stages of the war as well as film and television portrayals of

the Vietnam vet as marginal and even psychotic in the early 1970s,[123] it is not

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[120] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 541.

[121] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 544.

[122] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 543.

[123] For a discussion of the shifting ways that the Vietnam War and the Vietnam vet have been
portrayed, see: Rick Berg, "Losing Vietnam: Covering the War in an Age of Technology," in *The
Vietnam War and American Culture*, John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, eds. (New York:
Columbia University Press, 1991), 115-147.

difficult to understand Wheeler's desire that not all veterans should be seen

through the lens of a particular filmic representation. Still, as Suid points out,

Casualties of War portrayed an actual historical event and was by no means an

isolated occurrence. Speaking more metaphorically, Suid continues:

> ...through the violation and murder of one peasant girl, De
> Palma reminded audiences of the ultimate irony of the American
> experience in Vietnam. To carry out the government's professed
> goal of saving Vietnam from Communist domination, the U.S.
> military wrought untold destruction on the small peasant nation.
> Eriksson's failure to stop the rape and murder also symbolized
> the inability of the antiwar movement to stop the conflict in a
> timely fashion.[124]

Often, the desire to acknowledge and pay tribute to the experiences of

individual soldiers involved in war comes into conflict with the desire to portray

the events that soldiers actually found themselves caught up in (no matter

what their role or actions). As difficult and as understandable as this situation

is, Rick Berg, a film historian but also a former Marine who served in Vietnam in

1968, takes a different approach to the period of the 1980s where Hollywood

films generally tried to recuperate the memory of Vietnam as victory. "[O]ur

desire to forget and to win through [cinematic] representation continues to

defeat us... and as they [Hollywood] attempt to forget and recuperate our loss,

they revise our tactics, our politics, and our history." Reminding his readers

that there are larger political and ideological issues at stake, Berg argues: "It is

all well and good to desire to turn Vietnam vets into heroes but not at the

expense of their children and their history."[125]

The case of *Casualties of War* is interesting since it shows that—outside

of any influence that the U.S. military has on contemporary Hollywood

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[124] Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 542.
[125] Berg, "Losing Vietnam: Covering the War in an Age of Technology," 144-145.

productions—there are many competing viewpoints that surround a film

whose subject matter is in any way controversial. But the controversy

surrounding the film must also be read against the larger cultural frame of the

period. Berg argues that in many of the Vietnam films of the 1980s—especially

those where the plot revolves around freeing American POWs still being held in

Vietnam—there is a tendency to 'return' to Vietnam to recover both the war

and the veteran.[126] And as Susan Jeffords argues in *The Remasculinization of

America*, the decade of the 1980s is marked by an ongoing attempt to rewrite

the Vietnam War in both popular and political culture.[127] In this sense,

Casualties of War seems out of place and perhaps belongs to an earlier cycle of

the Vietnam film.[128]

To return to the question of how the U.S. military's influence on the

content of Hollywood film should or can be understood, Suid, himself, argues

that the largely positive portrayals of the military have led to an unrealistic view

of the effectiveness of the military and the moral clarity of its various

involvements. While Robb argues that some question the constitutional

legality of the Pentagon's role in shaping popular culture,[129] there is

considerable difficulty in casting these actions as propaganda or—for those

productions where military assistance is refused—as censorship. As Jonathan

Turley, points out: "...this is not traditional propaganda since the military does

not generate the product itself and does not compel others to produce it.

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[126] Berg, "Losing Vietnam: Covering the War in an Age of Technology," 142.
[127] Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinzation of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
[128] The fact that De Palma had to wait two decades to make the film might also indicate that it was
'out of place' at the time it was finally released.
[129] This comes about since favouring one form of 'speech' over another is believed to be
inconsistent with the government's role as outlined in the First Amendment. See Robb, 47-48.

Rather, it achieves the same result through indirect influence; securing tailored historical accounts by withholding important resources."[130] Still, if we retain an idealistic view and consider the creation of cultural products as a part of larger field of expression, the subsidizing and encouragement of favourable portrayals complicate such a view. This is especially so since Robb argues that self–censorship is evident within the industry through the production of scripts that are, as Turley says, tailored so that military assistance will be assured. It is further complicated by the fact that the Pentagon's film liaison office considers its work as a way to lobby Congress and maintain military funding.[131] Whatever effects we might assume as arising from this relationship, it is indicative of the evolving role that the U.S. military sees for itself in relation to popular culture.

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[130] Jonathan Turley, "Foreword," in *Operation Hollywood*, 17.

[131] Robb quotes Major David Georgi who says: "We want to show Congress what we can do.... Obviously, a movie is not always 100 percent factual, so when we get Congress to watch it, they see it in a favorable light, and down the road, this will help with funding" (p. 183).

Chapter 2

Spectatorship and the Shift from Total to Limited War

The Second World War and its Mythical Status

In her book, *The World War II Combat Film*, Jeanine Basinger comes to the

seemingly redundant conclusion that, before World War II, the World War II

combat film did not exist.[1] In her exhaustive study, Basinger traces the

evolution of the war film from its beginnings in World War I and through the

interwar period to the middle of the Second World War where many recurring

elements would settle into the generic form of the combat film. While the

genre would ebb and flow through the next sixty years—responding to new

conflicts (Korea, terrorism), steering clear of others (Vietnam, the Gulf Wars),

and responding to itself as a genre—the generic elements would remain

remarkably stable.

My specific interest in Basinger's study come from the way she describes

the various evolutionary stages or "waves" of the genre and the various

meanings and functions she assigns to them. In the first wave (1941 to 1943)

the genre is in its final stage of emergence and its function was to apply

narrative form to current events then unfolding.[2] Accordingly, Basinger says

these films "were an attempt to create stories about the real event,

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[1] Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 13, 107.
[2] I will not cover all the 'waves' that Basinger identifies and the dates that I provide are simplified versions of Basinger's, which are much more specific.

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incorporating a narrative line and a set of characters, thus making the events

alive and personal for the moviegoer. Viewers participated vicariously in war,

and, by extension, were educated to the new combat process."[3] By the second

wave (1944 to 1946), the genre is firmly established and, consequently, both

filmmaker and audience have a shared vocabulary so that filmmakers can

routinely take advantage of genre expectations on behalf of the audience.

While many of the narrative elements are in place, Basinger says that an

important element in "this self-conscious"[4] stage is the influence of

documentary films since the audience would base its expectations of how

combat should look by the documentaries it had seen during the war.[5] The

third stage would follow the decade of the 1950s and would include

adjustments for contemporary concerns (racial tensions, Communism) and, for

some films, the inclusion of the Korean conflict. The most important aspects of

these films is that they seem to provide a ritualistic space where the American

audience can, through combat's reenactment, share and celebrate the trials

and outcome of the war. As Basinger states, "the war was now war movies,"[6]

and this is a theme that would continue into the fourth wave (1960 to 1970); a

period that would be dominated by large-scale epic combat films such as *The

Longest Day*, *Battle of the Bulge*, and *Tora! Tora! Tora!*. Basinger considers this

decade to be the final 'evolutionary' stage: "the true war has been removed,

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[3] Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 111.
[4] Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 112.
[5] Of course, this is complicated by the fact that, for a variety of reasons, the documentaries that were produced often relied on re-staged scenes and combined footage from various sources. See: James M. Skinner, "December 7: Filmic Myth Masquerading as Historical Fact," *The Journal of Military History* 55, no. 4 (October 1991): 507-516; and Peter Maslowski, *Armed with Cameras: The American Military Photographers of World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1993).
[6] Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 141.

and in its place is its filmed replica. This finally makes the war a legendary

story—fully distanced and mythic—suitable to be one of our national stories for

all time."[7]

The Second World War is often described as 'the Good War' that was

fought—at home and abroad—by 'the Greatest Generation.' Unlike the

conflict in Vietnam (or even the First World War), World War II was marked by a

moral and political clarity that involved most of its participants in depth. Susan

Carruthers calls it the "paradigmatic wartime experience,"[8] despite the fact that

its characteristics and circumstances ended with the war itself. After World

War II, the geopolitical situation changed radically and with the coming of the

nuclear age and the Cold War, a new age of 'limited war' or 'small wars'

began.[9] So strong is the imaged/imagined nature of World War II that, as

Daniel Hallin argues:

> ...the understandings of war which prevail today are still derived
> to a large extent from the age of total war; indeed subsequent
> wars have typically been presented to the public in their initial
> stages as replays of the Second World War, and many of the
> conflicts over wartime communication arise from the clash
> between expectations based in the culture of total war and the
> political reality of limited war.[10]

If the experience of World War II still resonates (and the recent

popularity of films, television programs, and video games set during the war

indicate that it does) the nature of that 'experience' is a very complicated

question. In their introduction to a collection of essays examining the

representational nature of the conflict, historians John Whitelay Chambers and

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[7] Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 170.
[8] Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War*, (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 12.
[9] See Dyer, "Notes on Nuclear War 1: Running on Empty," in *War*, 199-222.
[10] Hallin, "The Media and War," 209.

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David Culbert argue, like Basinger, that public understanding of past wars is often based more on manufactured representations than memory or experience. But they also concede that the same representational forms that complicate historical understanding and popular memory create difficulties for the perception of contemporary conflicts:

> ...to what extent have images, derivative perspectives on the world, become the perceived sense of 'reality' in contemporary culture? How much has this resulted from the cinematic representation of warfare in which people are separated from the real events and the mass horror of modern industrial warfare by layers of representational and interpretive distancing? ...To what extent is war, at least the perception of it as represented by assembled moving images, a central part of modern consciousness?[11]

The relation between modern warfare and modern aesthetic experience has become an increasingly important question since the end of the Second World War. Generally, the 20th Century has brought new ways of witnessing war, 'experiencing war,' and vicariously participating in it. This has become more pronounced in the era of 'limited war' which has, ironically, meant that fewer and fewer people on the 'home front' are either directly or indirectly involved in the conflict. A crude analogy—but one that is heard again and again—might be that modern war has now become a spectator sport.

The evolution of the World War II combat genre is indicative of such a relationship. During the conflict, the genre coalesced into a recognizable form, in part, because of a series of influences ranging from the ideological views of the OWI and the needs of the military, to the economic and formal constraints of Hollywood. Jeanine Basinger is careful to distinguish this period as one which 'created the reality' of the war for viewers since the various constraints

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[11] Chambers and Culbert, *World War II: Film and History*, 5.

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or influences involved promlematize the desire to see this as an unmediated version of the war. Similarly, Pierre Sorlin argues that if 'war' "is a highly imprecise term for which nobody has yet given a satisfactory definition,"[12] it has largely been replaced by an "imaginary war" that is "represented as the sum of heroic actions carried out by handfuls of individuals."[13] "In their screened versions," Sorlin comments, "wars are often more hallucinatory than real."[14]

In an era of limited conflict, the trend seems to be that the screened versions of war are often the primary way that the public is touched by it. Of course, military conflict is very real for those fighting it and for those civilians caught in its immediate surroundings (and those who will then have to live amidst the destruction). However, as Michael Ignatieff argues, the media landscape is increasingly becoming "a decisive theatre of operations." Writing after the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, Ignatieff argues that: "War thus becomes virtual:"

> ...not simply because it appears to take place on a screen but
> because it enlists societies only in virtual ways. Due to nuclear
> weapons, it is no longer a struggle for national survival; with the
> end of conscription, it no longer requires the actual participation
> of citizens; because of the bypassing of representative
> institutions, it no longer requires democratic consent; and as a
> result of the exponential growth of the modern economy, it no
> longer draws on the entire economic system. These conditions
> transform war into something like a spectator sport. As with
> sports, nothing ultimate is at stake: neither national survival, nor
> the fate of the economy. War affords the pleasures of a

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[12] Pierre Sorlin, "War and Cinema: Interpreting the Relationship." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 14, no. 4 (1994): 357.

[13] Sorlin, "War and Cinema," 360.

[14] Sorlin, "War and Cinema," 364.

spectacle, with the added thrill that it is real for someone, but not, happily, for the spectator.[15]

Vietnam: Television and the "Living Room War"

If the Second World War was the paradigmatic wartime experience, then Vietnam was its antithesis. It was a conflict rather than a war (the U.S. Congress did not make a formal declaration) and one that was marred by uncertain origins and obscure objectives and would alter the relationship between the military and the media for some decades. It was also the first major conflict that was broadcast via television in an ongoing and sustained basis.

The presence of television played a variety of significant roles as the conflict unfolded. It is often cited as one of the reasons why the Vietnam War received little attention from Hollywood. Since the conflict received almost nightly coverage, there was not the impetus to bring the conflict to theatres.[16] As Jeanine Basinger notes, very few Vietnam combat films were made during the war itself; some films were ostensibly about the conflict even though they were set in another (such as World War II or Korea). It would not be until the early to mid-eighties that films about Vietnam would become more common, although here the films were largely extraction or prisoner liberation films that, as Basinger says, "make a *new* Vietnam War—one in which *we* are victorious."[17]

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[15] Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (Toronto: Viking, 2000), 191.
[16] Rick Berg points out that Hollywood seemed more interested in producing documentaries, "because they insisted on documenting the real war, the one seen on TV...." Rick Berg, "Losing Vietnam: Covering the War in the Age of Technology," in *The Vietnam War and American Culture*, John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 123.
[17] Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*, 191 (emphasis in original).

Television would come to be seen as the central and extremely controversial aspect of the Vietnam conflict. Dubbed the 'first television war' or 'the living room war,'[18] the ultimate failure of the American military in Vietnam was considered by many to be caused by the eminent role television played in bringing the war home to television audiences. Unlike previous wars, foreign correspondents were given wide access to South Vietnam (provided to a significant degree by the U.S. military itself) and to soldiers and other military personnel. And, most significantly, their stories were largely free of military or government censorship.[19] It was the relatively free access and sustained coverage that would prove to be so controversial. Some military and government officials blamed network coverage for the collapse of public support for the war. Through television, the public saw the horror of war on a daily basis rather than a sanitized version of it filtered through Hollywood drama or military censors. In this argument, government officials were also affected. Responding to what they saw on the newscasts and the continual withering of public support, they would refuse to give the military the latitude they needed to effectively win the war. The situation came to be known as 'the Vietnam syndrome:' where an ambiguous and complex conflict coupled with

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[18] The phrase 'living room war' originally came from Michael Arlen, *The Living Room War* (New York: Penguin, 1982).

[19] The conflict is often referred to as the 'uncensored war.' The U.S. military did impose restrictions on the reporting of certain kinds of sensitive information but such restrictions were relatively minor when compared to later conflicts. See: Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 119-120 and Daniel Hallin, *The 'Uncensored War': The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford Uiversity Press, 1989), 128-129, 211. Also, Major General Winant Sidle, who was the chief of Army information during the conflict, mentions that only nine reporters had their accreditations revoked or suspended for breaking the 'ground rules' and only two were considered as serious. Major General Winant Sidle, "A Battle Behind the Scenes: The Gulf War Reheats Military-Media Controversy," *Military Review* (September 1991), 55.

unfettered media access would have dire consequences for the ability of the

military and government to effectively prosecute a war.[20]

Unlike the press, it was felt that television—as a visual news medium—

focused more on the sensational aspects of the war which usually meant it did

little to provide a larger context for viewers and focused primarily on aspects

that were damaging to the military and government (violence and destruction,

as well as civilian and U.S. military casualties). Perhaps the most famous

episode was the on-air resignation felt and expressed by Walter Cronkite on 27

February 1968: "To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the

face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To

suggest we are on the edge of defeat is to yield to unreasonable pessimism. To

say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory,

conclusion."[21] Of course, the war was far from over but 1968 would prove to

be a pivotal year in the conflict as the Tet offensive (a series of attacks launched

by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong) would be broadcast on TV screens

across the U.S. The Vietnam conflict had largely been an 'invisible' one; the

jungle terrain and the fact that most of the fighting took place at night largely

precluded the filming of actual combat.[22] The Tet offensive, however, took

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[20] For a very useful discussion of the 'Vietnam Syndrome' see: Tarak Barkawi, "Globalization, Culture, and War: On the Popular Mediation of 'Small Wars,'" *Cultural Critique* 58 (Fall 2004), 130-133.

[21] Walter Cronkite, 'We Are Mired in Stalemate' (Broadcast: February 27, 1968). The full text of the broadcast is available at:
[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/vietnam/cronkite.cfm] and is also reproduced in *Reporting Vietnam: Part One: American Journalism 1959-1969* (New York: Library of America/Penguin Putnam, 1998), 581-582.

[22] As Michael Clark argues, this helped contribute to the conflict's "ineffable, indescribable, [and] finally unrepresentable nature." Michael Clark, "Vietnam: Representations of Self and War," *Wide Angle* 7, no. 4 (1985), 5.

place in cities across South Vietnam, in daylight, and in front of journalists and television crews.

Such a view of the media's role in the Vietnam conflict has subsequently been called the 'conventional' viewpoint as research has revealed that it was considerably more complex if not—in some respects—almost completely reversed. Looking at the war coverage through content analysis and placing it in the context of domestic political opinion, it becomes difficult to support the conventional wisdom of how U.S. military interests were thwarted by the media. Especially important in this regard has been the work of Daniel Hallin who has shown that in the early stages of the war, the news coverage was fairly 'objective' in that it largely placed the conflict in the context of the Cold War and was consistently favorable to American military policy.[23] Often, reporters and newscasters would speak in the first-person plural ('our forces') indicating that the conflict was a national endeavor. Newscasters and reporters, placing the Vietnam conflict firmly in the nation's wartime tradition, often evoked the memory of the Second World War. In addition, news reporting presented the conflict as a traditionally masculine endeavor where special emphasis was placed on physical and mental toughness and professionalism. Most notably, Hallin argues that the early coverage framed the conflict in a way that celebrated consensual values, linking the government's and military's interpretation of events with the perceived views

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[23] My discussion in this section is based on: Daniel Hallin, *The 'Uncensored War':The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Daniel Hallin, "Images of the Vietnam and the Persian Gulf Wars in U.S. Television," *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz, eds. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

and values of the public.[24] Because of this, Hallin says, oppositional or anti-war voices were consistently marginalized in the war's early stages. Around 1968 and 1969 the change in coverage would become noticeable. Hallin does not attribute the change to an 'oppositional' media but to a gradual change in the overall political climate. During this period:

> ...the United States was deeply divided about the war. The division existed at all levels: among political elites in both parties and throughout the government, in the mass public, and among the soldiers in the field, who were the principal characters in television's drama of war. Television was not in the vanguard of this change: the positive image of war of the early years persisted until the wider political change was fairly well advanced....
> It would not be accurate to say that even in the later years television positioned itself in opposition to the war. It was still unusual for TV journalists to take an openly critical stance.[25]

One of the most controversial and complex aspects of any war is the level of screened violence shown to civilians watching at home. In the 'conventional' interpretation of the media's role in Vietnam, it was assumed that the constant talk of casualties and their visual representation helped turn public opinion against the war.[26] Hallin argues that even in its later stages television "presented not the 'literal horror of war', but a relatively sanitized, and indeed in the early days often a romanticized view, based on the nation's collective memory of the Second World War."[27] In fact, Hallin notes that

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[24] Hallin, *The 'Uncensored War'*, 110-117.

[25] Hallin, "Images of the Vietnam and the Persian Gulf Wars," 49.

[26] This point has been subject to considerable debate. In studying the Korean and Vietnam wars, John Meuller has argued that the increasing awareness of casualties as a conflict wears on will have a strong effect in terms of declines in public opinion in favour of war. John Meuller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley, 1973. More recently, see: Scott Sigmund Gartner and Gary M. Segura, "War, Casualties, and Public Opinion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 3 (June 1998): 278-300; and Cori E. Dauber, "The Shots Seen 'Round the World: The Impact of the Images of Mogadishu on American Military Operations," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2001): 653-687.

[27] Hallin, "The Media and War," 210.

violence was often very carefully framed (in part to protect family members from learning of a death of a loved one by watching the evening news) and was often purged of political and moral implications by the use of language that portrayed war as a technical process, presented the violence in a "trivialized" or "cartoonlike" way, or framed the conflict with language and metaphors derived from sports.[28]

There is a general consensus that the relationship between government, the military, and the media was more cooperative than confrontational. The reasons for such cooperation are varied. In their political-economic approach to the media, Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman examine the ideological assumptions shared by media organizations, the military, and government toward Indochina generally and how this overdetermined media coverage in favour of U.S. policy and military intervention. Again, the ideologically-driven Cold War frames such assumptions as do the economic ties between state and corporate interests.[29] Studies examining the content of newspapers, magazines, and television promote similar conclusions: that early in the conflict media organizations provided favourable or even 'pro-war' coverage of the conflict, dissenting voices were largely ignored or framed in such a way that they were effectively marginalized, and that it was not until questioning attitudes began to appear in more mainstream spheres that they were reflected in the media.[30] However, such views must be tempered by the fact that any

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[28] Hallin, "Images of the Vietnam and the Persian Gulf Wars," 48.

[29] Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

[30] These issues are treated by various authors: Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War*, Daniel Hallin, "The Media and War," and Clarence R. Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

conflict, in its initial stages at least, tends to produce a 'rally effect' among the general population behind the president, the government, and the military.[31]

The significance of the Vietnam conflict was felt in other ways as well. In many ways, Vietnam punctured the mythic status of World War II. Largely regarded as a failure and characterized by polarized public opinion, the Vietnam conflict did not fit the script surrounding the 'Good War,' including relations between the media and the government and military. Despite academic research into media performance during the war, the belief that the media thwarted the execution of the war persisted among military and government officials throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. Writing in the *Military Review* in 1987, Major Cass D. Howell, expresses this position when he asks: "The point is that *nothing happened in the Vietnam War that had not occurred, either in degree or frequency, in any other war in which Americans had fought.* What, then, accounts for this perception of the Vietnam War being immoral?"[32] Howell's answer is predictable enough: the new role television coverage played in communicating the events of war to the public. Howell continues:

> Television is too powerful—it has too much impact. It is clear
> that, if we accept this erosion of public will power, our cause,
> however just and necessary, is doomed. The enemy knows he
> does not have to win many battles to win the war as long as he

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[31] Again, John Meuller's study of the Korean and Vietnam wars described a 'rally round the flag' phenomenon that subsequently decreased as casualties mounted. Meuller's findings have been utilized in later studies of the first Gulf War. See: Douglas M. McLeod, William P. Eveland and Nacy Signorelli, "Conflict and Public Opinion: Rallying Effects of the Persian Gulf War," *Journalism Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 20-31.

[32] Major Cass D. Howell, "War, Television and Public Opinion," *Military Review* (February 1987): 75. Original emphasis. Also available at: [http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev] Accessed: Nov. 2003.

keeps the war on television and drags it out interminably. What an enviable position![33]

If the pages of *Military Review* are any indication of a wider phenomenon within the U.S. military, the perception of the strained relationship between the military and media began to change in the early 1990s. Here, military authors began to rethink the approach to media relations and while an air of suspicion was still evident, these authors argue that military leadership has to understand the nature and pressures of modern reporting and, more significantly, work on improving military-media relations to mutually benefit each party.[34] There is even some recognition of the important role the media plays in U.S. public life:

> The members of the press, those who publish the nation's
> newspapers and magazines, broadcast on the radio or project
> the images of television into the homes of millions of Americans,
> serve an equally vital function in providing to the electorate
> news and other information that is needed to make the decisions
> required of a self-governing population.[35]

This shift in the military's view of the press should not be overstated. At best, it represents a grudging respect for the power of the press while still viewing the media with a certain suspicion. It can also be viewed as a public relations move to assuage the fears and suspicions of the media itself with the goal of better integrating or aligning the interests of the media in ways that will be beneficial to the military. At any rate, both governments and militaries were mindful of the 'lessons' learned in Vietnam and this would affect the

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[33] Howell, "War, Television and Public Opinion," 77-78. For a similar but slightly more nuanced view, see: Lt. Colonel Geoffrey G. Prosch and Lt. Colonel Mitchell M. Zais, "American Will and the Vietnam War," *Military Review* (March 1990): 71-80.

[34] Examples include: Major Frederick J. Chiaventone, "Ethics and Responsibility in Broadcasting," *Military Review* (August 1991): 64-76; Major General Winant Sidle, "A Battle Behind the Scenes: The Gulf War Reheats Military-Media Controversy," *Military Review* (September 1991): 52-62; and Captain James B. Brown, "Media Access to the Battlefield," *Military Review* (July 1992): 10-20. All are available at: [http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev].

[35] Major Frederick J. Chiaventone, "Ethics and Responsibility in Broadcasting," *Military Review* (August 1991): 65.

coverage of later conflicts. Since military control of the press in Vietnam was

largely felt (from the military's perspective) to be unstructured and haphazard,

conflicts in the Falklands (fought by the British in 1982), Grenada (1983), and

the invasion of Panama (1989), would see more severe restrictions placed on

the media even though the U.S. military had been advised to allow the press

more freedom and to organize the press into 'pools' in the mid-1980s.[36]

The First Persian Gulf War: Television and Live Coverage

The first Gulf War presented a number of interesting developments, not the

least of which is that it attracted significant attention from those studying the

media's relation to the government's and military's prosecution of the war.

While Vietnam was called the 'Living Room War,' the Persian Gulf War was the

first war that was covered *live* by television and broadcast around the world

and much scholarship and media criticism focused on this development.[37] The

Gulf War was a supremely televisual war and one that would offer new ways

for the home audiences to view the conflict. Yet, while it received almost

continuous attention (CNN essentially came of age because of its 'round-the-

clock' coverage), many scholars contend that it was shaped in ways that

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[36] See: Major General Winant Sidle, "A Battle Behind the Scenes: The Gulf War Reheats Military-Media Controversy," *Military Review* (September 1991), 52-62. Sidle was the chief of Army information during the Vietnam war.

[37] A sample would include a series of essays published before, during and shortly after the war by Jean Baudrillard, collected in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place,* trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995). Studies that were published shortly after the war include: Bruce Cumings, *War and Television* (London: Verso, 1992); Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); and Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller, *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf—A Global Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992; and Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press and St. Martin's Press, 1992).

precluded any alternatives to going to war and presented the conflict itself as essentially clean and casualty free.[38]

Before hostilities began, other countries tried to intervene diplomatically and discussions had taken place but, often, these were ignored by the U.S. State Department and, subsequently, major news media.[39] To many observers, the major media (especially television) made the conflict with Iraq seem inevitable even though there was considerable debate in Congress and even in some military circles.[40] Public opinion was equally split until the eve of the outbreak of hostilities. Douglas Kellner, who began a content analysis of U.S. network television and major newspapers before the war began, shows how the pre-war television climate simplified the complexities of the domestic and international political situation by generally favouring information and attitudes coming from the White House. This is not surprising since, as mentioned in the context of Daniel Hallin's work, in any period of military crisis there seems to be a tendency for major media to become dominated by official sources and perspectives favourable to military operations. This is confirmed

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[38] In an essay appearing in the French press shortly after the cessation of the ground war, Jean Baudrillard would famously remark that the 'war' was constructed as a "clean" and "surgical war." Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 61-62.

[39] The situation was considerably more complex than was often portrayed through television. Rarely mentioned was the fact that Iraq had been an ally of the U.S. (and was supplied with arms and military equipment in its war with Iran) and had a long-standing disagreement with Kuwait over oil drilling on the Iraq-Kuwaiti border. There was even a question if the U.S. had, through its diplomatic channels, intentionally or unintentionally led Saddam Hussein to believe that he could enter Kuwait without U.S. intervention. Andre Gunder Frank provides a short account of the economic and political forces worldwide that precipitated the 'need' to go to war by the various countries involved. See Andre Gunder Frank, "A Third World War: A Political Economy of the Persian Gulf War and the New World Order," in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf—A Global Perspective*, Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 3-21. Douglas Kellner provides an extensive and more nuanced discussion of the pre-war events and (non)controversies in a chapter entitled "The Road to War," (pp. 12-55) in *The Persian Gulf TV War*.

[40] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 109.

throughout Kellner's analysis of the pre-war build up. The major television

networks often passed on U.S. government disinformation as news (i.e. that

Iraq had also amassed troops on the Saudi border as well as 'stats' that

significantly overestimated the military strength of Iraq).[41] Further obscuring

the situation was the tendency to personalize the impending conflict by

substituting Saddam Hussein as a stand-in for the Iraqi people or 'Iraq' itself.

The perceived effect, was to focus popular attention on Hussein rather than the

Iraqi people.[42] As Hallin shows, the television coverage was largely structured

in a manner similar to that of the early years of the Vietnam conflict. Despite

the lingering lessons of Vietnam, war was presented as a national endeavor

('our' war), a national tradition (references to the Second World War), and

masculine. But Gulf War television coverage stressed patriotic themes far

greater than Vietnam coverage; a development that Hallin attributes to a

greater self-consciousness about patriotism in a post-Vietnam America.[43] In

fact, both the White House and the Pentagon stressed that the Gulf War was

not, in any way, comparable to Vietnam; an assertion that was repeated in the

media. In fact, as Michelle Kendrick argues, the major television news networks

went further and framed the Gulf War as a national redemption narrative,

casting the Vietnam war itself as an imperfect one fought by draftees and

volunteers using dated equipment. In the Gulf War, the U.S. military was cast

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[41] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 17-30.

[42] Hussein himself was thoroughly demonized (direct comparisons with Hitler became one of the dominant themes) and he was often referred to by his first name which, through constant mispronunciation, led to further associations: "Saad'm" which, as Ella Shohat argues, easily transfers to 'Satan,' 'Damn,' and 'Sodom'. See Ella Shohat, "The Media's War," in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 149.

[43] Hallin, "Images of the Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars," 53. Douglas Kellner also discusses the often excessive patriotism and argues that it was often framed through sports metaphors, especially football: see Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 255-260.

as highly sophisticated (especially technologically) and professional, limiting any possibility that the conflict would generate into a 'quagmire' of uncertain outcome.[44]

Techno-War, 'Total Television' and the 'Video Game War'

Once the conflict was underway, it was largely seen and interpreted as a televisual war. The war, of course, was represented and reported upon by a vast array of media, from supermarket tabloids to an emerging alternative press, but it was by far the television coverage which attracted viewers and dominated the discussion. Dubbed "Pentavision"[45] by one critic, many felt that the television coverage generally favoured the Pentagon and its sophisticated management of information.

To put the notion of 'Pentavision' into perspective, it is necessary to understand some of the characteristics of the media system and the conflict itself. The conflict itself was relatively brief and was mostly fought with aerial weapons (missiles, aerial bombing). The ground assault near the end of the conflict was very brief and received little first-hand news coverage. In fact, there was little coverage that could be considered 'first-hand.' The Pentagon and other coalition members had put severe restrictions on international journalists, mostly by organizing select journalists into news pools or media reporting teams (MRTs). Of the roughly 200 placements, these were only provided to select members of the U.S., British, and French media as these

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[44] See Michelle Kendrick, "Kicking the Vietnam Syndrome: CNN's and CBS's Video Narratives of the Persian Gulf War," in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 59-76.
[45] John MacArthur, quoted by Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 139.

countries formed the largest military contribution to the coalition. The MRTs were given 'front-line' access but only under the supervision of American military public affairs officers or British public relations officers. These journalists were required to sign a set of guidelines stipulating that they would not conduct off-the-record interviews with any military personnel, that they would agree to have their reports 'reviewed' by military censors, and that they would remain with their military handlers at all times. Those journalists who did not get access to the MRTs were set up in press centers in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, and Dhahran where military public relations officers held daily briefings. There was controversy over the fact that many journalists could not get Iraqi or Saudi visas and those journalists who broke rules were threatened with having their pool privileges or their accreditation revoked.[46]

The military press briefings themselves were interesting since they were largely controlled by military press officers. MRTs were required to send stories and information back to the press centers for the use of journalists not involved in the pools. However, many journalists quickly realized that the press briefings were largely in place for the coalition military structure to release information they wanted to release rather than fielding questions from the press.[47] The press briefings were largely constructed *for* television. Low on useful information and dominated by visual aids—especially video imagery—the briefings favoured television media over others. The importance of television was not lost on the Iraqi government either. Mindful of the 'lessons' of

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[46] Discussion of the press pools is taken from: Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 134-138; Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 80-86; and Stig A. Nohrstedt, "Ruling by Pooling," in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf—A Global Perspective*, Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 118-127.
[47] Stig A. Nohstedt, "Ruling by Pooling," 121.

Vietnam, the Iraqi regime courted Western media in order to show the effects

of coalition bombing on the civilian population (CNN even worked out an

agreement with the Iraqi government that allowed it to stay in Baghdad at the

start of the air war).[48] The dominant imagery of the conflict, however,

consisted of the video supplied by the Pentagon which showed 'smart'

weapons impacting targets (shot either from the point of view of coalition

aircraft or from the cameras mounted on the weapons themselves)[49] and the

video cameras of television media (primarily CNN) situated on the ground or

the tops of hotels that recorded the coalition air strikes on Baghdad and the

response of Iraqi anti-aircraft batteries. As Bruce Cummings would aptly

describe it, the war unfolded on television screens through a "radically

distanced, technically controlled, eminently 'cool' postmodern optic." [50]

Key to the way this imagery of the war was understood is the concept

of distancing. Here, war was made into a spectacle through the way that

television offered viewers a thrilling sense of immediacy (either through the

'liveness' of the images and sound or the newness of the point of view offered

by weapon-mounted cameras) but showed little beyond this 'reality'

established on the screen. Carruthers argues—echoing many others—that in

the Persian Gulf War, "the military sought completely to reshape public

understandings of war itself, so that civilian audiences would see it as an

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[48] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 133.
[49] The Weapon System Video program (WSV), formerly known as 'Armament Delivery
Program,' is responsible for providing a visual record of aircraft weapons delivery, targeting and
accuracy. The WSV program is a part of the larger Joint Combat Camera (COMCAM) Program,
and collects a variety of imagery for this stated purpose but also for use in intelligence and for
public affairs or public relations. See: U.S. Air Force, "Air Force Instruction 33-132: Weapons
System Video Program," (30 April 2001). Available at: [http://afpubs.hq.af.mil/].
[50] Cummings, *War and Television*, 121.

essentially bloodless, hi-tech enterprise, effected with such precision that only

infrastructure, not humans, suffered its lethal effects...."[51] Such developments

have been discussed in a variety of ways and through many different

theoretical perspectives, but two notions that help frame the U.S. military's

evolving role with various media are 'technowar' and 'total television.'

The term 'technowar' was first advanced by James William Gibson in his

book, *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam* (1986), to describe an emerging

military strategy whereby many different aspects of warfare would be

integrated. In terms of military operations, this involves the deployment and

testing of new weapons systems, managerial science, and integrated

communication and command structures in order to maximize enemy

casualties and to minimize those to friendly forces.[52] In terms of the issues at

hand, technowar also involves public relations, propaganda, and a

sophisticated program of media management and is therefore related to the

military's own notion of 'Full Spectrum Dominance.' From the perspective of

the military, such an integrated and comprehensive strategy makes perfect

sense. Others, however, have looked on with a different set of concerns. The

use and testing of high-tech weaponry and—importantly—their showcasing

through the media are used as a form of psychological warfare. Interestingly,

this is not just directed at enemy governments, soldiers or civilians but is also

directed at other countries and also domestically. Ali Kamali, for example,

argues that by showcasing new weapons in the Persian Gulf War (mostly

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[51] Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 132.

[52] Others have used different terms to otherwise describe the same concept. For example, James Der Derian uses the term 'virtuous war.' James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001).

notably the Patriot anti-missile system and the B-1 stealth bomber), "the

Pentagon legitimatized the defense budget." "The way in which the new war

technology was triumphantly painted," Kamali continues, "created [the] belief

among Americans that their tax dollars were put to proper use. The Middle

East became a show case for selling expensive weapons."[53] Such secondary

effects, it should be noted, were important at the time as the fall of the Soviet

Union and the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s had raised questions over

defense spending. In this sense, the concept of 'technowar' also makes room

for the increased connections between militaries, private defense contractors

and the necessity of showcasing such high-tech military equipment. Here, the

specific case of the Patriot Missile (which was produced by the Raytheon

Corporation and became a celebrity of sorts during the conflict) is extremely

interesting. General Norman Schwartzkopf would state in January 1991: "The

Patriot's success, of course, is known to everyone. It's 100 percent—so far, of

33 [Scuds] engaged, there have been 33 destroyed." A month later, President

George H.W. Bush would announce: "42 Scuds engaged. 41 intercepted.

Thank God for the Patriot missile!" However, after lingering questions posed

by the media—especially in Israel where the Patriots had been deployed by the

U.S. military to protect the country—Israeli General Dan Shomron would state

in 1997: "To the best of my recollection, only one Scud missile exploded in the

air as a consequence of a Patriot explosion...."[54]

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[53] Ali Kamali, "The United States – United Nations Coalition in the Persian Gulf: A Critical Evaluation," in *The Gulf War as Popular Entertainment: An Analysis of the Military-Industrial Media Complex*, Paul Leslie, ed. (Lewiston and Queenston: The Edward Mellen Press, 1997), 10.
[54] The statistics and quotes come from Christopher Cerf and Victor Navasky, "'Thank God for the Patriot Missile!'" *The Iraq War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf, eds. (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 138-139.

Kellner also stresses the importance of showcasing new and often experimental weapons, arguing that it not only legitimized the current conflict but reflected and legitimized a larger military ideology:

> ...technowar legitimates a high-tech military and its right to control a tremendous amount of the country's resources and to utilize military assets as an instrument of foreign policy. The ideology of technowar thus legitimates domination of the polity by the military and the exercise of a certain form of modern warfare as rational and beneficial to the public. Ideologies of technowar present it as rational, good, just, and beyond critical questioning.[55]

Such an ideology is by no means monolithic but many characteristics of technowar would mean that it would receive significant play in the media. "The television presentation," Kellner points out, "was extremely dramatic, highlighting again that this was a live 'You are There' TV war which was binding together the world as fascinated and often frightened spectators of military spectacle."[56]   'Fascination' is the operative term here. Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz contend that "the importance of producing realistic war images and emotionalized icons of war has given way in this century to increasingly depersonalized icons of what has come to be called techno-war."[57] The military spectacle of modern warfare combined with the depersonalized and sanitized way it *can be* represented, seemed to many tailor-made for network television. In an essay titled, "The Gulf War as Total Television," Tom Engelhardt attempts to show how the respective needs of the military and network news were served by the Persian Gulf War. Engelhardt argues that the military—through its organization of the press briefings and the imagery it

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[55] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 183-184.
[56] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 145.
[57] Jeffords and Rabinovitz, *Seeing Through the Media*, 23.

supplied—received unprecedented access to television audiences. In fact,

Engelhardt makes the important observation that:

> ...military and civilian spokesmen commonly addressed television
> viewers over the shoulders of reporters unceremoniously
> scrambling to ask questions. These televised events made
> explicit and visual the sidelining of the reporter in bringing war
> news to the public. Unlike their military briefers, the journalists,
> according to one *Washington Post* reporter, looked like 'fools,
> nit-pickers and egomaniacs... a whining, self-righteous, upper-
> middle class mob jostling for whatever tiny flakes of fame
> (might) settle on their shoulders.' The briefings, commented
> spokesman Lieutenant General Thomas Kelly, were 'the most
> significant part of the whole operation [because] for the first
> time ever... the American people were getting their information
> from the government—not from the press.[58]

Network news, on the other hand, were supplied with imagery and reports that

would not prove to be offensive to either audiences or advertisers (advertisers

with the networks were initially unsure how their product's display might be

affected by the war imagery).[59] Engelhardt argues that 'total television' was

tied to the media consolidation of the 1980s and the tendency to apply the

same marketing techniques used for other products to news production.

Consequently, visual spectacle was favoured over in-depth analysis and the

alluring rhythms and repetition of advertising made its way into news

production.

Other authors have traced the shared interests, interlocking

directorships and direct ownership ties between major television networks,

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[58] Tom Engelhardt, "The Gulf War as Total Television," in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 81. During the latest Gulf conflict, one reporter (George Curry) complains about the military coalition's media management: "What's going on is you're not even getting basic information that you need. And that is, I've said, you know, they're not talking to us, they're talking to [the] audience beyond us and we're just conduits. [The] audience is in TV Land, and we're in Never Never Land." Quoted in John Kampfner, "War Spin," British Broadcasting Company, 2003. A transcript of the documentary is available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/programmes/correspondent/transcripts/18.5.031.txt].
[59] Engelhardt, "The Gulf War as Total Television," 87-88.

defense contractors and other related interests such as oil companies. At the time, General Electric owned the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and its revenues from defense contracts were three times its revenue from the network. The board of directors of both the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) were involved with oil companies including Texaco (the chairman of ABC) and military contractors Honeywell and the Rand Corp. (CBS).[60] Such connections cannot be exclusively relied upon to explain pro-war or favourable coverage (especially at the level of journalists) but it does show that there is a possibility for shared interests to become aligned in the upper levels of corporate structures. The strength of Engelhardt's discussion of 'total television,' on the other hand, is that the separate interests of the military and news organizations came together in a well-orchestrated and entertaining event. On television screens, technowar and total television combined and often reinforced one another. While the Iraqi government encouraged international journalists to visit sites of coalition bombing, coalition forces prevented interviews of civilians or soldiers. The coverage was largely sanitized and made rational. Killing and destruction were hidden from view and described in euphemistic and often medical language. As Franklin sarcastically asks: "After all, since one of the main goals was to create the impression of a 'clean' techno-war, almost devoid of human suffering and death, conducted with surgical precision by wondrous mechanisms, why not project the war from the point of view of the

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[60] Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, 59-60. Also, see: J. Timmons Roberts, "The Military-Industrial-Media Complex: Old Biases, New Linkages," in *The Gulf War as Popular Entertainment: An Analysis of the Military-Industrial Media Complex*, Paul Leslie, ed. (Lewiston and Queenston: The Edward Mellen Press, 1997), 45-54.

weapons?"[61] Qualitatively, the imagery of the Gulf War allowed viewers to act

as witnesses but, as Cummings argues, in a radically distanced way. In that

sense, many questioned the ability to see the 'real' war or the 'reality' of war—

most notable was Jean Baurdillard's deliberately provocative argument in the

French press that the war would not and, later, did not take place.[62]

The characteristics of the television coverage led many politicians,

commentators, and journalists to describe the appearance of the war as a

'joystick war,' 'Nintendo-like' (referencing the prominent Japanese game

company), or simply 'just like a video game.'[63] One Jordanian journalist,

expressing his frustration of the war coverage, offered an ironic battle cry: "Zap

the Iraqoids!"[64] The video game analogy is representative of a larger critique

whereby the increased 'distancing' of war and visual technologies removes any

causal connection (and, therefore, moral responsibility) between soldiers and,

especially, war planners from their actions.[65] And because these technologies

have been increasingly used to image/imagine war for home audiences, the

fear is that such distancing resides in the 'home-front' as well. In a similar vein

but writing about a more contemporary context, Mark J. Lacy argues that

"distancing populations and participants from the consequences of violence

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[61] H. Bruce Franklin, "From Realism to Virtual Reality: Images of America's Wars," in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 42.

[62] Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[63] Melanie Swalwell collects many such references and provides a critique of the analogy. See: Melanie Swalwell, "'This Isn't a Computer Game You Know!': Revisiting the Computer Games/Televised War Analogy," in *Level Up* (Digital Games Research Conference Proceedings) CD-ROM, eds. Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2003.

[64] Rami G. Khouri, "Joysticks, Manhood, and George Bush's Horse," in *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Persian Gulf—A Global Perspective*, Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 235. Kouri's article was originally published in the *Jordan Times*, February 23, 1991.

[65] For example, see: James Der Derian, *Virtuous War,* and Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema.*

makes it easier to make people indifferent: it has a narcotic effect—what

[Zygmunt] Bauman describes in terms of a 'moral sleeping pill.'"[66] Lacy is

careful in his analysis to recognize that the effects are not uniform for

audiences and that many cultural texts specifically try to provide 'moral

proximity' with victims of war and violence. Importantly, the way that war or

violence is presented and contextualized is a key feature, but one that may be

compromised when it enters into the domain of entertainment media where

other constraints often exist.

An important question then centers on the nature of these kinds of

mediated experience. Marxist analyses of contemporary culture, specifically the

work of Guy Debord, insist that such 'experiences' are the only ones that are

possible. "Everything," Debord states in one of his most memorable phrases,

"that was directly lived has moved away into a representation." So much so,

Debord argues, that now "reality" reaches "its absolute fulfillment in the

spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images, which

exist above it and which simultaneously impose themselves as the

tangible...."[67] In a variety of ways, similar motivations lie behind the

contemporary critiques of media representations of war. In her study of the

collapse of the public discourse of a nation's war heritage into the realm of the

personal, Robyn Wiegman argues that:

> ...the Persian Gulf War has been called the 'first postmodern
> war'—a phrase that turns on the ascendancy of the visual and of
> its frantic, continuous, and ultimately hollow deployment. In
> this, the 'postmodern' is intended to mark the substitution of a

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[66] Mark J. Lacy, "War, Cinema, and Moral Anxiety," *Alternatives* 28, no. 5 (Nov./Dec. 2003): 612.

[67] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. anon. (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), para. 1, 36.

visual, highly commodified cultural terrain—what critics call
spectacle—for the articulation and apprehension of history and
its complicated meaning. As Rhonda Hammer and Peter
McLaren explain, 'Spectacles do not invite situating information
into a context.' Instead, analytical depth is exchanged for the
chaos of an excessive, spectacular surface.[68]

Whether it is described as spectacle, technowar, virtual war, postmodern war

or—more recently—'militainment,'[69] the ability of the U.S. military to direct and

limit what the public sees can only be seen as increasing in its sophistication.

In Afghanistan, the Pentagon allowed producers Jerry Bruckheimer and Bertram

van Munster to create a six-part TV series for ABC about U.S. Special Forces'

operations. Largely based on the conventions of Reality-TV (including point-of-

view shots from cockpits of fighter planes and from the undercarriage of

military helicopters), the producers were given access to military operations

that ABC's own News Department complained they were not given. As Susan J.

Douglass described it: "The Pentagon provided Bruckheimer's film crews with

transportation, access to aircraft carriers and other military sites, as well as

technical assistance. As co-producer Bertram van Munster put it, the military

was 'very enthusiastic about the whole thing. Obviously we're going to have a

pro-military, pro-American stance.'"[70]

Previously, however, reports surfaced that the Pentagon's U.S. National

Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA) had entered into a contract with Space

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[68] Robyn Wiegman, "Missiles and Melodrama (Masculinity and the Televisual War)," in *Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 171.
[69] Robin Anderson, "That's Militainment: The Pentagon's Media-Friendly 'Reality' War" (Online), *Extra!* (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) (May/June 2003), [www.fair.org/extra/0305/militainment.html].
[70] Susan J. Douglass, "Selling the War on TV," *Nation* 276, no. 12 (31 March 2003), 7. The series first aired in February 2003.

Imaging, Inc. for the exclusive rights to commercial satellite images collected over Afghanistan by the company's IKONOS satellite.[71] The agreement cost the Pentagon $1.9 million per month and stipulated that the company would not sell or otherwise distribute the satellite imagery to any other organization or entity. There were protests over the agreement by various groups including the Radio-Television News Directors Association and Refugees International (which argued that international humanitarian organizations relied on satellite imagery to plan for the potential migration of refugees).[72] There was, of course, intense speculation as to why the Pentagon entered into such an agreement:

> NIMA argues that the U.S. needed the satellite coverage for battlefield mapping, mission planning and even to assist with bomb damage assessments. However, many cynics argue that since the satellites already owned by the U.S. Government have resolutions of as small as 10 cm., the IKONOS was not really needed and that the contract was just a way to keep information about the progress of the conflict out of the hands of the media. The U.S. has seven overhead imaging satellites currently in orbit, four of which, known as KH-11 'Keyholes,' take photographic images estimated to be 6 to 10 times better than the IKONOS satellite's capabilities.[73]

Whatever the Pentagon's motives were, given the U.S. military's history of media relations, it is probably not surprising that 'cynics' might take such a view.

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[71] Space Imaging, Inc. makes examples of its imagery available on its website: [www.spaceimaging.com/].

[72] David Corn, "Their Spy in the Sky," *The Nation* (8 November 2001), available at: [http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20011126&s=corn].

[73] Jessica Altschul, "Commercial Spy Satellites Pose a Challenge to Pentagon Planners," Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (28 February 2002). Available at: [www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2002/020228-eye.htm]. Also see: Gordon Petrie, "Wartime Imagery from Afghanistan – An Analysis," *GI News* 2, no. 4 (Dec./Jan. 2002), 34-37. Also available at: [http://web.ges.gla.ac.uk/~gpetrie/11-Petrie.pdf].

Chapter 3

A Synopsis of the
Video Game Industry

As I previously mentioned, the video game industry today is extensive and rivals

other cultural industries in terms of revenue and popularity. In 2004, video

game software sales in the U.S. set a new record, reaching $7.3 billion.[1] It is

also an international phenomenon with major markets extending from Asia

(most notably Japan), Europe, and to North America. Yet, in many ways, the

industry is still relatively immature having been established for only about the

past thirty to forty years and, as a new and popular medium, it still suffers from

a great deal of political and popular scrutiny, especially over the role of

mediated violence and, to a lesser extent, gender representation. But the

industry can also be regarded as immature from the perspective of scope as

well. Despite significant advances in the last few years, the industry has been

mostly dominated by males which is reflected both in its workforce and in the

lingering perceptions of its audience. The sense that the medium is immature

is also reflected in its academic and even popular reception. Espen Aarseth,

one of the founding members of the online, academic journal *Game Studies*,

announced with only slight exaggeration that 2001 was the 'year-zero' of video

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[1] Dan Hewitt, "Computer and Video Game Software Sales Reach Record $7.3 Billion in 2004" (Press release), Entertainment Software Association (January 26, 2005).

game studies.[2] In addition, within the industry itself and within the press that covers it, it has only been recently that questions concerning the medium as an art form as well as its social impacts and meanings have been consistently posed.[3]

In terms of history, video- or computer games date back to the late 1950s and early 1960s with experiments conducted on early analogue computers. In 1958, Willy Higginbotham created a 'tennis for two' demonstration for visitors to Brookhaven National Labs. In 1961-1962, a group of researchers at MIT (most notable among them was Steve Russell) created *Spacewar!* on a PDP-1 computer. *Spacewar!* is often recognized as the first interactive computer game. Also worth mentioning, however, was a Ph.D student at Cambridge University named A.S. Douglas who created a graphical tic-tac-toe game (playable against the computer) as a demonstration of his thesis on human-computer interaction. Douglas' work took place a decade before *Spacewar!,* in 1952. [4]

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[2] Espen Aarseth, "Computer Game Studies, Year One," *Game Studies* 1, no. 1 (July 2001), [http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html].
[3] For example, see: Ernest W. Adams, "Will Computer Games Ever be a Legitimate Art Form?" Game Developers Conference, 2001 [www.designersnotebook.com/]; Henry Jenkins, "Games, The New Lively Art," [http://web.mit.edu/21fms/www/faculty/henry3/GamesNewLively.html]; Matthew Southern, "The Cultural Study of Games: More than Just Games," Game Developers Conference, 2001 [http://www.igda.org/articles/msouthern_culture.php]; and Matthew Weise, "Creativity, Technology, and Videogames," [http://www.uwm.edu/~sands/awwzine/weise.htm].
[4] Even though there are some fine works on the history of video games, there is considerable controversy over their beginnings. This is mostly due to the fact that there were lawsuits and patent disputes by some of those involved. In any case, A.S. Douglas is rarely mentioned and when Willy Higginbotham is mentioned his name suffers from inconsistently spelling. Most histories are popular is scope and many are available online, and are created and maintained by amateur enthusiasts. See Leslie Haddon, "Electronic and Computer Games: The History of an Interactive Medium," *Screen* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 52-73; Steven L. Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games* (Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing, 2001); and Leonard Herman, *Phoenix: The Fall and Rise of Videogames* (Springfield, NJ: Rolenta Press, 1994). Kent's introductory chapter in *The Medium of the Video Game* is abbreviated but also useful: Steven L. Kent, "Super Mario Nation," in *The Medium of the Video Game*, Mark Wolf, ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 35-48. There are many online resources which provide detailed discussions and even

While notable, these early games were restricted to play on large and expensive mainframe computers and electronic equipment. And it wasn't until the 1970s that video games would begin to make their way into consumer markets: most notably, coin-operated arcades machines, home consoles, and early home computers. Even in its infancy, the consumer video game market was international in its scope either through exports of games or licensing agreements between companies in Japan, the United States and the U.K.[5] The rising popularity of video games gave birth to various 'crazes' that helped focus popular attention on the medium. *Pong!* and *Pac-Man* still occupy the popular imagination while *Space Invaders* was so popular in Japan during the late 1970s that it caused a national coin shortage, forcing the Japanese mint to triple production of the 100-yen piece.[6] The quick popularity of these games also contributed to an industry crash between 1982 and 1984. Early game systems spawned countless imitators and counterfeits that resulted in litigation over patents and intellectual property as well as shortages of microchips and other electronics hardware. It also led to increased competition as new and existing companies tried to enter the market and a slew of derivative products, sometimes of questionable quality, were released.[7] Indicative of the overall situation were the disastrous releases of a video game version of *E.T.* and the console version of *Pac-Man* in 1982.

'emulations' which allow individuals to play versions of early video games: *Killer List of Video Games (KLOV)* [www.klov.com], *The International Arcade Museum* [http://www.arcade-museum.com/]; and *Pong Story* [http://www.pong-story.com/intro.htm].

[5] This is covered in a very extensive way by Kent in *The Ultimate History of Video Games*. Also see: Leslie Haddon, "Electronic and Computer Games: The History of an Interactive Medium," *Screen* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 68-70.

[6] Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 116-117.

[7] See Kent and especially his discussion of *Pong* and its many imitators. Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 60-64.

By the early 1980s, video games had become a major aspect of popular culture and the period has been described as its 'golden age.'[8] That year, Atari (the dominant company in both the arcade and console markets) released a home-console version of *Pac-Man* for its Video Computer System (VCS, also known as the Atari 2600) initially released in 1977. Atari manufactured 12 million cartridges or copies of the game despite the fact that its own market research revealed that only 10 million homes actually owned and used the VCS.[9] Technologically, home consoles lagged behind arcade hardware and in their rush to produce the title, Atari released a badly flawed game. Seven million games were sold but many were returned by disgruntled customers.

Atari's fate was perhaps sealed with the release of a video game version of *E.T.* Atari was purchased by Warner Communications in the late 1970s and in 1982 the head of Warner, Steve Ross, had signed an exclusive licensing agreement with Steven Spielberg for $25 million. Because of the agreed-upon release, it left Atari with only six weeks to produce and manufacture the game. The result was deeply-flawed and almost unplayable. The unwanted inventories of both *Pac-Man* and *E.T.* were unceremoniously dumped into a landfill in a New Mexico desert and when Atari learned that people had discovered the site, they sent steamrollers to crush the stock of cartridges and covered the site with cement.[10] Shortly after, Atari announced that its profits would not meet initial projections and, consequently, Warner shares dropped.

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[8] Kent, "Super Mario Nation," 45.

[9] Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 236.

[10] Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 240. For a contemporary account, see: "Atari Parts Are Dumped." *New York Times* (28 September 1983): D4.

In 1983, Atari announced $536 million in losses and Warner Communications sold the company the following year.

The period between 1982 and 1984 would see either the demise of many of the leading companies or corporations abandoning their video game divisions. It would be followed by a significant reorganization of the industry that would see the ascendancy of major Japanese companies such as Nintendo, Sega and Sony in the international market.[11] The period after 1985 would also see a gradual drop in the importance of the arcade market and an increase in the market for home-consoles and personal computers (PCs). This in itself is important because the formal properties of games would also significantly change. It was by no means a complete break but the relative decline of arcades meant that games could be longer in terms of gameplay (doing away with the necessity for players to constantly feed quarters in machines) and also more involving in terms of the narrative and story.[12] The evolution of hardware would see improved graphics (including the ability to render in actual 3D), as well as improved storage media such as CDs and, later, DVDs. Such advances allowed for the incorporation of full-motion video, voice acting and musical scores, and the expansion of in-game artificial intelligence for in-game, non-playable characters (NPCs). As well, the scale of diegetic or 'in-game' worlds would expand significantly.[13]

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[11] On the decline of the video game market, see the chapters, "The Fall" and "The Aftermath," in Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*. For an interesting discussion of the rise of Japanese companies, especially Nintendo, see David Sheff, *Game Over: Press Start to Continue*, revised edition (Wilton, CT: GamePress, 1999).

[12] Newman, *Videogames*, 13-15.

[13] For example, the game *Spiderman 2* developed by Treyarch, published by Activision and released in the middle of 2004, models (albeit in a simplified version) the entire island of Manhattan.

As many commentators argue, the articulation of space has become an integral aspect of contemporary video games.[14] In earlier video games (roughly those from the 1970s), the in-game or diegetic world was limited to that shown on the screen. Some games did incorporate off-screen space but these games were limited to two-dimensional views (mostly top-down or side-scrolling viewpoints). Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, the ability for gaming systems to render real-time, three-dimensional worlds expanded significantly and affected game design and gameplay experiences. As James Newman points out, the move from the screen as 'boundary' to 'window' on a larger world has led to the emergence of a dominant aspect of gameplay that is centered upon exploration and navigation.[15]

A significant aspect of any discussion of video games and the industry is the role played by the technology involved. The evolution of technology has led to greater complexity and this has affected the management, marketing, and production models of the industry (a subject that Newman rightly identifies as one that is often lacking in the literature so far). In the 1970s it was not uncommon to find games produced by one or two individuals. Today, big-budget or marquee games can run into the tens of millions of dollars for production, marketing, and publishing costs and employ teams of designers, programmers, musicians and sound artists, voice actors, as well as individuals involved with quality assurance and testing.[16] For example, *Ghost Recon 2* was

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[14] See for example the chapters devoted to 'Space' in Mark J.P. Wolf, *The Medium of the Video Game* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) and in James Newman, *Videogames* (London: Routledge, 2004).
[15] Newman, *Videogames*, 32-33.
[16] For a good overview of the industry and structure of modern development studios, see Newman, *Videogames*, 29-48.

in production between September 2002 and October 2004 and, during that

period, involved over 60 artists, engineers, designers, and quality assurance

testers in its internal development team.[17] Smaller development studios

employing a dozen or so staff still exist and produce games but with the

eventual release of next-generation consoles (announced by companies like

Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo for release by 2006), the hardware requirements

are expected to be so complex that some smaller developers might not be able

to compete.[18]

The video game industry is perhaps unique in that the hardware is

often proprietary and out of the control of the game developers and, to an

extent, structures the audience. This is especially the case with the home

console market. A few large companies design and produce the hardware of

the console itself and will produce first-party software for it.[19] These games are

often exclusive and will not be available for other consoles. But because each

console is, hardware-wise, so different from each other, the console

manufacturers must also ensure that they receive third-party support from

[17] Heather Maxwell Chandler, "Ghost Redux: Production Challenges for Ghost Recon 2 Xbox," *GamaSutra* (7 March 2005). Available at: [http://www.gamasutra.com/gdc2005/features/20050307/chandler_01.shtml].
[18] For example, see: John Borland and Richard Shim, "Developers Uneasy about New Game Consoles," *CNET News.Com* (12 May 2005), available at: [http://news.com.com/]; Alfred Hermida, "Next Gen Games Prove a Challenge," *BBC News, UK Edition* (6 September 2004), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3630726.stm]; and Paul Hyman, "E3 Debriefing: Game Developers are Mad as Hell," *The Hollywood Reporter* (1 June 2005), [www.thehollywoodreporter.com/thr/columns/video_games_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000939341].
[19] For instance, the developers of *Full Spectrum Warrior* (a commercial version of a game designed for the U.S. Army) had difficulties in negotiating with both Sony and Microsoft to have the game appear on their consoles. Upon the game's release, the game was only available for Microsoft's Xbox. See James H. Korris, "Full Spectrum Warrior: How the Institute for Creative Technologies Built a Cognitive Training Tool for the Xbox," Proceedings from the Army Science Conference, 2004 (IP-09), [www.asc2004.com/Manuscripts/sessionI/IP-09.pdf]; and Billy Berghammer and Adam Biessener, "Full Spectrum Warrior Interview: Pandemic Studios' William Henry Stahl," *Game Informer Online* (3 May 2004), available at: [www.gameinformer.com/News/Story/200405/N04.0503.1843.05215.htm].

other publishers and developers for their system. One measure by which consumers judge the quality of a particular console or system is the 'library' of games available for it. But in many ways, the most significant way that consoles are judged and marketed is through technical performance.

For third-party developers and publishers, making a game available for all the consoles currently on the market (as well as for the PC market) can add extra costs as the game would need to be optimized for each system. Each console has significant differences in the way that it handles various graphical rendering capabilities and other aspects of programming that affect the performance of the game. A game designed for one console will, for the most part, be optimized for that system but 'ports' of games (where the game received minimal changes in its conversion) to other systems are also common. Typically, 'ports' lag in performance since the game has not been designed to take advantage of the specific qualities of the console. On the other hand, games that are optimized for a particular system—that is, games which are designed from the ground-up to take advantage of the specific technical specifications of a particular console—are often more difficult to translate to other systems. A game originally designed for the PC is considerably more difficult to port to the home console market because the technical capabilities of PCs are often much higher than home consoles.

What this means for the games themselves—mostly in terms of gameplay—is that a particular title may be made available for all or only one of the gaming platforms depending on the complexity of the game, the resources that the publisher and developer devote to the game, whether or not it has

specific features such as online multiplayer capabilities, or if specific licensing

agreements exist between developers and console makers. For a title like *Halo:*

Combat Evolved, easily one of the most popular first-person shooters on the

market,[20] it was originally released for the Xbox in November 2001. The game

was developed by Bungie Software and published by Microsoft. The game was

originally in development as a PC game but during its development, Bungie

Software was purchased by Microsoft and the game became an exclusive title

for the launch of Microsoft's Xbox console.[21] However, the popularity of the

game ensured that it would be eventually released for other systems: a PC

version was released in 2003 (with Gearbox Software handling the port of the

game) and a version for the Macintosh was released in 2003 (published by

Destineer and developed by Westlake Interactive). *Halo: Combat Evolved* was

not, of course, released for either of the two other major consoles on the

market (Sony's Playstation 2 and Nintendo's GameCube) as they are in direct

competition with Microsoft's console.

Such a publishing schedule is common for many game titles and in most

cases each version is similar in terms of the specific content of the game. If a

particular title is released for more than one platform, differences between

each version commonly exist but these differences are primarily concerned with

appearance and performance: the quality of the graphics or the speed with

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[20] *Halo* has, unlike other game titles, maintained its popularity since its original release in 2001. The game still maintains a presence in the top 20 best-selling titles for both consoles and PCs. According to the sales data collected by the Entertainment Software Association for 2004, *Halo* occupied 9th place for console sales and 16th for PC sales even though a much-anticipated sequel was released in November 2004. See: [20] Entertainment Software Association, "Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry," (2005). Available at: [http://www.theesa.com/files/2005EssentialFacts.pdf].
[21] See: "Halo: Combat Evolved" (online review), *IGN.com* (27 September 2003), [http://insider.ign.com/videos/articles/451/451925p1.html].

which the hardware accesses the game's data (commonly referred to as 'load times'). However, since some titles are originally released for one platform only and then are translated to other platforms, some new content may be added. *State of Emergency* (Rockstar Games/VIS Entertainment), for example, was originally released for the Playstation 2 early in 2002 and then released nearly a year later for Microsoft's Xbox. While essentially the same game, the Xbox version was updated graphically (to take advantage of the superior graphics and hardware capabilities of the Xbox) but also included new game elements and multiplayer components.[22] More recently, the release of *Ghost Recon 2* (Ubisoft/Red Storm Entertainment) saw versions for the Playstation 2 (PS2) and the Xbox released within weeks of each other. While each game revolves around a similar backstory (following the exploits of U.S. special forces in North Korea), each version is set in a different period of that larger story. The PS2 version is set in 2007 and the Xbox version in 2011 and, consequently, while each version provides a similar experience they are fundamentally different in terms of in-game missions and story-line. Whether this represents a particularly clever marketing model[23] that will be followed by other publishers remains to be seen, but it provides an example of how a particular title can exist in various versions that, when approached critically, need to be treated separately.

An interesting aspect of the PC market is the release of versions of games that are created by players themselves. These modified versions of games (commonly referred to as 'mods') are a significant aspect of the video

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[22] For example, see the review of the Xbox version: Jeff Gerstmann, "State of Emergency (online review)," *GameSpot* (28 March 2003). Available at: [http://www.gamespot.com/xbox/action/stateofemergency/review.html].
[23] Since some households might own one or more home consoles (as well as a PC), releasing different versions of the same game makes a great deal of sense from a sales perspective.

game culture but are rarely represented in the industry-related literature or sales figures as they are free and are circulated online among players. An unsupported version of *Halo: Combat Evolved*—commonly referred to as *Halo: Custom Edition*—that allows players to create custom multiplayer maps or levels (using the ' *Halo* Editing Kit' available from Bungie Software), was published by Gearbox for the PC and released in 2004. Even though this cannot be considered an official version, releasing software for the game that allows players to modify (or 'mod') certain aspects of the game and share it with other players is also common and is increasingly a way for publishers and developers to maintain player interest in particular titles. *Battlefield 1942* (released in 2002 for the PC, published by Electronic Arts and developed by Digital Illusions CE) was also released with level-editing software and has spawned a large number of player-created mods. *Battlefield 1942* is a first-person shooter set in various World War II settings and while the basic structure of the game (the physics and graphics engine, etc.) cannot be altered, the modification software provides players with basic tools for creating new terrain for the maps as well as new 'skins'. By creating new skins for vehicles, weapons, soldiers and other in-game objects, players can alter their appearance in the game. A simple example would be the skin that replaces the in-game appearance of various nations' flags with versions that are more historically accurate.[24] **[Figure 3.1]** More ambitious would be those full-scale mods that completely replace the appearance of the game. In such cases, a group of players will combine their talents to create a new version of the game that

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[24] The skin was created by a player known as 'Projektil' and is available as a downloadable file that the user must install into the appropriate directory of the official version of the game. The file is available at: [http://www.fileplanet.com/113452/110000/fileinfo/Historical-Flags].

might be set in a different historical conflict (World War I, Somalia, Iraq), fantasy based worlds or a futuristic, science-fiction based world.
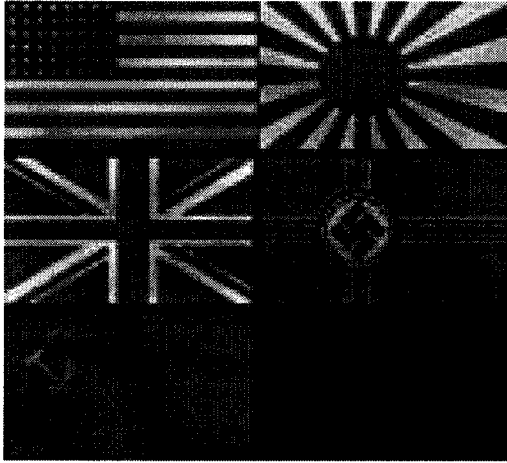

Figure 3.1: Player-created flag 'skin' for *Battlefield 1942*.

The existence of mods is significant as it provides an example of the ways that communities coalesce around certain games and computer-related technologies, and sometimes actively create their own content. The 'modding community' is extensive and even though it involves the alteration of existing intellectual properties, it is largely tolerated by the industry and is actively encouraged by some companies.[25] Many of the full scale mods for *Battlefield 1942* are coordinated through the PlanetBattlefield website and as of June 2005 there were over 34 full releases available for download as well as 31 versions that are playable but still being actively developed.[26] These full-scale mods are often designed and maintained by a group of like-minded players

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[25] See: Paul Hyman, "Video Game Companies Encourage 'Modders'," *The Hollywood Reporter* (9 April 2004),
[http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr/columns/tech_reporter_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000484956].
[26] A list of available titles is maintained at
[http://www.planetbattlefield.com/bf1942/tweakin/mods/].

and amateur game artists, programmers and researchers. One particular mod,

titled *Call to Arms,* is the creation of thirteen active contributors and attempts

to include the historical role of the Canadian Military in World War II.

According to their mission statement:

> The *Call to Arms* is a *Battlefield 1942* mod that focuses mainly
> on the Canadian contribution to the Second World War. Many
> people know very little about the key roles that the Canadians
> played that eventually lead to the destruction of the axis forces.
> This mod will try to focus mainly on accuracy of the battles while
> keeping playability in mind. This might even be an educational
> tool to some who know little about the Canadian effort.[27]

The *Call to Arms* is fairly typical of those 'historical' mods available for

Battlefield 1942. It has been in development since 2003 and maintains a user

forum for those interested in the mod as well as continually soliciting for other

'serious' contributors. The community aims for historical accuracy in terms of

the appearance of uniforms, weapons, and vehicles as well as maps and

historical battles.[28]

As mentioned, the modding community[29] is embraced by some

companies since doing so retains audience interest in a particular title well after

its release and allows for a dedicated fan structure to develop around the

company's products. Other companies who provide a variety of online support

and technical infrastructure also support the modding community. The

PlanetBattlefied website is a part of a larger 'Planet' collection of websites

owned by IGN Entertainment. IGN Entertainment operates a variety of online

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[27] *Call to Arms* Mod Info., [http://www.planetbattlefield.com/calltoarms/info.html]. The official website is available at: [http://www.planetbattlefield.com/calltoarms/].

[28] A description of the maps, including historical background materials relating to the battles that the Canadian military was involved in, is available at: [http://www.planetbattlefield.com/calltoarms/maps.html].

[29] This should not be confused with the 'modding' community that promotes the modification of console hardware that allows users to play illegally copied games and import games.

review sites, digital distribution (download) sites, community sites and online

forums, as well as providing various services to video game developers.[30]

Often, the modding community has an odd relationship with the

intellectual property of other companies. *Battlefield 1942* was published by

Electronic Arts and developed by Digital Illusions CE. Another full-scale mod

called *HomeFront* translates *Battlefield 1942* into the world of *Halo* which is

owned by Bungie Software and its parent company, Microsoft. Even though

the *HomeFront* mod is virtually identical to *Halo* in appearance, the community

surrounding the mod has created all of its own in-game maps and skins and

conceives of its creation as a homage to both *Halo* and *Battlefield 1942*. In

such cases, the companies that own the intellectual property and publishing

rights remain quiet on such developments, presumably because of the negative

public relations that would undoubtedly be raised by the online gaming

community which form, of course, a significant aspect of their own audience.[31]

What I have described is by no means a comprehensive view of the ways

that industry allows for small communities to form around specific software

titles or even the ways players actively contribute to specific titles and circulate

their own creations to others. But it does give an indication of how the

common assumption of video games as primarily a solitary or anti-social

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[30] For a description of IGN Entertainment's corporate structure, see:
[http://corp.ign.com/corporate.html]. The company's holding are diverse and serve a variety of customers but it derives its revenue through direct contracts with video game developers (through online consulting and beta testing). Other aspects of the company's activities, such as digital distribution and game reviews, are driven by a mixture of free (advertising supported), subscription-based, or pay-per-download models
[31] The *HomeFront* website is located at: [http://www.planetbattlefield.com/homefront/].

activity is being re-thought through recent research.[32] As with other cultural

industries, the fans create a significant portion of the medium's range of

content. Two different kinds of player-created content that deserve brief

mention here are game FAQs or 'walkthroughs' and 'machinima.' Marquee

and other popular titles are often accompanied by officially licensed game

guides that provide players with an overview of the game, a 'walkthrough' of

the game's missions or levels, as well as other strategy tips and information

about the game.[33] Within the industry, these official guides exist alongside

ones produced by the players themselves. These might cover the entire game

(walkthroughs) or a specific aspect of the game (FAQs) and may range from ten

to over a hundred pages.[34] Since games can be extremely complex and

commonly involve exploration, puzzle-solving, and strategy, it is common to

'get stuck' in a particular level of the game and the guides are often used by

players to find solutions to specific problems. The guides themselves are

usually written by a single individual but are continually updated with

suggestions and corrections suggested by other players.[35] 'Machinima' (an

amalgamation of 'machine' and 'cinema') are animated shorts or movies where

individuals or small groups record in-game footage and edit the generated

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[32] For a relatively early discussion of the issue, see: Carsten Jessen, "Children's Computer
Culture," Department of Contemporary Cultural Studies, The University of Southern Denmark,
1995. Available at: [http://www.humaniora.sdu.dk/kultur/arb_pap/com-culture.pdf]. For a recent
discussion of the social networking that takes place in online, multiplayer games, see: Mikael
Jakobsson and T.L. Taylor, 'The *Sopranos* Meets *EverQuest*: Social Networking in Massively
Multiplayer Online Games," Melbourne: Digital Arts and Culture Conference Proceedings, 2003.
Available at: [http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/dac/papers/Jakobsson.pdf].

[33] Two main publishers dominate the official 'game guide' market in North America: Prima
Games [www.primagames.com/] and Brady Games [www.bradygames.com/].

[34] In keeping with tradition, these guides are usually circulated as simple text (.txt) files but other
file formats are becoming increasingly common.

[35] The player-generated FAQs and Walkthroughs are archived by various websites: see
GameFAQs [www.gamefaqs.com] and GamerHelp [www.gamerhelp.com].

scenes together along with newly created dialogue and voice-overs, music, graphics and titles. While much of what is produced is of an ephemeral nature, other examples are considerably more serious; involving a group of individuals working from prepared scripts and, in some cases, marketing their films on the internet. The group behind *Red vs. Blue*, which uses *Halo: Combat Evolved* to generate the visuals for their films, produces weekly episodes (which have been compiled in two DVD sets) and have a considerable fan-base.[36]

The player-generated FAQs and walkthroughs are examples of the way that the gamers help to create communities where dialogue and game-commentary coalesce around specific titles and certain game franchises. Machinima is similar but it is also a part of the emerging digital filmmaking culture[37] and, as such, is often more subversive in terms of its relation to the larger game and film industries. But it is also indicative of how, in video games specifically and in interactive digital culture generally, the notions of spectatorship and performance are increasingly being aligned, creating what is, in many ways, a more active conception of the audience.[38]

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the home console market was largely dominated by two Japanese firms: Nintendo and Sega. The competition between the two companies is notable since each company created a recognizable brand for their system; Nintendo created a 'family-friendly' image

[36] The *Red vs.Blue* site is available at: [http://rvb.roosterteeth.com/home.php]. Machinima.com archives hundreds of fan or player-generated machinima.
[37] See: Matthew Mirapaul, "Computer Games as the Tools for Digital Filmmakers," *New York Times* 151 (22 July. 2002): E2. Also, see: Henry Lowood, "High-Performance Play: The Making of Machinima," in Videogames and Art: Intersections and Interactions, Andy Clarke and Grethe Mitchell, eds., Intellect Books, forthcoming. A draft version of the essay is available at: [http://www.stanford.edu/~lowood/Texts/highperformanceplay_finaldraft.pdf].
[38] Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman elaborate on the way that the video game player can be considered as a 'player-producer.' See: *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

including a library of games that would be suitable for younger audiences while Sega courted a 'cooler' image directed largely at teenagers. Such branding attempts affected not only the public image of each company but also their game libraries, even when games were made available for each system. As Stephen Kent writes:

> When the extremely brutal game *Mortal Kombat* (which ends with such impressive fillips as the victor yanking the vanquished's skeleton bloodily out through his throat) appeared, Nintendo insisted that the publisher take out much of the violence. The uncensored [Sega] Genesis version out-sold the Nintendo version three to one.[39]

Similar relationships still exist between console manufacturers today even though Sega eventually dropped out of hardware manufacturing in 2001 and its place in the home console market has been taken by both Sony and Microsoft. Today, Nintendo retains somewhat of a 'respectable' image while Microsoft Xbox courts consumers with its 'serious gamer' and 'bad-boy' image and this often affects the range and type of content in each company's respective libraries. Consequently, few military-themed games are released for the Nintendo Gamecube.[40] Instead, publishers focus on the Xbox, Sony's Playstation 2 and the PC markets.

Today, Sony is the market leader. It released the Playstation console in 1994—notable at the time for its real-time 3D rendering and shading—which has sold more than 101 million units and has seen over 3000 games released

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[39] Kent, "Super Mario Nation," 47.

[40] This might also reflect the interests of the Japanese market. From my own research in Japanese games, there seems to be less interest in military-themed games, especially first-person shooters. Most of the games that are available are imports from the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. Japanese games, when they touch on realist or modern warfare, are largely confined to flight games (i.e. *Zero-Shiki Kanjou Sentouki,* (Taito/Marionnete, 2004) and others in the series) and tank sims such as *The Sensha* (literally 'tank') from D3/Vingt-et-un Systems and released in 2003.

for the system. Sony then released the Playstation 2 console in 2000, which

sold over 80 million units and has a game library of over 2000 titles. Microsoft

entered into the console market with the release of the Xbox in 2001. So far, it

has sold over 20 million units and has over 700 games available to players.

Nintendo released its latest console, the GameCube, in 2001, which has sold

more than 20 million units and has over 600 games in its library.[41]

Since the commercial video game market has only existed since the

1970s and has undergone significant changes over that period, understanding

the nature of the audience poses significant problems. Traditionally, the

audience was understood to be comprised of children and young teenagers (as

well as their parents). Since arcades have offered a different social space than

the home (not to mention the presence of arcade machines in bars and

lounges), young adults and adults were also significant. But by and large, the

market was understood by video game companies as being dominated by

males. As one Nintendo executive remarked in the mid-1990s: "Boys are the

market, Nintendo has always taken their core consumers very seriously. As girls

get into that core group, we will look for ways to meet their needs."[42] Whether

or not the audience was actually dominated by males (or boys) is an open

question but perhaps moot since the market was *understood* to be male by an

industry which itself was dominated by males. As Justine Cassell and Henry

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[41] All systems mentioned continue to sell, so these figures will continue to change (for example, Sony announced in May 2005 that the Playstation 2 has sold over 90 million units). For consistency, I have taken these statistics from a single source and it should be noted that the date of release reflects when the console was first released regardless of country (consequently, the release dates for Japanese consoles are earlier than is commonly understood in North America). See: Winnie Forster, *The Encyclopedia of Game Machines: Consoles, Handhelds and Home Computers, 1972 – 2005* (Utting: Gameplan, 2005).

[42] Quoted in Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, "Chess for Girls? Feminism and Computer Games," in *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 14.

Jenkins argue, the industry was dominated by games directed at a male

audience throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. Such games focused on

violence or competitive action (fighting, combat), male-dominated sports, or

were simply action games that featured male-only protagonists.[43] Often, the

violent nature or combative themes were shown to alienate girls and that

among both boys and girls a belief lingered that video games were primarily

the preserve of boys.[44]

Beginning in the 1990s, an effort to give girls a voice in the industry

began to form. This primarily led to an effort to broaden the field of games

(ones that would be attractive to girls specifically or a more gender-neutral or

'cross-over' audience) and the creation of game studios led by prominent

females in the industry. This effort was also reflected in the audience and the

creation of websites run by girl-gamers.[45] These developments have led to an

interesting debate about whether girls want or need gender specific games or

whether they have always been fans of those genres primarily considered as

being directed to males.

Recent player surveys show considerably more balance in terms of

gender as well as age. In the U.S., the Entertainment Software Association

(ESA) has conducted market research that reveals, as of 2004, that the average

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[43] See especially, Cassel and Jenkins, "Chess for Girls?" 7-14.

[44] Kaveri Subrahmanyam and Patricia M. Greenfield, "Computer Games for Girls: What Makes them Play?" in *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 46-47.

[45] For example, see: Game Gal [http://www.gamegal.com/], Game-Girl Advance [http://www.gamegirladvance.com/], Game Girlz [http://www.gamegirlz.com/], GrrlGamer [http://www.grrlgamer.com/], Killer Betties [http://www.killerbetties.com/], and Women Gamers [http://www.womengamers.com/].

age of players is 30 and that females comprise 43% of players.[46] Despite the

general nature of these statistics, it is revealing that the industry association in

the U.S. is at least making an attempt to broaden the image of the

gameplaying audience in the minds of both the general public and companies

within the industry itself. In fact, the 2005 ESA report also claims that "Women

over the age of 18 represent a greater portion of the gameplaying population

(28%) than boys from ages 6 to 17 (21%)."[47] As mentioned, the ESA believes

that the average age of players is 30 and its study revealed that 35% of players

are 18 years-old or younger, 43% are between 18 and 49, and that 19% are

over the age of 50.

Despite such statistics, it could still be argued that the general

perception within the video game industry is that it serves a younger,

predominantly male audience. Violent, crime or combat-related games receive

more advertising attention than those in other genres. As well, many of the

leading gaming magazines and websites consistently devote far more of their

attention to such games.[48] Many of these games do sell incredibly well (such as

Halo and the *Grand Theft Auto* series) but they are consistently joined on the

sales charts by games in a variety of other genres. My arguments here are

largely speculative and based on observation but any casual glance at video

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[46] Entertainment Software Association, "Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry," (2005). Available at: [http://www.theesa.com/files/2005EssentialFacts.pdf].
[47] Entertainment Software Association, "Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry," (2005), 3. The study was published in 2005 but covers the year 2004.
[48] See: Matthew Sakey, "But Seriously, Folks: The Gaming Press Needs to Grow Up," *International Game Developers Association* (January 2005), [www.igda.org/columns/clash/clash_Jan05.php]. For a related discussion, see: Paul Hyman, "Blockbuster Mentality Creates Hurdles for Fledgling Developers," *The Hollywood Reporter* (13 August 2004), [http://www.thehollywoodreporter.com/thr/columns/tech_reporter_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=10 00612512].

game magazines would reveal that the audience is considered to be comprised of teenage males who would be considered (or conceive of themselves) as the 'hardcore' players.[49] Not surprisingly perhaps, but a great deal of the industry's attention caters to this demographic and it can be assumed that it forms the primary audience for military-themed shooters.[50] Even though, according to the ESA's survey, 'children's' games and games considered as 'family entertainment' closely rival the sales (in terms of units sold) of a genre like 'Shooters,' one would hardly get that impression by reading the video game press.[51] In fact, industry publications often have a hard time approaching games aimed at children or younger audiences, especially when a game is not easily recognizable as educational or as a 'children's' game. Often, such games are approached from a teen or adult perspective and are discounted as being too simplistic or too easy in terms of gameplay.[52]

As the publishing-side of the industry becomes increasingly consolidated and risk-averse,[53] it increasingly looks to 'blockbuster' games, franchises and film tie-ins for its publishing model. Again, this is not surprising as the video game industry is operating—at its highest levels at least—like

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[49] For a discussion of 'hardcore' and 'casual' players and how this affects the industry, see Newman, *Videogames*, 50-53. Also see: Bob Mandel, "Are The Best Gamers Necessarily the Best Reviewers?" *Adrenaline Vault* (5 February 2005), [http://www.avault.com/articles/getarticle.asp?name=greatgamer].

[50] The ESA report does not describe the audience for particular genres, but by following the discussion of military-themed games on message boards, online forums, and through clan and modification websites it is revealed that the audience is primarily male. Age is significantly more difficult to determine from such sources; all that can be safely determined is that age ranges from teenagers to older adult males.

[51] The ESA estimates that for PC game sales in 2005, Family and Children's games constitute 20.3% of sales while 'Shooters' make up 16.3%. For console sales, the numbers are virtually identical: Shooters at 9.6% and Children's and Family at 9.5%.

[52] This has led to review and discussion sites catering specifically to games that are suitable—from a gameplay perspective—for younger players. See the *GamerDad* website [www.gamerdad.com] and especially the rationale for the site's creation [www.gamerdad.com/faqs.cfm].

[53] For a good discussion of this see: Newman, *Videogames*, 46-48.

other major cultural industries. The effect is that a few key genres receive considerably more attention than others as focus is placed on the teen demographic. In the case of video games, however, the teen demographic is largely read as being male; often, this masks the significance of other age groups and females.

Finally, the category of games that I have called 'military-themed' games is potentially very large and could conceivably include a variety of genres within itself (i.e. first-person shooters, third-person action games, flight simulations, as well as strategy and real-time strategy or RTS). For the sake of this study, I have chosen to concentrate on those games in the first two categories—first person shooters and third-person action—as these genres tend to focus on 'realistic' combat (either historical or contemporary), usually include some sort of narrative structure, and often receive the most military interest. These are among the most high-profile games in the industry and are played by a demographic that is considered key to military recruiting. Historically, these genres were the product or made possible because of the significant advances in hardware capabilities in the 1990s that allowed, as Steven Poole points out, earlier two-dimensional shooters to break "the bounds of flat-plane representation."[54] One of the first games to incorporate a first-person perspective in this genre was *Battlezone*, a vector-based game released in arcades in the early 1980s. But because of technological limitations (vector-based graphics would not become an industry standard) it was not until the

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[54] Steven Poole, *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Video Games* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 38.

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release of *Wolfenstein 3D* in 1992 and *DOOM* in 1993, both for the PC, that the popularity of the first-person shooter would expand significantly.

The genre has a close relationship with computer hardware development as high profile first-person shooters are often linked to the most demanding graphical-rendering capabilities. In fact, the release of both *DOOM 3* and *Half-Life 2* in 2004 could only be played by those with high-end PCs. Because both the developers and fans of the genre come to expect increased levels of photorealism and physics handling capabilities, such games often drive the sale of high-end graphics and processing hardware. This perhaps provides an impression of the audience for these games. Fans of the genre usually consider themselves to be among the 'hardcore' gamers or at least those who are relatively savvy when it comes to computer technology. As I will discuss in the next chapter, it is also one of the reasons that the U.S. military is interested in the genre.

Chapter 4

The U.S. Military, Recruiting and the Video Game Industry

The U.S. military's primary interest in video games is for recruiting purposes

and in addition to the games themselves, branches of the military (especially

the army and marine corps) also maintain a regular advertising presence in

prominent game magazines. The U.S. army has an annual advertising budget

of U.S. $180 million a year. Since the army's marketing research has identified

key demographics, their advertising initiatives are spread over select areas of

popular culture. The Golden Knights (a precision parachute team) regularly

performs at air shows, auto races, football and other sporting events, as well as

Florida beaches during spring break. The army also sponsors a National Hot

Rod Racing Association driver and a driver on the NASCAR circuit, as well as

two Pro Stock Motorcycle Racing circuit drivers, three professional bull riders

and an eight-member professional rodeo team.[1] Traditionally, the U.S. military

has had a strong presence in both high school football (it sponsors the U.S.

Army All-American Bowl) and college football. The army has also maintained

close links with professional football and in recent years this has expanded to

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[1] See, for example: Richard Whittle, "Uncle Sam Wants You, and it Shows," *Dallas Morning News* (31 May 2005). Available at [www.dallasnews.com], accessed June 2005.

the Arena Football League where it sponsors the U.S. Army Iron Man of the

Year award.[2]

The interest in such events as those listed above can be explained by the

fact that the army has identified such events as attractive to demographics that

have traditionally shown strong support for the military. These efforts are

directed not only at potential recruits but also at what the army calls

'influencers' (parents, coaches, teachers, and other adults).[3] The military's

interest in the recruiting potential of commercial video games is similar but also

reflects the military's awareness that the current generation of American

children are adept at and come to expect a certain level of proficiency with

computer technology. The use of commercially available video games is also

seen as relevant because it not only mimics the military's own training

simulators but also because it resembles the form of modern combat. As Marc

Prensky notes:

> Because modern warfare increasingly takes place on airplane,
> tank or submarine computer screens without the operator ever
> seeing the enemy except as a symbol or avatar, simulations can
> be surprisingly close to the real thing. In addition, since war is a
> highly competitive situation, with rules (or at least constraints),
> goals, winners and losers, competitive games are a great way to
> train. In the words of one former officer: "You play these games
> as a kid, you grow up understanding the risks and rewards of
> making decisions in real life." Chess has grown up. War gaming
> has become a business term.[4]

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[2] See the Arena Football League website: [http://www.arenafootball.com/].
[3] Whittle, "Uncle Sam Wants You," and Casey Wardynski, Colonel, "Informing Popular Culture: The America's Army Game Concept" in *America's Army PC Game: Vision and Realization.*, ed. Davis, Margaret, (United States Army and MOVES Institute, 2004) 7. Also available at: [http://movesinstitute.org/AABookletpre-Casey.pdf].
[4] Marc Prensky, "True Believers: Digital Game-Based Learning in the Military" (online), 6. Available at: [http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/default.asp], accessed: April 2005. The essay also appears as chapter 10 of Prensky's book *Digital Game-Based Learning* (McGraw-Hill, 2001).

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With the release of *America's Army: Operations* (2002), the U.S. Army stated

that the game existed primarily as a recruitment tool that would allow

potential recruits to form a better understanding of the army and its

operations. A less well acknowledged aspect of the game was that the two

modes (action and career) would help the army evaluate the players as

potential recruits. Since the game has an extensive online component, player

stats can be traced in a manner similar to the way that the commercial sector

tracks customer purchasing habits and preferences. As Prensky describes it:

> In terms of data, both the Action Game and Career Game are
> "instrumented" to provide an understanding of the players'
> interests and aptitude, the latter through a link to their AFQT—
> Armed Forces Qualifying Test—score. Players can link to a variety
> of career, job, and school information from inside the Career
> game. What they choose, how long they spend on the
> information, and downloads or printouts are noted, summarized
> and output. Both games collect information about the player's
> approach to problem solving and dealing with frustration. The
> Career game collects AFQT... information from a player, and
> correlates it with other standardized tests such as the Armed
> Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).[5]

America's Army: Operations is specifically framed as a recruitment tool

and one that is tied to military public affairs. More recent games that have

been commercially released such as *Full Spectrum Warrior* or *Close Combat:*

First to Fight are not framed as recruiting tools specifically and would,

presumably, exist as part of a more general public relations effort or to help

satisfy public demand for authentic military-themed games. These

[5] Prensky, "True Believers: Digital Game-Based Learning in the Military," 9. As his article appeared before the release of *America's Army*, Prensky does not identify it by name but as 'two' games being developed for the Army by the MOVES institute. This is a problem with other games produced by or for the military as they are often identified in the production stage with names that often bear no resemblance to the final title. To date, the only publicly available game developed for the Army by the MOVES institute is *America's Army* and the game combines both an action mode of play and a career mode.

commercially-available games are based on training simulations custom made

for the military and, generally, not made available for public consumption

(although, a day after the release of *Full Spectrum Warrior* it became known

that a 'cheat code' was available that would unlock what was presumed to be

the military version of the game).[6] Unlike *America's Army*, which was

developed and distributed by the U.S. Army, these commercial versions are

derived from games developed for the military and are the result of

development and publishing agreements between the military and commercial

companies.

In that sense, these kinds of games—where the U.S. military enters into

a contractual agreement with commercial developers to create a custom

version of a training simulation game that eventually sees some sort of

commercial spin-off—are a relatively recent phenomenon. The military itself

has used commercial versions of games (commonly called COTS or 'commercial

off-the-shelf' games) since the early 1980s which they either modify or use as

is. More indirectly, the U.S. military has provided developers of some of the

most popular military-themed games with technical assistance and advisors

and, as I will discuss later, some of the commercial developers and publishers

have strong links with military research into computer graphics, artificial

intelligence, and distributed networks.

The U.S. military has a fairly strong relationship with and influence over

the military-themed video game genre. This influence is similar to the

relationship the military has with other areas of popular entertainment: most

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[6] See Greg Kasavin, "Inside the Hidden US Army Mode" (Online), *GameSpot* (11 June 2004).
Available at: [www.gamespot.com/xbox/strategy/fullspectrumwarrior/preview_6100542.html].

notably film and television. As outlined in earlier chapters, the U.S. military has worked together with Hollywood studios throughout the 20th century. The relationship began informally at the beginning of the century and has gradually become more formalized with each major branch of the military maintaining public affairs offices that deal, in part, with requests from film and television producers for assistance.

Within the video game industry, a similar relation exists. Due to the interest in military themes from players and developers, the military itself is an important source of information and inspiration. Studios will send members of their development team to military facilities to observe and receive instruction in a variety of subjects including weapons systems and operations, vehicle design, military tactics, protocol and even terminology. Again, it is important to note that this is largely driven by a desire for verisimilitude and the fact that contemporary video game hardware has reached a level of sophistication whereby equipment and in-game characters can be realistically simulated in the finished game. This might include, for example, differences in handling characteristics for military vehicles or realistically simulating weapon recoil and reloading. As such, development teams actively collect data on weaponry (such as recording the sound and operation of various weapons) or the gestures and movement of soldiers (recorded through the use of motion-capture systems) that will be incorporated (and, of course, simplified) in the final game design.

Interesting examples of this process would include two commercially-released games that incorporate future weapon-soldier systems under

development by the U.S. Army. *Delta Force: Land Warrior*, released by

NovaLogic in 2000, incorporated the Land Warrior system that was being

developed by the Army's Training and Doctrine Command Analysis Center

(TRAC) in Monterey, California. The Land Warrior system consists of a

lightweight, wearable computer system that incorporates various

communications functions, a helmet-mounted LCD display, and a modular

weapons system. In order to incorporate a simplified version of the system in

the game, the producers worked with TRAC and sent design teams to observe

the testing of the system at Fort Benning, Georgia.[7] NovaLogic would later

donate 1200 copies of game to the United States Military Academy at West

Point, New York for use in its cadet training programs.

Similarly, the previously mentioned *Ghost Recon 2* (2004) would include

a related but much more futuristic weapons-soldier system that is currently

under development by the U.S. Army. One of the single-player modes available

for play in the game, known as 'Lone Wolf' mode, allows users to play through

missions with a soldier equipped with the Future Force Warriror equipment.[8]

As implemented in the game, the inclusion of such equipment is not merely

cosmetic but was designed so that players could use different tactics that the

system makes available. These include the ability to use intelligence from

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), more specialized weapons (such as a camera

mounted into the rifle) and the ability to call-in air strikes. The way the system

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[7] Wes Eckhart (interview), "Delta Force: Land Warrior Interview," *IGN.com* (27 October 2000). Available at: [http://pc.ign.com/articles/087/087022p1.html].

[8] See the interview with one of the game's designers: Christian Allen (interviewed by Hilary Goldstein), "Ghost Recon 2: Lone Wolf," *IGN.com* (6 October 2004). Available at: [http://xbox.ign.com/articles/554/554676p1.html]. Christian Allen is also interviewed in an article available at Ubisoft's Official Ghost Recon Website, see: [http://www.ghostrecon.com/us/newspost.php?id=8751]

is incorporated in the game is, of course, simplified but throughout the design process, the development team for the game was invited to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to observe the use of weapons and equipment (the game's designers also used Special Forces team members in the motion capture process) and worked closely with the Natick Soldier Center where the Future Force Warrior system is being developed.[9]

The production team mentions that since the *Ghost Recon* series is set in the near future and is known for its 'cutting edge' military gameplay—the game is developed by Red Storm Entertainment[10], the development studio founded by author Tom Clancy—they felt it was necessary to model the latest innovations in infantry combat. The Future Force Warrior system would be a perfect fit since the system resembles, especially in its advanced second stage, a cyborg-like military suit commonly seen in video games and science fiction film. **[Figure 4.1 below]**

The Future Force Warrior program is overseen by the U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center in Natick, Massachusetts.[11] The Army describes the system "as part of the Army transformation to a Soldier-centric force that will complement future combat systems."[12] The system has been in production over the last ten years and is related to the earlier Land Warrior system seen in Novalogic's *Delta*

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[9] Heather Maxwell Chandler (Producer, Red Storm Entertainment), "Production Challenges for Ghost Recon 2 for Xbox," Paper presented at the Game Developers Conference, March 2005.
[10] Red Storm Entertainment's company website is located at: [http://www.redstorm.com/].
[11] More commonly referred to as 'Natick,' the general website for the US Army Soldier Systems Center is available at:[www.natick.army.mil/soldier/WSIT/]. Fact Sheets on the Future Force Warrior systems are available from the Natick Soldier Systems Center website. Future Force Warrior (FFW): [www.natick.army.mil/soldier/media/fact/individual/FFW.PDF]; and Future Warrior Concept: [www.natick.army.mil/soldier/media/fact/individual/FW.PDF].
[12] Cheryl Boujnida, "Army Displays Latest Warfighting Innovations," *Army News Service*, U.S. Army Public Affairs (17 June 2005). Available at: [http://www4.army.mil/ocpa/read.php?story_id_key=7481]

Force: Land Warrior.[13] The Future Force Warrior system is an ambitious project

that is composed of two programs. The first (which is the system featured in

the game) is slated to be released in 2010. It incorporates a variety of new

technology including advanced body armor, an 'on-board' computer system
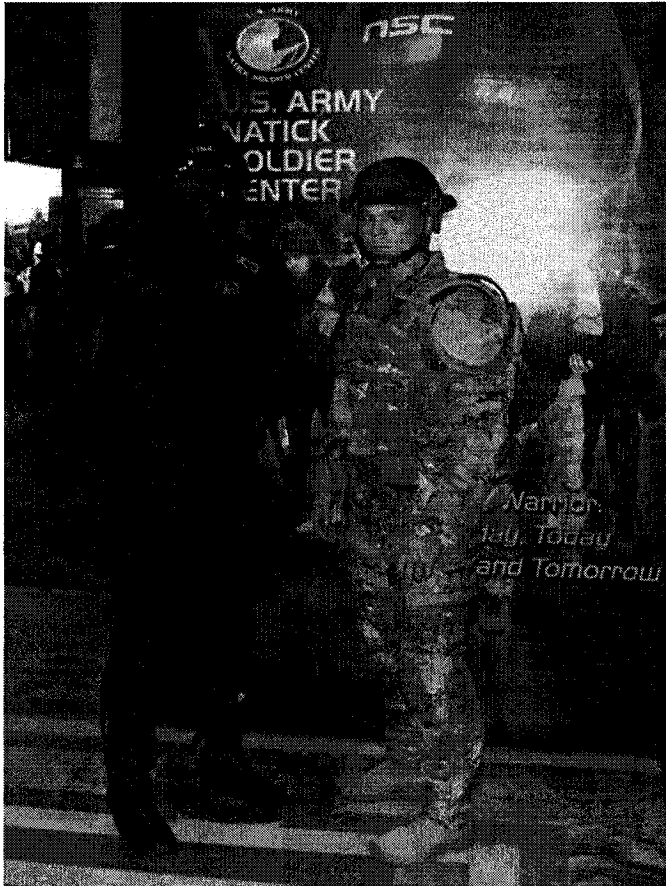
Figure 4.1: Display of
Natick's Future Force Warrior
programs: Future Force
Warrior (right) and Future
Force Concept (left).

that monitors the soldier's overall physiological state (so that distant medics

can monitor each soldier), a drop-down and see-through computer screen, and

a microphone-less communications system that instead registers vibrations of

the soldier's cranial cavity. More prosaically, but likely of more benefit to the

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[13] Jean-Louis DeGay (an equipment specialist at Natick) gives an interesting interview for the
video game community that covers details of the system and its origins. See: Jean-Louis DeGay
(interview), "Future Force Warrior Explained," *IGN.com* (6 October 2004). Available at:
[http://xbox.ign.com/articles/554/554668p1.html].

soldier, is that the system increases body protection while reducing the 100 pounds of equipment currently carried by soldiers to less than 50. A much more advanced second project, called the Vision 2020 Future Warrior concept, is slated for release sometime between 2015 and 2020.

Even though the second system is not incorporated in *Ghost Recon 2*, it merits some mention for the ways that it is being developed and showcased by the military. Both systems were shown to members of Congress and the public in July 2004 and again in 2005. In an interview with the *Army News Service*, Brig. General James Moran explains: "What we're doing today is showing members of Congress how American dollars are being spent to benefit our Soldiers *everyday*."[14] Considering that these systems are not planned for use until five to twenty years in the future, such a statement seems somewhat ironic but perhaps more important is that there is no mention of what the systems would likely cost.[15] Much of the discussion of the second system seems so far-fetched that it is difficult to comprehend. Currently under consideration is the incorporation of nano-technology (where fibres in the suit will become rigid once it senses a bullet strike) as well as "nanomuscle" fibres and robotic elements that are estimated to increase lifting and load-carrying capabilities of individual soldiers anywhere from 35 to 300%. The incomprehensible nature of the system (as well, perhaps, the tendency for

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[14] Cheryl Boujnida, "Army Displays Latest Warfighting Innovations" (Online). Emphasis added.
[15] I could not find any mention of the costs of the program from military sources but the journalists Tom Engelhardt and Nick Turse mention that: "The Army's Natick Soldier Systems Center is currently supervising a seven-year, $250 million 'Future Force Warrior' program." See: Tom Engelhardt and Nick Turse, "Sci-Fi Superwarriors," *Anti-War.com* (15 October 2004). Available at [http://www.antiwar.com/engelhardt/?articleid=3792].

exaggeration) is evident in the way the reporter for the American Forces Press

Services attempts to describe it to the reader:

> Think about a good action movie that shows an average person
> walking down a street with a nice designer suit. All of a sudden,
> gunshots are heard and just before a bullet hits this person, his
> soft fabric suit transforms into an incredible display of alien
> armor that deflects bullets. If Natick engineers are successful,
> this movie will become a reality in the future U.S. Army.[16]

While I must admit that I have difficultly in comprehending such technology,

the science-fiction qualities are, of course, a part of the fascination that military

technologies do exert. Even though the writers of many articles within the

video game press often wonder if showcasing such systems in video games

might be giving away 'sensitive' information, such posturing is likely a ruse

since this *is* 'cutting edge' technology that the military wants and needs to

showcase (at least in limited or simplified ways) and that the video game

industry knows will attract an audience. And it is more than likely that the

second system will indeed be featured in a future video game or elsewhere

since so much has been invested in these systems already. At the

demonstration of the systems to members of Congress on Capitol Hill in 2004,

it was announced that the Army had recently awarded a five-year, $50 million

contract to the Massachusetts Institute for Technology to supplement its

current nano-technology research and to establish the Institute for Soldier

Nanotechnologies.[17]

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[16] Phil Copeland, "Future Warrior Exhibits Super Powers," American Forces Press Service, U.S.
Department of Defense, (27 July 27, 2004). Available at:
[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2004/n07272004_2004072705.html]
[17] See Phil Copeland, "Future Warrior Exhibits Super Powers" (Online). The Institute for Soldier
Nanotechnology website is available at: [http://web.mit.edu/isn/]. Currently, the Institute has three
founding industrial partners—the military contractor Raytheon, DuPont, and Partners
Healthcare—and is seeking others.

Another reason that the second system will likely be incorporated into a future commercial video-game release is that the military will need training tools for its soldiers to become familiar with the system itself. This is essentially what happened with the aforementioned game *Delta Force: Land Warrior*. NovaLogic, the publisher and developer of the game, was originally contacted by the U.S. Army to modify its previously released *Delta Force 2* game as a training simulator.[18] In an informal interview from 2004, Michael Macedonia, who is a former infantry officer and is now the chief science and technology officer at the U.S. Army's Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation (PEO-STRI), recounts:

> ...we were trying to figure out how to take commercial games and modify them to fit our training needs. So we go to NovaLogic and we said, hey, there's this new weapons system called Land Warrior that infantrymen wear. It looks like a Borg outfit. It's got the monocle, they see computer graphics on the monocle, and they've got a special radio, GPS, different types of weapons. What happened was, the soldiers were having a hard time learning how to use this thing. So we said, why don't we turn it into a game, so the soldiers could sort of practice it. And there's nothing classified about it at this point. So, NovaLogic said they'd incorporate it in the game....[19]

The resulting game, *Delta Force: Land Warrior* (2000) is the commercial release of the training software simulator, *Land Warrior*, which was produced by NovaLogic's subsidiary, NovaLogic Systems (NLS). NovaLogic Systems was itself created in 1999 to "to capitalize on the technologies NovaLogic had developed for the gaming market by bringing them to the military and civilian training communities." As well, in this endeavor NovaLogic Systems maintains

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[18] See: "Delta Force 2 Recruited to Serve the Army," *IGN.com* (21 March 2000). Available at: [http://pc.ign.com/articles/076/076859p1.html].
[19] Michael Macedonia (interview), "Spot On: The US Army's There-based Simulation," *GameSpot.com* (21 April 2004). Available at: [http://www.gamespot.com/news/2004/04/21/news_6093860.html].

partnerships with defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Sikorsky.[20]

The use of existing commercial software and modifying it for military purposes is the most common way that the U.S. military intersects with the video game industry and this relationship goes back to the early 1980s. The popular arcade game, *Battlezone* (Atari, 1980) was a futuristic but simple tank-battle game that the U.S. Army requested be updated for use as a training simulator for tanks crews. *Battlezone* was one of the first video games to offer a first-person perspective and rendered the environment (including tanks and other in-game objects) in a simple wire-frame view. The military version, known either as *Military Battlezone* or *Army Battlezone*, needed to be considerably more complex and realistic since it was intended to simulate the M2 Infantry fighting vehicle (which was later renamed as the Bradley). The opposing in-game vehicles needed to be modeled after their real-world counterparts and since the Army wanted to use the game as a way to help soldiers identify differences between friendly and enemy tanks, many more vehicles needed to be included than in the arcade version. As well, the military game needed more accurate ballistics that would take into consideration the effects of gravity and distance.

For a long time, the *Army Battlezone* game was an object of folklore as much as anything else as there was doubt among amateur websites documenting the history of early arcade games and those interested in game-preservation over whether the contract with the military actually existed or

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[20] See Novalogic's Official website, specifically its 'Corporate History' section: [http://www.novalogic.com/corp_history.asp]. NovaLogic Systems does not seem to maintain a web presence.

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whether the Army version ever made it past the prototype stage. Throughout

the years, Atari remained silent about the military version and there seems to

have been internal divisions within the company's staff over the wisdom or

morality of creating a game for the Army.[21] But, the Army version was

undoubtedly made as it is often mentioned by those involved with the

military's simulation projects[22] and is mentioned (along with a screen-shot of

the game) in a recent Atari compilation of early arcade games.[23] Atari only

produced a few prototypes which had to be designed in under three months so

it could be showcased at a military conference and trade-show. In fact, it

seems highly likely that the intention of the project was to only produce a

prototype rather than putting it into full-scale production.

One of the most well-known commercial games that has been modified

by the U.S. military is *Marine Doom* (1995). Research into the possible use of

commercial off-the-shelf games had been undertaken by the Marine Corps'

Modeling and Simulation Management Office (MCMSMO) and after

experimentation with a variety of commercial games, *Doom II* (id Software,

1994) was selected because it offered a realistic (for the time) first-person point

of view, allowed multiple users to play over a network, and was easily

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[21] See the interview with Ed Rotberg, one of *Battlezone*'s programmers and who reluctantly
agreed to work on the Army version, in: Stephen L. Kent, *The Ultimate History of Videogames*,
153-155.

[22] See for example: Michael Macedonia (interview), "Spot On: The US Army's There-based
Simulation" from 2004.

[23] See the special features of *Atari Anniversary Edition* (Infrogames/Digital Eclipse Software)
released for the Sega Dreamcast in 2001. It should also be mentioned that Atari's contract with
the U.S. Army was indirect and mediated by a group of retired Army generals. This is mentioned
in some trustworthy sources such as Kent, *The Ultimate History of Videogames* (153). See, as
well, an interview with a 'well-known' but anonymous programmer/designer who worked at Atari
at the time, available at CoinOpGames.org (a game preservation website):
[http://coinop.org/kb_dl.aspx/KB/gametech/armybattlezone.html]. Apparently, a direct contract
with the military would qualify Atari as a defense contractor, making its financial statements open
to scrutiny.

modifiable. The developers of *Doom II* had released editing software for the game so that fans could modify it, making the transition of the futuristic and fantasy-based game into a version usable by the Marines possible.[24] Lieutenant Scott Barnett and Sergeant Dan Snyder of the Marines' Simulation Office led the conversion of the game so that it could be used by four-member fire teams. *Marine Doom* was used by the Marines as a training tool for use between actual training sessions and as a way of acquainting soldiers with unfamiliar locations (achieved by digitizing the floor plans of various American embassies and then building training various scenarios around the plans).[25] At the time, the use of games like *Marine Doom* was considered by the Marines as a way of maintaining "operability" by having soldiers train or play with such games during off hours. In 1997, the Marines formalized the process by allowing Marines to use government computers to play "approved PC-based wargames."[26]

Since that time, all branches of the U.S. military have utilized commercial video games that they use as-is or modify internally. In addition to the games already mentioned, the list of games that the U.S. Army has used includes: *M1 Tank Platoon* (Microprose, 1998), *Operation Flashpoint* (CodeMasters/Bohemia Interactive, 2001), *Battlefield 1942* (Electronic Arts/Digital Illusions CE, 2002), and *Steel Beasts* (Schrapnel Games/eSim Games, 2000). In addition to *Doom II*, the U.S. Marines used a modified version of

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[24] For a description of the game from the U.S. Army's Topographical Engineering Center, see: [www.tec.army.mil/TD/tvd/survey/Marine_Doom.html].
[25] See: Rob Riddell, "Doom Goes to War," *Wired* 5, no. 4 (April 1997).
[26] See: Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Military Thinking and Decision Making Exercises," MCO (Marine Corps Order) 1500.55 (12 April 1997). An electronic version is available at the Marine Corps Publications Electronic Library: [http://www.usmc.mil/directiv.nsf/0/86b631baa8c30301852565600071ec85?OpenDocument].

Close Combat (Microsoft/Atomic, 1996), *Soldier of Fortune* (Activision/Raven

Software, 2000), *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (Electronic Arts/2015, 2002),

as well as modifying *Operation Flashpoint* (CodeMasters/Bohemia Interactive,

2001).[27]

According to Michael Macedonia of STRI-COM, the U.S. Department of

Defense spends about U.S. $4 billion each year on simulation and training

equipment.[28] Given that figure and that the U.S. military has traditionally used

civilian defense contractors to build its simulators and training games, it would

seem surprising that the military has been using games from the consumer

market in its training. However, as Macedonia points out:

> The U.S. military is exploiting commercial entertainment
> technology and simulation to revolutionize education and
> training.... DoD [Department of Defense] is leveraging the
> capabilities of commercial products by firms such as IBM, Sony,
> and Microsoft to take advantage of the huge investments those
> companies pour into research and development. Microsoft, for
> example, spent over $2 billion on development of the X-box
> alone, far surpassing the U.S. Army's [STRI-COM] entire science
> and technology budget of $1.6 billion.[29]

The growth of the consumer computer and electronics market has, of course,

exploded over the last two decades, effectively reversing the previous funding

model for research in such fields. As Tim Lenoir shows, the U.S. Department of

Defense was instrumental in providing funds and direction to early research

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[27] The list has been culled from a variety of sources. One of the best sources is a DARPA-funded website providing resources for creators of military simulations: The Department of Defense Game Developers' Community [www.dodgamecommunity.com/]. The website provides an extensive list of games but sometimes provides confusing titles for games and contains some minor omissions. Michael Macedonia of PEO-STRI has written several articles and has given several interviews describing the U.S. military's use of video games and is an important resource (see bibliography).

[28] Michael Macedonia, "Games Soldiers Play," *IEEE Spectrum Online* (March 2002). Available at: [http://www.spectrum.ieee.org/WEBONLY/publicfeature/mar02/mili.html].

[29] Michael Macedonia, "Games, Simulation, and Military Education," *EDUCAUSE, Forum for the Future of Higher Education* (2002). Available at: [http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ffpiu018.pdf].

and development in fields like computer graphics and computer processing,

virtual reality, distributed computer networks, and computer simulation since

the 1960s; especially through the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency

or DARPA.[30] Lenoir's research is crucial in understanding how some of the

most advanced research and consumer systems of today (including animation,

cinematic special effects, and networked, multi-user fields such as on-line

gaming) are conceptually related to ongoing research funded through DARPA.

Gradually, as those individuals working in military-funded research moved to

the private sector to start their own companies and with the growth of the

consumer market generally, the R&D budgets of the private sector began to

overtake that of the military. In addition, the end of the Cold War would also

play an important role in forcing the military to look at games from the

commercial game sector. As Lenoir notes:

> ... a stronger emphasis was placed during the 1990s on running
> a fiscally efficient military built on the practices of sound
> business, and of making military procurement practices interface
> seamlessly with commercial industrial manufacturing processes.
> With pressure to reduce military spending being applied by the
> Federal Acquisitions Streamlining Act of 1994, the Department
> of Defense... remodeled policies and procedures on procurement
> that had been in place for more than twenty-five years. Among
> the policies the new directives established was a move away
> from the historically based DOD reliance on contracting with
> segments of the U.S. technology and industrial base dedicated to
> DOD requirements—moving instead, by statutory preference,
> toward the acquisition of commercial items, components,
> processes, and practices.[31]

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[30] Tim Lenoir, "All But War is Simulation: The Military-Entertainment Complex," *Configurations* 8, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 289-335. DARPA was created in 1958 in response to the Sputnik launch in 1957. Originally known as ARPA, the agency was responsible for overseeing the development of many diverse technology-related projects, including ARPANET, a pre-cursor to the internet. DARPA's website is located at: [www.darpa.mil/].

[31] Lenoir, "All But War is Simulation," 314.

This trend of looking toward the private sector is not only motivated by budgetary restrictions on the part of the military. In May 2000, the Defense Science Board released a report detailing the current status of psychological and information operations as well as emerging trends in the fields of communications and new media.[32] Throughout the report, familiar marketing concepts are deployed that stress the importance of acquiring accurate demographic statistics of target audiences, the need to create a consistent brand identity, and achieving synergy amongst military departments as well as with existing commercial media. The report recognizes that the sheer number of new media technologies as well as the increasing market penetration of information delivery systems such as cable TV, satellite TV and internet radio, means that traditional forms of PSYOP and information operations often have no way of reaching these audiences. "A much wider problem," the authors of the report point out, "is that the PSYOP message now needs to compete against a very rich entertainment menu. As a result, it will become increasingly difficult for the PSYOP community to acquire 'mindshare' in its target audiences."[33]

To counter such difficulties, the authors of the report recommend various strategies for the use of these new and emerging communications technologies as well as stressing the importance of utilizing commercial expertise and—a key element—building relationships with a wide spectrum of existing commercial media. The nature of specific media such as cable or

[32] Defense Science Board, U.S. Department of Defense, "The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information in Support of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Time of Military Conflict," May 2000, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C. 20301-3140.
[33] Defense Science Board, "The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information," 35.

satellite TV, often precludes the U.S. military from acquiring their own

broadcast systems. As well, the sheer number of emerging technologies

identified as being extremely desirable—including interactive web

(chat/messaging, streaming media), cellular-based voice/text communications,

High Definition Television, as well as video games—are identified as being too

numerous for the military to assume direct control over broadcasting or

distribution infrastructures.[34] Instead, the Defense Science Board recommends

that military personnel acquire training in "state-of-the-art practice techniques

across the spectrum of traditional and emerging media" and be "trained to

engage a stable of commercial providers who can deliver these quality

products."[35] As well, the authors recommend that PSYOP should increasingly

'piggy-back' on existing commercial distribution media:

> The insertions of PSYOP 'commercials' and 'specials' into
> existing, branded channels could prove a highly effective, and
> cost-effective, means for disseminating PSYOP content. Here
> DoD [Department of Defense] might wish to become an 'anchor
> tenant' within new systems in order to ensure that such channels
> exist and are available for DoD use.[36]

Such a perspective mirrors that taken in fields more closely related to video

games but also reflects the ways that the military has become increasingly

integrated in the private sector generally.[37] This, in itself, should not be very

surprising since those individuals that sat as invited members of the Defense

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[34] See: Defense Science Board, "The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information,"
23-26 and Chapter IV.

[35] Defense Science Board, "The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information," 23.

[36] Defense Science Board, "The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information," 35.

[37] When the subject of the military-industrial complex is discussed, it is often raised in relation to
the arms industry. In his book, *Private Warriors*, journalist Ken Silverstein documents the
intersection of public and private interests penetrating the U.S. military-industrial complex and the
continued move of career soldiers from militaries around the world into private industry. This
happens in the arms manufacturing sector but also includes the increasing rise of private security
forces and private mercenary armies staffed, in part, by former soldiers. See: Ken Silverstein,
Private Warriors (London: Verso, 2000).

Science Board came from companies involved in communications technology (BBN Technologies), marketing and management-consulting (Booz, Allen, & Hamilton), or entertainment (Walt Disney Imagineering).[38] In relation to the computer science fields, Lenoir notes that historically:

> ...support from federal agencies [had] been directed toward seeing that the products of federal research funding [were] transferred to technologies in service of both national defense and the commercial sector. For most of the period covered to this point (up to the end of the 1980s), policy discussions about these goals—of seeing that research served national defense, and that it ultimately benefited the commercial sector—were either kept rigidly separate or delicately balanced in a complicated dance.[39]

The policy discussions that broadly frame the directions of the military are formed, in part, by those working in the private sector and, it should be noted, in academia. As the Future Force Warrior program indicates, partnerships between academic research institutions, private sector defense contractors, the military—as well as the video game industry—have become increasingly aligned in very interesting and perhaps surprising ways. Within the video game industry, the technology-driven partnerships that Lenoir traces in the fields of computer graphics, distributed networks and computer-based simulations are also supplemented by the increased focus among the private sector, academia, and the military on subjects like digital games-based learning and game-based role playing.

In an essay titled "Games, Simulation, and Military Education," Michael Macedonia of STRI-COM describes simulation technology as "the creation of

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[38] The membership of the task force is listed in Appendix 2 of the Defense Science Board report. Some of these companies are mentioned in Lenoir's essay.
[39] Lenoir, "All but War is Simulation, 313-314.

virtual experiences."[40] Recognizing that the entertainment industry has a long

and successful history in the creation of such virtual or synthetic experiences

(skills that defense contractors often do not possess), Macedonia says the U.S.

Military, since the late 1990s, has been increasingly looking to form

partnerships with the makers of commercial products:

> ...the military is undertaking a number of research efforts to
> further explore the use of commercial entertainment technology
> and content for education and training.... [T]he army and DoD
> have partnered with the University of Southern California to
> form the Institute for Creative Technologies, which will focus
> primarily on development of both the technology and the art to
> create virtual experiences.[41]

The Institute for Creative Technologies[42] or ICT was created in 1999 at

the University of Southern California through a five-year, $50 million program

initiative of the U.S. Army. The ICT was intended to bring together research

and development in the broad field of interactive technology and to create

partnerships between the military, academia, Hollywood and the gaming

industry, and the private sector. The University of Southern California was

chosen for its location (Los Angeles is a hub of the entertainment, computer

and aerospace industries) and the pre-existing relationships that USC has with

such industries. In an essay describing the creation and the activities of the ICT,

Michael Macedonia and Paul S. Rosenbloom state:

> From the beginning, ICT has actively engaged the entertainment
> industry (film, TV, interactive gaming, etc.). ICT will serve as a
> means for the military to develop expertise in, and benefit from,
> the technology developed in the entertainment industry, and for
> transferring technologies from the entertainment industry into

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[40] Macedonia, "Games, Simulation, and Military Education," 33.
[41] Macedonia, "Games, Simulation, and Military Education," 33. Also, see the previously
mentioned interview Macedonia gave to *GameSpot.com* in 2004: Macedonia (interview), "Spot
On: The US Army's There-based Simulation."
[42] The ICT website is available at: [http://www.ict.usc.edu/disp.php].

the military. ICT will also work with creative talent from the entertainment industry to adapt story and character concepts to increase the degree of immersion experienced by participants in synthetic experiences, and to improve the outcomes of these experiences.[43]

In addition to a host of other initiatives, the ICT Games Project (one of ten major projects) has produced training simulators and a commercial video game spin-off. *Full Spectrum Command* is an infantry command simulator (where the player or trainee coordinates the actions of about 120 soldiers) that is used in the Infantry Captains' Career Course at Fort Benning on battlefield synchronization and command tactics.[44] The previously mentioned *Full Spectrum Warrior* (both its military and commercial versions) was created by ICT in partnership with Pandemic Studios and Sony Imageworks and was initially released for the Xbox.[45] Currently, the ICT is developing *Full Spectrum Leader*, a training game for platoon leaders.

ICT exists in addition to the military simulation and modeling programs that currently exist within each branch of the military and are coordinated through the Defense Modeling and Simulation Office (DMSO).[46] In its early

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[43] Michael Macedonia and Paul S. Rosenbloom, "Entertainment Technology and Virtual Environments for Training and Education," in *The Internet and the University: 2000 Forum*, Maureen Devlin, Richard Larson, and Joel Meyerson eds., Boulder: EDUCAUSE, 2001): 86. Also available at: [http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ffpiu0005.pdf].
[44] Information on the game is available at the ICT website [www.ict.usc.edu/disp.php?bd=proj_games_fsc] and at The Department of Defense Game Developers' Community [www.dodgamecommunity.com/].
[45] For an interesting discussion of the design of the game, see the paper presented to the 2004 Army Science Conference by one of the Creative Directors at ICT: James H. Korris, "Full Spectrum Warrior: How the Institute for Creative Technologies Built a Cognitive Training Tool for the Xbox" (IP-09), Proceedings from the Army Science Conference, 2004. Available at the conference website: [http://www.asc2004.com/Manuscripts/sessionI/IP-09.pdf]. Korris is a former Hollywood producer and writer and previously worked for Ron Howard's Imagine Films.
[46] The DMSO website is available at: [www.dmso.mil/]. The DMSO coordinates with a variety of Department of Defense programs including Modeling & Simulation Information Analysis Center (MSIAC), Army Model & Simulation Office (AMSO), Army Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation (PEO STRI) which was formerly known as STRI-COM,

development, *America's Army: Operations* was produced at the Modeling,

Simulation, and Virtual Environments Institute (MOVES) associated with the

Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. Since the motivation for

creating such a game was driven by recruiting—the Army had missed recruiting

targets for two straight years beginning in 1997—the idea for creating

America's Army originated in the Army's Office of Economic and Manpower

Analysis at West Point and not in one of the military's simulation and modeling

offices.

With the early success of the venture, the U.S. Army created two new

studios: the America's Army Future Applications Team was formed in

cooperation with the Armaments Research and Development Center (ARDEC) at

Picatinny, New Jersey; and the America's Army Government Applications Team,

located in Raleigh, North Carolina, was created for the development of key

government applications and to evaluate new technologies for future America's

Army game releases.[47] The development team at America's Army Government

Applications office includes video game designers, simulation specialists and

some ex-Army personnel. Some employees have come from commercial

development studios, including Interactive Magic, SouthPeak Interactive, Vertis,

Vicious Cycle Software and Red Storm Entertainment. Jim Heneghan, the head

of the new studio, is a former West Point graduate who, after spending

Navy Modeling & Simulation Management Office (NAVMSMO) as well acting as a liaison with
similar organizations in the militaries of other countries.

[47] On the America's Army Government Applications Office, see: John Gaudiosi, "Army Sets Up
Video-Game Studio," *Wired* (Online), 21 June 2004. Available at:
[http://www.wired.com/news/games/0,2101,63911,00.html]. The development teams are
described at the *America's Army* website, under the 'development' section:
[http://www.americasarmy.com/community/dev.php]. For an interesting discussion about how
other governmental programs, such as the Department of Homeland Security, are looking to
develop training games, see: Shawn Zeller, "Training Games," Government Executive (January
2005). Available at: [http://www.govexec.com/features/0105-01/0105-01s1.htm]

thirteen years as an Apache helicopter pilot, was a producer at Red Storm Entertainment (Tom Clancy's game studio that has produced *Ghost Recon 2* and other popular military-themed video game franchises).

Such an example provides the final way that the U.S. military exerts some influence over the military-themed video game genre. Personnel in many of the development studios, including some of the most high-profile studios, have come from the military (some of whom are now being attracted back to studios like America's Army Government Applications office or research institutes like ICT). Such connections between the military and commercial development studios are seen at all levels: upper management and ownership, development personnel, and advisors or Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

As mentioned, Jerry Heneghan, before acting as head of the America's Army Government Applications office, was a producer at Red Storm Entertainment. Red Storm Entertainment was created in November 1996 by author Tom Clancy who was looking to move into the emerging field of interactive entertainment. Doug Littlejohns, a former British Royal Navy captain, became president and CEO of Red Storm in 1997.[48] Red Storm became a subsidiary of the French video game publisher Ubisoft in 2000. Ubisoft has offices in over eighteen countries and while it publishes games in a variety of genres, it is increasingly becoming known for its extensive catalogue of military-themed titles. In 2004, Ubisoft announced that it had struck a licensing agreement with the U.S. Army to turn *America's Army* into a multi-

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[48] For an account of the company's corporate history, see: [www.redstorm.com/corporate/background.php].

platform franchise.[49] The agreement—reportedly the first time a publisher has

been granted an official license by the military—will allow Ubisoft and its

subsidiaries to develop and publish games for home consoles based on

America's Army.[50]

Likewise, NovaLogic, the company behind *Land Warrior* and *Delta Force:*

Land Warrior has upper-management connections with the U.S. military. For

example, Bob Springer is a board member of NovaLogic and is President of

NovaLogic Systems (NLS).[51] Previously, Springer had a long and impressive

military career including 72 combat missions in Southeast Asia as an Air Force

pilot before going on to become the Commander of the 21st Air Force stationed

in New Jersey and the Vice Commander in Chief, Military Airlift Command. He

retired as a three-star general before becoming involved with NovaLogic and its

subsidiary NLS.[52]

The popular online, multiplayer franchise *SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals*

(which itself was produced with the cooperation of the Naval Special Warfare

Command) was developed by Zipper Interactive. The company was founded in

1995 around a development team that previously filled key roles on the U.S.

military's Simnet project.[53] Simnet (SIMulator NETworking) was approved by

DARPA in 1982 to coordinate research in high-end computer graphics and

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[49] See the *America's Army* press release (14 April 2004), available at:
[www.americasarmy.com/intel/fullstory.php?i=1112] and Tor Thorsen, "Ubisoft Drafts *America's Army*, *GameSpot.com* (14 April 2004). Available at:
[http://www.gamespot.com/xbox/action/americasarmy/news_6093550.html].
[50] The first game, *America's Army: Rise of a Soldier* (Ubisoft/Secret Level) is slated for release in October 2005 for the Xbox and the Playstation 2.
[51] See "Delta Force 2 Recruited to Serve the Army," *IGN.com* (21 March 2000). Available at:
[http://pc.ign.com/articles/076/076859p1.html].
[52] For a detailed biography about Springer, see: [http://www.9gs.org/bios/springer_robert.htm].
[53] See the 'corporate' section of Zipper Interactive's website [www.zipperint.com/] and the corporate biography at IGN.com: [http://games.ign.com/objects/027/027141.html].

distributed networking for military communications and simulator training and

was made operational in 1990. As Lenoir argues, Simnet was a crucial research

and development project that set standards for distributed interactive

simulations (DIS) and high-level software architecture (HLA) that would be

adopted by both industry and the military and approved by the American

National Standards Institute. Among its many applications in the computer

and entertainment fields, Lenoir argues that Simnet played a crucial role in

preparing the way for online, multiplayer or networked video games in the

commercial sector.[54]

Perhaps the most high-profile way that members of the military are

incorporated in the design of video games is the use of military personnel

(either retired or active) as technical or creative advisors. The drive for

verisimilitude and the creation of 'authentic' experiences drives the use of such

advisors as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). In the official guide[55] to *Conflict:*

Desert Storm, a 13 year veteran of the 22nd SAS (British Special Forces) is

prominently featured. Cameron Spence is described in the guide as "one of the

senior members of the so-called 'Sabre Squadron' in the Gulf War, a mobile

attack unit that spent some six weeks deep in Iraq."[56] Spence played through

each mission with the game's Consultant Designer and offers both general

tactics as well as Intelligence Reports before each mission walkthrough. In

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[54] Lenoir provides an excellent discussion of Simnet and its role in computer graphics and networking research, see: "All but War is Simulation," 308-313.

[55] Official game guides are produced by third-party publishers who work closely with the developers and publishers of the game. They include detailed information on the game as well as 'walkthroughs' (strategies for completing the various missions in the game).

[56] Phillip Markus, *Conflict: Desert Storm, Official Strategy Guide*, (Indianapolis: Brady Games/Pearson Education, 2002) 3.

addition to the prominent role he played in the guide to the game, Spence

acted as an SME for the developers of the game itself.

For *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, Electronic Arts hired retired Captain

Dale Dye of the U.S. Marine Corps to ensure that missions, weapons, and

enemy movements were accurately portrayed in the game. Previously, Dye

acted as consultant for various Hollywood films such as *Saving Private Ryan*

and *The Thin Red Line*. Dye had acted as a consultant SME on the *Medal of*

Honor series since 1999 and with *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, Dye was also

featured as one of the non-playable characters in one of the game's missions.

Electronic Arts also hired Specialist Alfred Rascon, a medic that served with

various U.S. Airborne and Infantry battalions, to supervise the script for the

game and the in-game dialogue of medic characters.[57] As *Medal of Honor:*

Allied Assault is a historical title set during World War II, the SMEs were retired

members of the military who had knowledge of the period (rather than direct

experience as both Dye and Rascon served primarily in Vietnam).

For games set during more contemporary conflicts, the trend is to use

active-duty soldiers and this provides a glimpse of the various functions that

the SMEs play in the design of these games. Not only are they an invaluable

resource for developers but, with the continual drive for realism and

authenticity, they are increasingly used in the marketing of military-themed

games. *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* (NovaLogic, 2003), set during the

famous incident in Somalia in 1993, used both retired soldiers (including Lee

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[57] Both Dye and Rascon are featured on the EA website for *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*: [www.eagames.com/official/moh/alliedassault/us/personnel/consultants.jsp]. Also, see the interview Dye gave to *GameSpot*: Chris Cross, Dale Dye (interview), *GameSpot.com* (7 April 2005). Available at: [www.gamespot.com/ps2/action/medalofhonor4/preview_6121863.html].

Van Arsdale, a former Delta Force Squadron Commander) and active members

of the Army's Rangers as consultant SMEs.[58] While the identity of some of

these soldiers was kept secret, the SMEs were featured prominently in the

marketing activities surrounding the game. More recently, *Close Combat: First*

to Fight, the game developed in conjunction with the U.S. Marines for use as a

training tool but also released commercially, used forty active duty Marines

during the game's development. About twenty of the Marines are featured as

in-game characters along with brief biographies and personal quotes.

As this chapter attempts to show, the U.S. military maintains an active

and evolving presence in the commercial video game market, especially in the

genres of the first-person shooter and third-person action games. What this

involvement means for the structure and design of such games (as well as the

meanings generated within them) will be treated more specifically in later

chapters but of more immediate concern is what this involvement means for

the industry itself. Since the U.S. military performs a variety of roles with

regard to the industry, the effects of such involvement are particularly hard to

gauge. Even though the military played a historical role in the development of

the technology currently being used in the video game market, the first-person

shooter and third-person action genres—in their initial stages at least—

developed independently of any direct military involvement. As is evident from

my discussion above, this changed in the mid-to-late 1990s and has been

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[58] See the interview conducted by Steve Butts with two Army Rangers who, for reasons of
confidentiality, are simply identified as 'A' and 'B.' 'A' served in Somalia during the events that
are depicted in the game. See: Steve Butts, "Black Hawk Down: We Talk with Two Rangers
Advising the Team," *IGN.com* (25 July 2002). Available at:
[http://pc.ign.com/articles/365/365924p1.html].

especially prevalent since 2002 and the release of *America's Army*. Particularly

interesting is what effect this involvement might have on the supply and

demand of such games and in this the effects on the former are much easier to

understand than the effects on the latter.

In an editorial from August 2004, the editors of a popular online review

site ran a feature outlining upcoming Xbox titles. In their introduction, the

editors comment on what many in the industry began to observe:

> With little irony, 2004 is the year of war. It's sad, true, and
> ongoing. It's a year of war—and in the videogame industry, of
> *war games*. This year we'll see about eight war games, either
> first- or third-person shooters. Is it a coincidence? Probably not.
> Do you want to play war games? Seems like it. After the
> September 11 tragedy, movie rentals of war-based movies shot
> up to record highs, and military and war-based videogames sales
> have in turn reached all-time highs.... [The] *Medal of Honor*
> [series] has become a platinum brand for Electronic Arts and
> every publisher and their mother is hoping to strike it rich with
> the next one. Just this fall, we'll see four Vietnam War games,
> three World War II games, and including 2005, five more World
> War II games. And those are just the games that have been
> *announced*.[59]

World events since 2001 have, of course, generated greater interest in military

themes. This is, in itself, not surprising since, historically, periods of military

conflict often see a rise in military-themed entertainment.[60] While the

involvement of the U.S. military in the gaming industry cannot help explain

audience demand for such products, such involvement does artificially create

supply through the commissioning of games from the private sector that can

easily be re-released as commercial products. As well, the military's

involvement influences and subsidizes research into specific areas of the

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[59] Douglass C. Perry and Hilary Goldstein, "Full Metal Jacket," *IGN.com* (24 August 2004). Available at: [http://xbox.ign.com/articles/541/541823p1.html]. Emphasis in original.
[60] Patrick M. Regan, "War Toys, War Movies, and the Militarization of the United States, 1900-85," *Journal of Peace Research* 31,no.1 (1994), 45-58.

computer or entertainment industries. Of course, the U.S. military is involved in

the video game industry in a variety of different ways: they provide expertise

and act as consultants for a variety of commercial video-game developers;

subsidize portions of the industry through the use and licensing of commercial

game engines;[61] subsidize academic research institutes such as ICT; as well as

hire a variety of video game personnel (producers, programmers, game

designers, and game artists) from the private sector for their own development

studios. An important effect of such involvement is that it, in part, helps direct

the development of the video game industry itself by promoting, subsidizing

and directly influencing certain genres.

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[61] For example, *America's Army* was based on the 'Unreal' engine and the simulation game being developed by PEO STRI is based on the 'There' engine. A game engine is the core software component of a game and provides the underlying foundation for how graphical rendering is handled and might also include other aspects such as Artificial Intelligence (behavior modeling) and collision detection (how solid objects interact). The licensing of existing game engines for use in new games is common within the video game industry.

Chapter 5

Genre, Video Game Studies and the
Military-Themed Shooter

Genre and Video Game Studies

In his discussion of how *Halo: Combat Evolved* mixes genre conventions, Aki

Jarvinen playfully admits that: "Even though a ludologist deserves a slap in the

face every time s/he compares a game to a movie, I cannot help myself...."[1] I

mention this casual remark since, in a way, it helps explain the general

constraints upon genre discussion within the emerging field of video game

studies. As a 'ludologist,' Jarvinen identifies himself as someone who believes

that the primary and defining element of video games (and their study) is

gameplay rather than seeing the medium as being primarily defined by other

elements such as narrative. As James Newman argues in his introduction to the

subject in *Videogames*:

> Even though the discipline is in its infancy, a schism has already
> emerged between 'narratologists' and 'ludologists.' In fact,
> ...the issue of narrative has, in some form or other, polarized
> almost all areas of the videogames community, from players to
> designers to academics.[2]

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[1] Aki Jarvinen, "*Halo* and the Anatomy of the FPS," *Game Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 2002). Available at: [www.gamestudies.org/0102/jarvinen/].
[2] Newman, *Videogames*, 91.

While I will discuss both narrative and gameplay in more detail in later

chapters, it deserves some mention here since the polarizing nature of the

debate has affected the way that genre has been discussed in its academic

setting.

Players, reviewers and the producers themselves use genre as a way of

categorizing the products of the industry, but in the field of video game

studies, the subject of genre has received little sustained attention. In his

overview of the field (published in 2004), Newman devotes only a couple of

pages to classification or genre. Newman mentions seven broad categories of

classification that are commonly used in industry reviews and how similar

typologies are deployed—sometimes in problematic ways—in academic studies.

Chris Crawford, a video game designer, provides a genre-like classification

system in his widely referenced *The Art of Computer Game Design* (1982) but

as Jarvinen notes, Crawford's system has not made its way into industry or

academic discussion.[3] Mark J. Wolf has produced an extensive and ambitious

classification system but, unfortunately, it has been met with both deserved

and undeserved criticism.[4]

Most of the systems mentioned are informed by a perspective that takes

as its starting point the primacy of interactivity, gameplay, or the activity of the

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[3] Jarvinen, "*Halo* and the Anatomy of the FPS." In *The Art of Computer Game Design*, Crawford divides games into two large categories based on gameplay type: skill-and-action games (emphasizing perceptual and motor skills) and strategy games (emphasizing cognitive effort). Crawford's book was originally published in 1982 but since it is out of print, an electronic version is available at [http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/fac/peabody/game-book/Coverpage.html] or [http://www.mindsim.com/MindSim/Corporate/artCGD.pdf]. More recently, Crawford argues that games should be approached in terms of the combination of basic elements ('hand-eye coordination,' 'puzzle solving,' and 'resource management'). While the system may be useful from a design perspective, it is less useful as a way of classifying games. See Chris Crawford, *The Art of Interactive Design* (San Francisco: No Starch Press, 2003).
[4] Mark J. Wolf, "Genre in the Video Game," in *The Medium of the Video Game*, Mark J. Wolf, ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 113-134.

player *within* the game. Such a perspective is essentially the one advocated by

ludologists and is largely motivated by the need or desire to situate the video

game as an aesthetic object in its own right and to separate what is distinctive

about video games from that of other mediums such as feature film, television,

or narrative-driven fiction.

Such aesthetic or formalist approaches to video game genre have been

criticized in various ways. Newman rightly points out that such systems

"necessarily divert attention from the locations of play and players within

specific socio-cultural, historical, and even interactional or 'ludic' contexts."[5]

Zach Whalen argues that attempts to codify game genres into a definitive

system fail to take into account the often useful ways genre is used in video

game journalism (as an important site of contact between consumers,

reviewers, and industry), as well as the importance of technology (especially

hardware) in mediating game production and consumption.[6]

Treating video games as an aesthetic object on its own terms is certainly

a worthwhile endeavor. Henry Jenkins, among others, has argued that there is

much to be gained through an approach that treats video games as a popular

art form. In an essay where he outlines the potential and historical precedence

of such an approach, Jenkins points out that:

> As academics have confronted games, they have often found it
> easier to discuss them in social, economic, and cultural terms
> than through aesthetic categories. The thrust of Media Studies
> writing in recent years has been focused around the category of
> popular culture and been framed through ideological categories,

[5] Newman, *Videogames*, 12.

[6] Zach Whalen, "Game/Genre: A Critique of Generic Formulas in Video Games in the Context of 'The Real'," *Academic Gamers* (2003). Available at: [http://www.academic-gamers.org/articles.shtml?game_genre.html].

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rather than in terms of popular art, a concept which carried far greater resonance in the first half of the 20th century.

My goal here is not to argue against the values of applying concepts and categories from cultural studies to the analysis of games, but rather to make the case that something was lost when we abandoned a focus on popular aesthetics. The category of aesthetics has considerable power in our culture, helping to define not only cultural hierarchies but also social, economic, and political ones as well. [7]

Jenkins' argument is important because, in advocating for the development of an aesthetics of video games, he argues that it will supplement other worthwhile approaches to the study of video games. However, the ongoing debate between 'ludologists' and 'narratologists' seems to have coloured the fledgling discussion of genre in such a way that ludology or gameplay often overrides other potential attributes such as narrative, iconography, or theme and, as Newman points out, cannot sufficiently account for other important considerations such as the socio-cultural context of consumption.

Gameplay vs. Narrative

Without getting too involved in the debate at this point, it will be useful to discuss its most salient points, especially for the ways it pertains to and has affected the discussion of genre. Many of the earliest and most well-known studies that have incorporated computer games in some manner have framed them as interesting extensions of drama or narrative and have discussed games as a form of interactive drama or stories that are performed. [8] Such a way of

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[7] Henry Jenkins, "Games, the New Lively Art," forthcoming in *Handbook for Video Game Studies,* Jeffrey Goldstein, ed., (Cambridge: MIT Press). An electronic version (cited) is available from Jenkins' website: [http://web.mit.edu/21fms/www/faculty/henry3/GamesNewLively.html].
[8] Significant works include: Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: Free Press, 1997) and Brenda Laurel, *Computers as Theatre* (London: Addison Wesley, 1993).

characterizing games was facilitated by the increased sophistication of the

technology involved (and especially the introduction of the CD-Rom as a

storage medium) which allowed, among other things, for the widespread use

of cut-scenes or full-motion video.

Cut-scenes (short, pre-rendered videos) would allow for story elements

to be introduced between the game's levels or missions. A vast majority of

games—even the earliest arcade or home-console games—were released with

some sort of backstory or, at the very least, some sort of descriptive context (an

alien invasion or the existence of a 'damsel-in-distress'). So, story in itself was

nothing new. But the increased use of cut-scenes would allow for story

development as the player progressed through the game, something that was

considerably more difficult to realize during the actual gameplay itself. The cut

scene was not without its critics, especially among some writers in both the

design community and in the emerging field of video game studies. Richard

Rouse, for example, would argue that the increased use of cut-scenes was

introducing passive elements into what is essentially an interactive medium.

Such a view, it was believed, was dominant among players as well for whom

cut-scenes only acted as a distraction or an interruption.[9] Arguing more

generally, Markku Eskelinen would conclude his essay on the current situation

of game studies by saying that narrative elements such as cut-scenes:

> ...are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games,
> and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing
> tools is just a waste of time and energy. It's no wonder gaming
> mechanisms are suffering from slow or even lethargic states of

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[9] Richard Rouse, *Game Design: Theory and Practice* (Plano: Wordware Publishing, 2001).

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development, as they are constantly and intentionally confused with narrative or dramatic or cinematic mechanisms.[10]

Approaches informed by a view that video games were extensions of narrative were often criticized for either importing theoretical traditions from other disciplines (for example, film or television studies and literary criticism) that did not always fit the medium of video games or that in doing so, video games were being relegated to an inferior relationship with other more well-established media.[11]   Such a stance is, of course, somewhat understandable since, as Jenkins noted above, early video game studies were often dominated by scholars working primarily in other disciplines.[12] The 'gameplay vs. narrative' debate was in part motivated by a desire to establish video game studies as its own field of inquiry and to treat video games as a medium distinct from other—but related—popular media. In fact, *Game Studies*, an online, peer-reviewed journal that was established in 2001, instructs potential writers that: "Proposed articles should be jargon-free, and should attempt to shed new light on games, rather than simply use games as metaphor or illustration of some other theory or phenomenon."[13]

Despite the overly polemical nature of some of these early arguments, it has focused attention on the subject of both gameplay and narrative in a

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[10] Markku Eskelinen, "The Gaming Situation," *Game Studies* 1, no. 1 (July 2001). Available at: [http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/].
[11] Important authors in this tradition would include Espen Aarseth, Markku Eskelinen, Jesper Juul, Aki Jarvinen and Gonzalo Frasca.
[12] For a more recent and useful collection of essays that investigate the relations between video games, film, and television (largely from a film and media studies perspective), see: Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, eds., *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002).
[13] See the 'About' section of the *Games Studies* website: [www.gamestudies.org/about.html].

perhaps more rigorous way by those on both sides of the debate.[14] While

some games (most notably in the 'adventure' or 'role-playing' genres) establish

fairly well-developed and even elaborate stories (including sustained character

development, suspense and anticipation, and complex causal relationships),

others use story in minimal or even in non-existent ways (such as puzzle

games). This might indicate the primacy of gameplay and the centrality of the

player's activity but even here some writers have argued that the lack of

developed story should not imply a lack of experience of narrative by players.

Using a tradition whereby fans actively participate in media texts and

sometimes actively construct their own meanings (such as the work of Henry

Jenkins on television audiences where he argues fans actively 'poach' from texts

what best suits their interests[15]), some writers have argued that narrative in

video games can be understood in similar ways—not so much by what the

game provides in terms of story but what players bring to the game and what

they do *in* and *around* it in creating their own narrative.[16]

Others have argued that video games should be compared with other

popular forms in order to better understand the ways that narrative often

functions. Craig Lindley, for example, argues that the three-act structure

commonly used in cinema can often be seen in the overall structure of video

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[14] In fact, some 'ludologists' have made efforts to distance themselves from the debate itself and even some of their own earlier writings. See: Jesper Juul, "Games Telling stories? A Brief Note on Games and Narratives," *Game Studies* 1, no. 1 (July 2001). Available at: [www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/]. Also, see Gonzalo Frasca, "Ludologists Love Stories, Too: Notes From a Debate that Never Took Place," in *Level Up* (Digital Games Research Conference Proceedings), Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens, eds., 92-99 (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2003).

[15] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992).

[16] See: Celia Pearce, "Towards a Game Theory of Game," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game,* Noah Frup-Waldrop and Pat Harrigan, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004). The essay is also available at: [http://www.cpandfriends.com/writing/first-person.html].

games and even in individual game levels. In making his comparison however, Lindley argues that the second act (literally, "the playing out of the implications of the conflict") dominates in video games and in the individual levels, as this represents the core elements of gameplay.[17] Similarly, Jesper Juul has argued that while certain story elements exist in games, they are largely positioned in the past while the core element of gameplay (Lindley's expanded second act) operates in the 'here' and 'now' of the player experience. The result, Juul argues, is that narrative and gameplay exist in an uneasy and sometimes contradictory relationship.[18] But, again, as both Juul and Lindley incorporate a consideration of narrative, they simultaneously relegate it to a position where gameplay needs to be considered first.

I have not done justice to the debate itself[19] or the individual arguments of the various authors involved, nor do I want to argue against the importance of gameplay as a primary or constitutive element for the consideration of games as an aesthetic object. Instead, my brief remarks here should be taken for the way that gameplay has been incorporated into the discussion of genre and has, mostly unintentionally, added constraints to the discussion of video

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[17] Craig A. Lindley, "The Gameplay Gestalt, Narrative, and Interactive Storytelling," Zero Game Studio, The Interactive Institute, Sweden (2002). Available at: [http://zerogame.tii.se/pdfs/CGDClindley.pdf]. Lindley's essay was also published in: *Computer Games and Digital Cultures* (Conference Proceedings), Frans Mayra, ed. (Tampere: University of Tampere Press, 2002).

[18] Juul made such arguments in a much more forceful way in earlier writings where he argued that, essentially, narrative and interactivity were impossible to reconcile in video games. See: Jesper Juul, "A Clash Between Game and Narrative," M.A. Thesis, University of Copenhagen (1999). An English translation is available at: [http://www.jesperjuul.dk/thesis/]. Also, see: Jesper Juul, "Games Telling stories? A Brief Note on Games and Narratives," *Game Studies* 1, no. 1 (July 2001). Available at: [www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/].

[19] Even though, in later writings, Gonzalo Frasca describes the ludology/narrative debate as one that never took place, it still seems to be taking place. In the most recent DiGRA conference (June 2005), Janet Murray delivered an introduction to the keynote address titled "The Last Word on Ludology v Narratology in Game Studies." An electronic version is available at: [www.lcc.gatech.edu/~murray/digra05/lastword.pdf].

game genre which, I would argue, unnecessarily limits the way video games

can be understood.

Genre and the Emphasis on GamePlay

As mentioned previously, Mark Wolf has provided the only academic attempt

to outline a comprehensive analysis of genre in video games.[20] As such, Wolf's

essay on genre will be used as a starting point.

In his opening discussion, Wolf provides a brief overview of the way

that genre is approached and implemented in other disciplines, especially film

studies. After discussing the role that iconography, narrative structure, theme,

and the socio-cultural context of the audience have played in the genre analysis

of film, Wolf admits such approaches have limited applicability in a discussion

of video game genre: "Video game genre study differs markedly from literary or

film genre study due to the direct and active participation of the audience in

the form of the surrogate player-character, who acts within the game's diegetic

world, taking part in the central conflict of the game's narrative."[21] Wolf's

argument is made more clearly in his discussion of iconography:

> While some video games can be classified in a manner similar to
> that of films (we might say that *Outlaw* (1978) is a Western,
> *Space Invaders* (1978) science fiction, and *Combat* (1977) a war
> game), classification by iconography ignores the fundamental
> differences and similarities which are to be found in the player's
> experience of the game. *Outlaw* and *Combat*, both early games
> for the Atari 2600, are very similar in that both simply feature
> player-characters maneuvering and shooting at each other in a

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[20] Mark J. Wolf, "Genre in the Video Game," in *The Medium of the Video Game*, Mark J. Wolf,
ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 113-134.
[21] Wolf, "Genre in the Video Game," 114.

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field of obstacles on a single, bounded screen of graphics, with cowboys in one game and tanks in the other.[22]

For Wolf, player activity or gameplay (he uses the term 'interactivity') becomes the defining element of his taxonomy. He does not completely dismiss categorizing strategies that consider iconography or theme but argues they have a secondary role in a proper classification system.[23]

Wolf's genre breakdown includes an alphabetical list of forty-two different genres (including Abstract, Adaptation, Adventure, Artificial Life, Board Games, Capturing, Card Games, Catching, Chase, Collecting, Combat) with descriptions of each, a list of examples, and cross-referencing to take into account overlap. As I mentioned earlier, Wolf's system of classification has been criticized for its unwieldy nature (42 separate categories), or that it includes categories (Diagnostic, Demo, and Utility) that are not usually considered as games, or the fact that its categories are difficult to map onto contemporary video games.

Aki Jarvinen, for example, writes:

> ...if we see genre-based categorizations as a means of making sense out of a larger whole, 42 genres ceases to be useful. Or, we have to accept that the diversity of games requires many more genres and subgenres than traditional media products which have benefited from genre studies. Or, that a game genre equals hybridity, because game genres are complex sums of interaction and rule mechanisms, audiovisual styles, and popular fiction genre conventions. *Halo* presents a case in this direction.[24]

Jarvinen's argument for hybridity is a compelling one as it would better explain recent games where there is often a mix of previous gameplay categories.

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[22] Wolf, "Genre in the Video Game," 115.

[23] Wolf also asserts that they may become more useful as video games become more complex or technologically advanced (p. 115).

[24] Jarvinen, "*Halo* and the Anatomy of the FPS."

Jarvinen uses *Halo: Combat Evolved* as an example and argues that the innovation of the popular title lies precisely in its ability to mix various pre-existing elements: the action of a first-person shooter, a compelling story realized through cut-scenes and story elements within levels, the ability to switch to a third-person perspective in various aspects of the game, and so on. If we were to employ Wolf's system and apply it to *Halo*, we could easily include it within eight of Wolf's categories to take account of the different elements of gameplay or interactivity involved.[25]

Even though Jarvinen offers 'hybridity' as a conceptual framework (and many recent games would indeed be better characterized as hybrids), it really is not a solution to the question of genre. In his discussion, Jarvinen discusses *Halo* as a singular whole which is common but can also be problematic. Like a great many other titles, *Halo* offers players a series of different methods of actually playing the game. Players can play through the 'story mode' either individually or cooperatively with another player. Since the story is a crucial aspect of the game under such conditions, *Halo* could be characterized, using popular terminology, as an 'action/adventure' first-person shooter (FPS). *Halo* also offers a multiplayer mode where a large number of players can play against one another over a network. Here, the story that is effectively advanced in the single and cooperative modes is absent and is replaced with a type of gameplay that allows individuals to play competitively in a variety of formats. In this sense, with the focus on multiplayer gameplay and the lack of

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[25] For clarity's sake, the categories might include: Adaptation, Adventure, Combat, Driving, Fighting, Flying, Maze, and Shoot 'em Up. Some of these categories would be debatable depending on a player's preferences and perspective.

story, the multiplayer aspect of *Halo* would be best categorized as an action-based FPS.

To use Wolf's terminology, each mode of play in *Halo* offers different ways for players to 'experience' the game but in his classification system Wolf leaves out such questions. This is problematic, especially if genre analysis is meant, in part, to take into account the socio-cultural context of the consumption of games. As mentioned, Wolf's classification system has been criticized in various ways. The criticism is warranted and not at the same time. Wolf's classification system aims to be comprehensive (which Wolf recognizes) but also historical. While he includes some games from the 1990s in his classification system, most of the games that Wolf provides as examples in each category are early arcade, home-console, or computer games released in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. As it is, Wolf's genre breakdown might properly be read as a way of classifying early video games which primarily offered a single type of gameplay.

In my discussion so far, I have used the terms 'genre' and 'classification system' interchangeably in describing the system that Wolf offers. Upon closer inspection, Wolf's system is really a useful classification or cataloguing system rather than a genre breakdown. In his discussion, Wolf mentions that the system he devised was based on the Library of Congress Moving Imagery Genre-Form Guide and, again, his categories are largely based on early video games.

Even though Wolf points to the rich tradition of genre analysis in film and literature, his desire to define genre in video games primarily through

gameplay or interactivity prevents him from fully investigating the approaches

to genre analysis that he mentions. In fact, the desire to view video games as

being primarily defined by gameplay often leads to a misunderstanding of how

genre analysis is used in other disciplines. Early in his discussion, Wolf quotes a

passage from Thomas Schatz' book, *Hollywood Genres*, where Schatz writes:

> Genre study may be more 'productive' if we complement the
> narrow critical focus of traditional genre analysis with a broader
> socio-cultural perspective. Thus, we many consider a genre film
> not only as some filmmaker's artistic expression, but further as
> the cooperation between artists and audience in celebrating
> their collective values and ideals. In fact, many qualities
> traditionally viewed as artistic shortcomings—the psychologically
> static hero, for instance, or the predictably of the plot—assume a
> significantly different value when examined as components of a
> genre's ritualistic narrative system.[26]

Such an approach to genre would be extremely useful if deployed in video

game genre studies as it would help explain the differences between 'story

mode' and multiplayer modes in games such as *Halo* or the significance of

mods to games like *Battlefield 1942* as discussed in the previous chapter

(where the actual 'playing' of the game is supplemented by the social activity

of players contributing to the game's design). But subsequent to the quotation

from Schatz' book, Wolf writes:

> One could easily substitute 'video games' for 'film' in the above
> quote; video games' heroes are certainly more static than film
> heroes, and plots are often even more predictable. And most of
> all, the interactive experience of playing a video game is even
> more of a 'cooperation between artists and audiences,' who go
> beyond 'celebrating collective values' by applying those values to
> the activity found in the gameplay (the 'ritualistic narrative')
> itself.[27]

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[26] Schatz, quoted in Wolf, "Genre in the Video Game," 113.
[27] Wolf, "Genre in the Video Game," 113.

Wolf's argument here could be interpreted in a way that makes video games, as a whole, a sub-genre of, say, Hollywood action films rather than existing as its own art form. That, of course, is not Wolf's intention but Wolf's insistence on defining video games through a formal analysis based solely on gameplay prevents a useful application of Schatz' arguments.

Within video game studies and specifically when discussing genre, there is a tendency to leave aside visual elements such as iconography and other potentially useful ways of understanding genre. This has been particularly problematic for my own interests in military-themed games. Since there is a tendency to look at genre from a formal perspective (and one dominated by gameplay), it would seem to be an artificial construct to create a category based on realistic, modern combat as such games should—from a gameplay perspective—be included in the larger first-person or third-person shooter category and alongside games understood as science-fiction or even as Westerns. While such an approach is no doubt useful for purposes of comparison, it cannot fully account for the various ways that players approach specific games or even groups of games or even their preferences.

Even though it is common to find players who are attracted to *any* kind of first-person shooter for example, it is equally common to find players who are only interested in specific kinds of games or specific kinds of gameplay. Among fans of first-person shooters, it is very common to hear of individuals who will *only* play FPS games on a PC (using the keyboard and mouse as opposed to the controllers on home consoles) since they feel that the PC's input devices give them more control and accuracy. In addition, it is not

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uncommon to encounter players who prefer 'realistic' games (games that

simulate contemporary weapons and tactics) or players who are attracted

primarily to FPS games set in a specific historical period (i.e. World War II). This

would suggest that, at the very least, other factors—hardware preferences, the

desire for authenticity, or the degree of historical interest—may be equally

important in determining player preferences.

The existence of mods would provide another interesting test case. As I

mentioned previously, two of the many mods created for *Battlefield 1942*

include *Call to Arms* (which attempts to draw attention to the efforts of the

Canadian military in World War II) and *Home Front* (built by fans of *Halo* who

wanted to re-create that 'world' within the style of gameplay that *Battlefield

1942* offers). From a formal/gameplay perspective, the games would be

identical even though it is not difficult to imagine that there might be

significant differences as to why players might be attracted to each. As well, it

would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to sufficiently explain or

understand the motivations behind the players who created the mods in the

first place (since the activity of creating the mod would not be considered as

gameplay).

Such questions are investigated by writers and theorists within the

broad field of video game studies but when it comes to consideration of genre

such questions are often left aside in order to foreground formal analysis

primarily defined through gameplay.[28] The reason, perhaps, is that the

gameplay vs. narrative debate has reduced the perceived importance of certain

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[28] For an interesting discussion of how a narrow, formal conception of genre is often featured in scholarly works, see: Zach Whalen, "Game/Genre: A Critique of Generic Formulas in Video Games in the Context of 'The Real.'"

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elements (like narrative) because they are understood to either come from

other media or are more properly formal elements that define other media.[29]

I agree with Wolf and others in that we should consider the experience

of the player as a primary concern, but the 'experience' of games encompasses

more than just a narrow focus on gameplay or in-game player activity. A

formal analysis should also include many aspects of the game's design

including location and setting, stylistic and atmospheric conventions, narrative

and the degree with which it is present, types of character(s), and even

consideration of hardware and questions of user input.[30] Such considerations

become more important in genre analysis since genre, when it is raised in other

disciplines, attempts to understand a range of determinants—historical,

economic, social, aesthetic, ideological—involved in the production of

meaning.[31] In terms of video game genre, we need to understand how

meaning is generated and this points to the importance of questions that go

beyond a formal approach based solely on gameplay. For example, we could

ask how a particular game (and others like it) defines 'realism,' whether it is set

in this world or is more fantasy-based, whether it is a part of a larger franchise

or whether its diegetic world is borrowed from other media (as in any *Star*

Wars game). We could also consider if it is historical, politicized in any way,

and if it presents players with questions of morality surrounding their in-game

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[29] Here, it is tempting to compare the discussion of form to the debate which took place in the 1950s surrounding contemporary art where artists and critics (notably, Clement Greenberg) attempted to isolate formal properties of sculpture or painting from elements that were understood to be properties of other media.

[30] For example, the Rhythm/Music/Dance genre is especially notable in this regard since 'dance-pads,' electronic 'drums,' and even Sony's Eye-Toy are important aspects of the genre. Wolf's genre of 'Rhythm and Dance' includes a description of such hardware.

[31] My comments here have been adapted from the discussion of genre criticism in *The Cinema Book* (2nd Edition), Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink, eds. (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 137-231.

actions or whether the point of the game is to allow players to act with complete freedom. In effect, such elements could be considered as formal aspect of a game since many are design elements and specifically need to be introduced in the game's source code.

Genre in Game Journalism and Other Places

Within video game journalism, descriptions of genre often take a much more modular approach that combines the use of a broad set of commonly recognized genres along with various modifiers that describe various thematic or structural aspects of the game. Often, the various categories or genres that are employed do focus on gameplay, as these reflect the most commonly understood ways of categorizing games by the journalists themselves, as well as developers, publishers, and consumers (for example: Action, Adventure, Educational, Racing/Driving, Role-Playing (RPG), Simulation, Sports). The various modifiers that are also used often focus on perspectives and viewpoints used in a game (such as first-person, third-person, isometric, side-scrolling) as well as thematic modifiers. These usually help distinguish between basic kinds of sports for example but also include whether or not titles aim for realism (as in simulation sports titles) or are more interested in exaggeration (such as in extreme sports). The various modifiers used to describe non-Sports titles includes those describing stylistic aspects of the game (Horror, Sci-Fi, Medieval-Fantasy), to further refine the specifics of gameplay (Stealth, Persistent

Universe, Managerial), or which point to the game's origins and influences (Anime, Arcade, Film Adaptation).[32]

A modular approach is able to, as Jarvinen argues, better adapt to the continued evolution in game design and account for hybridity. And even though the basic or common genres are based on the type of gameplay, reviews and features will often group games by one or more of the various modifiers (World War II games or games that take place in an online, persistent universe[33]). However, as Zach Whalen points out, gaming websites simultaneously offer a competing system of categorization based on hardware or platform.[34] Categorization by the platform (i.e. PC, the major consoles, and the major handheld devices) is, Whalen argues, often ignored by scholarly attempts to discuss genre and raises "important typological questions" such as: "What is the medium of gaming? Is each platform a separate medium? Does the apparati of a player's interface with the game include the hardware of the console itself?"[35] Whalen argues that such questions are often ignored in scholarly discussions of video game genre since these reflect the economics and marketing surrounding the industry:

> ...the question of platform as it is related to game consumption
> addresses a concern that is independent of... questions about
> what games are and how games are played. [The] ...formalistic

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[32] Some videogame related websites provide guides relating to genre for their reviewers. MobyGames has a detailed and useful guide available from its website: [www.mobygames.com/glossary/genres].

[33] Persistent Universe refers to games that takes place in a setting or world that is constantly 'running' even when the user is not actively playing the game. When a particular user resumes gameplay, the 'world' of the game has changed from the last time the user played the game. Persistent Universe can describe games played online (as in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games or MMORPGs) or in offline games such as *Animal Crossing*.

[34] This can also be seen, but in different ways, in gaming magazines which often separate reviews by platform in different sections of the magazine or the magazine itself might be devoted to a single platform.

[35] Whalen, "Game/Genre: A Critique of Generic Formulas in Video Games," 4.

canonization of games as quasi-literary objects can only result from the type of understanding which does not depend on a game's commercial success as a marker of quality. Therefore, the consumption of games (the buying of games and accessories) is, unfortunately, a less important question for this discussion. This is unfortunate because the media objects themselves and the journalistic typologies of games create the practical sense of genre that game scholars tend to eschew or take for granted with little careful attention.[36]

The questions that Whalen proposes are raised in similar ways by James Newman. In his discussion of the scholarly use of genre in video games, Newman argues that "an overly text-centred approach to understanding videogame play" often does not address other important considerations such as "ludic context."[37] Newman writes: "An underused means of differentiating types of videogames and, more importantly, types of experience, structure and engagement, centres on the location of play."[38] In his discussion, Newman focuses upon coin-op or arcade systems and argues that the social space of game consumption not only affects design considerations but also the experience of players themselves. As Newman argues that 'ludic context' is often ignored—especially in the way that arcade systems are given little attention—it could be argued that handheld games are likewise ignored even though these types of games present specific design questions and are played under a different set of social conditions.

There are, however, other areas of academic studies that approach the categorization of video games with little attention to formal aspects of gameplay or even consideration of hardware. 'Serious Games' is a label describing an emerging genre that is organized primarily through the subject

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[36] Whalen, "Game/Genre: A Critique of Generic Formulas in Video Games," 4.
[37] Newman, *Videogames*, 12.
[38] Newman, *Videogames*, 13.

matter and the intention of the creators. The category of Serious Games or

Social Impact games includes games that are used in advertising (advergames),

politics and activism, education, and public policy[39] and points to a potentially

useful way of thinking about genre within the field of video game studies.

While gameplay, format, and platform are important elements of discussion,

they are not held as defining elements of the genre and its various sub-

categories.

Genre – Mode – Milieu

A potentially useful way of conceptually framing genre analysis in video games

is provided by Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska and, through modification and

further discussion, by Zach Whalen. In their introduction to the anthology,

ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces, King and Krzywinska offer 'Genre,'

'Mode,' and 'Milieu' as three broad categories with which genre in video

games can be approached. 'Genre' uses the commonly understood categories

describing gameplay (Action, Action-Adventure, Strategy, etc.) which can be

combined, added to, and further sub-divided. 'Mode' is used to describe how

the game-world is experienced by the player and would include in-game

perspective (first-person, third-person, isometric) as well as options for number

of players (single-player, multiplayer) and whether it can be played over a local

area network (LAN) or over the internet. 'Milieu' is used to describe stylistic

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[39] Various websites offer ongoing discussion of 'serious games,' including: The Education Arcade [http://www.educationarcade.org/], Serious Games Initiative [http://www.seriousgames.org/], Social Impact Games [http://www.socialimpactgames.com/], and WaterCooler Games [http://www.watercoolergames.org/]. Also, the annual Game Developers Conference features a 'Serious Games Summit' that attracts designers, marketers, government and military researchers, as well as video game scholars. See: [http://www.seriousgamessummit.com/home.html].

conventions and narrative content which, King and Krzywinska say, is similar to the way that genre is usually employed in film studies.[40]

Implied in their discussion, however, is the fact that this is a tiered system with 'genre' occupying the primary level of categorization. This is due in part because they say that the move from 'genre' to 'mode' to 'milieu' involves a movement from the more general to the more specific. But it might also be the result of King and Krzywinska's desire to not add further tension to the ongoing ludology vs. narrative debate. In explaining their choice of the three categories, they state: "The reason for adopting this terminology, however, is to avoid imposing a film-oriented framework upon games, from the outside, rather than working more closely with the dominant discourses surrounding games themselves."[41] At any rate, the need to maintain such a hierarchy is debatable. Whalen, for example, further refines King and Krzywinska's categories but argues that the mediating effects of hardware and platform distinctions would indicate that under certain circumstances, 'mode' might be of central importance.[42] Likewise, if we consider the genre of 'serious games,' questions concerning the content or subject matter (we could include this under 'milieu') become central as a way of categorizing such games. In that sense, I would agree with Whalen when he states that: "...it appears that

[40] Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, "Introduction," in *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, eds. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 26-27.

[41] King and Krzywinska, "Introduction," 27. Both King and Krzywinska are, it should be pointed out, Lecturers in Film and Television Studies at Brunel University.

[42] Whalen also looks at the recent genre of Massively Multiplayer Online games and argues that since they are dependent on particular technologies for their existence, 'mode' can—for that particular genre—be seen as equally important as 'genre.'

'genre,' 'mode,' and 'milieu' describe different game qualities in more or less equal proportion."[43]

The U.S. Military and the Military-Themed Shooter

Ultimately, my discussion of genre is not motivated by a desire to find an all-inclusive manner of categorizing video games nor to propose an alternate model. Instead, in looking at the role that the U.S. military is currently playing within the video game industry today, questions concerning genre become important in organizing a study that attempts to understand such influence. While the military shows an interest in a variety of genres for training and education, those games that have seen a commercial release—such as *America's Army*, *Full Spectrum Warrior*, and *Close Combat: First to Fight*—would be characterized as action-based shooters. In that sense, they share similarities with other action titles, especially those characterized as first-person or third-person shooters. Therefore, comparing such games to others in the gameplay genre would be useful. However, since these games are meant to act as training tools (or are derived from training tools), they could easily be characterized as simulations in that they model real-life situations and variables concerning modern combat. And, from a gameplay perspective, they have introduced some novel approaches to both game design and gameplay. *America's Army*, for example, introduces role-playing elements in its career mode and *Full Spectrum Warrior* is not really an action-shooter per se, since the

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[43] Whalen, "Game/Genre: A Critique of Generic Formulas in Video Games," 3.

player is involved in controlling groups of soldiers rather than directly controlling a single in-game avatar.

Even though these games share important similarities with other action-based shooters they diverge in other significant ways. The importance of multiplayer options (especially for the specific ways it is utilized in *America's Army*) and the fact that these games are mostly available for the PC and Microsoft's Xbox, shows specific concerns with audience and other aspects of the industry. In that sense, mode becomes an important question. But it is likely in terms of milieu where these games (even ones that that the U.S. military shows considerable interest in but have not commissioned or designed themselves) show many important similarities. Of course, the U.S. military is primarily interested in a realistic or authentic experience of modern combat and this more than anything would be a useful way of categorizing such games. Realism, then, is a defining element and these games often exhibit specific concerns with the accurate modeling of weapons and equipment, strategy and 'rules of engagement,' setting and level design.

Such design considerations do, of course, affect gameplay but in other ways, issues over representation and questions of ideology also become important. Since these games primarily target a younger audience, problems of the representation of war (especially in terms of gore and the framing of violence) become an issue. Likewise, the presentation of story (especially if it is historically based) also becomes an issue. As some of these games are set in the near future, questions concerning story and 'historical setting' become especially problematic. In a related way, the presentation of 'the enemy' also

poses significant problems from the perspective of game design. Should players be allowed to play (as in many other games) on the side of the enemy? And since many of these games are set in the near future, even a simple question of *who* the enemy should be (or is) becomes an interesting question.

I will investigate such questions in more detail in later chapters, but in terms of organizing this study—especially in terms of grouping a range of games into a conceptually related genre—it quickly became evident that a narrow focus on gameplay would prove limiting in many ways. By proposing to look at military-themed shooters or, more specifically, military-themed shooters that have exhibited influence by the U.S. military, my primary interest lies in understanding the use of such games as a propaganda and public relations tool. To do so, however, it is equally important to approach these games for what they mean in a cultural sense and also how they function as aesthetic objects in and of themselves. Consequently, it becomes important to look at these games and the various meanings we can ascribe to them in terms of how they intersect with larger social, cultural, and political meanings in addition to comparing them to other games both within and, at times, outside of the genre.

As many have recognized, the often limiting ways that genre analysis is understood within video game studies do not lend themselves to such analysis since the question of meaning is limited to those that can be found in a formal analysis of gameplay. As Zach Whalen argues, such an approach "tend(s) to isolate games as a-historical formal objects"[44] and the games that I am

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[44] Whalen, "Game/Genre: A Critique of Generic Formulas in Video Games," 10.

specifically looking at are clearly not meant to be a-historical in that sense. Of

course, there is nothing wrong with formal analyses of video games but genre

analysis must go beyond mere classification to include how these games fit

within larger social, economic, historical, or ideological meanings. Expanding

the way that genre analysis is understood within video games studies would

also, I would argue, bring it in line with the often fruitful ways that video

games are already approached outside of genre analysis, including the

emerging discussion of video game criticism and questions of methodology.

Genre and Video Game Criticism

Within the industry, there is growing concern with the state of video game

criticism or, more properly, the distinct lack of criticism in reviews of games

within the industry's press. The reasons for such concern stem from the fact

that even though the press surrounding video games is extensive, it is largely

dominated by questions of technical virtuosity and spectacle, is overly

concerned with new releases and especially blockbuster games or established

franchises, and often pays singular attention to violent or risqué content as a

measure of quality.[45] Even though similar complaints can be heard in relation

to other media, it is especially true within the video game press which, almost

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[45] For example, Matthew Sakey, who writes a regular column for the International Game Developers Association, has commented upon the state of video game reviews and argues that it contributes to the stagnation of game development. Taking into consideration the feedback he received after one of his earlier columns on the subject, Sakey writes: "It would seem that plenty of gamers, developers, and even members of the press are sick of unsophisticated reporting and childish behavior from major gaming periodicals." See: Matthew Sakey, "Culture Clash: How the Gaming Press Can Redefine Games," International Game Developers Association (February 2005). Available at: [http://www.igda.org/columns/clash/clash_Feb05.php]. Also, see: Matteo Bittani, "Make Better Criticism: A Mature Form of Cultural Analysis," International Game Developers Association conference proceedings (March 2004), available at: [http://www.igda.org/academia/IGDA_2004_GDC_Criticism.pdf].

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exclusively, considers its audience to be composed of a male, teen demographic

and is particularly tied to the heavy marketing activities of marquee games and

franchises.[46] In fact, as part of its "Curriculum Framework" for the

implementation of game studies within post-secondary educational

institutions, the International Games Development Association gives video

game criticism and analysis a particularly prominent position.[47]   Recently,

there have been a variety of attempts to remedy the situation, especially

through websites (where production and publishing costs are less of a concern)

which offer space to the academic study of games as well as those that are

oriented toward a general audience.[48] Significantly, this situation has also seen

recent attempts to outline methodological approaches to game analysis.

Writing in 2003, Espen Aarseth points out: "The cautious search for a

methodology, which we should have reason to expect of reflective practitioners

in any new field, is surprisingly absent from most current aesthetic analyses of

games."[49] Aarseth is correct in that the discussion of game analysis is often led

by example and is rarely approached as a topic in and of itself. One of the first

attempts was provided by Lars Konzack in 2002, and even though Konzack is

careful to frame his discussion through a ludological perspective, he remains

open to other disciplinary approaches. In fact, when compared to the

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[46] This is especially noticeable in print journalism and video game magazines, many of which are devoted to a specific platform including the 'official' magazines devoted to the major consoles produced by Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo.

[47] International Games Developers Association, "IGDA Curriculum Framework," version 2.3 (February 2003). Available at: [http://www.igda.org/academia/curriculum_framework.php].

[48] Academic websites would include Academic Gamers [http://www.academic-gamers.org/] and the peer-reviewed journal *Game Studies* [http://www.gamestudies.org/]. A very interesting example of a critical website oriented toward a general audience is Game Critics [http://www.gamecritics.com/index.php].

[49] Espen Aarseth, "Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis," Melbourne: Digital Arts and Culture Conference Proceedings, 2003. Available at: [http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/dac/papers/Aarseth.pdf].

discussion of genre analysis, Konzack provides a much more open framework to game analysis.

Konzack outlines seven levels or 'layers' of analysis that can be combined in various ways depending upon the game(s) being analyzed and the larger concerns of the researcher which he then applies to a single title, *Soul Calibur* (Namco, 1999). Konzack's seven layers include 'hardware' (a discussion of platform and other hardware considerations necessary to play the game), 'program code' (an analysis of the in-game rules that govern player activity), 'functionality' (related to program code in terms of how the in-game rules make possible or constrain the player's in-game actions), 'gameplay' (an analysis from the perspective of ludology, discussing the in-game player activity in terms of goals and sub-goals, resources and obstacles, rewards and penalties, how in-game space is defined, time limits). The remaining levels include 'meaning' (basically the semantic meaning generated by the game through gameplay but also mediated by narrative, theme, and iconographic elements), 'referentiality' (the degree to which the game depends upon outside sources of influence or depends on knowledge of historical events or on established stories borrowed from other media), and lastly, 'socio-cultural' considerations (how the game's design is related to the actual social space—or what Newman calls the 'ludic space'—of playing the game).

While Konzack presents his methodological approach as a tentative 'first-step,' the strength of his discussion lies in the fact that he considers a range of qualities including technical aspects as well as aesthetic, social, and cultural questions. From my own perspective, Konzack's approach is exemplary

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not only for the range of his levels but the fact that he considers them as inter-related (such that a game's rules are related to the meanings possible in the game for example) and can be utilized in a non-hierarchical way. Building on Konzack's discussion, Aarseth simplifies the 'levels' into three familiar groupings as well as providing a more practical discussion of methodology relating to games' research.

Aarseth condenses Konzack's levels into three inter-related categories which he argues might be more applicable to different kinds of research being conducted depending on disciplinary interest. 'Gameplay' includes players' actions, strategies and motives and would also include the 'ludic' context and would, Aarseth argues, be applicable to sociological or ethnological research interests. 'Game-Structure' or 'Game-Rules' would include Konzack's discussion of program code and functionality (the rules governing the game) and is of primary importance to fields such as game design, computer science and, especially, artificial intelligence and behaviour modeling. 'Game-world' would include fictional content, topology or level design, as well as larger issues of meaning and referentiality and might be of particular concern to humanities-based research, media studies or aesthetics. Like Konzack, Aarseth stresses an open and modifiable framework for analysis but even so, it is interesting that Aarseth's three categories are similar in many ways to King and Krzywinska's Genre-Mode-Milieu breakdown in terms of genre analysis; suggesting, perhaps, that disparate approaches to game analysis are coalescing into a somewhat stable and recognizable form.

Aarseth's discussion is additionally important since he not only provides

an extended argument in terms of what—theoretically—should be considered

but also with respect to useful or practical ways of acquiring knowledge about

such disparate areas included in game analysis. From the beginning, Aarseth

stresses the importance of actually playing the games. This might seem

obvious or simplistic but it is offered as a way of preventing the use of games

in analyses simply to advance other arguments (which Aarseth and others often

view with suspicion) and where the individual has clearly not played the game

or, in some cases, has not even seen it being played.[50] However, in stressing

the importance of gaining first-hand knowledge of games, Aarseth also argues

that—due to the specific nature of video games—it is equally if not more

important to look at how games are experienced by others. In doing so,

Aarseth links his discussion of methodology with larger theoretical issues

concerning what video games are and how they can be seen differently from

other media.

Throughout his article, Aarseth makes some interesting statements

concerning the nature of video games. For instance, he argues that games

must be understood as taking place in "virtual environments" and that games

"are about controlling and exploring a spatial representation."[51] He also states

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[50] Again, such an argument could be seen as unnecessary resistance to analyses coming 'from the outside' as it were. In his article, however, Aarseth provides specific examples to support his arguments and while I see no reason to specifically mention them here, suffice it to say that the 'kind' of analysis that Aarseth is making reference to usually relates to larger debates over media effects (especially in terms of violence and gender representation) or how playing video games contributes to the social impairment of players. Without disparaging the merits of these debates, I would agree with Aarseth that it is problematic to enter into them without some first-hand knowledge or experience of the games themselves.
[51] Aarseth, "Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis," 2.

that a "game is a process rather than an object"[52] and that even though video games share attributes with other representational media, they are best defined "as simulations... [that] can portray, in principle, any phenomenon we would care to think about...."[53] Here, Aarseth is making reference to the argument (central to ludology) that games are primarily defined by players' actions and choices in a virtual world that—through systems of physical and behavioral rules—attempt to include and respond to the actions and choices of the player. The in-game world may be relatively simple and abstract but it might also be extremely complex in the sense that it attempts to model natural processes and conditions or even human behaviour. As Gonzalo Frasca writes:

> Traditional media are representational, not simulational. They excel at producing both descriptions of traits and sequences of events (narratives). A photograph of a plane will tell us information about its shape and color, but it will not fly or crash when manipulated. A flight simulator or a simple toy plane are not only signs, but machines that generate signs according to rules that model some of the behaviors of a real plane. A film about a plane landing is a narrative: an observer could interpret it in different ways (i.e., 'it's a normal landing' or 'it's an emergency landing'), but she cannot manipulate it and influence how the plane will land since film sequences are fixed and unalterable. By contrast, the flight simulator allows the player to perform actions that will modify the behavior of the system in a way that is similar to the behavior of the actual plane.[54]

Frasca's argument—like Aarseth's—is that games, no matter what specific genre we might consider, are attempts to model behaviour of simple or complex systems and that in interacting with such simulations the player has the ability to 'act.' In the game, a player may be rewarded or penalized for

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[52] Aarseth, "Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis," 2.
[53] Aarseth, "Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis," 1.
[54] Gonzalo Frasca, "Simulation versus Narrative," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, Mark J. Wolf and Bernard Perron, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2003), 223-224.

certain actions (i.e. for killing an enemy or killing a civilian) depending on the rule structures and design of the game.

The question of in-game actions or choice provide some intriguing possibilities but is, of course, the cause of considerable consternation as it is the existence of interactivity that is often cited in debates over video game violence. In a discussion of two recently released games—*Manhunt* (Rockstar Games/Rockstar North, 2003) and *The Punisher* (THQ/Volition, 2005)—that encourage and reward the player for committing violent acts, Keith Stuart, a regular contributor to the Game Culture section of *The Guardian*, writes:

> In most instances, game violence is a transitory act—you pull the trigger a couple of times and your enemy is down. In *The Punisher*, the interactivity of the violent act lingers, inflicting pain becomes a gameplay challenge, arguably more psychologically involving than merely aiming and firing. The element of sadism is an extension of what we saw in *Manhunt* last year, where the lead character is ordered to kill gang members in a variety of lurid ways, purely to satiate the bloodlust of a psychotic spectator [a character in the game]. Literally, senseless violence.[55]

More interesting perhaps (and increasingly common) are games where the player has considerably more freedom to act in either good or evil ways *and* where specific consequences are tied to in-game decision-making. In games such as *Fable* (2004), *Black & White* (2001), *Knights of the Old Republic* (2003) or *Deus Ex: Invisible War* (2003), the player is often confronted with the knowledge that their actions will affect later outcomes in the game and, in the process, can take on a semblance of moral choice. For example, consider the reactions generated in a review of *Deus Ex: Invisible War* by Steve Butts:

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[55] Keith Stuart, "Where is Game Violence Going?" *The Guardian (Unlimited)* (11 March 2005) Available at:
[blogs.guardian.co.uk/games/archives/game_culture/2005/03/where_is_game_violence_going.htm l].

Sure, most of us are content to shoot Nazis because, well, they're Nazis. But here, there's always a much deeper reason to the action; you'll be shooting because you've made the decision to be enemies with a particular person or group, not because the game designers thought you needed someone to shoot at.

For the record, we know that the developers considered it a flaw that you had to kill anyone at all to finish the first game. My own temperament and the exigencies of deadlines have kept me from trying to run through *Invisible War* without actually killing anyone. But even so, I started to feel bad that I was assassinating people, particularly when there was an equally tempting material reward for not doing so. Eventually I decided to let people live so long as they weren't shooting back at me. But even this gets complicated in the world of *Invisible War*.[56]

For me, the most interesting aspect of the review is the fact that Butts mentions it was his own attitudes and temperament that guided his actions in the game's fictional world.

Still, while Frasca argues that games are simulational more than representational, the representational elements of games are still important to consider; especially since the development of computer hardware has made possible increasingly realistic portrayals of people, events, actions and settings. As Keith Stuart, in his article concerning *Manhunt* and *The Punisher*, wonders: "So where is all this going? ... Human characters are gradually transmuting from the iconic to the naturalistic—where once you were shooting stick men, you're now up against complex 3D models. The people we are killing are beginning to look just like... people."[57] However, it is not just the increased levels of realism but also the fact that, as simulations, real-world phenomena are increasingly used as subject matter for games. An interesting and perhaps literal example would be an online game released in November 2004 which

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[56] Steve Butts, "Deus Ex: Invisible War Review," *IGN.com* (1 December 2003). Available at: [http://xbox.ign.com/articles/442/442573p1.html].
[57] Keith Stuart, "Where is Game Violence Going?"

allowed players to 're-create' the assassination of John F. Kennedy by adopting

the point of view or position of Lee Harvey Oswald. *JFK Reloaded* was

produced by a Scottish video game company, Traffic Games, and was described

as a simulation where players could attempt to recreate the shooting in order

to prove or disprove the theory that a lone gunman was responsible for the

assassination.[58] The game attempted to simulate the conditions surrounding

the assassination, including ballistics and character movements and was based,

in part, on the findings of the Warren Commission.[59] The developers argued

that it was a serious attempt to investigate the specific conditions surrounding

the assassination but, of course, the release of the game generated

considerable controversy and much discussion.[60]

As simulations, Aarseth argues, games present some interesting

problems in terms of methodology. Since games can portray and simulate

other phenomena, they can and need to be studied by a wide variety of

different disciplinary approaches. Even though Aarseth considers the actual

playing of the games as crucial and offers a general framework for how

gameplay can be deployed in an analysis (including gaining knowledge of the

genre as a whole and playing in order to gain knowledge of the game-system

and rules), he also argues that 'playing for analysis' can be limiting in certain

respects. While the researcher can play in a variety of ways and for different

analytical reasons, it is impossible to mimic the different ways that games can

be or are played by players themselves. This includes the recognition that

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[58] *JFK Reloaded* is available at: [www.jfkreloaded.com/start/].
[59] A detailed description of the simulation and its assumptions is available at:
[www.jfkreloaded.com/faq/].
[60] For example, see the discussion at WaterCooler Games:
[www.watercoolergames.org/archives/000296.shtml].

players play for different reasons[61] and can be quite inventive in the way they actually play the game, sometimes in ways that the game's designers never anticipated or even desired.

Consequently, Aarseth points out that: "Drawing on the experience generated by others is crucial, not merely useful."[62] In order to understand players' experiences, Aarseth suggests the particular importance of a wealth of textual sources increasingly surrounding media generally and especially surrounding video games, including press reviews, player-generated walkthroughs and FAQs, discussion boards (either 'official' or not), observing others play and interviewing and interacting with other players. Aside from understanding the specifics of gameplay, examining how others approach and interpret such games can be equally illuminating, especially when interested in understanding the social nature of such games and how they can be understood in a larger cultural sense. This is especially true when considering Konzack's levels of 'meaning' and 'referentiality' which are, even outside of video game studies, difficult to strictly identify given the considerable ways that signs and symbols can be interpreted by different individuals.

The approach that Aarseth describes has been particularly important for my own study of the U.S. military's involvement in the commercial video game market. In order to ensure that my own temperament and ideological outlook

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[61] Aarseth mentions a study completed by Richard Bartle that casts players as falling into various groups (socializers, killers, achievers, and explorers) and how the interaction of various types often influences the general social atmosphere in a game (especially in online games). The game designer, Richard Rouse, also presents a similar breakdown in terms of 'what players want' when they play. See: Richard Rouse, "What Players Want," in *Game Design: Theory and Practice*, (Plano, Texas: Wordware Publishing, 2001), 1-8. This also relates to a general notion of players as 'social actors.' For example, see: Anne Mette Thorhauge, "Player, Reader and Social Actor," Melbourne: Digital Arts and Culture Conference Proceedings, 2003. Available at: [http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/dac/papers/Thorhauge.pdf].
[62] Aarseth, "Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis," 6.

do not overly colour my interpretation of games in the military-themed shooter genre, I have attempted to understand and incorporate the experience of other players as well as to approach these games as a part of a particular medium with its own properties and possibilities. As entertainment products, military-themed games in general must, as Hallin and Gitlin argue, be read as a complex form of cultural interest and expression generally surrounding war. But as propaganda and public relations, those games that bear the imprint of the military should also be read as a way that an institution can direct and frame such cultural interest in specific and, sometimes, misleading ways. Therefore, it is equally important to consider these games for the ways they intersect with larger political and global issues and how they are influenced by representational strategies in other media.

Image File:

Chapter 6

The Military-Themed Shooter Genre and Game Structure
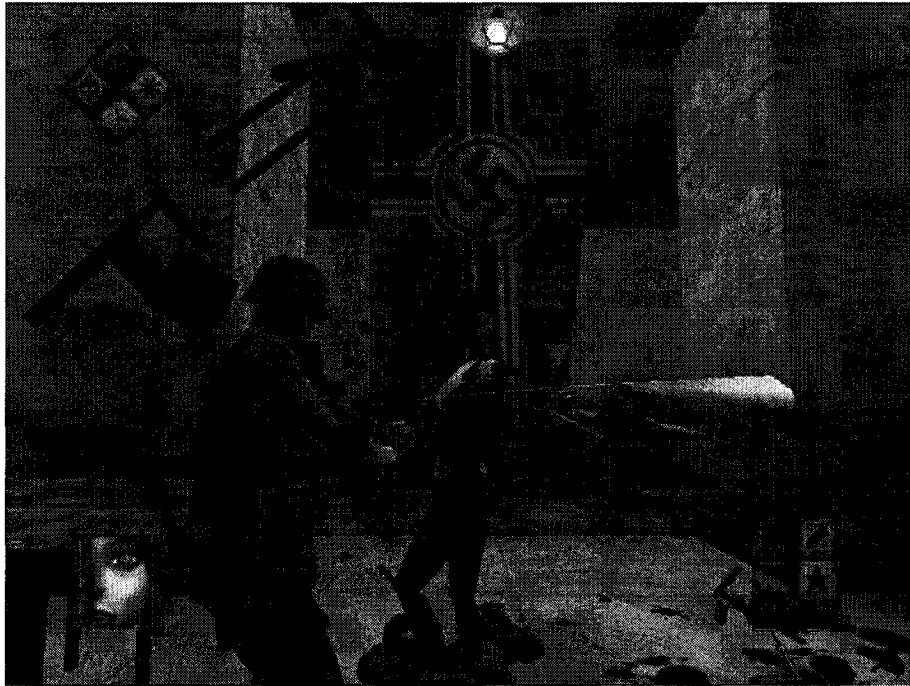
Figure 6.1

Butcheress: Eckstein, finally! Where's Kommando?

Figure 6.2

Figure 6.1: Scene From *Bloodrayne*, Figure 6.2: The Butcheress from *Bloodrayne*
In some games, the mythical status of World War II is combined with fantasy and fantastical imagery. Reflecting Susan Sontag's argument that fascism continues to offer fascination—even of a psycho-sexual nature—is a cut-scene (figure 6.2) depicting the 'The Butcheress' who is also a lead scientist in the game.
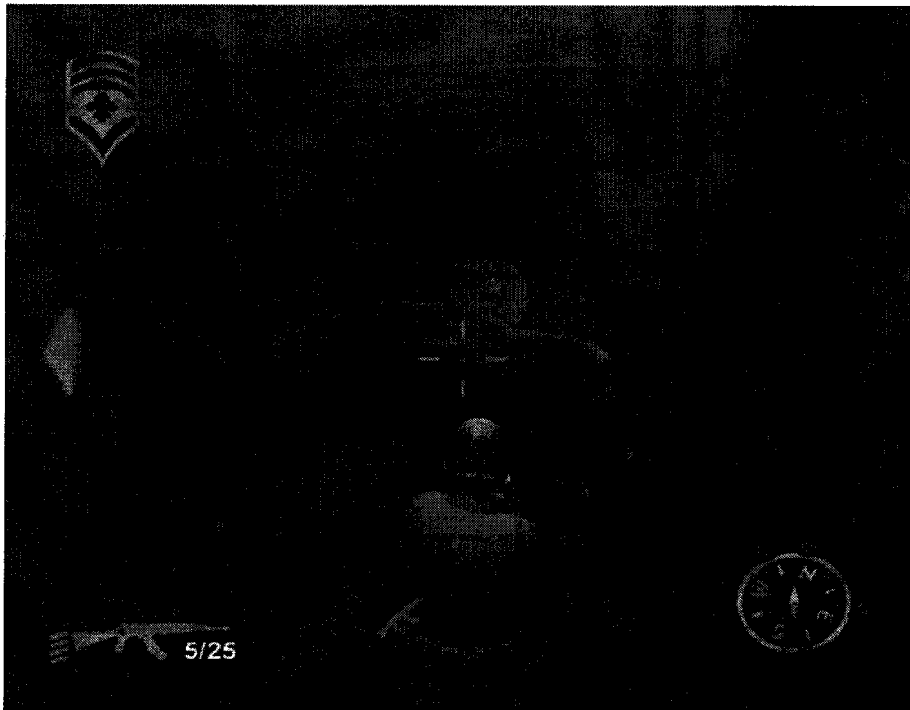
170

Figure 6.3

Figure 6.4

Figure 6.3, 6.4: Examples of a Third-Person Shooter/Action

In Third-Person Shooters/Action games, the camera sits behind and slightly above the playable character. Consequently, the gameplay is altered in subtle ways as the player can see more of their character. Figure 6.3 is a screen shot from *ShellShock: Nam '67*. The light-coloured triangle at the left of the screen indicates that enemy fire is coming from that direction. Figure 6.4 comes from *Conflict: Desert Storm II*. This game is also an example of a squad-based shooter as the player can toggle or switch between a number of characters in the squad (as indicated by the selection menu at the left of the screen). Typically, each member of the squad will have different weaponry and attributes.
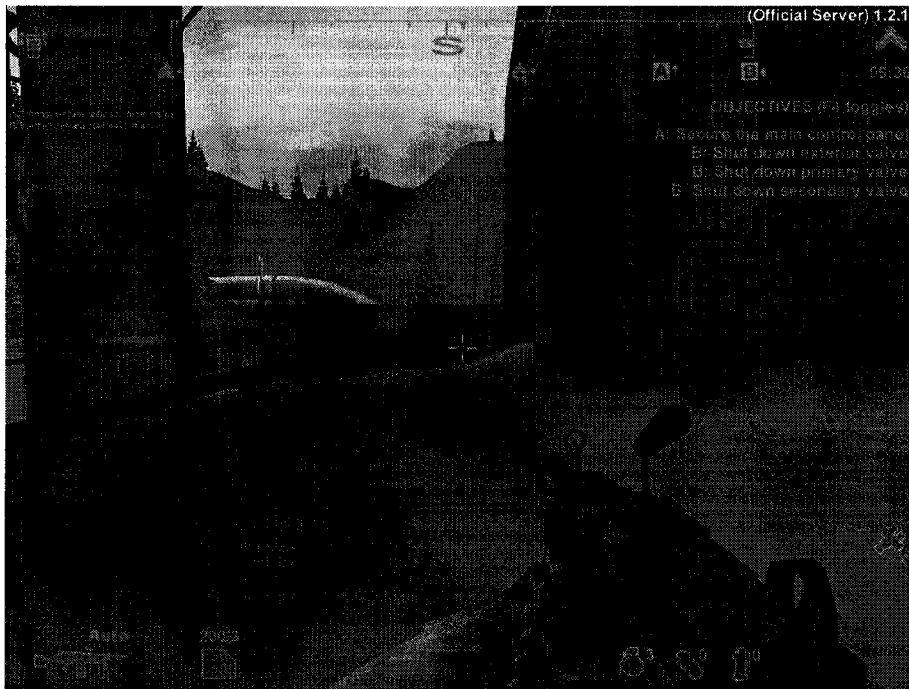
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Figure 6.5

Figure 6.6

Figure 6.5, 6.6: Examples of First-Person Shooters (FPS)
First-Person Shooters adopt a first-person point of view where the player sees the action as if he or she was the playable character. Typically, the only aspects of the player's character that can be seen are the weapon and the hand and forearm. Figure 6.5 is a screen shot from *America's Army* and Figure 6.6 is a screen shot from *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*. Both screen shots also show the Heads-Up Display (HUD) that provides the player with a variety of in-game information. This typically includes the current weapon(s) and remaining ammunition, health meter, a map or compass and an icon depicting the current position of the soldier.

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Figure 6.7

Figure 6.7: HUD from *Ghost Recon*

The first game in the *Ghost Recon* series utilized a first-person, no-weapon point of view. Since it was felt that the lack of the weapon's visibility was not conducive to player-identification, the point of view was altered in the sequels.
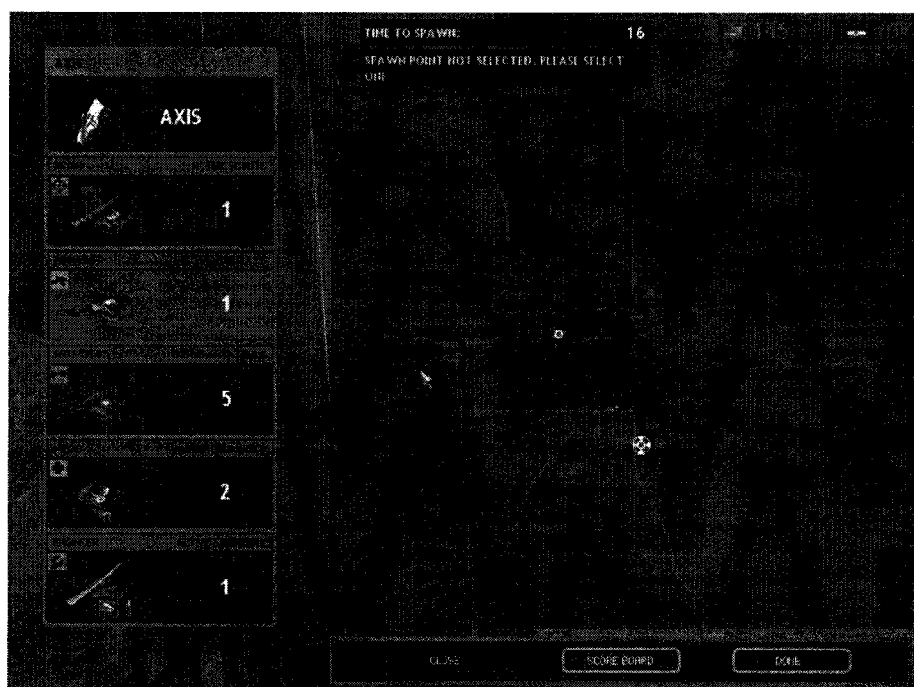

Figure 6.8

Figure 6.8: The 'spawn' or 'insert' screen from *Battlefield 1942*

The above screen shot shows the 'spawn' screen where the player can select different classes of soldier and the point (indicated by the small white dots) on the game's map indicating where the player's avatar will spawn or be inserted into the level.
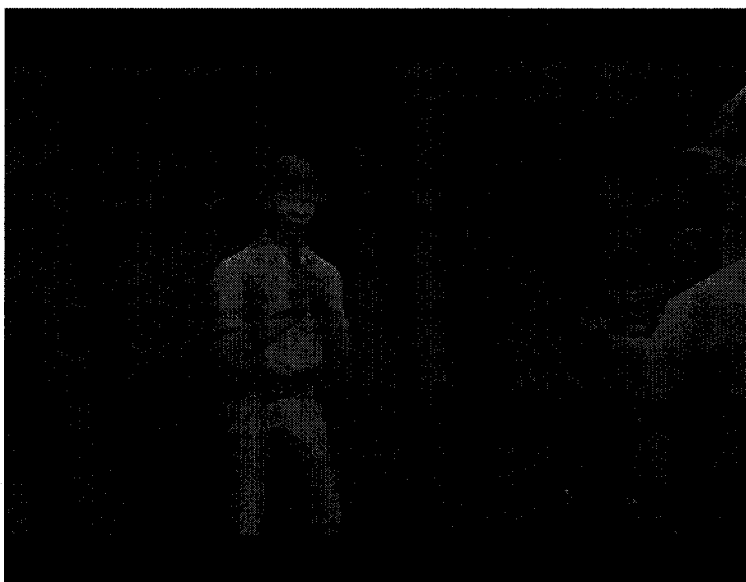
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Figure 6.9

Figure 6.9: Cut-scene From *ShellShock: Nam '67*

Cut scenes are typically inserted at the beginning or at the end of gameplay sequences. Cut-scenes are often denoted by a letterboxed or cinematic frame, are scripted, and non-interactive. The above image comes from the cut-scene near the end of the first mission of *ShellShock: Nam '67* where a Viet Cong officer commits suicide instead of being taken prisoner by U.S. soldiers.
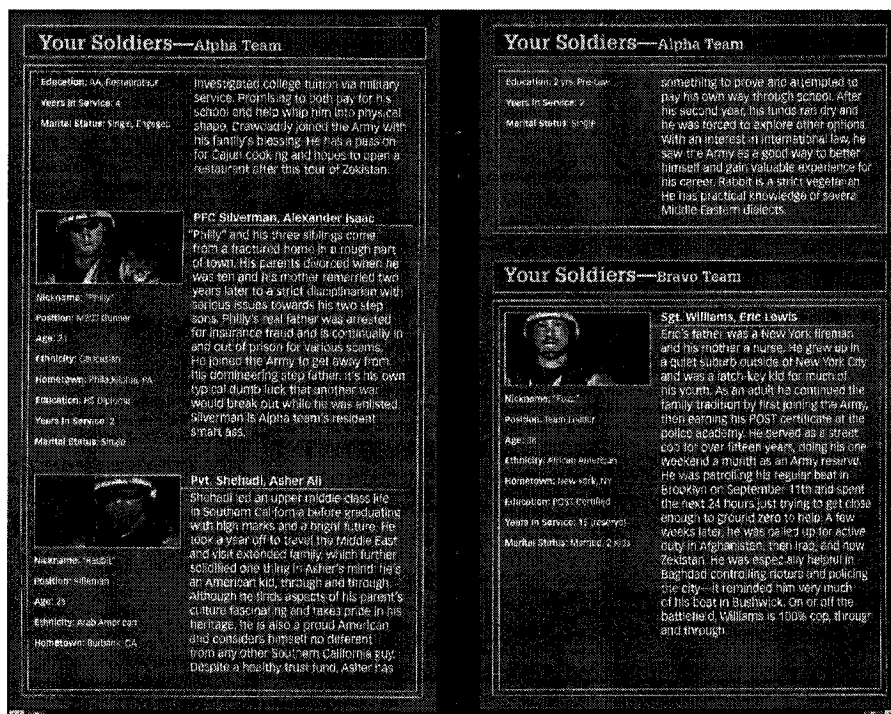

Figure 6.10

Figure 6.10: Depiction of Soldiers in the manual for *Full Spectrum Warrior*

Like the combat genre in film, it is Increasingly common to provide identities for soldiers in the game. The above image shows U.S. soldiers as depicted in the manual for *Full Spectrum Warrior*.

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Chapter 6

The Military-Themed Shooter Genre
and Game Structure

Genre and The Military-Themed Shooter

As a subject within the commercial video game market, war plays a prominent

role in a variety of gameplay genres, including action games (first- and third-

person shooters), strategy games, simulations, and even in some adventure and

Role-Playing Games (RPGs). Within these genres, war is portrayed in a wide

range of historical periods (from ancient to futuristic conflicts) or based in

fantasy, science-fiction, or historically accurate settings. For the sake of this

study, I am excluding games that are either fantasy-based or based in a

futuristic but fictitious setting, even though such games might be largely

realistic (in terms of tactics and the representation of military conflict) and

might use the same physics engines as games I am considering. Examples of

such excluded games would include *Halo: Combat Evolved* and *Killzone*.

Despite the fact that the main character in *Halo* is a part of an earth-based

military force (described as Marines), it is a science fiction title featuring

futuristic weapons and an enemy coalition composed of various types of aliens.

Likewise, *Killzone* is also a futuristic first-person shooter but one that is more

realistic in terms of setting, weapons, and the enemy (genetically-modified

humans who are distinctly modeled on Nazis). The game depicts a plausible

reality but, of course, is largely disconnected from the world of contemporary politics and conflict. In *Killzone*, like a variety of other games, enemies are modeled on Nazis but are often conflated with stock horror characters such as zombies or mutants. Nazis, as the penultimate representation of evil, are regularly treated in a fantastical way, even in games that are presented in a quasi-historical setting. In games such as *Bloodrayne* and *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, the historical setting is modified by the inclusion of fantasy-horror elements and such games can be easily excluded.

Other games exist in an interesting grey area. Games such as *Freedom Fighters* and *Iron Storm* present 'alternate histories' to modern conflicts even though they could be, in terms of gameplay, described as military-themed shooters. *Freedom Fighters* presents an alternate version of the Cold War (similar to the events depicted in the film *Red Dawn*), where the Soviets occupy most of Europe and events lead to a Communist invasion of New York. *Iron Storm*, set in the 1960s, portrays a world where the Great War never ended and combines elements from both the First and Second World Wars. Even though such games could be approached for the interesting political and ideological meanings they put forth, since they present 'what if' scenarios that do not claim any connection to authenticity of historical accuracy, they will be excluded.

My primary interest is directed at those games which simulate or re-create historical and contemporary military conflicts but even here there is a corresponding need to exclude those games that are based on wars from the distant past (Classical Antiquity or ones that are set in Feudal Japan or Medieval

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Europe) as well as those that largely present military combat in an abstracted

form (such as the genre of 2D or 3D Strategy). The choice to exclude games

depicting warfare set in the distant past is perhaps obvious but the decision to

exclude the broad genre of Strategy was based on the fact that such games are

primarily concerned with a higher level of strategy or tactical planning in a

particular theatre of war or a specific battlefield. Since these games grew out

of strategy board games or pen-and-pencil games, their depiction of battle is

largely abstracted and the genre, while extremely popular, is largely considered

to be primarily attractive to an older audience or individuals who enjoy the

considerable conceptual challenge these games offer.[1] In such games, the

player adopts a broad perspective (say of a general or field commander) and, as

such, strategy games involve a different relation than shooters which involve a

more direct form of physical embodiment in the game's world. Despite the

fact that Strategy games are used by the U.S. military for their own training

purposes, for commercially released games the military is clearly interested in

those that bring the player much closer to the action and allow them to adopt

the position of the soldier.

In addition to games that present a realistic portrayal of historical or

contemporary military conflict, my interest then in qualified by a mode of play

that includes the player directly in combat. Consequently, the particular

category of games that I am calling the military-themed shooter is roughly

equivalent to action-based games that offer a first- or third-person perspective.

As previously mentioned, science fiction and fantasy-based titles (and even the

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[1] Stephen Poole, *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 49-51.

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few Western first-person shooters) are largely excluded even though specific titles will be mentioned for comparative purposes. Primary consideration is given to those games that the U.S. military has influenced either directly or indirectly and these games will be compared to other military-themed shooters for the ways they differ in terms of gameplay, narrative, player identification and depictions of enemies and history.

Historical Recreations and Future Wars

Of the many military-themed shooters that attempt to offer an authentic portrayal of past conflicts or that attempt to recreate specific battles, those that take the Second World War as the basis for their subject matter are by far the most numerous.[2] Outside of the military-themed category, the popularity of World War II is only rivaled by first-person shooters which are based in a science fiction world. One of the most popular games to take World War II as its setting was *Medal of Honor*, released for the Sony Playstation in 1999. As a first-person shooter, *Medal of Honor* differed from other games in the FPS genre in that it provided players with more variety in terms of missions and gameplay coupled with a more cohesive narrative. Due to its popularity, *Medal of Honor* has spawned a plethora of sequels and expansion packs that recreate missions and battles from various theatres of the Second World War. Such titles include: *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (2002), *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (2002), *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* (2003) and *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault*

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[2] This is true even if we consider other gameplay genres (such as Strategy games). Martin Bayer provides a discussion of war-based games across a variety of genres. See: Martin Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games: Images, Myths, and Reality," in *War and Virtual War: The Challenge to Communities*, Raymond W. Westphal, Jr., ed. (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2003): 71-86.

(2004). Games taking the Second World War as their subject matter have been numerous and extremely popular, largely due to a surge in interest that has been fueled by the fiftieth-anniversary commemorations and, just as significant, the immense popularity enjoyed by Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. In fact, Spielberg's influence is more direct since his company, DreamWorks Interactive, was responsible for the development of the original game and some of the sequels.[3] Other significant titles (some with their own expansions and sequels) include *Battlefield 1942* (2002), *Call of Duty* (2003), and *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* (2005).

Generally, such games are remarkably similar in terms of overall design. First, these games attempt to provide a historically accurate portrayal of the war itself through their setting in a variety of theatres of war (including those in Europe, North Africa, and the Pacific)[4], accurate modeling of weapons and equipment, and, in a growing number of titles, characters and stories that are based on true events. As both Martin Bayer and Eve Kingsepp note, there is a clear distinction between good and evil in such games as gameplay is often restricted so that players can only play on the side of the U.S., Britain or other Allied countries.[5] Kingsepp notes that not only is there a very clear demarcation of which side is evil (unlike some of the World War II films she

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[3] These include *Medal of Honor Underground* and *Medal of Honor: Frontline*. The series is published by Electronic Arts and various other development companies have worked on other titles in the series. For an extended discussion of Spielberg's films and video games, see: Eva Kingsepp, "Apocalypse the Spielberg Way: Representations of Death and Ethics in *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers* and the Videogame *Medal of Honor: Frontline*," in *Level Up* (Digital Games Research Conference Proceedings) CD-ROM, eds. Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2003.

[4] While the variety of settings is already numerous, if one includes the player-created mods (such as those for *Battlefield 1942*) the number of available locales and theatres of war expands significantly.

[5] See Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games," 74.

includes in her discussion) but that "there is an abundance of it."[6] The reasons

for such a clear distinction in games is likely due to the mythical status of

World War II as the 'Good War' and the fact that enemies in first-person

shooters have traditionally been both abundant and presented as little more

than obstacles which must be eliminated to reach other goals in the game.

While the Second World War is perhaps overly represented, other wars

receive little attention. Both World War I and the war in Korea are largely

absent no matter what gameplay genre is considered. With respect to World

War I, the conflict has been included in some flight games and simulation

games but since the period was marked by trench warfare and simplistic

weaponry and equipment it does not seem to garner much interest. As a

reflection of this, *Wings of War* (2004) takes the air war of World War I as its

subject matter but 'updates' the conflict with rockets and other weapons not

normally associated with the period.[7] The status of the Korean War in the

video game industry is perhaps best summed up by the title of one of the few

games released: *Korea: Forgotten Conflict* (2003).

As the status of the Korean War indicates, the Cold War is also generally

under-represented. An early an especially well-regarded exception would be

Balance of Power (1986) created by Chris Crawford. The game was an

extremely complex strategy-simulation of the Cold War that allowed players to

assume the role of the U.S. or Soviet Union and interact with over sixty other

countries. As Bayer notes, since the Cold War was fought by proxy and was

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[6] Kingsepp, "Apocalypse the Spielberg Way," n.p. (see the section titled 'Apocalypse and the Victory over Evil').

[7] Again, there are a number of realistic World War I mods created for *Battlefield 1942* and, interestingly, one set during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). See the PlanetBattlefield website: [www.planetbattlefield.com/bf1942/tweakin/mods/].

characterized by limited conflicts, it does not carry much interest for players or developers.[8] This might help explain why the conflict is limited to strategy-based games or action-based titles that present a hypothetical, 'what if' scenario like *Freedom Fighters* or *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* (2001). More recently, however, the industry's interest in the Cold War period seemed to enjoy a sudden and very noticeable increase. In 2004, numerous titles relating to the conflict in Vietnam were released, including such first- and third-person shooters as *Shellshock: Nam '67* (2004), *Conflict: Vietnam* (2004), *Men of Valor* (2004), *Vietcong: Purple Haze* (2004), *Battlefield: Vietnam* (2004) and *Marine Heavy Gunner: Vietnam* (2004). While Vietnam has historically received little attention from video game makers, the release of games based upon the Vietnam War—many of which were released within months of one another in late 2004—has raised questions both outside and inside the video-gaming industry. The sudden surge in interest is likely a result of the general popularity of such games since the late 1990s and the fact that the shooter market was largely dominated by science fiction and World War II titles. And as the case of player-created mods shows, it is relatively easy to repurpose existing game engines and modify the look of a game to present it in a different setting or conflict.[9]

While the inclusion of the Second World War as the setting for video game titles has been unproblematic and almost exclusively celebrated, taking the Vietnam conflict as subject matter has generated some controversy within

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[8] Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games," 74.
[9] For example, *ShellShock Nam '67* was developed by Guerilla Games and utilized the engine being developed for its higher-profile game, *Killzone*.

the industry.[10] As a relatively recent but still politically charged conflict,

Vietnam seems to present some problems for those associated with the

industry. The fact that the conflict is still considered as morally debatable or

that many of those who participated are still alive is often mentioned.

However, the dominant theme in such discussion revolves around the medium

itself and its tradition of presenting simplified and entertainment-based

representations of its subject matter. As Christian Nutt, an editor at GameSpy,

states: "Fictionalized game accounts of real world history... tend to trivialize

and, as games are made today, inevitably divorce the content from its

meaning."[11] The simple idea behind this is that video games and gameplay

have been traditionally approached as a medium that provides 'fun' for the

player. This becomes complicated when combined with politicized and

sometimes questionable subject matter when, it should be pointed out, it

specifically relates to real-world events or subjects. Combining 'fun' with

content that could be considered questionable (such as violence) is, of course, a

relatively common phenomenon in video games. But if it is presented in a

'cartoon-like' way or is set within an obviously fantastical or exaggerated

setting, players and others in the industry often see it for what it is: fantastical

or exaggerated. As games become more realistic and, increasingly, take some

aspect of the 'real world' as their subject matter, some in the industry are

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[10] See for example: Christian Nutt and Dave Kosak, "Case File 21: Conflicts over Vietnam," *GameSpy* (March 23, 2004), [http://archive.gamespy.com/counterspy/march04/spy21/]; GamesIndustry.biz <contact@gamesindustry.biz>. "Weekly Update – 21/04/2004" (Electronic Newsletter), April 21, 2004 (*GameIndustry.biz* is a British industry publication); and Daniel Weissenberger, "ShellShock Nam '67 (Review)," *GameCritics.com* (20 October 2004), available at: [www.gamecritics.com/review/shellshock/main.php].
[11] Christian Nutt and Dave Kosak, "Case File 21: Conflicts over Vietnam," *GameSpy* (March 23, 2004), [http://archive.gamespy.com/counterspy/march04/spy21/].

raising questions. However, it is interesting that, as a 'real-world' and historical

event, the Second World War is not considered in the same manner as Vietnam,

especially when—in terms of game design, structure, and narrative—these

games are remarkably similar to those set in Vietnam. The status of the Second

World War is, as previously mentioned, more mythical than real in many ways

and this is especially noticeable with respect to the representation and status of

Nazis. As Susan Sontag has argued, Nazis and German Fascism more generally,

have been subject to a tremendous degree of cultural fascination and even

eroticizing over the past six decades.[12] So much so that within the video game

industry, Nazis have morphed into an object of fantasy rather than retaining

material properties situated within the real world. In their purely exaggerated

form in some video games, Nazis exist on a level of meaning similar to ghouls,

zombies, or other mythical creatures and this, to some extent, probably affects

the way more realistic World War II games are approached as well [**Figure 6.1**

and 6.2]. Games situated during the Vietnam conflict offer a very different

relation to history as the games usually offer a stylized but gritty realism and

often use documentary footage in cut-scenes and opening sequences. Unlike

some games set in World War II or ones that have Nazis as enemies, the current

generation of Vietnam games does not exhibit the same tendencies for

fantastical exaggeration.

Realism in video games is a very complicated subject and will be covered

in more detail in the next chapter but it is necessary to mention that video

games, in general, tend to remediate specific content from other media and

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[12] Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Vintage, 1981): 73-105.

this is especially true with respect to military-themed shooters set in historical

or contemporary conflicts. An especially prominent and well-recognized

example would be the opening sequence from Stephen Spielberg's *Saving*

Private Ryan which served as inspiration for the opening sequence of the game,

Medal of Honor: Frontline, published by Electronic Arts. Another game in the

Medal of Honor series, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, exhibits a similar relation to

a prominent Hollywood film. This time, the opening mission—which recreated

the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, borrowed heavily from certain scenes

from *Pearl Harbor*, including the scene where Cuba Gooding, Jr. mans an anti-

aircraft gun to shoot down Japanese planes. *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30*,

while focusing on a different Airborne regiment, shares remarkable similarities

to the television series, *Band of Brothers*, especially the third episode. Likewise,

Call of Duty borrows from *Band of Brothers* as well as the film, *Enemy at the*

Gates. While not specifically based on the film or the book, *Delta Force: Black*

Hawk Down is largely situated in and around the events depicted in Ridley

Scott's *Black Hawk Down*.[13]

Another fascinating example is *Kuma\War* (2003). Instead of recreating

past military conflicts, this game aims to provide a simulation of current events

as they unfold in (almost) real time. *Kuma\War* was, after much pre-release

marketing and press, finally released on March 20, 2004 (roughly the

anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq). The game is the product of Kuma

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[13] Related to my discussion of the reaction to video games set in Vietnam, it is interesting to note that Mark Bowden, the author of *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, has been critical of the move to turn the events in Somalia (or more generally, war) into a game. Bowden refused to be a part of NovaLogic's game and has expressed his belief that turning war into a game tends to trivialize what is a powerful and traumatic experience. See the discussion on the WaterCooler Games site: [www.watercoolergames.org/archives/000194.shtml].

Reality Games and is billed as a 'different kind of news service' and a 'new way of experiencing the news.'[14] The game itself is a PC-based, online game similar to other first-person shooters. Subscribers are allowed to download newly created missions that are modeled after current military conflicts within weeks of their occurrence and are presented to the player through faux newscasts. Missions have included the capture of Saddam Hussein and the 'Battle of Sadr City;' a mission that allows players to re-create a U.S. Army mission that took place on May 23, 2004 where the 1st Cavalry Division was sent into a Baghdad suburb controlled by the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

Such borrowings point to the increasingly complex and dialectical relationships between media and, especially, forms of new media such as video games. The concept of remediation comes from Jay David Bolter and Richard Gruskin and their argument that these relationships go beyond mere 'borrowing' to include how media generally appropriate the representational strategies of other media forms in an attempt to heighten immediacy but, at the same time, to erase all traces of mediation.[15] This 'double logic,' as Bolter and Gruskin describe it, is especially noticeable within the medium of video games and in a variety of different ways. While video game versions of Hollywood films are becoming increasingly common and can be explained, in part, by the synergistic tendencies to simultaneously release intellectual property across a wide variety of media, some film-to-video game tie-ins have a somewhat interesting status. Paul Ward, writing about the relation between film animation and video games, states that "what we see happening with

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[14] The official Kuma/War website is available at: [http://www.kumawar.com/].
[15] Jay David Bolter and Richard Gruskin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

many contemporary computer animated films, and also videogames based on

computer-animated films, is a complex negotiation between simulation and

emulation."[16] "One of the pleasures of the game," Ward argues, "is the access

it gives the player to a measure of control over a recognizable film character, as

well as the approximation offered to the film's diegesis."[17] While this relation

does not apply to all video games, it is particularly relevant to military-themed

shooters. The fact that many games base specific missions or large parts of the

game on remediated aspects from other media—mostly from Hollywood or

television portrayals—points to how the authenticity of these games is further

complicated.

The final category of military-themed shooters includes games that are

situated vaguely in the present, near future or recent past and deal with more

generic military conflicts or counter terrorism. More significant perhaps is that

this category of games deals with post-Cold War military situations as well as

contemporary weapons, military equipment and tactics. Significant games

would include *SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals* (and its sequel), and the *Ghost Recon*

and *Rainbow Six* series (both associated with the popular author Tom Clancy).

Unlike the earliest first-person shooters, which basically consisted of the player

being introduced into the game world and then killing everything in view,

these games emphasize stealth-like gameplay where strategy and cautious

movement is a necessity. As such, all these games have significant multiplayer

options and all feature voice communication (via head-sets) allowing players to

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[16] Paul Ward, "Videogames as Remediated Animation," in *Screenplay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, eds. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 130.

[17] Ward, "Videogames as Remediated Animation," 130.

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strategize and identify objectives. These games feature largely fictitious story lines set in the present or near future and in a variety of international locales. The games developed by or for the U.S. military—such as *America's Army: Operations* (2002), *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004), and *Close Combat: First to Fight* (2005)—would also be included here. Closely related to those games already mentioned would be ones that deal more specifically with actual military conflicts such as *Conflict: Desert Storm* (2002), *Conflict: Desert Storm II: Back to Baghdad* (2003), *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* (2003), and the previously mentioned *Kuma/War* (2004).

All the games mentioned so far are, not surprisingly, produced by Western nations. Notable exceptions are two games that could be included in the category of military-themed shooters set in modern or contemporary settings. *UnderAsh* (2002) was produced by Dar Al-Fikr, a company based in Syria, and portrays Palestinians fighting against the Israeli military. *Special Force* (2003) was produced by Hezbollah's Central Internet Bureau and was meant to commemorate the group's battles against the Israeli military that eventually led to Israel's departure from South Lebanon in 2000. These two games are mentioned here since both were, as their developers describe them, produced to combat the ubiquity of Western-based shooters.

Point of View and Game-Structure

Situating games within different periods and specific conflicts provide variety in terms of setting, combatant nations, and weaponry and equipment. At the same time, however, the range of military-themed shooters is remarkably

consistent in terms of game structure, narrative and story elements, gameplay, and point of view and in this section I will explore these similarities and how they commonly differ from other gameplay genres.

At this point, it is important to consider the primary goal of these military themed games: attaining or simulating the experience or point of view of the soldier in the midst of combat. Such identification is primarily achieved through the very structure of the game, most noticeably through the first-person or third-person perspective that many of these games offer. Generally, game designers have experimented with a variety of in-game perspectives but a third-person perspective is by far the most common and is typically utilized across a variety of gameplay genres, from action and adventure titles to platformers, Role-Playing-Games, and Survival-Horror. In games that provide a third-person perspective, the in-game camera is situated behind and slightly above the playable character, giving the player a sort of peripheral view of the action. Within the military-themed shooter category, games such as the *SOCOM* and *Conflict: Desert Storm* series utilize a third-person perspective and it is becoming increasingly common for games to provide the player with the ability to toggle between a third-person point of view and a more closely focused, over-the-shoulder viewpoint for more precise aiming, such as in *ShellShock Nam '67*. [Figure 6.3 and 6.4]

A very prominent point of view seen in military or science-fiction shooters is, of course, the first-person perspective. These games provide a first-person point of view where the player sees the action as if they were the playable character. Typically, the only aspects of the player's character that can

be seen on-screen are the weapon as well as the hand and forearm. As such, a first-person perspective is more restrictive in that the player can only see what is directly in front of the in-game character and cannot directly view action happening on either side or directly behind. In order to counter such restrictions, the game's screen interface or Heads-Up Display (HUD) will provide the player with a variety of information such as a map (often indicating the position of enemies), markers indicating the direction of incoming fire or an icon indicating the current position or stance of the character (whether standing, crouching, or prone). While restrictive, the first-person point of view is particularly popular due to the history of the First-Person Shooter (FPS) itself and the fact that many players have a long history playing such games. Early first-person shooters such as *Castle Wolfenstein 3D* or *Doom* were primarily linear, 'run-and-gun' games where the primary mode of gameplay consisted of moving forward and shooting at an endless supply of enemies. Early first-person shooters were relatively simple and limited by graphical and computational resources of the time, but as game design became more complex (including the ability for the in-game character to adopt variable positions or stances), the in-game HUD has become more complex in order to compensate for the restrictive view. **[Figure 6.5 and 6.6]**

First- or third-person shooters are heavily action oriented and the ability for the player to have access to a variety of in-game information—such as the current weapon, stance, or the amount of remaining ammunition—is critical. For the first game in the *Ghost Recon* series, for example, the game used a first-person point of view but did not represent the character's weapon.

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Instead, an aiming reticule was provided in the center of the screen that changed depending on the weapon currently being used (the current weapon was also indicated by a small icon at the bottom of the HUD). [**Figure 6.7**] Despite the immense popularity of the game, the developer abandoned such a configuration for the next game in the series since, as one of the producers described it, the first-person, no-weapon view was not conducive to establishing a connection between the player and the in-game character.[18] Undoubtedly, players like to see the weapons (and, as well, the weapons firing) but the ability to see the weapon is becoming increasingly crucial to gameplay. While the amount of remaining ammunition is usually indicated in the HUD, it is often difficult to remain cognizant of ammunition levels while in the midst of in-game action. The ability to see the weapon, including the initiation of reload-animations (where the player can see the physical reloading of the weapon) is important since it immediately signifies that the player should take cover and contributes to the level of immersion in the game.

As Sue Morris argues, the first-person perspective is used very successfully in many games "to create a sense of the player's physical embodiment within the game space, and is recognized by game designers as contributing to a more visceral game experience because of the sense of immersion created."[19] This is undoubtedly true since the restrictive point of view can serve to heighten emotional aspects of tension-filled situations within

[18] Heather Maxwell Chandler, "Ghost Redux: Production Challenges for Ghost Recon 2 Xbox," *GamaSutra* (7 March 2005). Available at: [http://www.gamasutra.com/gdc2005/features/20050307/chandler_01.shtml].
[19] Sue Morris, "First Person Shooters – A Game Apparatus," in *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, eds. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 89.

the game, especially in terms of raising levels of both surprise and suspense.

Consequently, *not* being able to see behind or to the side of the in-game

character can be extremely important in this sense. At the same time, however,

it is important to consider that embodiment in video games is achieved in

different ways depending on gameplay genre. In platform games for example,

the spatial orientation of the playable-character within the gameworld is crucial

and a third-person point of view is a necessity.[20] Likewise, it is becoming

increasingly common for military-themed shooters to provide options for

players to use either a first-person or third-person point of view depending on

player preferences.[21]

In addition to perspective, a significant aspect of game-structure is the

availability of different modes of play. Traditionally, first-person shooters were

exclusively single-player games and, again, this was largely due to technological

limitations. More recently, however, multi-player options are increasingly

common and have generated a significant amount of interest from players and

the industry. Some games, such as the *SOCOM* series and *Battlefield 1942*, do

provide single-player modes of play but are primarily attractive due to the

attributes of online play. The financial success and critical acclaim of such titles

(including, of course, games outside of the military-themed category such as

Halo) have led some to argue that multi-player has become the primary mode

of play for the FPS. Morris, for example, argues that the single-player modes of

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[20] In fact, the only platforming game that I am aware of that uses a first-person view is *Jumping Flash* (1995), released for the Playstation.
[21] Again, this is made possible by more technologically advanced game engines and hardware which can render both first- and third-person perspectives within the same game, something that was not possible in earlier stages of game development.

play might be played once (if at all) while players might engage in online play for months or years.[22] James Newman also recognizes the increasing importance of multi-player options within the first- and third-person shooter genre, arguing that it has become a privileged mode of play within the industry.[23] This is certainly true in that multi-player options are increasingly common and that online play has become an integral part of the business model for some companies (for example, Microsoft has put a great deal of emphasis on its Xbox Live service). Still, it is necessary to be careful not to generalize here. Online or networked play that allows multiple players (8, 16, and 32 are common) to engage in various types of play in a single arena or map is very popular. But cooperative play, which allows two players to essentially play through the single-player or story mode simulataneously, is also increasing in popularity. Likewise, many players are attracted to the single-player mode of play since this mode tends to offer a more cohesive experience in terms of narrative and many games, especially those produced by smaller publishers and developers, still only offer single or cooperative play in order to avoid the significant costs sometimes associated with online play.

Setting questions over single- or multiplayer types of play aside for the moment, the mode of gameplay within military-themed shooters can also be distinguished by those that allow the player to play as a single character, those that offer squad-based or team-based play, as well as hybrid forms. Again, the continuing evolution of hardware and game design has allowed for such refinement in terms of these types of gameplay. The oldest and, for a time, the

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[22] Morris, "First Person Shooters – A Game Apparatus," 84.
[23] Newman, *Videogames*, 149-150.

most common type of play include games that situate the player in the role of a single character or a series individual characters in different stages of the game. In some of the earliest first-person shooters, the player's character was not accompanied by any friendly soldiers and instead faced an endless stream of enemies. Since the player was alone in the game's world and the gameplay and story revolved around the player's actions, these games were commonly called 'ego-shooters.' Even though it is standard to provide friendly but non-playable characters (NPCs) alongside the player's, games that only allow the player to control a single character are still popular. The *Medal of Honor* series is a well-known example of such gameplay but more recent examples would include *ShellShock Nam '67* and *Call of Duty: Finest Hour*.

Squad-based shooters offer more opportunity for tactical decision-making to players by allowing them to switch between playable characters in one or two squads and/or issue commands to other, computer-controlled characters. Such games are typically more complex and require the player to adopt a more measured pace. In *Ghost Recon*, for example, the player could issue commands to two squads and, while one of the squads was selected, switch between members of that squad in a first-person perspective. In *Ghost Recon 2*, the squad-based gameplay was simplified to a great extent but the player was still responsible for issuing commands to computer-controlled squad members. Other games that offer slightly different forms of squad-based gameplay include *Conflict: Desert Storm*, *Conflict: Desert Storm - Back to Baghdad*, and *Close Combat: First to Fight*.

The games in the *Battlefield* series (*Battlefield 1942, Battlefield: Vietnam*, and the recently released *Battlefield 2*) are described as 'team-based' shooters; these games are largely played in online multiplayer form with large maps and a relatively large number of players on each side. Because the gameplay stresses large battles involving an equal number of soldiers, there is a necessity to balance the capabilities of each side in terms of weapons and equipment. When played in single-player mode, other soldiers on the battlefield are controlled by artificial intelligence and even though the player will control a single avatar, these types of games are different from the ego shooters in that the gameplay (and story) does not revolve around a single character. Therefore, there is a distinct lack of player-character identification in the design of the game. In such games, it is normal to die a number of times—it can even be tactically beneficial to die intentionally—and, unlike single-player modes in most other games, the game or level does not end when a player dies. Instead, the player must wait before being able to 'respawn' at various points on the map controlled by the player's team. What is more, because this type of game stresses both action and strategy on the map, players have an ongoing choice of character-types (usually with different attributes—such as playing as a medic) during a single gameplay session. Such choices can be used strategically by players over the course of a single battle. [**Figure 6.8**]

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that as game design evolves, titles that combine different types of gameplay—sometimes in interesting or unusual ways—are also increasingly common. Jarvinen's suggestion that gameplay genre is characterized by hybridity has a lot of merit since, as game design and

programming become more complex, it becomes easier to combine various gameplay elements. Such hybrids would include the military training sim, *Full Spectrum Warrior,* and *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30.* Both games offer hybridity in very different ways. *Brothers in Arms* is, in many respects, a standard military-themed shooter. It offers a first-person point of view and offers limited squad-based control. But it also includes an in-game option that allows the player to pause the action and access a restricted birds-eye view of the battlefield; introducing strategy and tactical elements. *Full Spectrum Warrior* is not a shooter in the conventional sense as the player does not directly control an individual playable-character but directs and issues commands to two squads, with soldiers in each squad 'acting'—to a limited degree—on their own. In a sense, *Full Spectrum Warrior* is a strategy-action hybrid but one that places the player very close to the combat.

Despite differences in terms of the specific kinds of gameplay offered to the player, military-themed shooters can be generally regarded as combat simulations. As I mentioned previously, video games have an interesting connection to the notion of simulation since games in a variety of genres model real-world behaviours or abstract phenomena. Within the category of military-themed shooters, the realistic simulation of combat is especially pronounced since it is featured prominently in the marketing of such games. Still, it is important to consider such simulations as abstract and rule-based and that while developers pay close attention to certain areas of combat (tactics or the realistic modeling of weapon performance), other aspects of combat such as realistic representations of violence are sometimes extremely simplified or

completely elided. Of course, developers need to balance the desire for realism with consideration of what players want from a game, including the necessity to provide for 'fun' gameplay and to ensure that the game's controls do not become overly complex.

If games, as writers like Frasca and Aarseth argue, can generally be understood as simulations, it is necessary to separate this conceptually from the category of games that are specifically branded as training or educational simulations. Even within the commercial video game market, simulations are very popular. Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* series or the train sims that are popular in Japan[24] are examples, but it raises questions about whether military-themed games should themselves be understood as educational (simulations) or primarily as entertainment (games). Since some of these games are produced by or for the U.S. military and many commercial games are used in military training facilities, such a question is by no means a simple one. As David Nieborg points out, whether a specific title can be regarded as a game or a simulation depends on the way the game is designed, framed, and the manner of its reception.[25] As Nieborg argues:

> The developers of AA [America's Army] are able to experiment and create their simulations within existing boundaries, building upon existing cultural, socio-economic and technological conventions and discourses.... The Army game is the centre of a growing community where gamers meet to experience a similar representation and simulation of war and combat to soldiers and

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[24] Train sims such as *Densha De Go! Final* (Taito, 2004) are very popular in Japan and place the player in the role of a train conductor who controls trains on some of Japan's most well known rail lines.

[25] Nieborg applies these questions to a specific game— *America's Army*—but his discussion can be extrapolated and applied to all military-themed games. See: David B. Nieborg, "America's Army: More Than a Game," in *Transforming Knowledge into Action through Gaming and Simulation* (CD-ROM), Thomas Eberle and Willy Christian Kriz, eds. (International Simulation & Gaming Association, Conference Proceedings, 2004).

vice versa. The success of AA has implications for thinking about games and simulations and the use of these interactive texts for advertisement, education, propaganda and training.[26]

Central to such questions is consideration of what and what is not included in such simulations/games since even the most sophisticated simulations must simplify certain qualities and focus on others. However, since military-themed shooters can be so closely intertwined with larger political events and ideological questions, there is growing interest among researchers in how these games define 'realism,' portray past conflicts, or simply what they tend to leave out.[27] Realism, and its definition, becomes a central question and even though it will form the basis of later chapters, it is important to mention it here because it is informed, in part, by game-structure, including type of gameplay and the way a game is framed through narrative.

Stories and Narrative Structure

The specific historical period in which these military-themed shooters are set provides a variety of differences in terms of locale, the articulation of space and the environment of the game-world, as well as choices of weaponry and equipment. Games set during the Second World War provide the most variety since the conflict itself took place in many different theatres of war and involved a range of participant nations. Since the in-game world or the

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[26] Nieborg, "America's Army: More Than a Game," n.p.

[27] Such consideration is of central concern to two authors I have already cited: Bayer and Nieborg. Interesting perspectives on such questions are also provided by Paul Budra and David Leonard, both of whom will be discussed in later chapters. See: Paul Budra, "American Justice and the First-Person Shooter," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004), 1-12; and, David Leonard, "Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex: Video Games and a Pedagogy of Peace," *Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education* 4, no. 4 (November 2004), [www.utpress.utoronto.ca/journal/ejournals/similie].

articulation of space is an important characteristic of the medium, the ability to model different locations and even seasonal differences can provide a range of possibilities for the game designer and, of course, the player. World War II games commonly take advantage of this as do many of the games set in the present and which focus on counter-terrorism. Typically, these games will base individual missions in different locales and, at times, in a variety of different countries. The fact that some games are set during specific conflicts—such as the Gulf War or the Vietnam conflict—mean that the location is usually much more constricted but variety will be introduced by providing levels set in a variety of rural locations or taking place in small villages, as well as large-scale urban environments. The need for such differentiation in terms of level design poses problems in terms of story continuity as often there is little attempt to tie each level or location together through narrative; instead, players are moved from one location and mission to the next with little explanation or concern over why.

Generally, these games are structured around specific missions that form the heart of the gameplay experience. Missions are very specific in nature, giving the player pre-determined goals to achieve that are often based upon historical battles or even specific scenes from prominent films. The missions themselves are bracketed by non-interactive, cinematic cut-scenes that provide some degree of narrative structure for the overall game itself and, more prominently, provide the player with some degree of foreshadowing for what may be involved in the next mission. [**Figure 6.9**] While some genres of video games—such as Role Playing Games (RPGs), Adventure and Survival-

Horror—are more focused on story and narrative elements, military-themed

games often place much less importance on dramatic narrative. When story-

elements exist, they are often simplistic and merely provide an informational

framework for the player to understand the specific goals of each mission. The

result is that player identification is often forced—as both Bayer and Kingsepp

argue in relation to World War II games—along the lines of simplistic poles,

where enemies are merely targets, civilians are rarely present, and the

complexities of the larger political situation are absent. This is evident in games

set contemporaneously and that deal with counter-terrorism (especially so in

the case of games directly associated with the military) and, to a limited extent,

in the games situated during the Vietnam Conflict.[28]

The general category of first- and third-person shooters is not generally

known for an emphasis on story but as Jo Bryce and Jason Rutter argue, first-

person shooters have continually moved in that direction. Bryce and Rutter

note that even some of the early FPSs—such as *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom*—

began to include a larger story context and provided the player a 'real-time'

role in moving the game's story to its conclusion; something that has

continued in games like *Half Life* and the original *Deus Ex*.[29] If we consider

other games like *Halo: Combat Evolved* (and especially its sequel, *Halo 2*), *Deus*

Ex: Invisible War, or even the hybrid *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath*, it becomes

evident that many first-person shooters do place a great deal of emphasis on

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[28] Some Vietnam games—such as *ShellShock Nam '67* and *VietCong: Purple Haze*—emphasize the more controversial aspects of the conflict and this is reflected in both the narrative and gameplay.
[29] Jo Bryce and Jason Rutter, "Spectacle of the Deathmatch: Character and Narrative in First-Person Shooters," in *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, eds. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 74-76.

narrative and can provide complex and evolving stories. *Halo 2* was interesting

since more of the game's story focused on the enemy and the game even

allowed the player to adopt the role of an enemy character in one of the

game's levels. And, as already mentioned, *Deus Ex: Invisible War* provided a

complex story that simultaneously problematizes the player's place in it.

However, all these games are fantasy or science-fiction based titles and such an

emphasis on narrative is rarely seen in games from the military-themed

category. Due to the fact that military-themed games deal, more or less, with

real-world situations, there is less tendency to add complexity to the story or to

allow any sort of narrative identification with the enemy or 'other' side.

An interesting exception would be the team-based shooter category

since the game-structure is based on allowing players to play on either side. In

games such as *Battlefield 1942*, *Battlefield Vietnam* or even the science-fiction

title, *Star Wars Battlefront*, opposing sides are balanced in terms of gameplay

and, even in terms of story. Story in these games is relatively simple but as

Dave Kosak notes, *Battlefield Vietnam* provides commentary during the loading

screens between levels that stressed the political controversy surrounding the

conflict and the human toll the conflict took on both sides.[30] The antithesis of

such design decisions would be the way that multiplayer options were

implemented in *America's Army: Operations*, where players on different teams

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[30] Nutt and Kosak, "Case File 21: Conflicts over Vietnam." As well, Eric Gewirtz, the director of *Star Wars Battlefront,* provides an interesting discussion of the desire to stress both sides and how this affected the design of the game in its early stages, arguing that "Storm troopers have always been a fan favorite, but are rarely accessible to the players in Star Wars games." See: Eric Gewirtz, "Action Wrap Report - Star Wars Battlefront," *IGN.com* (17 November 2004), available at: [http://rpgvault.ign.com/articles/566/566898p1.html].

always saw their opponents as enemy forces while they and their teammates were always represented as U.S. soldiers.

Finally, a discussion of game-structure must include the role played by in-game characters. Whether story is emphasized or not, a playable-character exists in most games regardless of gameplay genre and the relationship between player and character is an interesting question. James Newman, for example, stresses that video game characters are defined primarily for the in-game attributes and abilities they offer to the player. For Newman, the primary player-character relation is one based on 'vehicular embodiment' where the character is best "understood as a suite of characteristics or equipment utilized and embodied by the controlling player."[31] Here, Newman argues that the way audiences identify with characters in other media might play less of a role in video games and he specifically wants to challenge the notion that identification-through-empathy is of primary interest. In games that offer the player a choice between characters with different attributes, Newman argues that often, player preference is determined more by abilities and attributes rather than, say, the personality or gender of the character. In terms of military-themed shooters, such choice also plays a determining role, especially in terms of the swiftness with which a particular character can move or the type of weapons with which stock characters are equipped.

Similarly, Steven Poole also recognizes the importance of such a 'kinetic' relationship attained "through a joyously exaggerated sense of control or amplification of input" that videogame characters can provide. "This kind of

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[31] James Newman, "The Myth of the Ergodic Videogame," *GameStudies* 1, no. 2 (July 2002). Available at: [www.gamestudies.org/0102/newman/].

attractiveness is true," Poole says, "of all good characters in modern

videogaming: a few simple controls result in absorbing, complex

movements."[32] However, noting the popularity of certain video game

characters and especially the pop-cultural fascination some characters attract,

Poole also recognizes the importance that personality plays including emotional

and representational attributes. As Poole states:

> A good videogame character is one that the player, because of a
> fulfilled combination of dynamic and iconic criteria, likes.... But
> since the character is under our control, if we like him (or her)
> we must also feel somehow protective, and anxious lest we
> cause the character harm through our own manual inadequacy.[33]

Such a perspective cannot be applied to all videogame characters since a large

number of protagonists are difficult to 'like' in the conventional sense, but

Poole's remarks indicate that personality can be, depending on the game, just

as important as functionality or in-game physical abilities. A particularly useful

example is provided by the critically acclaimed adventure game, *Ico*. In the

game, the player could only control a single character: a young boy which

offered little in terms of physical attributes or abilities. However, since the

game required the player to help and protect a sickly (and mute) princess, the

emotional impact of the game was achieved in an odd sort of way through a

conceptual coupling of the two characters.[34]

It is commonly argued that videogame characters, then, provide a

different sort of function when compared to other media. Videogame

characters tend to be flat or static so that, it is argued, the player can better

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[32] Stephen Poole, *Trigger Happy*, 160.

[33] Poole, *Trigger Happy*, 163.

[34] A similar relationship is produced in games like *Lemmings* (which Poole discusses) and, I would
add, both *Pikmin* and *Pikmin 2*. As well, games that provide two, inter-related characters are also
fairly common: the *Jak and Daxter* and *Ratchet and Clank* series are prominent examples.

identify with them.[35] And here, it is important to consider the interactive

qualities of the medium since, unlike cinema, we rarely see videogame

characters 'develop' over the course of the story. We could say—and the

discussion of *Deus Ex: Invisible War* provides an excellent example of this—that

in videogames, character development does not take place within the on-

screen character so much as it takes place in the player *through* the character.

Of course, certain games—and the military-themed category would be included

here—do not emphasize this relationship since story or in-game player actions

are treated in an unproblematic way. Instead, the focus on conflict and

combat is of primary importance and forcing the player to 'think' about their

in-game actions is largely absent. Characters are certainly present in military-

themed shooters and are increasingly provided with an identity and

information about their personal background. In fact, many games and

specifically those produced for the U.S. military include a group of characters

similar to those characteristically seen in the combat genre in film—a group of

soldiers from a diverse set of racial and socio-economic backgrounds that are

framed in an overtly masculine way—but the characters remain flat and

certainly do not 'develop' over the course of the game. In *Full Spectrum*

Warrior, the player is introduced to the in-game characters in an opening

sequence largely derived from combat films. Soldiers are differentiated

through back-and-forth dialogue, freeze-frame close-ups, and the inclusion of

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[35] For example: Gonzalo Frasca, "Rethinking Agency and Immersion: Playing with Videogame Characters," SIGGRAPH, Conference Proceedings (2001), available at: [http://www.siggraph.org/artdesign/gallery/S01/essays/0378.pdf] and Petri Lankoski, Satu Helio, and Inger Ekman, "Characters in Computer Games: Toward Understanding Interpretation and Design," Digital Games Research Association, Conference Proceedings (2003), available at: [http://www.digra.org/dl/display_html?chid=05087.10012].

personal details provided through various narrational elements. The identities

of the soldiers are reinforced in the game's manual where each soldier's name,

position, age, ethnicity, hometown, education, years of service, and marital

status are all provided along with a brief biography. [Figure 6.10]

While the genre of military-themed shooters shares qualities with games in the

broad category of first-person shooters or third-person action games,

important differences set it apart from games in these categories. The genre is

remarkably consistent in its concerns with introducing and combining new

elements of gameplay rather than creating complex narrative, and even though

the genre emphasizes realism and authenticity, it often re-circulates

conventions from other media. In the following chapters, prominent games in

the military-themed shooter genre—with emphasis placed on the games

influenced by the U.S. military—will be discussed in relation to a variety of

issues pertaining to entertainment products that take war as their subject. The

notions of authenticity and realism present an interesting range of issues for

the genre and are often mobilized in very specific ways (such as focusing on

weaponry and tactics). Like other media, the desire to portray warfare brings

with it specific problems in terms of representation. Here, the representation

of gore and enemies as well as the larger issue of mediated violence will be

investigated. However, as an interactive and simulational medium, video

games are increasingly discussed in terms of political and ideological meaning

and the degree to which gameplay can be considered as political.

Consequently, the most salient aspects of this discussion will be applied to the games mentioned here.

Image File:

Chapter 7
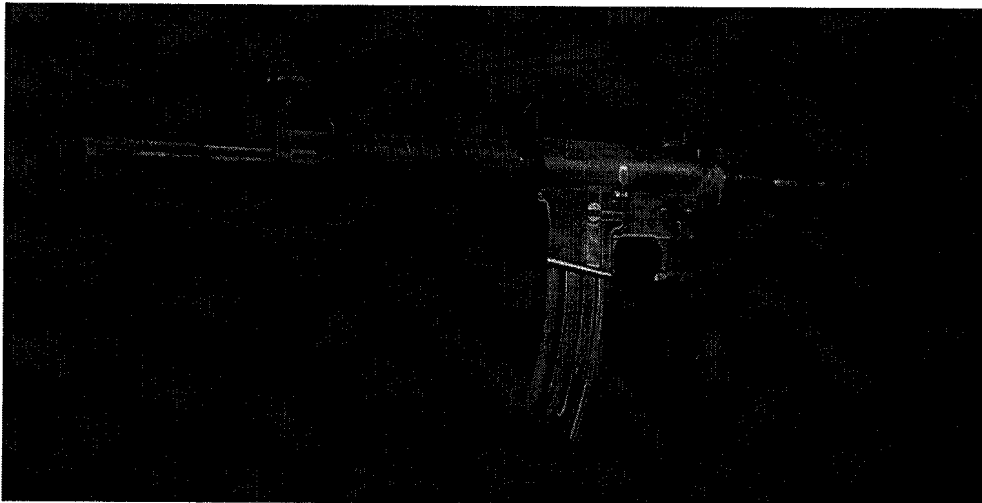
Authenticity and Realism in Military-Themed Shooters

Figure 7.1
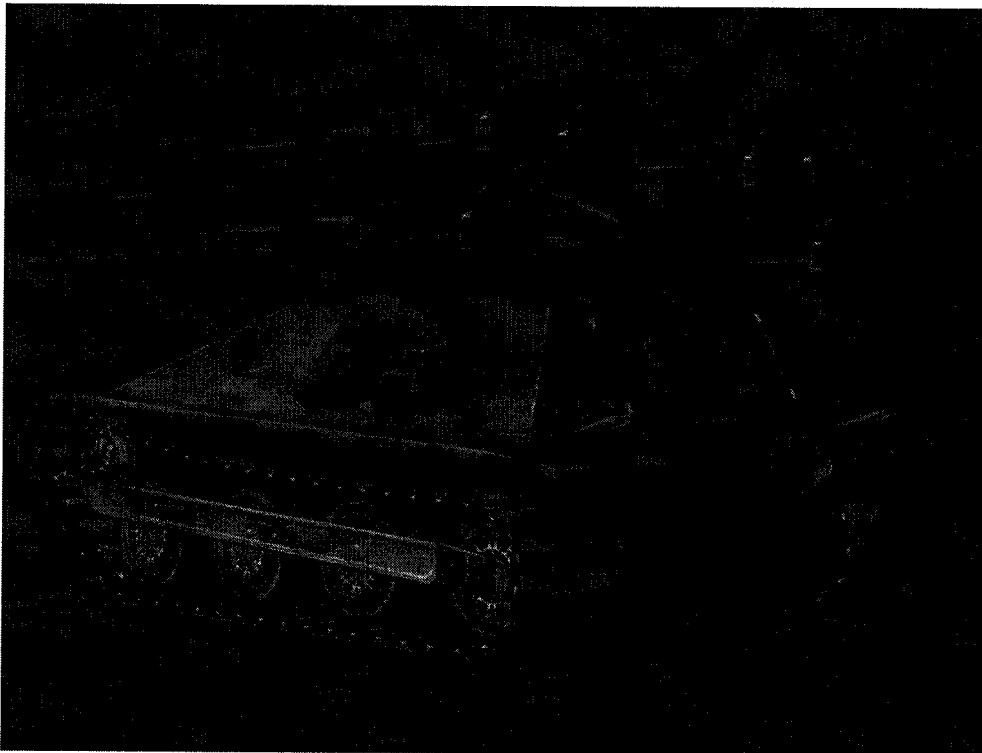
Figure 7.2

Figure 7.1 and 7.2: Weapon and Vehicle models from *Men of Valor*
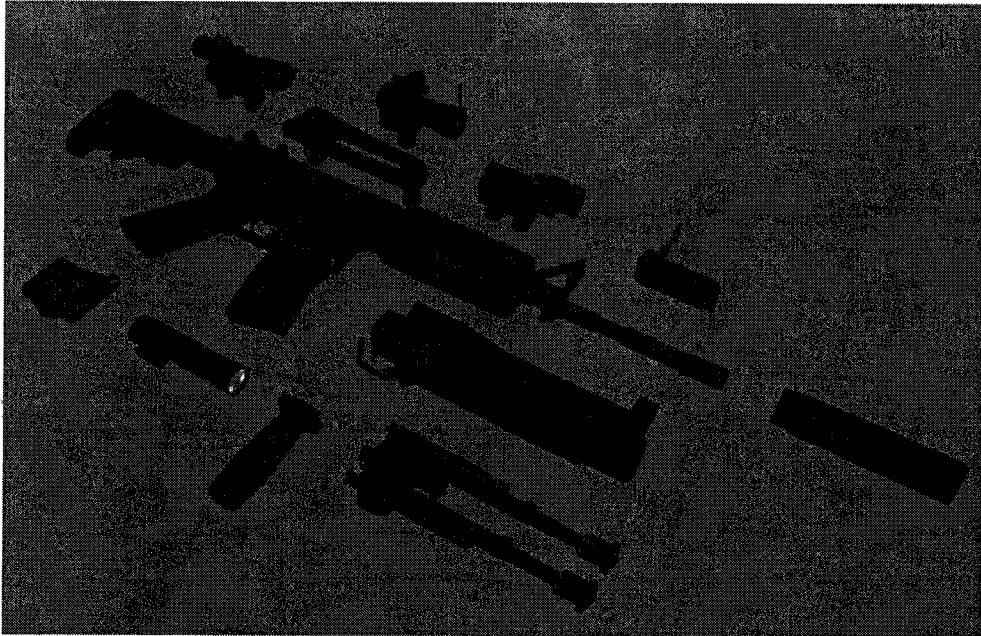
Figure 7.3
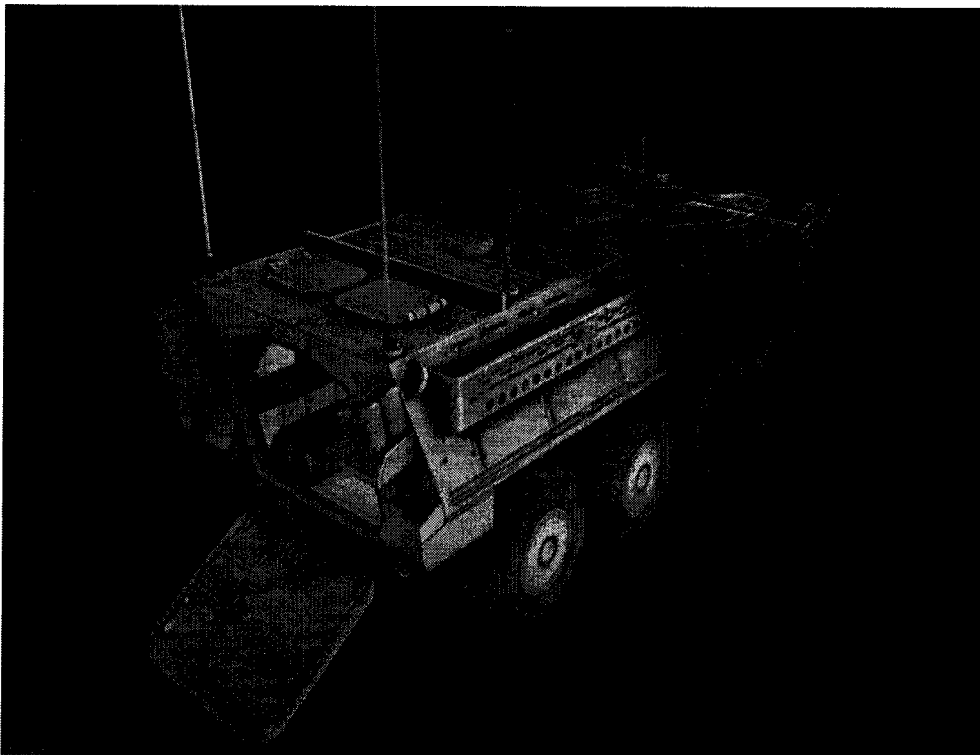
Figure 7.4

Figure 7.3 and 7.4: Weapons and Vehicle models from *America's Army*

Weapons and equipment receive a great deal of attention in terms of game design and are often the element in military-themed shooters that is treated the most realistically. These images, as well as those from the previous page, are high-resolution models used for publicity and the models will usually appear in low-res form during gameplay.
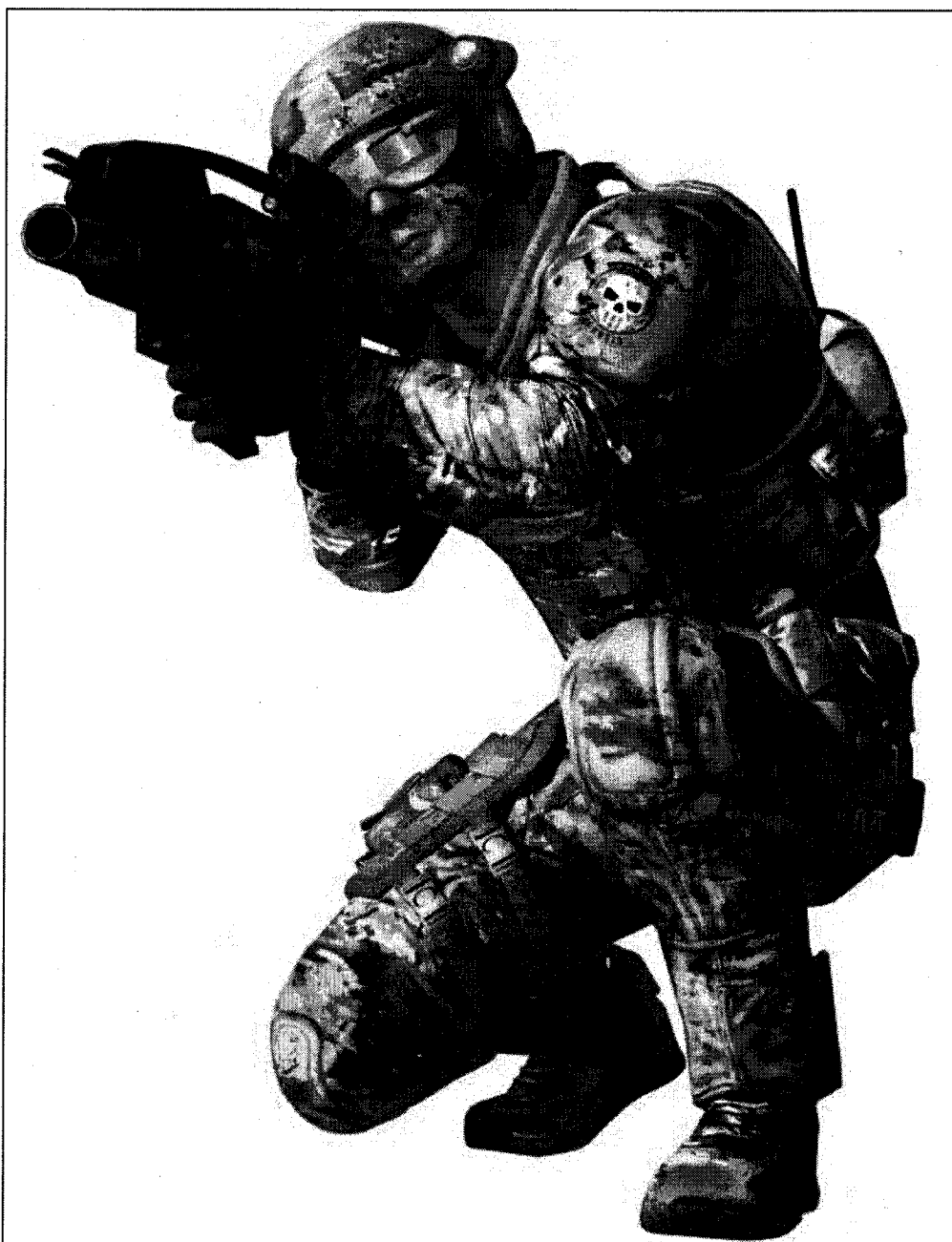
Figure 7.5

Figure 7.5: Character model in the Future Force Warrior battle dress, *Ghost Recon 3*

Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter (or Ghost Recon 3) is slated for release in late 2005 and will incorporate elements from the Army's Future Force Warrior program to a greater extent than in the previous game in the series.

Figure 7.6

Figure 7.6: Screen Shot of in-game view while aiming, *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30*

The desire for realism and authenticity is strong in the military-themed shooter genre. Increasingly, game designers attempt to simulate combat with more realistic representations and behaviour of weapons. This can include restricting the player's view while aiming, providing more accurate load times, weapon recoil, as well as tying accuracy to the soldier's stance and, in some games, simulating the effect of breathing.
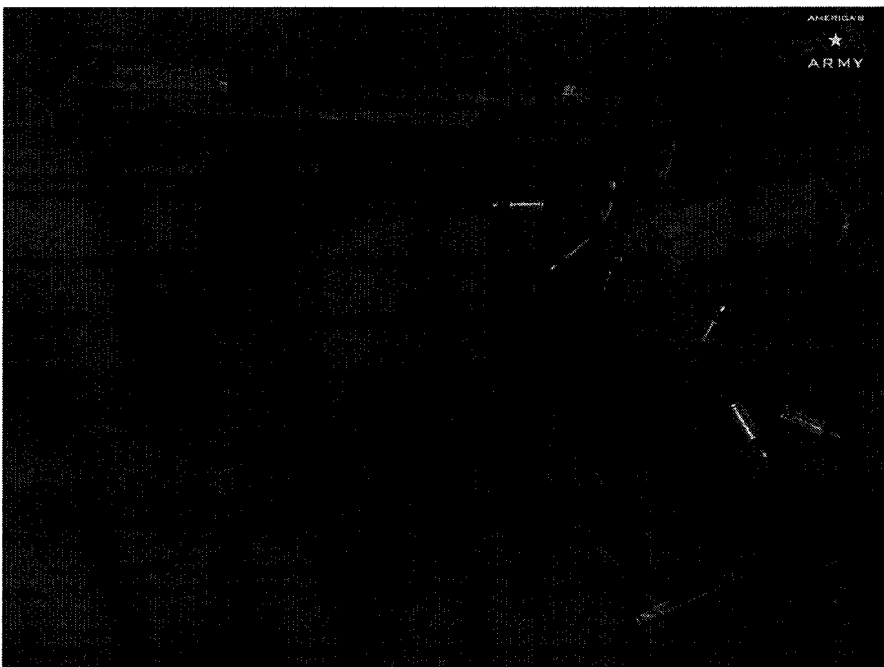
Figure 7.7

Figure 7.7: Wallpaper available from *America's Army* website.

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Figure 7.8

Figure 7.8: Screen Shot of player being wounded, *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30*

Because of the restrictive view used in first-person shooters, indicating when (and from what direction) the player's avatar is 'hit' becomes important. In *Brothers in Arms*, taking fire is indicated through a portion of the screen momentarily turning red. The player's overall health is indicated by the colour of the soldier icon in the lower left.

Chapter 7

Authenticity and Realism in Military-Themed Shooters

The Desire for Authenticity and Realism

Like Hollywood, the video game industry places a great deal of emphasis on perceptual realism and the desire for ever-increasing levels of photorealistic representation, as well as accurate or 'real-world' physics, can be seen surrounding the marketing of every new generation of computer and console hardware. Preceding the release of the Playstation 2 in 2000, for example, Sony dubbed its newly designed processor the 'emotion engine' to describe the console's processing and rendering capabilities. Similar rhetorical framing can be seen in the pre-release marketing for the next generation consoles recently announced by Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft. And while such framing can be understood from a marketing standpoint (especially considering the significant costs associated with developing new hardware), the quest for ever-increasing realism can be seen in the marketing surrounding specific game titles and is especially prominent for first-person shooters generally and, specifically, in the genre of military-themed shooters.

Of course, 'realism' is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down since it is intertwined with a variety of competing and conflicting influences and discourses:

technological innovation, economic competition within industry, marketing hype, as well as the tendency for a particular medium to define itself in terms of other media (remediation), and the influence of a variety of social, political, and ideological attitudes. As indicated in the last chapter, the tendency for military-themed shooters to take cues from film or television is almost a ubiquitous phenomenon. The relation between the *Medal of Honor* series and *Saving Private Ryan*, *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* and the television series *Band of Brothers*, and *Kuma/War*'s general reliance on representations from TV news and press reports can be considered as a general strategy whereby these games establish their claims to authenticity. However, such authenticity claims are achieved in other ways as well. Those games that have a close proximity to the military—through modeling weapons and tactics in consultation with the military or the reliance on soldiers as subject matter experts—will feature such relationships prominently in their marketing materials. As the marketing blurb on the back of *Close Combat: First to Fight* states: 'Experience a first-person shooter so realistic, the Marines use it as a training tool.'

As both Martin Bayer and Eva Kingsepp note, addressing the player in such a manner is a common feature of military-themed games. Both authors point to Elecontric Arts' marketing slogan used for some of the games in the *Medal of Honor* series—'You don't play – you volunteer'—for the way it is used to help establish the series' claim of both realism and authenticity. The similarities to *Saving Private Ryan* as well as the fact that the games were endorsed by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, also helped to establish such claims.[1] Such methods are also indicative of the primary goals of these games: to allow players to experience war and to experience

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[1] See: Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games," 79-80; and the section 'Death in the Virtual World' in Kingsepp, "Apocalypse the Spielberg Way," n.p. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of *Medal of Honor* was donated to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

war from the point of view of individual soldiers. Of course, this also reflects the

reason why players are attracted to these games and even games in general. As Bayer

simply states:

> ... games enable the virtual realization of dreams and fantasies.... In
> games, it is possible to save the world. Or, as the actor George Clooney
> put it, regarding his role in the war movie *The Thin Red Line*: 'Everybody
> wants to be a World War II hero.'[2]

The cultural fascination with warfare is realized in a perhaps literal way in the medium

of videogames since these games allow one to play as a soldier and to experience

combat in a virtual but realistic world. And the opportunity is no doubt a compelling

one. As Henry Jenkins rightly points out, the success of action or combat games

should be understood through the way they allow individuals to play or adopt

culturally-influenced (and, primarily masculine) behaviours that are privileged but

largely unavailable in the real world.[3] This is something that is recognized by game

designers themselves, in that games allow players to participate in activities that they

would not want, or even be allowed, to experience in real life.[4] This relation of

individuals to mediated experience can, of course, be seen with regard to other media.

Martin Jay, for example, asserts that the nature of aesthetic spectatorship has

generally shifted to one where an involved, 'kinaesthetic' subject is invited and

attracted to virtual scenes of violence and catastrophe.[5]

The value and validity of such experience is, of course, a very controversial

topic. Gerard Jones, for example, makes the compelling argument that the portrayal

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[2] Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games," 79.

[3] Henry Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement': Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces," in *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000) 262-297.

[4] As Richard Rouse points out: "Another part of the fantasy fulfillment element of computer games is enabling the player to engage in socially unacceptable behaviour in a safe environment." Richard Rouse, *Game Design: Theory and Practice* (Texas: Wordware Publishing, 2001), 7.

[5] Martin Jay, "Diving into the Wreck: Aesthetic Spectatorship at the *Fin-de-siècle*," *Critical Horizons* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 2000): 101.

of violence in video games, movies, and other media can provide a safe fantasy-world where children can become familiar with and control certain emotions (anger, revenge) and controversial subjects (violence or sexuality).[6] The argument that Jones makes is meant to insert some nuance to the debate over mediated violence, which has become increasingly politicized and polarized.[7] In this sense, it is not so much a question of whether or not violence should be depicted but how it is framed, contextualized and the meanings that can be taken from it. Jenkins adopts a similar perspective, arguing that the assumption whereby all forms of media violence should be strictly avoided ignores the potential for learning about and reflecting upon controversial subject matter. Jenkins argues for a more meaning-driven approach that places media violence in a larger social context but also looks at the meaning of violence as portrayed in specific films or games.[8]

Within the violence debate, those who take an approach against depictions of violent acts and argue for media reform often fail to make any distinction among the considerable range of violent representations often seen in popular media. For his part, Jenkins has argued for a different approach, similar to Jones, where 'meaningful

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[6] Gerard Jones, *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-Believe Violence* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

[7] I am thinking mostly of the way the issue has been adopted by politicians but the debate is also polarized when it come to those who might be considered experts. Jonathan Freedman, professor of psychology at the University of Toronto has, at the request of the Motion Picture Association of America, reviewed much of the literature pertaining to the media violence debate—including laboratory and field experiments as well as longitudinal studies—and has concluded that the results do not support the view that exposure to media violence increases aggressiveness or desensitizes viewers. Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, a former Psychology professor at West Point and self-described 'killology' expert has been especially critical of contemporary entertainment media for mobilizing the same strategies of desensitization used by the military to teach soldiers to kill. See: Jonathan L. Freedman, *Media Violence and its Effect on Aggression: Assessing the Scientific Evidence* (University of Toronto Press, 2002) and Dave Grossman and Gloria DeGaetano, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1999).

[8] Henry Jenkins, "The War Between Effects and Meaning: Rethinking the Video Game Violence Debate," (2004), available at: [http://web.mit.edu/cms/faculty/WarEffectMeaning.htm].

violence' is considered for its positive affect on audiences.[9] But as King and

Krzywinska note, Jenkins' idea of 'meaningful violence' is also directed at the games

industry itself: "[Jenkins] has called for games to embody more substantial, respectable

and responsible dimensions, rooted primarily in narrative qualities (to make violence

'meaningful,' for example, through its location in relation to character, narrative

consequences and to be 'about something')."[10] Despite his passion for the medium,

Jenkins notes that:

> Not every gamer thinks deeply about their play experiences nor does
> every designer reflect upon the meanings attached to violence in their
> works. Most contemporary games do little to encourage players to
> reflect and converse about the nature of violence. If anything, the
> assumption that game play is meaningless discourages rather than
> fosters such reflection.[11]

As indicated in the last chapter, this is especially true of military-themed shooters, but

Jenkins' remarks also reflect the unease over videogame depictions of 'real-world'

phenomena such as war, especially when the games wrap such experiences in the

pleasurable aspects of play. In fact, this forms the heart of more general media

critiques, for as Jay argues in relation to media texts that provide vicarious experiences

of disaster or violence, the viewer is, more often than not, addressed primarily through

spectacle and pleasure.[12] The question of affect or effect is a considerably complex

one to answer with any certainty but the most useful approaches are ones that do not

claim a causal relationship between representation and subsequent behaviour (such as

the claim that watching violence will make individuals more aggressive or violent

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[9] Jenkins, "The War Between Effects and Meaning," 5-6.
[10] King and Krzywinska, "Introduction: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces," 21. The authors are paraphrasing Jenkins from a paper delivered at the Game Cultures Conference, Bristol, June 2001.
[11] Jenkins, "The War Between Effects and Meaning," 5.
[12] Martin Jay, "Diving into the Wreck: Aesthetic Spectatorship at the *Fin-de-siècle*," *Critical Horizons* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 2000): 101.

themselves) but how such depictions can inform or mediate the understanding of other issues. Working from the perspective of peace studies, David Leonard argues:

> The blur between real and the fantastically imagined, given the hyper-presence of war on television and within video games, constructs a war without bloodshed, carnage, or destruction.... The erasure of carnage and bloodshed through smart bombs, CNN, video games, and other forms of virtual warfare is making peace increasingly more difficult....[13]

Leonard's argument that war has been largely replaced by its representations is no doubt a familiar one but given that claims of authenticity and realism dominate the genre of military-themed shooters, it is useful to consider how both authenticity and realism are defined and, perhaps more significant, what is left out.

Fetishizing Military and Video Game Technology

When discussing realism in the military-themed shooter genre, it becomes obvious that developers concentrate primarily on certain aspects of the combat experience. As both programming and hardware continue to evolve, the ability to accurately simulate tactics and strategy elements has increased as well as the ability to model movement of in-game soldiers. However, the area that receives the most attention from both developers and from players is the accurate modeling of weapons and military equipment. While I mentioned that there is an emerging and questioning attitude toward the morality of using real-world events as the subject matter for military-themed games, such questions are, traditionally, rarely considered by the majority of gamers or by reviewers in the mainstream press. In fact, one of the dominant themes

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[13] David Leonard, "Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex: Video Games and a Pedagogy of Peace," *Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education* 4, no. 4 (November 2004), n.p. Available at: [www.utpress.utoronto.ca/journal/ejournals/similie].

in the discussion of such games is the 'realism' that these games offer and both

players and reviewers take a considerable amount of pleasure in the realistic modeling

of weaponry and other military technology, especially vehicles. **[Figures 7.1 – 7.4]** In

reviews of these games, providing a detailed list of weapons and their capabilities is

common and is often the subject of discussion in online forums. As one player—

contributing to the 'User Review' section of IGN.com for *America's Army*—states:

> Realistic weapons are awesome in AA [*America's Army*]. Every gun is
> deatiled [sic] to the max, from the way your player squeezes the trigger
> or flips to change rate of fire or even reloads it. Americas Army is as real
> and intense as it can get.[14]

Such fascination is, it should be noted, an important aspect of the genre since

weapons are an extension of the in-game character and forms, to use Newman's

phrase, an important aspect of the 'vehicular' abilities offered to the player. Still, such

focus on the *materiel* and technology offers an interesting point of identification and

one that can be seen across the media spectrum (for example, CNN's 3D modeling of

U.S. weapons and aircraft that were available on their website during the last Gulf

War[15]).

In chapter 4, the incorporation of future soldier combat systems in *Delta Force:*

Land Warrior and *Ghost Recon 2* was discussed and this points to the ongoing

influence that the U.S. military has in the video game industry. The evolution of

technowar as a dominant framework for modern warfare stresses the importance of

military technology, not only in terms of actual combat but also as a 'strategic enabler'

in terms of psychological warfare, public relations and the showcasing of military

technology. In this case, the showcasing of military technology in film or videogames

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[14] medmark. "Best Game Ever (America's Army Reader Review)" (Online). *IGN.com*, available at:
[http://rr.pc.ign.com/rr/002/002534.html].
[15] The 3D interactive models can be accessed at:
[http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/forces/weapons/index.html].

can be seen as an extension of the portrayal of military technology in other media. As

was the case with *Delta Force: Land Warrior*, the U.S. Army approached NovaLogic to

include its Land Warrior system into a commercially-released game,[16] and the Future

Force Warrior system will be, in addition to its inclusion in *Ghost Recon 2*, featured

much more prominently in the next game in the series (now officially known as *Ghost

Recon: Advanced Warfighter*).[17] **[Figure 7.5]**   However, owing to the interactive and

generative nature of modern warfare,[18] cultural interest in weaponry and their

performance is high, and especially in periods of conflict.[19]   For example, Sony

Computer Entertainment of America (the U.S. subsidiary of Sony's entertainment

division) filed an application to trademark the phrase, "Shock and Awe," days after the

beginning of the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.   The phrase—originating in the U.S.

military—had come into use to describe the bombardment of Baghdad and had

already circulated extensively in the media. Sony had intended to use the phrase for an

upcoming videogame title but cancelled the trademark application after various news

reports surfaced.[20]

Within the military-themed shooter genre, the prominence and realistic

modeling of weapons has increased but has also been, for some games at least,

[16] Michael Macedonia (interview), "Spot On: The US Army's There-based Simulation," *GameSpot.com* (21 April 2004). Available at: [http://www.gamespot.com/news/2004/04/21/news_6093860.html].
[17] The game is scheduled for release in the forth quarter of 2005. See: David Adams, "Ghost Recon 3 Renamed," *IGN.com* (27 June 2005). Available at: [http://xbox.ign.com/articles/629/629270p1.html].
[18] Tarak Barkawi, "Globalization, Culture, and War: On the Popular Mediation of 'Small Wars'," *Cultural Critique* 58 (Fall 2004): 125.
[19] As an example, sales figures for military-themed videogames rose beginning in February with the build-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. See: Mike Snider, "Combat Games Selling Full-Force: Makers Avoid Citing Iraq as a Boost," *USA Today* (16 April 2003), 4D.
[20] See: Julia Day, "Sony to Cash in on Iraq with 'Shock and Awe' Game" (Online), *The Guardian* (April 10, 2003) [http://media.guardian.co.uk/marketingandpr/story/0,7494,933239,00.html] and Sony Computer Entertainment, Inc., "Statement Concerning a Trademark Filing in US by Our Game Affiliate," Press Release, April 15, 2003 [http://www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/ServiceArea/030415/].

tempered in terms of the more outlandish tendencies.[21] In early games, the player's

character had instant access to an impressive inventory of weapons that might include

a pistol, assault rifle, heavier machine guns, a bazooka, and grenades. This unrealistic

inventory of weapons was supplemented with large of amounts of ammunition which

was also plentiful 'on the ground' and could easily be picked up by the player's

character. However, as the realistic representation of weapons has evolved—especially

with regard to the squad-based or tactical shooter—limits have been placed on the

number of weapons and ammunition. The inventory itself has not been reduced as

players will still have access to a variety of weapons in the game but there is a

reduction in the number that the player's character can carry at one time. The tactical

emphasis has also seen more emphasis placed on the conservation of ammunition.

A prominent example in this regard would be *America's Army: Operations*.

Since the game was designed to introduce players to contemporary military

operations, the designers of the game placed a great deal of emphasis on the realistic

modeling and behaviour of weapons. Weapons in *America's Army* exhibit more

accurate load times (in that they are longer than in other games) and recoil, as well as

tying ballistics and accuracy to the soldier's stance and breathing. The player can fire

weapons while holding them at waist level but greater accuracy is achieved by looking

through the weapon's aiming mechanism. However, the overall view is restricted and

the player's aim will be affected by the character's breathing. Similar emphasis can be

seen in a growing number of games set in a variety of historical periods. [**Figure 7.6**]

Implicit in my discussion above is the fact that the increased focus on weaponry

and equipment is, in part, tied to a desire for realism in other aspects of game design,

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[21] Martin Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games: Images, Myths, and Reality," in *War and Virtual War: The Challenge to Communities*, Raymond W. Westphal, Jr., ed. (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2003): 80.

especially in terms of the increasing levels of complexity in both tactics as well as the

accurate modeling of combat behaviour. In terms of behaviour modeling, it is

increasingly common to capture motion and movement of actual soldiers as well as to

sample various aspects of weapons and equipment, most notably through audio

sampling and sound design.[22] Behaviour modeling is also seen through the increased

desire to provide more sophisticated artificial intelligence in games in order to guide

the behaviour of friendly and enemy non-playable characters. Success in this area of

game design is relative as it is more common to encounter words such as 'moronic'

and 'idiocy' being used by both players and reviewers when describing the artificial

intelligence in military-themed games and is one of the major reasons why multiplayer

options are so popular (since computer-controlled characters are replaced by human-

controlled ones). Still, there is no denying the way that military technologies are

portrayed and, to an extent, fetishized in current games. The producers of *America's

Army* continually release wallpaper for computer screens showcasing the detailed

design of the weapons in the game.[23] [**Figure 7.7**] As one of the game's designers

describes them: "…we receive lots of compliments on how great they look and

perform. You would never see weapons laid out like this in the game—they're always

in use or holstered; but the gamers appreciate the artistry applied to our weapons

modeling…."[24]

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[22] Researchers at the MOVES institute, the simulation office of the Naval Postgraduate School, developed
America's Army in order to investigate a variety of issues including sound spatialization and the use of
sound to heighten emotion in games. See: Michael Zyda, Don Brutzman, et al., "This Year in the MOVES
Institute," MOVES Institute (2003), available at:
[www.npsnet.org/~zyda/pubs/Cyberworlds2003Paper.pdf]
[23] The gallery can be accessed at: [http://www.americasarmy.com/gallery/wallpaper_dev.php].
[24] James Abney, quoted in *America's Army PC Game: Vision and Realization*, Margaret Davis, ed. (United
States Army and MOVES Institute, 2004) 28. Also available at: [http://movesinstitute.org/AABookletpre-
Casey.pdf].

Interestingly, the focus on military equipment includes such minor details as

boots and sunglasses. In *Ghost Recon 2*, the special features section of the game

offers—in addition to information and video of the Future Force Warrior program and

the Natick Soldier Centre—sections for military contractors such as Blackhawk Products

Group, Eagle Industries, as well as the eyewear maker Oakley to display products that

can be unlocked in the game.[25] The presence of Oakley sunglasses is explained by their

being the "preferred equipment" of U.S. special forces and in the updates to *America's

Army*, players are treated to even more variation in eyewear including M-Frames,

Juliets as well as combat A-frame goggles.[26]

Defining Realism in Military-Themed Shooters

The focus upon military technology points to the ways that realism is largely defined

within video games and in this sense the focus upon military technology is tied to the

development and valorization of video game technology itself. Within the military-

themed shooter genre, realism is primarily defined in visual terms; for example,

through the quantitative and performance-based aspects of weaponry (such as rate of

fire) and spectacular but abstracted destruction. Such concerns have led many authors

to draw parallels between prominent action games (including first-person shooters as

well as military-themed games) with action films or, more generally, the Hollywood

Blockbuster.[27] As Geoff King argues:

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[25] The equipment can be accessed through the 'Profiles' section of the main menu and by selecting 'Suppliers.' *Ghost Recon 2* (Xbox), Ubisoft/Red Storm Entertainment, 2004.

[26] See: *America's Army PC Game: Vision and Realization*, Margaret Davis, ed. (United States Army and MOVES Institute, 2004) 8.

[27] This is especially noticeable in research that specifically looks to Hollywood film and video games as being conceptually related. See: Patrick Crogan, "Gametime: History, Narrative, and Temporality in

> Some forms of cinematic spectacle invite the viewer to sit back in a state
> of admiration/astonishment, contemplating the scale, detail, convincing
> texture or other impressive attributes of the image. Others seek to
> create a more aggressive, explosive and 'in your face' variety of
> spectacular impact.... One of the pleasures of games is the ability they
> offer the player, vicariously but with some control over the experience,
> to explore strange and often visually striking and spectacular worlds of
> digital animation.[28]

Since both cinematic and video game genres have grown out of, in part, the

application of computer-generated imagery, such a relationship should be expected

and is perhaps best exemplified by the film *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (2001)

that was based on the popular video game series and was made entirely through

computer animation. The tendency to celebrate visual and auditory spectacle as well

as the sensual immersion of the viewer often leads to other aspects of the cinematic or

video text to be given much less emphasis. Complaints or critiques that are most

commonly encountered are that these texts fail to offer compelling narratives or often

sacrifice depth for more spectacular or sensational meanings. Both Andrew Darley and

Geoff King warn of the tendency for such critiques to become, as King says,

"excessively sweeping and all-encompassing" rather than applying them to or taking

into account specific socio-historical contexts.[29] Such a warning is no doubt important

since the tendency toward spectacle can be generally read as a celebration of new

technological and cultural forms. More specifically and as I indicated in earlier

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Combat Flight Simulator 2," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, eds.
(New York: Routledge, 2003): 275-301; Andrew Darley, *Visual Digital Culture: Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Geoff King, "Die Hard/Try Harder: Narrative, Spectacle and Beyond, from Hollywood to Videogame," in *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, eds. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 50-65; and Andrew Mactavish, "Technological Pleasure: The Performance and Narrative of Technology in *Half-Life* and other High-Tech Computer Games," in *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, eds. (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 33-49.
[28] King, "Die Hard/Try Harder: Narrative, Spectacle and Beyond, from Hollywood to Videogame," 57.
[29] King, "Die Hard/Try Harder: Narrative, Spectacle and Beyond, from Hollywood to Videogame," 63. Darley provides a useful historical account of such critiques, see Darley, *Visual Digital Culture* (2000).

chapters, it is increasingly common to encounter games that combine spectacular

tendencies with, for example, compelling and meaningful narrative.

The tendency toward spectacle, I would argue, is an important consideration in

the military-themed shooter genre since these games not only attempt to portray real-

world phenomena (military conflict generally or specific historical conflicts) but also

because the genre generally strives for authenticity and realism. Even though games

in other genres regularly address the player via the ability to become immersed in a

virtual world, games in the military-themed genre do so by evoking real-world events

and, at times, real-world truth-claims. As Paul Ward argues, 'realism' is a particularly

broad and, at times, messy concept but one that is determined, in part, by audience

expectations and the ways specific genres are framed, coded or, as Ward says,

indexed. In discussing the approach to realism in terms of games based on specific

animated films, Ward says:

> ... it is important to remember that our consumption of and interaction
> with these representations is not usually blind, but is subject to such
> 'indexing,' usually via phenomena such as advertising, our own prior
> knowledge of particular genres and so forth. No matter how 'real' the
> world of a film like *Toy Story 2* or *Shrek* appears to be, therefore, we
> *know* it is animated, partly because it is *coded* as such. Indeed, its
> coding as hyperreal animation (rather than, say, attempting to be
> passed off as live-action), is its main selling point.... The pleasure of
> these films and games lies in the way they *knowingly flaunt* their ability
> to imitate certain other representations (including each other).[30]

While games in the military-themed genre certainly do remediate or imitate other

representational media, they certainly do not flaunt it or otherwise call attention to it.

Instead, their claims to authenticity and the realistic portrayal of war are regarded as

self-evident (in that they 'look' amazingly realistic) or are supplemented by those

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[30] Ward, "Videogames as Remediated Animation," 131. Ward borrows the term 'indexing' from: Noel
Carroll, "Nonfiction Film and Postmodern Skepticism," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*,
David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 283-306.

games that receive military input or are designed by the military itself. The proximity to the military and, in some respects, its own endorsement of specific games are prominently featured in the marketing and publicity materials for such games.[31] However, such coding, indexing, or discursive framing has brought forth a variety of analyses that attempt to interrogate such claims to realism, mostly in terms of what the genre leaves out.[32]

The most common element within such analyses is a focus on the depiction of the act of killing. As many authors point out, the depictions of wounds or actual death are treated in a largely abstracted way. Martin Bayer, for example, argues that the depiction of wounds and death can be separated into three levels, ranging from those that basically do not show any (Bayer mentions *Medal of Honor*), games that indicate the existence of wounds with small "paintball-like" red blobs on uniforms (such as *America's Army*) to those games that place more emphasis on gore, such as soaking the character's uniform (or the ground) in blood (here, Bayer mentions *Soldier of Fortune II*).[33] There is a considerable range in terms of these depictions and it is interesting that, generally, games outside of the military-themed genre—such as the

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[31] My use of the term 'endorsement' should be treated with some caution. Despite the fact that the military commissions certain titles or provides assistance to others, games such as *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *Close Combat: First to Fight* are, as indicated in the fine print of advertisements or on the game box itself, 'not approved, endorsed, sponsored or authorized' by the specific branch of the military involved in its creation.

[32] Realism is discussed in a variety of places so I will only include those that focus specifically on the military-themed genre or on specific games. Bayer presents a very useful and comprehensive, but short, discussion and both Galloway and Kumar place more emphasis on situating 'realism' within a theoretical dimension. See: Martin Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games: Images, Myths, and Reality," in *War and Virtual War: The Challenge to Communities*, Raymond W. Westphal, Jr., ed. (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2003): 71-86; Alexander R. Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming," *GameStudies* 4, no.1 (November 2004), [www.gamestudies.org/0401/Galloway/]; Eva Kingsepp, "Apocalypse the Spielberg Way: Representations of Death and Ethics in *Saving Private Ryan*, *Band of Brothers* and the Videogame *Medal of Honor: Frontline*," in *Level Up* (Digital Games Research Conference Proceedings) CD-ROM, eds. Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2003; Abhinava Kumar, "America's Army Game and the Production of War," York University, YCISS Working Paper No. 27 (March 2004); David B. Nieborg, "America's Army: More Than a Game," in *Transforming Knowledge into Action through Gaming and Simulation* (CD-ROM), Thomas Eberle and Willy Christian Kriz, eds. (International Siulation & Gaming Association, Conference Proceedings, 2004).

[33] Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games, 81-82.

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aforementioned *Bloodrayne* games—tend to focus more on gore or even bodily

dismemberment. The question as to why the depiction of killing in military-themed

games is treated in a highly abstracted manner likely includes a variety of explanations.

As Bayer argues:

> ... *Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix* provides for one of the goriest
> gaming experiences in 'real-world' environments. As a result, it has not
> only been bashed in the game reviews, but also by the audience. Such
> games are highly unpopular with most gamers, as their focus lies on the
> gameplay, and not on shooting each other's limbs off....[34]

Bayer is likely correct in his summation of the game in that it was criticized for its

lackluster gameplay but while the visceral nature of the violence is noted in many

reviews, it is not the focus of such criticism. Instead, the fact that enemy soldiers react

slowly to the player's actions—again, the 'stupidity' of the AI—does receive a great

deal of criticism.[35] However, Bayer is, I believe, generally correct in that players tend to

focus more on elements of gameplay. While the spectacular nature of gore might be

attractive to some gamers, when looking at online, multiplayer games like *Battlefield*

1942 (which would fit into Bayer's first category), the combination of action and

strategy offered in a realistic setting seems to be the primary reason why the game is

attractive to players. *Battlefield 1942* forgoes any depiction of blood or gore and,

instead, indicates that an opposing player has been hit through slight body recoil and,

when the opposing player is killed, the avatar either simply drops to the ground or

slumps over before falling. Since most of these games are marketed to as wide an

audience as possible, achieving a Teen rating (in North America, provided by the

Entertainment Software Ratings Board or ESRB) is crucial. *America's Army*, for

instance, was designed for recruiting purposes and, therefore, was specifically aimed

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[34] Bayer, "Playing War in Computer Games, 81.
[35] See the reviews of both the Xbox and PC versions of the games at review sites like IGN.com or GameSpot.com.

at a teen demographic. Consequently, the game uses the 'paintball' technique and provides 'parental controls' to turn off the depiction of gore entirely or to only allow the child to play the 'laser tag' missions.[36]

The manner in which the aftermath of the violence is depicted is an interesting point as well and is handled in a variety of ways. In many games, the dead bodies of opposing soldiers will be displayed for a short period of time only to disappear after a few seconds. All evidence of 'the kill' might vanish or the body might be replaced with a small pool of blood and/or the opposing soldier's kit (weapons and ammunition). Eva Kingsepp has provided the interesting observation that in games that strive for authenticity (military-themed shooters) the bodies simply disappear, while games that are more overtly fantastic and exaggerated (such as *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*) tend to display dead bodies, presumably as evidence of the player's in-game prowess.[37] While Kingsepp finds such variation puzzling, especially since authenticity is regarded so highly in most military-themed games, she does recognize that it is partly an issue of allocating in-game resources. Retaining bodies in and around a game's level will consume processing resources and memory that could be devoted to other aspects of the game. Still, the question as to whether or not bodies should remain or disappear is an issue of game-design (especially since it is more likely that bullet-impacts or destroyed vehicles will remain) and is not only possible but is consistently favoured in the more exaggerated or fantastical titles.

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[36] As the FAQ for the game indicates—under a section titled 'Responsible Play'—"Parents are able to alter and control certain aspects of gameplay in *America's Army*. Parents can disable all the blood in the game, enable a language filter, disallow the ability to play as an Advanced Marksman, and limit gameplay to only those missions which feature the MILES laser-tag type play." The FAQ is available at: [www.americasarmy.com/support/faq_win.php].

[37] Eva Kingsepp, "Apocalypse the Spielberg Way: Representations of Death and Ethics in *Saving Private Ryan, Band of Brothers* and the Videogame *Medal of Honor: Frontline.*"

Kingsepp frames such differences by arguing that the exaggerated nature of games like *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* celebrate killing and death in an excessive and 'carnivalesque' manner (in the Bakhtinian sense), while the authentic titles attempt to efface such excesses through a 'postmodern' approach; one where death and killing is celebrated but is subsequently modified by erasing its effects:

> ...I would propose that one key seems to lie in the notion of 'authenticity' and postmodernity's often mentioned quest for heightened levels of experiences of the ultimately 'real,' often represented by the hyperreal. Especially through film and digital media it is possible to experience death and dying in an 'authentic' but still non-threatening way, and as death may be seen as the ultimate real, it is not surprising that it makes a thrilling issue. Of course, man's fascination with death is not a new thing; what is new in this context is rather the improved 'reality' of the experience through a high level of immersion.[38]

For Kingsepp, games put a far greater emphasis on what she calls the material representation of combat for its claims to authenticity since the games themselves are largely a way of measuring the player's performative skills. It is not surprising then that weaponry and vehicles are rendered in such detail while the liminal, metaphysical, or emotional impact of war-related death—which Kingsepp says is often encountered in other media—is rarely investigated.

The discussion of gore is primarily directed at the depiction of those characters (enemy or friendly) that the player can see. When it comes to the player's avatar, different strategies must be utilized. This is especially true of first-person shooters where the player can only see his or her character's weapon, forearm and hand. In these cases, when the player's character is hit it is represented through sound effects (including a moan or groan) and reinforced through iconic elements such as the top or sides of the screen momentarily turning red (indicating, as well, the direction of

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[38] Eva Kingsepp, "Apocalypse the Spielberg Way," n.p.

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oncoming fire). [Figure 7.8] The current health status of the player's avatar is indicated through colour gradations (either a meter or an icon representing the soldier's body) progressively moving from green to red. When death does occur, it is temporary and the player must restart from the last save point, restart the mission, or wait for a limited period of time before they are able to 'respawn.'

At this point, it is important to consider that these games provide for play and there is no denying that these games are fun, engaging, or provide for a compelling level of immersion and even emotion. But it is necessary to be careful when using such terms since the kind of emotions involved are likely nowhere near those involved in actual combat and instead are primarily concerned with competitive gameplay: tension, frustration, surprise, exhilaration, and so on. The need to provide for engagement through gameplay in military-themed shooters has an important effect on the genre's definition of realism and rather than providing an authentic experience of combat, it would be correct to say that these games provide authentic competition framed through the appearance of modern military combat. Combat as a game, therefore, treats—as it must—war and combat in an abstracted, highly simplified or symbolic way. In that sense, the realism found in military-themed shooters leaves out much more than it includes and is why such elements like physical fatigue, boredom, the logistics of dealing with supplies or prisoners, civilians and collateral damage are rarely if ever encountered.[39]

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[39] Authors considering the claims of realism in such games often mention these elements. See especially: Bayer, "Playing War in Combat Games," and David Leonard, "Unsettling the Military Entertainment Complex: Video Games and a Pedagogy of Peace."

Problems of War, Representation, and Simulation

In discussing the increasing move to realism in cinema, Joel Black makes the comment that:

> This is not at all to say that movies are becoming more 'realistic,' more like real life; if anything, they tend to be less credible and plausible than ever. But they are certainly more *graphic*—more physical and explicit— which is an entirely different matter. We need to recognize film as being first and foremost a 'literalist medium' whose nature is to make things *explicit*—to reveal or display the world in an evidentiary sense that is beyond the capability of traditional representational or art media.[40]

Here, Black begins his argument that the contemporary desire to make things explicit or visible—which he argues is largely derived from the experience of the cinematic form—has lead to a situation whereby forms of representation so fully permeate modern society that the line separating reality and fiction has blurred. In its most simplistic form, this can be understood as the need to continually 'up the bar' or 'push the envelope' of representation and, in that sense, video games share what Black calls the 'graphic imperative.' At its heart, however, Black's discussion of the blurring of fact and fiction is part of the general debate about whether forms of representation are merely mimetic and therefore offer unmediated truths about the world or whether forms of representation offer a mediated reality that does not so much reflect the world as construct it. Video games are special in that, unlike film or photography, there is no possibility of claiming an indexical relationship between recording apparatus and subject. As a virtual medium, video games cannot claim to offer referential realism through the ability to document actual objects, people or events. Furthermore, video games can be distinguished from other representational media in

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[40] Joel Black, *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative*, 8.

that they allow the player to act within the game world. As Alexander Galloway

argues, the possibility to act in games should inform any discussion of realism within

the medium:

> Games are an active medium that requires constant physical input by
> the gamer: action, doing, pressing buttons, controlling, and so on.
> Because of this, a realist game must be realist in doing, in action. And
> because the primary phenomenological reality of games is that of action
> (rather than looking, as it is with cinema...), it follows in a structural
> sense that the gamer has a more intimate relationship with the
> apparatus itself, and therefore with the deployment of realism. The
> gamer is significantly more than a mere audience member, but
> significantly less than a diegetic character. It is the act of doing, of
> manipulating the controller, that imbricates the gamer with the game.[41]

For Galloway, a definition of realism in gaming should go beyond the ability to simply

render material objects in a realistic manner—perceptual realism or, as Galloway calls

it, 'realistic-ness'—but should also include 'social' realism; that is, whether or not the

game allows the player to confront social, political, or moral issues during gameplay.[42]

Within this definition, Galloway also argues that the game must offer "some kind of

congruence, some type of *fidelity of context* that transliterates itself from the social

reality of the gamer, through one's thumbs, into the game environment and back

again."[43] I will return to this last aspect, what Galloway calls the 'congruence

requirement,' in the next chapter since it does pose some interesting problems. But in

arguing that room should be made for 'social realism,' Galloway provides a theoretical

basis that would be useful for the critiques of the military-themed shooter that I have

already discussed as well as for understanding games as simulations generally.

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[41] Alexander R. Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming," *GameStudies* 4, no.1 (November 2004),
[www.gamestudies.org/0401/Galloway/].
[42] In setting up his argument, Galloway provides a discussion of social realism as it has been articulated in
film theory, specifically by using the work of Andre Bazin and Fredric Jameson.
[43] Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming," (emphasis in original).

Previously, I had mentioned that a common critique of military-themed shooters is the fact that civilians are rarely represented. Such absence is interesting since, as Martin Bayer notes, civilians and civilian casualties have played an important role in affecting military operations in the last century. And it is especially significant in that many recent games, including those produced by or for the U.S. military, are meant to introduce players to the concept of MOUT (military operations in urban terrain) which increasingly forms an important aspect of contemporary military operations. When civilians are present, it is not just a matter of their representation but how they are incorporated into the player's interactions with the game. In a review of *ShellShock: Nam '67*, Daniel Weissenberger describes his interactions with civilians in a specific level of the game—including the possibility of committing his first war crime—and since the episode he describes requires contextualization, I will quote Weissenberger at some length:

> Here's the story of how I was able to commit my first ever war atrocity: My squad was dispatched to a village to search for weapon stockpiles. Wandering around the village, I decided to see if the game would let me kill chickens. It did, and unlike the universal video game symbol for 'dead chicken,' a cloud of feathers and blood, I was treated to a chicken corpse lying around. So I tried to kill a pig. Similar effect.... So I went over to the circle of civilians and shot one of them in the back of the head. Yup, that worked fine, and other than a stern warning that I'd just hit a civilian, absolutely no repercussion. So I shot a marine. But luckily marines are bulletproof, so no matter how many times I shot my pal in the head at point blank range, it had absolutely no effect. Remembering the warning I'd been issued, I decided to see if the game would actually reprimand me for shooting a second civilian. It didn't, but the rest of the civilians in the village were certainly upset by it. Rather than wait around to see if I'd just execute them one by one, they pulled out their bamboo-harvesting machetes and ran at me. Had they hacked me to death I wouldn't have minded at all, as I clearly had it coming. The rest of my squad wasn't having any of it, though, and one of them screamed "the villagers have armed themselves!" Ten seconds of automatic weapons fire followed, at the end of which the village's entire population (another six people above and beyond the ones I'd executed) lay dead on the ground. Here's the kicker—the villagers were

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all isolated so that we could search their villages for weapons caches in peace. After the massacre is over, the game tells me that I've accomplished an objective. What's that objective? Stopping a villager from getting away. So apparently one of them was actually hiding weapons for the VC, and gunning down the whole lot of them saved me the trouble of actually searching the village to discover which one... and at the end of the mission, there was no reprimand of any kind. No taking me off active duty, no court martial, no stockade time....[44]

Here, it is interesting to note that Weissenberger was not objecting to the *possibility* of killing civilians but to the fact that doing so was entirely inconsequential with regard to the game's rules. In that sense, it is not a question of what to show (as in the realistic depiction of gore) or even what is possible, but the fact that the player's actions were not tied to what might be considered as 'real-world' expectations or consequences. And this points to one of the most interesting aspects of video games. If, along with Aarseth and Frasca, we consider them to be simulations of real-world processes and behaviours then it follows that it would be problematic to strictly forbid certain player-actions while only allowing others. As the reviewer of *Deus Ex: Invisible War* indicated, the fact that a variety of in-game actions were available (including questionable ones) and that these actions had effects, was important in adding extra meaning to the game.

For his part, Weissenberger notes in his review that the *ShellShock: Nam '67* 'crossed a line' with him and that others might not share his view. Surely, there is no firm ground when considering whether or not video games should incorporate some sort of moral framework and apply it to the player's in-game actions since, at that point, the question of whose morality is being imposed comes into play. In fact, by calling for video games to treat violence in a more meaningful way, Jenkins has been

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[44] Daniel Weissenberger, "Shellshock: Nam '67 (Review)," *Game Critics* (20 October 2004), available at: [www.gamecritics.com/review/shellshock/main.php]. Weissenberger is describing the second mission in the game, titled 'Hearts and Minds.'

criticized for being overly 'evangelical.'[45] However, in terms of realism or authenticity, there is considerably more weight in arguing that civilians should not only be present but their being killed should carry some sort of in-game consequence. Weissenberger was not, it should be pointed out, entirely critical of *ShellShock: Nam '67*. In fact, he praised the game for the ways it did not shy away from the controversial aspects of the conflict and showed how both sides could act in "vicious and bloodthirsty" ways.[46] Presumably, Weissenberger was critical because the claim for realism wasn't applied consistently throughout the game and specifically in the mission where he committed his virtual war crime.[47] While the game courts the controversial aspects of the conflict, it simply ends there and any contextualization and consequences from in-game actions are not carried through.

Here, it is interesting to note that the games associated with the military have exhibited an increased tendency to incorporate the presence of civilians and, in more limited ways, in-game consequences for killing them. In *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, civilians are relatively numerous in some levels and may even exhibit behaviour (such as yelling or throwing rocks) which can make it difficult for the player to distinguish between combatants and civilians. As well, if the player kills a large number of civilians it will result in mission failure. In both *America's Army* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* civilians are rarely encountered but both games mention that killing civilians is strictly forbidden through the military's Rules of Engagement (ROE). In

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[45] King and Krzywinska, "Introduction: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces," 21.

[46] The game was marketed in a way that stressed such a relationship. The opening line on the back of the box and used in some ads states: "It's 1967. You've been drafted to fight in the most controversial conflict of modern times. Prepare to experience the fear, chaos and atrocities of the Vietnam War." *ShellShock: Nam '67* (Eidos/Guerilla Games), 2004.

[47] Some game designers argue that perceptual realism (making things 'look' real) is not as important as providing the player with a consistent and understandable world. See: Chris Hecker, "Physics in Computer Games," *Communications of the ACM* (Association for Computing Machinery) 43, no. 7 (July 2000), 35-39 and Ernst Adams, "Dogma 2001: A Challenge to Game Designers," *GamaSutra* (29 January 2001), available at: [http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20010129/adams_01.htm].

America's Army, killing a civilian will result in points being deducted from the player's ranking score while killing too many teammates will result in the player being banned from online play. Still, civilians are a very minor component but a recently announced update for the game indicates that civilians will be incorporated in a more meaningful way and if a player intentionally kills a civilian it will be treated similarly to killing U.S. soldiers.[48] In *Full Spectrum Warrior*, civilians are very rarely encountered which is interesting since almost all of the game's missions take place in a large Middle-Eastern city. *Close Combat: First to Fight* is also set in a large urban setting (Beirut) but does introduce an interesting gameplay mechanic whereby the player has to also manage the morale or 'human will' (as it is described in the game's manual) of his or her AI-controlled team members. Among many other variables, killing civilians will decrease the team's morale and its combat effectiveness.

Conclusion

It would be misleading, however, to overestimate the presence of civilians in such games as there is relatively little emphasis placed on their presence (and meaning) within these games when compared to the overly fetishistic ways that weaponry and military-equipment are treated. And while weapons are treated with high-levels of

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[48] The update, known as the 'Q-Course,' was released in June 2005 and I have not played this version of the game. In a preview of the update, Jason Ocampo says: "Civilians are especially important in the Q Course, because the presence of innocents on the battlefield will have a huge effect on the way the game is played. In current versions of *America's Army*, since players know that there are only combatants on the battlefield, they tend to act aggressively. Ironically, they're a bit too aggressive for the Army's tastes. For example, while players of *America's Army* may lob grenades indiscriminately in the hopes of killing an opponent, in real life, US soldiers operate under rules of engagement that require them to identify their targets before engaging them." Jason Ocampo, "America's Army Updated Impressions – The Q Course," *GameSpot* (10 March 2005), available at:
[www.gamespot.com/pc/action/americasarmyoperations/preview_6120197.html].

realism, this realism is decidedly one-sided in that the effects of the weapons are carefully crafted. In fact, the realism travels only so far as the weapon itself, since once ammunition leaves the player's gun, the degree of realism quickly falls off and is replaced by more abstracted levels of representation. And while we could not expect military-themed games to be as graphic or realistic as actual combat—these are entertainment products after all and, as such, serve a variety of different functions—it is interesting to note what they intentionally include and leave out in terms of the portrayal of combat. But if these games are 'realistic,' 'authentic,' or attempt to place the player in the role of the soldier, it would be reasonable to expect that the games should make an attempt to depict that experience in ways that approximate the actual experience. While it might be overly moralistic to argue that violence should become more meaningful in games, it could be argued that if the main goal of these games is to depict the experience of soldiers—who are, of course, actual people—it certainly is not (or not only) a moral argument to expect that they would approach the difficulties that actual soldiers face, including how difficult it might be to distinguish between civilians and combatants or that killing a civilian might create psychological affect or have other real-world consequences. And it is tempting to think that it might be the military-influenced games that could lead in this regard since they, of course, are most familiar with what real combat is like and are most familiar with Rules of Engagement and other regulations governing soldiers' actions.

When we look at how realism is generally mobilized in the military-themed shooter genre it becomes clear that the tendency to emphasize weaponry and their largely spectacular but minimal consequences is remarkably consistent with the ways that war is represented in other media. In a content analysis of news reports coming

from embedded reporters during the invasion of Iraq in 2003—which is useful for comparative purposes since embeds provided a similarly 'involved' view of combat and frontline activities—the Project for Excellence in Journalism found that while military action dominated the coverage (especially the depiction of weapons being fired), over half of the imagery did not include any depictions of the 'results.' Those that did show the results of the firing of weapons did so by showing non-human targets (buildings and vehicles). As might be expected and as the authors of the report say, "...none of the embedded stories studied showed footage of people, either U.S. soldiers or Iraqis, being struck, injured or killed by weapons fired."[49]

As Barbara Bedway says of the general lack of imagery of war's effects, "the poverty of images has removed death from the war."[50] Something similar could be said of the peculiar ways that death is approximated and abstracted within the military-themed shooter genre. And as I will explore in the next chapter, such a focus takes on different meanings when we consider how it is framed through narrative, the depiction of enemies, historical fact and other questions concerning the political and ideological aspects of these games.

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[49] Tom Rosenstiel, Amy Mitchell et al., "Embedded Reporters: What Are Americans Getting?" Project for Excellence in Journalism (3 April 2003), 5. Available at: [www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/war/embed/pejembedreport.pdf], the general introduction to the report is available at [www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/war/embed/default.asp].
[50] Barbara Bedway, "Why Few Graphic Images from Iraq Make it to U.S. Papers," Editor & Publisher (18 July 2005), available at: [www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000980674].

Chapter 8

The Politics of Gameplay

Narrative and Gameplay

When discussing the role of narrative and gameplay within the military-themed shooter genre, it is tempting to separate the two conceptually. Narrative, it might be argued, is what is represented to the player in the form of backstory, unfolding narrative elements, characters (both allied and enemy), and the ways the game might intersect with current or past events. Gameplay, on the other hand, might be considered in terms of what it allows players to do within the virtual world that the game presents as well as in the social or ludic space the game provides access to. In multiplayer games or ones that provide multiplayer elements, for example, it is easier to separate gameplay and narrative elements since the primary motivation for play is the fact that it allows numerous players to congregate in virtual space to play and compete against one another.

As social spaces, these games offer a considerable range of player activity in that they "both reproduce and challenge everyday rules of social interaction while also generating interesting and creative innovations in verbal dialogue and non-verbal expressions."[1] While the player activity is primarily oriented toward the in-game goals

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[1] Talmadge Wright, Eric Boria and Paul Breidenbach, "Creative Player Actions in FPS Online Video Games: Playing Counter-Strike," *GameStudies* 2, no. 2 (December 2002), available at: [http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/wright/].

and objectives, as social spaces these games also provide for creative as well as, at times, political expression. For example, Talmadge Wright et al. have noted that in *Counter-Strike* (a mod for the popular *Half Life* game) players can create their own logos with image-editing software such as Photoshop and apply them to surfaces of in-game buildings for others to see and read.[2] The logos speak to a variety of themes—popular culture references, erotic or pornographic imagery, and political slogans—and can, in some cases, bring added meanings to what is largely an apolitical game. Such expression, of course, ranges from the serious to the trivial. For example, as a reviewer covering *Close Combat: First to Fight,* who enlisted the help of a colleague to experiment with what turned out to be the game's lackluster multiplayer options, says: "So we yelled at some 12-year-olds and some jingo patriots, and then logged off...."[3]

Gameplay and narrative are further separated when considering such games in terms of the game structure as apparatus or as a form of embodied, bodily training. Sue Morris, for example, treats the structuring potential of the first-person shooter for the ways that it creates—through its first-person point of view and interactive forms of player agency—a highly immersive player experience. While Morris includes intertextual sources such as other media texts and the social space of the game as important aspects for generating meaning, she largely sets aside narrative elements as she is primarily concentrating on multiplayer forms of play.[4] Working from a similar perspective, Simon Penny takes the political and ideological implications of game-

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[2] Wright, Boria and Breidenbach, "Creative Player Actions in FPS Online Video Games: Playing Counter-Strike." *Counter-Strike* takes place in a contemporary setting where individuals play as terrorists or counter-terrorists.

[3] Evan Kaigle, "Xbox Review - 'Close Combat: First to Fight'," *WorthPlaying.com* (20 June 2005), available at: [www.worthplaying.com/print.php?sid=26193].

[4] Sue Morris, "First-Person Shooters – A Game Apparatus," in *Screenplay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2002): 81-97.

structure and apparatus (especially with regard to first or third-person shooters) much

further. Penny argues that interactive entertainment, especially military simulations

and interactive or virtual training environments, should be considered for the ways it

differs from other representational and narrative media forms and for how it

encourages or structures virtual behavior that is, in some ways, analogous to real

world actions.[5] Working from theoretical traditions whereby bodily training can be an

important aspect of the formation of identity and where social behaviours are often

learned without conscious, rational understanding, Penny argues that the embodied

experiences that interactive entertainment offer must have some effect on real-world

behaviours and attitudes.[6] Coming as close as it does to the effects model commonly

seen in the media violence debate (which was probably intentional), Penny's argument

has elicited a variety of critical responses. Jan Van Looy, for example, argues that

while the appearance of violent actions (both real world and virtual) may seem similar,

they exist in very different contexts and utilize vastly different skills.[7] As well, Van Looy

mentions that Penny's conceptualization of the problem is actually too restrictive and

ignores other fruitful areas of effects research as well as counter-arguments

(catharsis).[8]

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[5] Simon Penny, "Representation: Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan, eds. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004): 73-84. Penny has also submitted the essay to *Electronic Book Review* where it has received responses from N. Katherine Hales and Jan Van Looy among others. See: [www.electronicbookreview.com/v3/servlet/ebr?command=view_essay&essay_id=penny].
[6] In his discussion, Penny utilizes the work of Michel Foucault (*Discipline and Punish*) and Pierre Bordieu (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*) in establishing his argument.
[7] Jan Van Looy, "Jan Van Looy Responds to Penny," *Electronic Book Review*, available at: [www.electronicbookreview.com/v3/servlet/ebr?essay_id=vanlooyr1&command=view_essay].
[8] Van Looy mentions: John L. Sherry, "The Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggression: A Meta-Analysis," *Human Communication Research* 27, no. 3 (2001): 409-431. For another useful but more general discussion of media violence, see: Sissela Bok, *Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1998).

I will return to the specifics of this discussion later in this chapter, but here I

would like to consider the fact that separating narrative from gameplay elements

often excludes what is a productive way of understanding military-themed shooters;

that is, how these games reinforce the largely dominant discourses surrounding war

and specific conflicts. In this sense, I do not want to completely abandon the

structural aspects of these games or the ways that shooters—as apparatus—can have

important mediating effects. Since these games offer a very limited point of view,

they—just as combat films—offer a very narrowly defined point of identification

whereby the player strictly identifies with the soldier and necessarily views the enemy

as the perpetrators of evil. Of course, the way the games are framed through various

narrative elements is also important for reinforcing such meanings. But the fact that

these games are *shooters* has important mediating effects as well. In an interview,

Marcus Beer (one of the project manager's for *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*)

mentioned that they wanted to provide players with a more comprehensive view of

the U.S. military's operation in Somalia:

> What we want to do is not only put across... the 24 hours in Mogadishu
> but the full twelve to eighteen month campaign beforehand. A lot of
> good work was done in that time that's been glossed over or totally
> ignored by various sections of the media. If we can give people a little
> more food for thought by showing them helping with aid convoys or
> taking out gun runners. That makes it worth it.[9]

The intention is surely admirable, but in terms of the game itself it is hardly noticeable.

The reason of course, is that the game is—first and foremost—a shooter and because

of this, missions or in-game activities are limited to or framed around this very activity.

The good work undertaken by U.S. soldiers in Somalia—the game's manual does show

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[9] Marcus Beer is interviewed alongside two U.S. Rangers who worked on the game. See: Steve Butts, "Black Hawk Down: We Talk with Two Rangers Advising the Team," *IGN.com* (25 July 2002). Available at: [http://pc.ign.com/articles/365/365924p1.html].

a photograph of a U.S. soldier providing medical treatment to a Somali infant—is

perhaps glossed over to a greater extent in the game since any action undertaken

during actual gameplay is largely restricted to the action of shooting.[10]

Defining Characters: Soldiers and Enemies

> Soldiers are our heroes. For men in touch with themselves, and thus
> content with the nature of their dark nature, the rank of supreme ass
> kicker in the world's most supremely ass kicking army is the highest
> achievement possible. It's where dreams come from. They are the ones
> who transcend mere thuggery. They are the ones that take simple
> violent competition to a new, contained, professional, and admirable
> level. They protect us and go where no one else will. They stand up
> against opposition that no one else would dare to go toe-to-toe with;
> then, with the might of their arm and the power of their M16, they
> bend the foe to do their bidding. Is it any wonder why it's so fun to
> play the part of the hero, of the soldier? While still embracing latent
> human tendencies—violent urges woven into every line of our genetic
> code—we get to become that which we never thought we had the
> metal to become. Be the hero. Be the conqueror. Put everyone in a
> coffin. Play *Black Hawk Down*.[11]

Such is the manner in which players are addressed when considering *Delta Force:*

Black Hawk Down. Despite its rhetorical flourishes, it is hard to describe this view as

some form of exaggeration since it is one that is commonly encountered not only with

regard to video games but throughout popular culture. As the war correspondent

Chris Hedges remarks:

> I learned early on that war forms its own culture. The rush of battle is a
> potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one that I ingested

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[10] By mentioning the aid convoy, I assume that Beer is making reference to a mission titled 'Marka Breakdown' where an aid convoy forms a prominent part of the mission (convoys do, however, play a role in a variety of missions). In this mission, the player is responsible for ensuring that an aid convoy reaches its destination. To do so, the player initially mounts a M2 .50 caliber machine gun atop a Humvee and then later must hitch a ride with a Black Hawk helicopter gunship where a M134 7.62mm electric minigun is available. Basically, the player must shoot everything that approaches the convoy. If successful, the mission abruptly ends once the convoy reaches the village and we do not so much as get to hand out one aid package.

[11] Ivan Sulic, "Black Hawk Down Review," *IGN.com* (18 March 2003), available at: [http://pc.ign.com/articles/389/389876p1.html].

for many years. It is peddled by mythmakers—historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state—all of whom endow it with qualities it often does posses: excitement, exoticism, power....[12]

In that sense, the 'soldier'—as an abstract concept or myth—is the site of a variety of projected meanings, especially ones where the capacity for human violence is legitimized as noble, heroic, and genetically defined.[13]   Within the military-themed shooter genre, such meanings are most commonly encountered in the ways that soldiers (that is, our soldiers or 'us') and enemies are portrayed. While some games—most notably some of those set during the Vietnam conflict—problematize such strict and simple categorization—the vast majority of games rely on a simple duality where our side is coded as good and the enemy as evil. While not surprising, it is interesting to note that in many games the enemy is often assumed and there is little need to provide them with forms of characterization or other defining elements. In *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, some historical information about the conflict is provided in the game (more detailed information is provided in the game's manual, including a short history of Somalia) but the enemies themselves are nameless and remarkably similar to one another despite some differences in dress. Similarly, in both *Conflict: Desert Storm* and *Conflict: Desert Storm II - Back to Baghdad*, the player faces an enemy that lacks an overall identity other than they come from some aspect of the Iraqi military.

As these games are set during actual conflicts that have received a great deal of media coverage, it is likely that the developers did not see any need to define the enemy more specifically. In addition, facing a nameless and relatively homogenous

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[12] Chris Hedges, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 3.

[13] On this point, see the work of Joanna Bourke, especially the chapters on 'The Warrior Myth' and 'Anatomy of a Hero': Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 2000).

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enemy is a traditional feature of many first- and third-person shooters; there might be some variation in terms of types or class of enemy but the presence of specific characters is rarely encountered. When specific characters are present, they are usually in the form of a single, fictional general (or other highly important individual) who must be eliminated in the game's finale. Developers, too, are aware that they tread some difficult terrain in making games set during actual—and recent—conflicts. For example, Wes Eckhart, the producer of *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* says: "Compared to other shooters, we're not gory. There aren't any limbs flying off or anything. That's cool looking but it could be seen, in a military context, as exploitive.... We're simulating a series of real-life events but we're not using people's names. Nobody wants that."[14] In the context of the interview it is clear that Eckhart is thinking of this more in terms of depicting or identifying actual U.S. soldiers but his thinking does extend to the enemy or opposing forces as well. Later in the interview, Eckhart states that, personally, he would never release a game featuring Osama Bin Laden as an enemy character.

The sensitive nature of the Somali episode also affected the way that the designers of *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* approached the depiction of U.S. soldiers. Rather than depicting actual soldiers or giving in-game soldiers a fictional identity, the game focuses on the various American units involved in Somalia at the time. Of the many units involved, four are profiled in the game: the Special Forces Operational Detachment ('Delta Force'), the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 10th Light Infantry Mountain Division, and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.[15] In this respect, *Delta*

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[14] Wes Eckhart, quoted in: Steve Butts, "Black Hawk Down Interview," *IGN.com* (24 July 2002), available at: [pc.ign.com/articles/365/365791p1.html].
[15] In the game's manual, the historical background of each of the units is provided and while specific soldiers are identified in the manual (for example, the letters of an Army Ranger are reproduced), this

Force: Black Hawk Down is somewhat of an anomaly. As I mentioned previously, it is becoming increasingly common for military-themed shooters to adopt a form of characterization that is similar to that commonly seen in the combat genre of film. In both of the *Conflict: Desert Storm* games, the player can control four specific characters, each of whom have different personalities, backgrounds and, most prominently, combat specialties. In this series, however, the degree of characterization is minimal as each soldier's personality relates more to the weapons that each has access to.[16]

Two games that are significantly different in this regard are those that were developed for the U.S. military. Both *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *Close Combat: First to Fight* make the characters of U.S. soldiers a much more prominent aspect of the game. In *Full Spectrum Warrior*, eight U.S. soldiers (as well but to a lesser extent, the platoon leader) are treated more fully. PFC David Daniel Shimenski is described in the game's opening sequence as a "gun nut" and a "special forces wanna-be" and for whom "Iraq was the most fun he ever had... ever."[17] In the manual, he is described as the youngest of two brothers who, as "a typical boy," was "obsessed with war movies, action figures, and realistic computer war games" and, like his father, is "a member of the NRA [National Rifle Association] and an avid game hunter." Cpl. Michael Francis Picoli, 22, or "Nova—short for 'Cassanova'—was rarely without one or two girlfriends (simultaneously) in school, a habit that he has carried into adulthood."[18] The brief

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provides contextual material for the player and does not imply that the individuals are represented in the game.

[16] In each game, the player has the choice to play as either American or British special forces but, despite this, the characters remain the same. Because of this the names for each soldier are vague in terms of ethnic origin—John Bradley, Paul Foley, Mick Connors, David Jones—and could be easily taken as British or American.

[17] Opening cinematic, *Full Spectrum Warrior* (THQ/Pandemic Studios, 2004).

[18] *Full Spectrum Warrior- Instruction Manual* (THQ/Pandemic Studios, 2004), 6.

biographies are quite varied in terms of ethnic and socio-economic background, as

well as describing the difficult family situations of some of the characters. As game

director William Henry Stahl of Pandemic Studios mentions, the development team

wanted the player to care about the characters in the game and consideration was

given to this in the game's design, especially the opening movie sequence.[19]

Close Combat: First to Fight takes the characterizations much further. The

game itself was developed with assistance of forty active-duty Marines that, according

to the various promotional materials used for the game, were "fresh from the

frontlines of combat in the Middle East." Before each mission, the player is assigned

three soldiers to fill out the player's four-man fire team. Rather than using fictional

characters, the developers used actual, active-duty Marines for fifteen of the twenty

possible characters available for each mission, most of whom had recently returned

from their second combat tour in Iraq.[20] **[Figure 8.1, below]** The soldiers involved

with the development of the game acted as SMEs and their involvement is, as with

other games, meant to add authenticity. As Marcus Beer says of the use of active-duty

soldiers for *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*: "Not only does it give us the expertise on

weapons handling and basic procedures that we haven't picked up on, it also gives us

additional credibility."[21] For *Close Combat: First to Fight*, the use of actual soldiers for

in-game characters also provides an additional point of identification for the player,

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[19] It is also interesting in that the characterizations probably provide a fairly accurate 'portrait,' if not of the composition of the Army at present, of the way the Army conceives of its recruiting demographics. For the interview with William Henry Stahl, see: Billy Berghammer and Adam Biessener, "Full Spectrum Warrior Interview: Pandemic Studios' William Henry Stahl," *Game Informer Online* (3 May 2004), available at: [www.gameinformer.com/News/Story/200405/N04.0503.1843.05215.htm].

[20] See: Douglass C. Perry, "First to Fight Bios: Who's the Toughest Fighting Squad on the Planet?" *IGN.com* (31 August 2004), available at: [xbox.ign.com/articles/543/543576p1.html]; and "Real Marines Join Your Fire Team in First To Fight, *Close Combat: First to Fight* – official website (n.d.), available at: [www.firsttofight.com/flash/bios/index.html].

[21] Steve Butts, "Black Hawk Down: We Talk with Two Rangers Advising the Team," *IGN.com* (25 July 2002). Available at: [http://pc.ign.com/articles/365/365924p1.html].

since the other fire team members under his or her control are not just characters but actual U.S. soldiers.

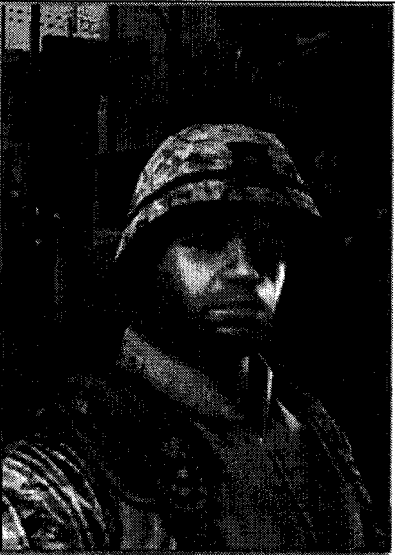|	
MICHAEL VAZ	**NAME:** Michael Vaz **RANK:** Sergeant **UNIT:** 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. India Company. **AGE:** 27 **HOME TOWN:** Berrien Springs, MI **NICKNAME:** Big Mike **WHY HE BECAME A MARINE:** "I wanted to challenge myself mentally and physically, and I wanted to see the world." **WHY HE'S PROUD TO BE A MARINE:** "1. The honor of being a Marine. 2. Being able to carry on the tradition that was set by my predecessors. 3. Knowing that I have made a difference in the world." **WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A MARINE:** "Knowing that once you are on the battlefield, nothing else matters except for covering the man on the left and right of you." **HOBBIES:** Snowboarding, golfing, working out. **FAVORITE QUOTE:** *"Most people go through life wondering if they've made a difference. Marines don't have that problem." (Ronald Reagan)*
EDDIE GARCIA II	**NAME:** Eddie Garcia II **RANK:** Corporal **UNIT:** 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. Bloody "G"eorge Company. **AGE:** 27 **HOME TOWN:** Bronx, NY **NICKNAME:** Prime **WHY HE BECAME A MARINE:** "My family has served in the Marine Corps during every war since the Korean War. I grew up reading about the honor of knights, noblemen, and samurai, and I wanted to be part of the modern-day equivalent." **WHY HE'S PROUD TO BE A MARINE:** "1. The Marine Corps discipline. 2. The importance of being part of the history and tradition of the Marine Corps. 3. Marines are at the tip of the spear." **WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A MARINE:** "Our friendships are born through hardship and shared experience. We are men united in our love for the Marine Corps and all its traditions." **HOBBIES:** Reading, video games, working on my home, movies. **FAVORITE QUOTE:** *"Semel Insanivimus Omnis -- We have all been mad once."*

Figure 8.1: Soldier Bios, source: *Close Combat: First to Fight* Official Website.

More so than other games, *Close Combat: First to Fight* also pays particular

attention to fleshing out the identity of OPFOR or opposing forces (as they are

commonly referred to by the military). While *Full Spectrum Warrior* is set in a fictitious

Middle Eastern country, *Close Combat: First to Fight* is set in Beirut in 2006 and

identifies a variety of enemy groups, including the Lebanese militia, militant radicals

from the 'religious zealot' Tarik Quadan's Atash movement, Syrian troops, as well as

Iranian Special Forces. As well, the game's manual identifies 'High Value Targets'

associated with these various groups that the player will encounter throughout the

game. These fictional characters are provided with brief biographical data and are

ranked through the playing card motif seen in the last Gulf conflict ('Ace of Spades,'

'Ace of Hearts,' etc.).

While the various enemy factions vying for control of Beirut are completely

fictional, the level of detail and close proximity to current events makes the scenario all

the more credible. This is especially true since the U.S. soldiers and the Marine unit

portrayed in the game are based on their real-world counterparts.[22] The creators of

the game are careful to not make specific reference to Islam (enemy characters are

simply referred to as religious zealots or radicals)[23] but the game includes characters

from all major countries in the region. Even though the game is set in Lebanon and

the other various factions or militaries involved come from Syria and Iran, some of the

major enemy characters originally come from or have significant ties with other

countries, including Yemen and Saudi Arabia and, not surprisingly, are characterized in

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[22] The game's scenario was written by Lt. Colonel Raymond Liddy, USMC (Reserve) and developers at Destineer. See: "Close Combat: First to Fight Story," *Close Combat: First to Fight* – Official Website (n.d.), available at: [http://www.firsttofight.com/html/pr2.html].

[23] One of the major enemy characters leads a radical religious movement called Atash. Online searches reveal that 'Atash' means 'fire' in Farsi (modern Persian spoken in places like Afghanistan and Iran) but has religious connotations going back to the ancient history of the region, including Zoroastrianism.

the usual ways. General Badr, the 'Ace of Spades,' is driven by an overwhelming

hatred of Western powers. Akhbar al'Saud, the 'Ace of Hearts,' has ties with the

Russians, is mainly motivated by "greed and a thirst for power" but is cowardly.

Khalid Samar, the 'Ace of Diamonds,' is sadistic and takes "delight in inflicting pain

and fear in those who are weaker than him." The 'Ace of Clubs,' Major Abdullah bin

Katan, is Saudi by birth but now leads the Iranian Special Forces who are aiding the

radicals. He is described as a professional soldier but unimaginative.[24]   In contrast,

the Marines are also professional but are not guided by personal motivations. Instead,

their motivation is "forged by the fires of intense discipline to each other, the values of

honor, courage, and commitment, and their country,"[25] and their presence in Beirut is

outlined as the initial component of a U.S. and NATO-led intervention called

'Operation Preserve Peace.'

Story, Questions of Historical Fact and Discourse

Close Combat: First to Fight presents an interesting development with regard to its

story and its blending of actuality with fictional elements. While many games in the

military-themed shooter genre make claims to realism or authenticity, few games will

actually claim historical veracity in any specific sense. The World War II game, *Brothers*

in Arms: Road to Hill 30 was billed with the tagline, 'Based on a True Story,' and the

developers of the game spent considerable time and effort to portray the efforts of

U.S. paratroopers in the activities immediately proceeding the Allied invasion in

Normandy. While the game shares many similarities with the television series *Band of*

Brothers, the developers had used aerial reconnaissance images and photos from the

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[24] See: *Close Combat: First to Fight – Instruction Manual, Xbox* (2K Games/Destineer, 2005), 31.
[25] *Close Combat: First to Fight – Instruction Manual, Xbox* (2K Games/Destineer, 2005), 7.

U.S. Army Signal Corps taken during the period as well as eye-witness accounts to model the specific battlefields in the game. Design team members conducted archival research as well as traveling with the game's military advisor and historian, Col. John Antal (ret.), to Normandy.[26]

Kuma\War, produced by Kuma\Reality Games, takes a similar approach in that the game's online missions, which are produced approximately every two weeks, have their basis in newspaper and television reports, government and military press releases, and other sources.[27] Currently, there are over fifty online missions available to subscribers which are 'ripped from the headlines' of the U.S. led War on Terror. Each mission provides actual newspaper articles, satellite photographs as well as video and audio clips that provide the player with background information. Each mission is also accompanied by a fictionalized news report (created by the producers) but the game strives for authenticity and realism as well as historical or factual accuracy; all of which is combined as the main marketing device used to sell the game.[28]

Realism, authenticity, and historical accuracy can be used to describe separate elements of any portrayal of a specific conflict and the question of how games are read—in terms of historical veracity—is a complex question. In this sense, military-themed shooters enter into the debate over historical accuracy commonly encountered with regard to filmic portrayals of history. The argument that entertainment products

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[26] Information concerning the game's design is available at the official website [www.brothersinarmsgame.com] but also see: Tom McNamara, "On Location with Brothers in Arms," *IGN.com* (16 September 2004), available at: [http://xbox.ign.com/articles/548/548609p1.html]. An interview with producer Marc Tardif also provides some interesting information, see: Marc Tardif (interview), "Developer's Corner: Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30," *Game Chronicles Magazine* (n.d.), available at: [www.gamechronicles.com/qa/bia/body.htm].

[27] The sources that the developers use to design missions are described in the 'Intel' section of the game's official website: [www.kumawar.com/intel.php].

[28] In July 2004, the developers announced the "Stories from the Front" competition which asked U.S. soldiers to submit real stories concerning their combat experiences, the best of which would be incorporated in future mission releases. See: [www.kumawar.com/Promotions/maximsummary.php].

should be understood metaphorically when representing historical subject matter is

surely correct. Every detail of a film or a game cannot, or should not, be understood

as a literal, historical fact since the nature of dramatic form involves the need to

combine, create composites, as well as add both drama and narrative structure. The

problem, however, is that metaphor is extremely open-ended and when confronting

entertainment forms that are, in some way or another, 'based on a true story,' it can

be difficult for any viewer (or player) to separate what might be fact from elements

that are embellished or completely fabricated.

Commenting on the controversial film *U-571* (2000)[29] and director Jonathan

Mostow's argument that, despite the film's numerous departures from the historical

record, the film would encourage viewers to seek out actual historical accounts of the

war, Lawrence Suid argues:

> Fictional films can certainly educate people about historical events, and
> they can inspire people of all ages to learn more about what they have
> seen on the motion picture screen. However, stressing that audiences
> should understand that *U-571* remains just an action-adventure movie
> carries Mostow only so far. For most people, what they see on the
> screen becomes their reality. They have no other frame of reference.
> They cannot separate fact from fiction, and contrary to Mostow's hope,
> not many people run to the library to transplant what they have seen on
> the screen into the framework of actual events.[30]

Similarly, but in relation to combat films, the editors of *Cineaste* argue that "since so

many Americans rely on Hollywood films and television for their knowledge of history,

and even current events, films such as *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers* should

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[29] The film created controversy even before it was released in theatres, especially in Britain, for its substitution of American for British forces in the capture of the Enigma machine (Germany's encryption tool used for military and state communication). For its release, the film included a title or caption before the end credits, outlining that it was the British Royal Navy that captured the Enigma machine. Suid, in his discussion of the film, pays more attention to the many other ways that the film departs from the historical record.

[30] Lawrence Suid, *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film,* revised edition, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 640.

not be regarded as merely innocuous genre entertainments."[31] The mediating effects

of entertainment products upon historical understanding are, of course, never

guaranteed as there will be a considerable range in audience reaction as well as a

range of historical knowledge that audience members bring to the film. However, in a

study examining the reaction of high school students to such entertainment forms,

Peter Seixas argues that not only did students approach films as relatively accurate

historical representations but sometimes judged their validity through the presence of

contemporary filmmaking conventions and high production values.[32]

Such questions concerning the mediating effects of entertainment forms

present problems for understanding the genre of the military-themed shooter since

many of these games combine various forms of (or claims to) realism and authenticity

but also provide a mixture of historical detail and fictional elements without clearly

delineating either. *Conflict: Desert Storm II – Back to Baghdad* is interesting in this

regard since one of the longest of the ten missions in the game (Mission 7) involves a

scenario where the player enters an Iraqi chemical weapons facility where Sarin nerve

gas is about to be loaded into SCUD missiles. Despite the fact that *Conflict: Desert*

Storm II is a sequel to the first game and is set during the first Gulf War, the game was

released in October of 2003 (seven months after the U.S.- and British-led invasion of

Iraq) and, for the North American release, the subtitle 'Back to Baghdad' was added.[33]

While it would be too much to expect that players would use Mission 7 as evidence for

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[31] Cynthia Lucia and Richard Porton, "Editorial," *Cineaste* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2002), 1.

[32] Sexias is concerned with the mediating effects of film on the understanding of the history of white and Native American relations and, therefore, he used Hollywood westerns (such as *The Searchers* (1956) and *Dances With Wolves* (1990)) in his study. See: Peter Seixas, "Confronting the Moral Frames of Popular Film: Young People Respond to Historical Revisionism," *American Journal of Education* 102, no. 3 (May 1994): 261-285.

[33] The game was developed by the U.K.-based Pivotal games. See: GamesIndustry.biz <contact@gamesindustry.biz>. "Weekly Update – 21/04/2004" (Electronic Newsletter), April 21, 2004. *GameIndustry.biz* is a British industry publication.

the existence of chemical weapons, at the very least we might think of it as existing

alongside other, similar claims from more official sources and, possibly, a

reinforcement of such claims. In that sense, it is prudent to question the effect of the

timing for the release of the game, especially when one of the most consistent

conceptual frames for such games is that they provide the player with the opportunity

to 'experience' the events depicted.[34]

An interesting development with some military-themed shooters—especially

those connected directly to the military—are the scenarios presented in games that are

set in the near future. The PlayStation 2 version of *Ghost Recon 2* is set in North Korea

in 2007 while the Xbox version is also set in North Korea but in 2011. The fictional

scenarios follow the 'ghosts,' a U.S. special forces unit, as they fight alongside forces

from allied countries (including Britain and Germany), to end an impending nuclear

threat. Not unexpected, perhaps, but the games provoked some anger in North Korea

with some newspapers calling it propaganda and evidence of U.S. warmongering.[35]

While *Ghost Recon 2* received significant input from the U.S. military, it was not

directly commissioned or developed by the U.S. armed forces. Those games that are,

however, present similar scenarios.

The instruction manual (as well as the in-game tutorials) for *Full Spectrum*

Warrior provides the back-story for the game which is set in a fictitious country called

'Zekistan':

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[34] In the game's manual, the first game is described as "only half the story" and then goes on to pose questions to the player: "What about the burning oil fields of Kuwait? What about Saddam's Chemical Weapons program?" See: *Conflict: Desert Storm – Back to Baghdad* (Instruction Manual), Gotham Games/ Pivotal Games / SCi Entertainment Group, 2003: 7.

[35] Jeremy Kirk, "N. Korea Angered by New Tom Clancy Game," *Stars and Stripes* (Pacific edition), 22 June 2004, available at: [www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=22021&archive=true]. Both of the *Ghost Recon 2* games were developed by the U.S.-based company, Red Storm Entertainment, and are published by the French company Ubisoft.

A devastating wave of terrorist attacks spreads across Europe and Southeast Asia, targeting specifically U.S. and U.K. interests, including embassies, regional corporate headquarters, and even western retail and restaurant chains. After months of intense hunting, U.S. intelligence tracks the source of the attacks to the tiny eastern nation of Zekistan.

After the U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, thousands of ex-Taliban and Iraqi loyalists crossed the borders of Zekistan seeking asylum by invitation of the nation's dictator, Al Afad. It wasn't long before the same terrorist training facilities and death-camps that the U.S. fought to remove in Afghanistan were operating again under full sponsorship by Al Afad's government. After repeated warnings and failed diplomatic resolutions in the UN, NATO votes to invade Zekistan to depose Al Afad, eliminate the terrorist element, and stop the ethnic cleansing of the Zeki people.[36]

It is tempting to wonder what sort of effect such a scenario would present to players even though it is purely fictitious. However, its status as pure fiction is rendered problematic through the similarity the scenario shares with the current geo-political situation and the history of the region; especially for the ways its combines the historical situation of Iraq and Afghanistan into the fictional history of Zekistan. In the scenario, Zekistan is described as being "nestled between modern day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China" and that its "history has always been punctuated by bloodshed and violence," including a fourteen-year resistance against Soviet invasion.[37] The game presents a very detailed history and, curiously, under the heading "Geopolitical Intelligence Report: Zekistan," the game's manual mentions: "Excerpt from *Under the Gun—A Brief History of the War on Terror*, by Liam A. Gomez, Harper Jones Press, London 2004."[38]

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[36] *Full Spectrum Warrior: Instruction Manual*, THQ Inc./Pandemic Studios, 2004: 7-8.

[37] *Full Spectrum Warrior: Instruction Manual*, THQ Inc./Pandemic Studios, 2004: 9.

[38] *Full Spectrum Warrior: Instruction Manual*, THQ Inc./Pandemic Studios, 2004: 9. A search of the Library of Congress catalogue, including variations on the author's name and the title, resulted in no matches; note, however, the similarity of 'Harper Jones Press' to the well-known and *real* publisher, HarperCollins.

The 'historical' premise that *Full Spectrum Warrior* constructs cannot be

approached from the conventional stance of history since it is purely fictional but in

one of the few reviews that considered the politics of the game, the reviewer mentions

that it "reads like an American warmonger's wet dream":

> The scenario is made all the more ridiculous because the fictional
> situation is so dire that no one could possibly object to an invasion. Not
> only are there terrorist training camps and attacks against American
> 'interests' there's even cultural genocide going on; still, the Americans
> wait until United Nations sanctions have run their course and the UN
> asks them to intervene, and here's the kicker: the country has absolutely
> no oil![39]

Here, it is interesting to note that the game does not try to reproduce history in any

specific sense but reproduces the conditions and arguments commonly encountered in

making the case for war—that is, in the real world—possible. As I mentioned

previously, *Close Combat: First to Fight* takes place in Beirut amidst a terrorist

insurgency and military coup set in 2006. And in many respects, the scenario is

strikingly similar to that seen in *Full Spectrum Warrior*: a dire political and military

situation, the failure of the United Nations, a coalition of allied countries—through the

military coalition of NATO—agrees to intervene purely for humanitarian purposes or to

'preserve peace,' etc. One of the most interesting aspects of these games is that both

frame the United Nations as an ineffective organization that is prone to failure. A

more extensive document outlining the story and 'history' of the *Close Combat: First

to Fight* is available from the game's official website and was circulated to industry

websites and publications.[40] The story again weaves elements from what can be

assumed to be the historical record with the fictionalized story of the game. After

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[39] Daniel Weissenberger, "*Full Spectrum Warrior* (Review)," *GameCritics* (1 September 2004), available
at: [http://www.gamecritics.com/review/fullspect/main.php].
[40] The *Digital Entertainment News* website, for example, reproduced the document in its entirety, see:
Daniel Pelfrey, "The Close Story," *Digital Entertainment News* (23 August 2004), available at:
[http://www.dignews.com/feature.php?story_id=5009].

describing the situation that will bring the Marines to Beirut, the story ends by saying: "Trained in asymmetric warfare and free of U.N. mandated ROEs [Rules of Engagement] that guaranteed earlier failure, these leathernecks [Marines] are ready for battle."[41]

Whatever we make of these discursive framings of modern war, it seems that these forms of representation are being taken seriously despite arguments that these are purely fictional forms of entertainment. *SOCOM III: U.S. Navy SEALS* was not scheduled to be released until August 2005 but its depiction of the war on terrorism in real countries set off official government protests by Bangladesh, one of the countries to be depicted in the game. The Bangladeshi government, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made formal complaints to the U.S. embassy and to Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA), the game's publisher, over their worries that the country was being depicted as a terrorist state.[42] SCEA denied that Bangladesh was being portrayed in such a manner but agreed to take all references to the country out to the game for its upcoming release.[43] It is somewhat fitting that in an era where audiences have been given increasing access to past or current conflicts, that this would extend to ones that have not been fought and, in that sense, it is understandable that this might be worrying to some governments. Whether or not the Bangladeshi government was justified in its worry is an open question but it is interesting to note that ever since *Marine Doom*, many of these games that are produced for or are used by the military are utilized as training simulations for soldiers.

[41] The story is attributed to Lt. Colonel Raymond Liddy, USMC (Reserve) and Destineer (the developer of the game). See: "Close Combat: First to Fight Story," *Close Combat: First to Fight* Official Website (n.d.), available at: [http://www.firsttofight.com/html/pr2.html].

[42] Nashir Uddin, "Sony Computer Game Portrays Bangladesh as Terrorist State, *News From Bangladesh* (Online), 19 April 2005, [http://www.Bangladesh-web.com], accessed: May 2005.

[43] "Sony Takes Scalpel to SOCOM 3," *GameSpot.Com,* 22 April 2005, [http://www.gamespot.com/ps2/action/socom3/news_6122773.html], accessed May 2005.

As such, an important function of these games is to not only simulate battle situations and tactics but also the terrain that the military is likely to encounter.

The Ethics of Simulation

In the essay, "Representation, Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation," Simon Penny argues that the embodied, enacted dimensions of video games have not been adequately considered by researchers interested in interactive media. For Penny, conventional critiques of representation are inadequate when approaching interactive entertainment since the player is allowed to directly act in a virtual world or space that, in some cases, "is analogous to, and is designed to be analogous to, human action in the world of physical objects."[44]

Penny considers violent interactive entertainment generally but also the use of interactive entertainment by the military and poses the question as to the meaning and effect of transposing military training simulations into commercial entertainment products. As Penny argues, and as I have indicated in earlier chapters, the military believes the use of interactive simulations as an effective means of providing additional training for soldiers but the question concerning whether such skills training or 'bodily enactment' have recognizable effects in terms of commercially available military shooters is much more difficult to answer, especially since the social context of military training is so different from the context in which commercial games are played. In a response to Penny, N. Katherine Hayles remarks:

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[44] Simon Penny, "Representation: Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation," *Electronic Book Review* (26 June 2004), para. 2. Available at:
[www.electronicbookreview.com/v3/servlet/ebr?command=view_essay&essay_id=penny]. The essay is also published in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan, eds. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004): 73-84.

During the decades when post-structuralism was teaching us valuable lessons about the power of discourse, the body was largely understood as an effect of discursive constructions. With the advent of sophisticated electronic literature and art, it is time to recover a sense of the body as a site for embodied cognition, cognition constructed not through words but through physical interactions with procedural works. ...Penny makes an important beginning when he points out that 'critiques of representation derived from painting, photography, film and video are inadequate for discussing the power of interactive experience.[45]

Both Hayles and Penny make an important point in arguing that critiques should take into account the interactive nature of media such as video games, but as I have tried to show in this chapter, ignoring their textual and representational elements—especially for military-themed shooters—limit the ways we can approach and understand the workings of these games. In this sense, it is not a bodily discourse—although that might be important as well—but the ways these games discursively frame war in a general sense and military conflicts specifically. For Jan Van Looy, the notion of embodied action should not be seen as contributing to a causal relation between simulated and real-world violence, but instead as a form of social or cultural expression. As Van Looy argues:

> ...supporting the claim that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold murdered 13 and wounded 23 in the Columbine High School in Littleton before killing themselves because they played too much *Doom*, may well have an effect that is opposed to one's intentions.... In essence, the wrong question is posed. When we see that [Harris and Klebold] played *Doom*, we should not ask ourselves why the game made them kill, because then we start from the presupposition that it did. Rather, we should ask ourselves which social, cultural, and psychological factors led them to create a customized version of the game with two shooters, extra weapons, unlimited ammunition and victims who could not fight back. Why were they unable to curb their desires and fantasies? Why could they not distinguish between the unreal and the real?[46]

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[45] N. Katherine Hayles, "N. Katherine Hayles Responds," *Electronic Book Review* (1 August 2004). Available at: [www.electronicbookreview.com/v3/servlet/ebr?essay_id=haylesr1&command=view_essay].
[46] Jan Van Looy, "Jan Van Looy Responds to Penny," *Electronic Book Review*, available at: [www.electronicbookreview.com/v3/servlet/ebr?essay_id=vanlooyr1&command=view_essay].

The fact that Eric Harris constructed a mod for *Doom II* (rather than the original) has

received a great deal of attention with regard to the media violence debate and,

specifically, as it relates to video games. After the Columbine incident, reports quickly

surfaced in the media that the killers were avid players of shooters like *Doom* and

Duke Nukem, a fact that would later resurface in U.S. Senate committee hearings

dealing specifically with the issue of media violence.[47] And the fact that Harris, like the

U.S. Marines, modified *Doom II* also received a great deal of attention.[48] However, Van

Looy's reversal of the question—asking 'why were they attracted to *Doom*?'—is

important to consider. Take, for instance, the comments of an individual explaining

why playing *America's Army* during the most recent Persian Gulf conflict was so

satisfying:

> [The war] has only affected me in the way that I want to play more. [I]
> guess it's an adrenaline thing... watching the war and then playing AA.
> Yeah. I feel better every time I kill the OPFOR in [the desert] Insurgent
> Camp [level] now... it also made me wish I was shooting at the French
> [since they had opposed the war].... [With the current war,] in a sadistic

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[47] Both Steven Poole and Steven L. Kent provide discussion on this episode. See: Steven Poole, *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Video Games* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000): 218-222; and Steven L. Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games* (Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing, 2001):544-555. Also, Eugene Provenzo has argued for the causal relationship between video game and media violence and aggressive behaviours and has used the *Doom* / Columbine episode as an example. See: Eugene Provenzo, "Children and Hyperreality: The Loss of the Real in Contemporary Childhood and Adolescence," Cultural Policy conference proceedings (2001), available at: [culturalpolicy.uchicago.edu/conf2001/papers/provenzo.html]. Also, see Provenzo's Senate testimony: Eugene Provenzo, "Testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee Hearing on 'The Impact of Interactive Violence on Children,'" (21 March 2000), available at: [http://brownback.senate.gov/FinishedDocs/MediaViloence/000321pro.pdf].

[48] For example, see: Eugene Provenzo, "Testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee Hearing on 'The Impact of Interactive Violence on Children,'" (21 March 2000), available at: [http://brownback.senate.gov/FinishedDocs/MediaViloence/000321pro.pdf]. Early on, there was a great deal of misleading information circulating in the press concerning what the mod looked like and included. For instance, it was erroneously reported that Harris had modeled his school and included it in his mod. The mod became known as 'U.A.C. Labs' (Harris had labeled one of the levels by that name) and was, for a time, available from various websites. Ben Turner has provided a walkthrough of the mod, see: Ben Turner, "U.A.C. Labs walkthrough, " available at [http://www.worldlynx.net/bent/misc/uaclabs].

sort of way there is an irony about the desert scenarios. I'm sure that is unintentional with the current situation in Iraq.[49]

We could conceive of these remarks as indicating that violent interactive media may play a cathartic role in alleviating or channeling aggression. And in relation to military-themed games such as *America's Army*, Van Looy poses another question (as well as tentative explanations) similar to the previous one: "why do they [players] prefer violent, strongly competitive games to others?"

> This [violent, competitive] image is instilled by society, not through
> fiction, but through news, stories, experiences in different settings, and
> so forth.... The choice of games depends on the society we live in, not
> the other way around. It is probably no coincidence that violent
> computer games are less successful in Japan than in the U.S., the last
> country with superpower ambitions and the largest military in the
> world.[50]

I would disagree with Van Looy's assertion that 'fiction' is both separate and does not contribute to the violent and competitive societal image mentioned since, as representations, video games (or other media) are, as Abhinava Kumar points out, "products as well as producers of" larger cultural meanings.[51] However, Van Looy is correct in arguing that these games cannot be isolated and critically evaluated on their own but must be considered as a part of the larger cultural context within which they exist. Van Looy's assertion that violent and military-themed entertainment is more popular in the U.S. than elsewhere is a difficult one to trace since there are no cross-cultural studies that I am aware of within video game studies pertaining to this question. More anecdotally, Stephen Kent argues that "first-person shooters (FPS) are big in the West, but have never really caught on in Japan... [a]nd few violent games

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[49] Quoted in Zhan Li, "The Potential of America's Army the Video Game as Civilian-Military Public Sphere," M.A. Thesis, Comparative Media Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2003), 69. Ellipses and editorial additions in original.

[50] Van Looy, "Jan Van Looy Responds to Penny."

[51] Abhinava Kumar, "America's Army Game and the Production of War," York University, YCISS Working Paper No. 27 (March 2004), 2.

sell well there...."[52] Eva Kingsepp admits that, from a Scandinavian perspective,

military-themed games such as *Medal of Honor* are often considered as "very

American... which is not exactly meant as a compliment."[53] To be fair, it might be

correct to say that it is an Anglo-American or Western phenomenon since almost all

military-themed shooters are produced by developers located in countries like the U.S.,

the U.K., Canada and France. However, and this might be more germane to Van

Looy's point, there is no denying the considerable role that the U.S. military plays in

influencing—sometimes directly—cultural products like video games and film. And

this points to what is perhaps the defining element of military-themed shooters and,

specifically, those associated with the U.S. military: their tendency to offer a very

narrowly defined point of view. For, if we are to, as Penny argues, pose ethical

questions surrounding simulations we have to consider the representational and

discursive elements of these games along with considerations of gameplay and the

notion of embodied actions.

It is, perhaps, not so much a question of whether games should attempt to

simulate past or current military conflicts but more a question of how they do so. In an

essay considering the aesthetic dimension of video games, game designer and writer

Ernst Adams describes his experience with the Cold War simulation game, *Balance of

Power*:

> I actually had a rather odd emotional experience playing *Balance of
> Power*, because I once tried playing it from the Russian side. Of course
> we're used to playing games from the enemy side in wargames – you fly
> a World War II flight simulator and you can fly either the German or the

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[52] Stephen Kent, "Video Games That Get Lost in Translation: Why Most U.S. Titles Don't Fare Well in
Japan (and vice versa)," *MSNBC* (28 April 2004), available at: [http://msnbc.msn.com/id/4780423/].
[53] Eva Kingsepp, "Apocalypse the Spielberg Way: Representations of Death and Ethics in *Saving Private
Ryan*, *Band of Brothers* and the Videogame *Medal of Honor: Frontline*," in *Level Up* (Digital Games
Research Conference Proceedings) CD-ROM, eds. Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens. Utrecht: Utrecht
University, 2003: n.p.

Allied planes, but all it really means is that the performance
characteristics of the planes are different. But playing *Balance of Power*
from the Russian side, I got an immediate and visceral experience of
what the Soviets were actually up against. The way the game is
designed, the Americans have a lot of money but very few men under
arms, while the Russians have very little money but tons of men under
arms. What this means is that their mechanisms for influencing world
opinion are really quite limited and crude. It's easy for them to send in
troops, but they can't afford to buy friends around the world by
sending powdered milk to starving children and things like that. And
the other thing I noticed is that all America's friends are extremely rich
and powerful – Britain and France and Germany and so on – while all
Russia's friends were extremely poor. And the experience of playing this
game was quite strange. Here they were, surrounded by enemies and
treaty organizations designed to hem them in. It really turned my world-
view upside down, because I had never put myself in their shoes before,
and I felt quite weird for a couple of hours afterwards.[54]

What is interesting in Adams' account is that this particular game provided a player

with the potential to experience a contemporary but abstract political situation from

the perspective of the side traditionally cast as the enemy. For Adams, the experience

challenged his existing attitudes and allowed him, momentarily, to view the situation

from a different point of view. More common within the genre of the military-themed

shooter is, however, for the game to offer the player a single-sided experience and this

is especially pronounced in those games that involve the military. As Marcus Beer,

project manager's for *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, says:

One of the things in the single player game is that you don't shoot U.S.
soldiers and during multiplayer, you don't get to play as the Somalis.
You're always playing as the U.S. soldiers. There's no way that we would
let people take on the mission from the view of the Somalis. That's not
right for us.[55]

Of course, the involvement of the military made such design decisions a necessity and

it is seen in other products—especially the multiplayer options in *America's Army* and

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[54] Ernest W. Adams, "Will Computer Games Ever be a Legitimate Art Form?" paper, Game Developers'
Conference (2001). The paper is available from Adams' website: [http://www.designersnotebook.com/].
[55] Quoted in: Steve Butts, "Black Hawk Down: We Talk with Two Rangers Advising the Team," *IGN.com*
(25 July 2002). Available at: [http://pc.ign.com/articles/365/365924p1.html].

Close Combat: First to Fight—where players always play as American soldiers and

always see the opposing team as the enemy. When such a structural design element is

combined with other, textual elements such as story that precludes anything but a

military solution, the representation of the enemy as overwhelmingly evil (and their

killing as morally unambiguous) and 'our' soldiers as naturally on the side of 'good,'

the combination is what qualifies these products as military propaganda. In a way,

this also helps explain the presence of *UnderAsh* (2002), the game produced by a

Syrian company that portrays Palestinians fighting against the Israeli military, as well

as *Special Force* (2003), produced by Hezbollah's Central Internet Bureau.[56] Both

games situate themselves in distinct opposition to the dominance of Western-based

shooters in the global market. As the English version of the *Special Force* website

states:

> However, the problem behind these electronic games, especially those
> designed for computers, is that most of them are foreign make,
> especially American. Therefore, they bear enormous false
> understandings and habituate teenagers to violence, hatred and
> grudges. In addition, some enfolds humiliation to many of our Islamic
> and Arab countries, where battles are running in these Arab countries,
> the dead are Arab soldiers, whereas the hero who kills them is – the
> player himself – an American.[57]

The games do not so much challenge the Western-based shooters but merely adopt

the very same structure; only reversing it so that it still represents a narrow point of

view but one that was, in the Western games, relegated to the 'other side.'

Propaganda meets propaganda.

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[56] The English version of the *UnderAsh* website is available at: [http://www.underash.net/emessage.htm].
A demonstration version of the game is no longer available from the website as the company has recently
produced a sequel called *UnderSiege* (*UnderAsh 2*). The *UnderSeige* demo is available at:
[http://www.underash.net/english_demo/Undersiege_Demo_ver1.55.zip]. The English version of the
Special Force website is available at: [http://www.specialforce.net/english/indexeng.htm].
[57] The quote, which I have left unedited, comes from the section titled 'Main' at the English version of the
Special Force website: [http://www.specialforce.net/english/indexeng.htm]. The website for *UnderAsh*
makes a similar claim. See the section titled 'Our Message,' available at:
[http://www.underash.net/emessage.htm].

By arguing that video games should include 'social realism' in order to be truly considered as achieving realism, Alexander Galloway also stipulates that there should be a 'fidelity of context' or a 'congruence requirement' between the "social reality depicted in the game and the social reality known and lived by the gamer."[58] In his discussion, Galloway includes a variety of games in different genres, including *UnderAsh* and *Special Force*. In his discussion of 'congruence' he contrasts these games with *America's Army* and argues that: "one cannot claim there to be a fidelity of context between an American teenager shooting foreign enemies in *America's Army* and the everyday minutia of that teenager, the specificities of his or her social life in language, culture and tradition. These are realistic war games, yes, but they are not realist."[59] Applying his definition of social realism to the games produced by Hezbollah and Dar Al-Fikr, Galloway argues that "*Special Force* and *UnderAsh* are among the first truly realist games in existence" since they provide a "documentary-like attention to the everyday struggles of the downtrodden, leading to a direct criticism of current social policy" for those players who play the games in their respective contexts. However, and Galloway readily admits this in his essay, it is considerably difficult to make such distinctions. In fact, Galloway argues that *America's Army* might be considered to achieve a "sort of sinister realism" since the game "can't help but foreground its own social ideology. It is not a subjugated ideology, but it is indeed an expression of political realties as they exist today in global military power struggles.... Again, this is not true realism, but, like it or not, it is a real articulation of the political advantage felt by and desired by the majority of Americans."

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[58] Alexander R. Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming,"*GameStudies* 4, no.1 (November 2004), [www.gamestudies.org/0401/Galloway/].
[59] Galloway, "Social Realism in Gaming."

Galloway's overall project—ensuring that the larger and complex social realities receive some representation in media texts that largely gloss over them—is certainly worthwhile,[60] but tying the definition of realism specifically to the social context of the player poses significant problems. While I can understand Galloway's argument that a Palestinian youth playing *UnderAsh* might be closer to the social context than an American youth playing *America's Army*, it could be argued that the point of view that *UnderAsh* offers, even to Palestinians, is itself very narrowly defined and likely leaves out many other social realities operating in the Occupied Territories. By relying on context, it could be argued that *America's Army* or *Close Combat: First to Fight* would be truly realistic when used or played by the U.S. soldiers that it is modeled after. But even here—and as I will argue in the concluding chapter—these games only provide a highly abstract and idealized representation of the soldiers themselves and, significantly, bears little resemblance to their experience or situation.

To return to the original problem concerning the ethics of simulation, it might be better to argue for Galloway's idea of social realism but also to combine it with the type of game design that Ernst Adams experienced while playing *Balance of Power*, or the design of *Halo 2* (where the player, however briefly, gets to experience the conflict from the other side), or where violence is made meaningful (since it is at least problematized) in *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. If we momentarily return to the comments of the individual playing *America's Army* while the second Gulf conflict was unfolding,

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[60] Galloway's argument for social realism is supported in slightly different ways by other writers. See: Gonzalo Frasca, "Videogames of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance and other Trivial Issues." The essay is available at *Electronic Book Review* [http://www.electronicbookreview.com/v3/servlet/ebr?command=view_essay&essay_id=frasca] and is reproduced in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, Pat Harrington and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004). Also see: Rafael Fajardo, "Pixels, Politics and Play: Digital Video Games as Social Commentary," *Intelligent Agent* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2003), available at: [http://www.intelligentagent.com/archive/Vol3_No2_gaming_fajardo.html]; and Jonas Heide Smith, "Does Gameplay Have Politics?" *Game Research* (13 April 2004), available at: [http://www.game-research.com/art_gameplay_politics.asp].

it could be argued that the game acts in a cathartic way in that it alleviates the aggressive attitudes the player felt at that particular time. However, it is also conceivable that, rather than alleviating aggression, playing the game actually channels or directs it in a certain way and onto specific, identifiable groups represented within the game's virtual setting. While these games are undoubtedly fun, it should be pointed out that games can be extremely challenging and frustrating. It is not uncommon for the player to exhibit this frustration by swearing at the game or throwing down the controller after, for example, being 'killed' by an enemy when just moments away from completing an in-game objective. Of course, too much cannot be attributed to such a scenario but it is interesting to note that such interaction with the 'enemy' (be they Iraqi or Lebanese) in these games might represent the only contact the player might have with these groups. And in this sense, the fact that military-themed shooters mostly restrict in-game activity to shooting and since the actions of these virtual enemies are so carefully framed and scripted to emphasize *their* wickedness and immorality (while our actions are framed as noble and even moral), it is prudent to ask how these games might influence or reinforce certain perceptions and attitudes.

In fact, these games often depict tendencies similar to the atrocity propaganda of earlier periods; something that should receive, I would argue, greater attention. For, as Joanna Bourke argues, one of the interesting developments of twentieth century warfare is that civilians or soldiers who have not seen or are not close to combat display more aggressive tendencies and increased capacity to hate the enemy than those who are in closer proximity. For her part, Bourke argues that this tendency results from the simple fact that, unlike soldiers who do see the enemy or witness the

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effects of combat first-hand, civilians do not get to 'see behind' the propaganda stories they are subjected to.[61]

If games or simulations are valued for their ability to incorporate learning, understanding, empathy or semblances of moral choice—which is certainly possible within the capacities of the medium—it is largely absent within the genre of the military-themed shooter. And since these games attempt to model or simulate an activity that has such dire and horrific consequences—over 100 million soldiers and civilians are estimated to have been killed in twentieth-century warfare—such an absence is indeed unfortunate.[62]

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[61] Bourke's findings are mostly limited to opinion in English-speaking countries during the major international conflicts of the twentieth century and are based on a variety of sources, including state and military research surveys. Using an example from the Second World War, Bourke states: "…civilians who had most experience of war (such as people subjected to aerial bombings) were *less* liable to demand reprisals. Indeed, one major survey found that the demand for reprisals for the bombing of British cities came most strongly from rural areas… where bombs had not been dropped, leading the British Institute of Public Opinion to conclude in April 1941 that favourable attitudes to reprisal bombing were in reverse ratio to the individual's experience of bombing." (p. 161). See: Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 2000): 139-170. Similarly, Susan Carruthers notes how during the Falklands Conflict between Britain and Argentina, soldiers often resented the "jingoistic, 'Argy-bashing'" adopted by some in the mass media. "[R]eporters such as Tony Snow [who traveled with British troops] found themselves unpopular with soldiers and seamen who thought the jingoistic tabloids both frivolous and unchivalrous towards the enemy. Indeed, in response [to one particularly famous] headline, men on board the *Canberra* wrote to *The Sun* requesting more copies— for toilet paper." Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave, 2000), 130-131.

[62] According to Chris Hedges, "not less than" 43 million military personnel and 62 million civilians have been killed as the result of war in the 20th Century. Chris Hedges, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 13. Matthew White, in the *Historical Atlas of the Twentieth Century* [http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/20centry.htm] puts the figure at 188 million. See White's evaluation and comparison of various sources for these totals: "Deaths by Mass Unpleasantness: Estimated Totals for the Entire 20th Century," available at: [http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat8.htm].

Chapter 9

Conclusion:
War, Militainment and Simulation

From the Military-Industrial Complex to 'Militainment'

Upon leaving office in 1961, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke to the

American public in a radio and television address where he delivered one of his

most infamous statements. After speaking to the external challenges and

opportunities of a new decade, Eisenhower would warn the American public

against new, internal challenges:

> Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no
> armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with
> time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no
> longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we
> have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry
> of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men
> and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment.
> We annually spend on military security more than the net income
> of all United State corporations.
>   This conjunction of an immense military establishment
> and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The
> total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in
> every city, every state house, every office of the Federal
> government. We recognize the imperative need for this
> development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave
> implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved;
> so is the very structure of our society.
>   In the councils of government, we must guard against
> the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or

unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for
the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.[1]

By providing a name to the vast and complex relations between military and

industrial interests, Eisenhower opened the doors for understanding how such

war-related interests were increasingly affecting politics and foreign policy and,

as President and a five-star General who became Supreme Commander of

Allied forces during the latter years of the Second World War, Eisenhower was

surely familiar with these pressures.

As James Fallows points out, "most historians suggest that Eisenhower's

principal concern was budgetary. That is, the military itself, its allied

contractors, and the appropriators in Congress all shared an interest in

trumpeting potential perils and then building weapons to offset them."[2] And

the budgetary implications are certainly extensive. In his book, *Private*

Warriors, journalist Ken Silverstein documents the intersection of public and

private interests penetrating the global military-industrial complex[3] but also

provides numerous examples of the vast resources available to the U.S. military

itself:

> One simple barometer of the Cold War's continued hold on
> policymakers is the Pentagon's budget, which in 2000—a decade
> after the fall of the Berlin Wall and with no credible 'enemy' in
> sight—sits at $268 billion. That's four times more than Russia
> spends and about eight times more than China. As this book
> goes to press [in 2000], the Pentagon is simultaneously planning
> three new tactical aircraft programs—the Joint Strike Fighter, the
> F/A-18E/F fighter-bomber, and the F-22—at a cost of about $400
> billion. Then there's the B-2 bomber, which was originally
> designed to penetrate the air defenses of the Soviet Union, a

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[1] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Farewell Radio and Television Address to the American People," (January 17, 1961). The text of the speech is available at the Avalon Project website, Yale University, [http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/speeches/eisenhower001.htm]. Audio versions of the speech are available at the EarthStation website: [http://www.earthstation1.com/President_Eisenhower.html].
[2] James Fallows, "The Military Industrial Complex," *Foreign Policy* 133 (Nov./Oct., 2002): 46.
[3] Ken Silverstein, *Private Warriors* (London: Verso, 2000).

nation that no longer exists. At $2.5 billion a copy, it costs more than its weight in gold and will eat up another $50 billion or so in total program costs. As new weapons systems roll off production lines, the Pentagon can't even use, let alone store, its entire current arsenal.... During the past few years, the United States gave away hundreds of tanks to foreign allies and sold hundred more at ten cents on the dollar. In 1999, the Pentagon dumped dozens of old M-60 and M-48 tanks off the Alabama coast to form artificial reefs. Meanwhile, the world's largest air force—other than the Pentagon's—sits moth-balled at the Davis Mountain Air Force Base in Arizona. Known as the 'Boneyard,' the Davis Mountain site is a broom closet for old planes so that new aircraft can be delivered and deployed.[4]

Ever since the terrorist attacks on Washington, DC and New York, the

Pentagon's annual budget consistently sits slightly above $400 billion per year,[5]

but as Fallows argues, the concern certainly extends beyond the parceling out

of defense subcontracts to the districts of members of the U.S. Congress.

Eisenhower's statement that this influence is "economic, political, even

spiritual" would indicate that it extends throughout the culture of the nation

and is not just limited to the political and economic spheres.

Fallows gives an example of such 'spiritual' influences by describing the

"corrupting effect" on uniformed military personnel through their alliance with

defense contractors. For career soldiers, their service is relatively short as most

leave military service by their mid-40s and seek a second career. As Fallows

rightly points out, the most lucrative opportunities lie somewhere in the vast

complex of private companies who provide support for military activity,

including a range of technology-related companies, the arms industry itself,

those who provide logistical support and a whole range of consumer goods

and supplies, as well as companies specialized in communications, planning,

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[4] Silverstein, *Private Warriors*, ix-x.
[5] See: U.S. Department of Defense, "Fiscal 2005 Department of Defense Budget Release," (2 February 2004), available at: [http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/2004/nr20040202-0301.html].

management and marketing. In this scenario, Eisenhower's charge that the

influence of the military-industrial complex is also 'spiritual' in nature would

take on a variety of other meanings. We can easily see that this influence

extends to various domains of institutional and popular thought. In recent

years, others have expanded upon Eisenhower's framing of the issue and have

documented how extensive and pervasive it has become. After the first Gulf

War in the early 1990s, the phrase "Military-Industrial Media Complex" was put

forward by those who saw much of the mainstream U.S. media as uncritical

and pro-war.[6] Others, however, looked at the institutional framework that

helps feed the entertainment industry: including the 'Military-Academic

Complex,'[7] the 'Military-Industrial-Think Tank Complex'[8] and, more generally,

MIME-Net.[9] Such concerns were focused once again when Iraq was invaded in

2003. The merging of entertainment and war coverage brought forth another

telling term: 'militainment.'[10] As Tim Lenoir, who has looked into the history of

the military's evolving relationship with the computer-based entertainment

industry, states:

> ...the military-industrial complex, contrary to initial expectations,
> did not fade away with the end of the cold war. It has simply
> reorganized itself. In fact, it is more efficiently organized than
> ever before. Indeed, a cynic might argue that whereas the
> military-industrial complex was more or less visible and
> identifiable during the cold war, today it is invisibly everywhere,

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[6] Paul Leslie, ed., *The Gulf War as Popular Entertainment: An Analysis of the Military-Industrial Media Complex* (Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).

[7] Nicholas Turse, "Wrestling the Military-Academic Complex" (Online), *AlterNet.Org*, (May 2, 2004), [http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=18570].

[8] William Hartung and Michelle Ciarrocca, "The Military-Industrial-Think Tank Complex: Corporate Think Tanks and the Doctrine of Aggressive Militarism," *Multinational Monitor* 24, no. 1/2 (January/February 2003): 17-20.

[9] MIME-Net, or Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network, is James Der Derian's phrase. See: James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001).

[10] Robin Anderson, "That's Militainment: The Pentagon's Media-Friendly 'Reality' War" (Online), *Extra!* (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) (May/June 2003), [www.fair.org/index.php?page=1141].

permeating our daily lives. The military-industrial complex has become the military-entertainment complex. The entertainment industry is both a major source of innovative ideas and technology, and the training ground for what might be called posthuman warfare.[11]

Laying cynicism aside, Lenoir is correct in that militainment is largely—and logically—a consequence of the evolving nature of both twentieth-century mass warfare and popular entertainment media. That the two should coincide in a variety of increasingly sophisticated ways should not be all that surprising. In the 1990s and the first years of the 21st Century, the U.S. military has adopted the technology and style of a variety of entertainment forms. Cinema is perhaps the most high-profile medium that the military has shown a great deal of interest in, but television has proven to be equally if not more important. Here we could include the sophisticated media management of the press pools in the first Persian Gulf conflict, the 'reality TV' imagery that came from embedding reporters in the next, the actual reality TV programs created during the war on terror in Afghanistan,[12] the whole Jessica Lynch episode,[13] as well as the Department of Defense's own 'Pentagon Channel'.[14]

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[11] Tim Lenoir, "Fashioning the Military Entertainment Complex," *Correspondence: An International Review of Culture and Society* 10, (Winter/Spring, 2002-2003), 14.

[12] *Profiles from the Frontline* (2003), from producer Jerry Bruckheimer and shown on ABC, was probably the best known. CBS, however, produced *AFP: American Fighter Pilot* (2002) and VH1 had its own series called *Military Diaries* (2002). See: Lisa de Moras, "'Reality' TV is Marching to the Military's Tune," *Washington Post* (19 March 2002), C07.

[13] The British paper, *The Guardian*, said the episode "will go down as one of the most stunning pieces of news management yet conceived. It provides a remarkable insight into the real influence of Hollywood producers on the Pentagon's media managers, and has produced a template from which America hopes to present its future wars. " ("The Truth about Jessica," *The Guardian* (15 May 2003), [http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,956127,00.html]). For a chronology of the story, see: Dante Chinni, "Jessica Lynch: Media Myth-Making in the Iraq War," Project for Excellence in Journalism (23 June 2003), available at: [http://www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/war/postwar/lynch.asp].

[14] The 'Pentagon Channel' is a 24-hour channel dedicated to military news, Pentagon news briefings, and other military-related programming. The Pentagon Channel was created in 2004 and is provided to U.S. military personnel throughout the world as well as being offered as a free service to domestic satellite and cable distributors. It is also freely available in webcast form. See the official website at: [http://www.pentagonchannel.mil/].

Here it is important to note that the U.S. military's recent involvement in the commercial video game industry is but a small part of its much larger and extensive public relations efforts. Consequently, it would be a mistake to put too great an emphasis on these entertainment products for the influence we might perceive they do or do not have on public attitudes concerning specific conflicts or war in general. Military-themed shooters are just part of a much larger whole and, therefore, need to be read against that much larger context. It is also mistaken to simply assume that just because the military is involved, that the result is always negative. As a public institution involved in what is perhaps the most difficult, dangerous and consequential of political acts, militaries are necessities and anything that allows the public more understanding about them and their activities has to be beneficial. It should be expected—even encouraged—that the military will provide information to the public, the media, or to political bodies. But it is an interesting development that the U.S. military is involving itself to the degree that it does in the production of entertainment while at the same time actively withholding other important information. For what does it mean when the military produces video games where civilians are largely absent, where death is inconsequential, where combat is sanitized and made 'fun,' and the virtual world is exclusively populated by enemies? In many respects, this parallels the current military doctrine where the U.S. military advocates for the "technical capability and the ethical imperative to threaten, and if needed, actualize violence from a distance, with no or minimal casualties."[15] James Der Derian calls this doctrine

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[15] James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), xv.

'virtuous war' to reflect the ways that modern warmaking is carefully framed as noble and without lasting consequence by leveraging a variety of media strategies. Conceptually, Der Derian's concept of 'virtuous war' is similar to the concept of techno-war and is related to the Pentagon's concept of 'Full Spectrum Dominance' where military operations are combined with the management of information.

There are, of course, significant casualties which result from military actions, but the concept of virtuous war or techno-war is a strategy whereby 'friendly' casualties are minimized while enemy casualties are maximized. As the war correspondent Chris Hedges remarks, "[c]orpses in wartime often deliver messages,"[16] and while it is an intention of virtuous war or techno-war to maximize enemy casualties, by such logic such casualties must be hidden from public view. Ever since the experience of the Vietnam war, the U.S. military refrains from documenting and releasing statistics on the total number of enemies or civilians killed as the result of combat. As General Tommy Franks, commander of the military operation in Afghanistan, told reporters in 2002: "You know we don't do body counts."[17] Consequently, the work of documenting enemy and civilian casualties—which is both extremely difficult to accurately measure and can be dangerous[18]—is left to others. In the current conflict in Iraq, it is estimated that anywhere between 24,000 and 100,000

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[16] Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 8.

[17] Edward Epstein, "Success in Afghan War Hard to Gauge," *San Francisco Chronicle* (23 March 2002) A1. Franks was actually rephrasing what Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said days earlier: "I don't do body counts." Quote comes from Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "Taliban and Qaeda Death Toll In Mountain Battle Is a Mystery," *New York Times* (14 March 2002), 1. For a more extensive discussion of the U.S. military's approach to civilian and enemy body counts, see: Carl Conetta, "Disappearing the Dead: Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Idea of a 'New Warfare,'" Project on Defense Alternatives, Research Monograph #9 (18 February 2004), available at: [http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5776.htm].

[18] For an interesting discussion of such difficulties, see: Lucinda Fleeson, "The Civilian Casualty Conundrum," *American Journalism Review* (April 2002), available at: [http://www.ajr.org/article_printable.asp?id=2491].

Iraqis have died as a result of the invasion; figures which some groups, at least,

try to make known to the public.[19] And while the military counts its own dead,

it puts limits on their representation should they deliver any unwanted

messages; especially controversial was the White House and Pentagon policy,

on the eve of the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, that forbade any

representation of the bodies of dead American soldiers returning to the US.[20]

Given this situation, and whether it is intentional or not, it is tempting to read

the use of video games as part of—or at least fitting in with—this larger

strategy.

The Politics of the Soldier

The stated motivation for releasing *America's Army: Operations* in 2002 was

the perceived usefulness of the interactive video game as a training simulation

and, especially, for purposes of recruitment. The game was the brain-child of

Colonel Casey Wardynski, Director of the U.S. Army's Office of Economic and

Manpower Analysis (OEMA), who had originally developed a concept study

"that envisioned using computer game technology to provide the public [with]

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[19] 'Iraq Body Count' is one such group that tries to publicize the mortality rates of the invasion of Iraq. Their current number of 24,865 (as of July 2005) comes from analysis of various media reports published between March 2003 and March 2005. Their website is available at [www.iraqbodycount.net] and their latest report, "A Dossier of Civilian Casualties in Iraq – 2003-2005," is available at [www.iraqbodycount.net/press/pr12.php]. A study published in the medical journal, *The Lancet*, claims that 100,000 deaths can be directly attributed to the war. See Les Roberts, Riyadh Lafta, Richard Garfield, et al., "Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: Cluster Sample Survey," *The Lancet* 364, no. 9448 (20 Nov. 2004): 1857-1864.

[20] See Dana Milbank, "Curtains Ordered for Media Coverage of Returning Coffins," *Washington Post* (October 21, 2003): A23. The ban on taking or distributing images of the repatriated bodies of US soldiers was quickly followed by a Freedom of Information Act request by Russ Kick. The initial ROIA request was rejected but after appeals, Kick received a CD from the US Air Force with over 300 photographs taken by military photographers. Kick distributed the photos on his website, the Memory Hole (www.thememoryhole.org), where they were picked up by various other media organizations.

a virtual Solider experience that was engaging, informative and entertaining."[21]

As a game, *America's Army* is structured so that players must complete 'basic training' before graduating to online, multiplayer missions. More importantly, the game is intended to introduce the player to the 'core values' of the army's culture: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, and personal courage. In terms of recruitment, Wardynski describes the game as an important tool in helping the general public "make connections between life-course decisions and life-course outcomes."[22]

Wardynski put this in a historical context that is revealing in many different respects. He says that in the early 1970s, about thirty percent of the American labour force had served in the military. Today, only about one in ten working Americans has seen military service. Wardynski attributes this to the substitution of an all-volunteer force for the draft in the early 1970s and cuts to military numbers and base closures enacted at the end of the Cold War. In an interesting statement, Wardynski says this has "markedly reduced the presence of military forces throughout the United States... [and] has further reduced opportunities for vicarious insights into military service."[23] Wardynski summarizes the situation in the following manner:

> Hence, whereas in the past a young American could gain insights into military service by listening to the recollections or the advice of an older brother, an uncle, a father, or perhaps a neighbor, today opportunities for such insights are relatively scarce. To the extent that information about military service shapes the career plans of young Americans today, these decisions were heretofore influenced by movies, television, magazines, books and

[21] "Origins of the Official U.S. Army Game." America's Army Website. Available at: [http://www.thearmygame.com/history.html].
[22] Casey Wardynski, Colonel, "Informing Popular Culture: The America's Army Game Concept" in *America's Army PC Game: Vision and Realization.*, ed. Davis, Margaret, (United States Army and MOVES Institute, 2004) 7. Also available at: [http://movesinstitute.org/AABookletpre-Casey.pdf].
[23] Wardynski, "Informing Popular Culture", 6.

advertising. Put simply, these decisions have their foundation in the popular culture. Consequently, it is not surprising that young Americans with little to no contact with Soldiers are less likely to include Soldiering as a potential career.[24]

The logic behind this strategy, Wardynski claims, is rooted in microeconomic theory and the importance of popular culture in communicating with the public. While a key assumption of microeconomic theory is that economic actors make rational decisions based on "perfect" information, there is a recognition that perfect information is not evenly distributed and that people tend to make their decisions based upon information that is immediately available in their environment. *America's Army*, therefore, was developed to introduce this 'perfect' information into the immediate environment where it was perceived to be lacking.

I think it is prudent to approach Wardynski's claims here with a certain amount of skepticism or at least put them into a larger context. It should be remembered that the soldiers are, in many different ways, a contested and controversial site of meaning and their presentation is carefully guarded by the military. While Wardynski claims there is a lack of information about the 'soldiering experience,' it could be convincingly argued that the opposite is increasingly true. What is commonly referred to as the 'alternative' press— which, as Douglas Kellner argues, started to become more significant during the first Gulf War[25]—regularly raises issues and perspectives commonly ignored by more mainstream sources of news, especially the significant range of views

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[24] Wardynski, "Informing Popular Culture", 6.
[25] Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 3-5.

amongst soldiers themselves.[26] Of course, this is not just restricted to the

printed word but includes independent filmmaking and documentary

productions as well as the 'activist' activities of various veterans'

organizations.[27]

One of the most interesting forums for communication, however, is one

that the military itself helped create: the weblogs of soldiers. The 'S-blogs'

(soldier's blogs) or 'milblogs' (military blogs) are an outgrowth of the military's

incorporation of computer-facilitated communications on the frontlines,

especially in terms of enabling actively serving soldiers to communicate with

family members back home.[28] However, the blogs can be accessed by anyone

with access to the web, including members of the general public and members

of the press (especially, alternative or activist publications where they are often

featured). Consequently, the military has struggled to come to terms with this

new development and has recently required soldiers to register their blogs and

have shut down some that they said revealed 'classified' information.[29] As the

journalist, John Hockenberry, says:

> Whether posting from inside Iraq on active duty, from
> noncombat bases around the world, or even from their
> neighborhoods back home after being discharged—where they
> can still follow events closely and deliver their often blunt

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[26] A single example cannot effectively encapsulate such a phenomenon but one example is especially telling. In 2004, Karen Kwiatkowski published an essay outlining her belief that 'hawks' in the U.S. Department of Defense suppressed key information and manipulated intelligence so as to justify the invasion of Iraq. Kwiatkowski had served in the U.S. military for twenty years and retired in 2003 as a communications officer in the Pentagon with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (U.S. Air Force). See: Karen Kwiatkowski, "The New Pentagon Papers," *Salon.Com* (10 March 2004), available at: [http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2004/03/10/osp_moveon/].

[27] For example, Veterans for Peace [www.veteransforpeace.org] and Veterans for Common Sense [www.veteransforcommon sense.org].

[28] See: Brad Knickerbocker, "An Officer and a Blogger," *AlterNet* (19 April 2005), available at [http://www.alternet.org/mediaculture/21798/]. Knickbocker's article originally appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor*. The websites 'Military Blogs' [http://www.aapavatar.net/blogs.htm] and 'The Mudville Gazette' [http://www.mudvillegazette.com] are collections of military blogs.

[29] Jonathan Finer, "Soldiers' Blogs Bring Iraq War Home," *The Washington Post* (12 August 2005), available at: [http://msnbc.msn.com/id/8917977/].

opinions—milbloggers offer an unprecedented real-time real-life window on war and the people who wage it. Their collective voice competes with and occasionally undermines the DOD's [Department of Defense] elaborate message machine and the much-loathed mainstream media....[30]

Undermining the military's dominant message—where soldiers are always honorable, do not question orders, or do not question the reasons for going to war—is certainly not the 'perfect' information that Wardynski had in mind. In the context of the games, especially the characterizations seen in *Full Spectrum Combat* or *Close Combat: First to Fight*, it is much easier to carefully construct the representations of soldiers and to have them 'speak' in ways that conform to the dominant message track, especially at a time when soldiers are increasingly speaking their minds. As a returning U.S. soldier, referred to simply as Zechariah, said recently:

> I keep hearing that the troops' morale is high over there. When you have a high-ranking officer standing next to you prepping your answers, it's hard to speak your mind. We weren't allowed to talk to media unless a Major or above was with us to prep our answers and screen certain questions.
>
> I couldn't tell you of a single soldier that was excited to be in Iraq having rockets shot at them and IEDs [Improvised Explosive Devices] blowing up their friends on a daily basis. Some of these guys are on their third or fourth tours over there. Do you really think they are excited to be in the 130 degree desert, living off of MREs [Meal, Ready-to-Eat], missing their children being born, watching friends die, praying they aren't next?
>
> President Bush, like Cheney, obviously has no idea as to what is going on over there and doesn't care. This whole thing about taking the fight to the terrorists has got me mad. He already proved to us and himself that Iraq wasn't a threat and that they had no WMDs and he is still trying to say they were terrorists and we need to stop them. They weren't terrorists until we killed off parts of their family. Now they are terrorists

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[30] John Hockenberry, "The Blogs of War," *Wired* 13, no. 8 (August 2005), available at: [http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.08/milblogs.html].

because they have lost something that the U.S. took from them, parts of their families.[31]

The Politics of Simulation

Earlier, I had discussed Lawrence Suid's belief whereby the overly positive

portrayal of the U.S. military in Hollywood film had contributed to the ease

with which the nation's leaders and policy makers led the country into the

Vietnam conflict. Similarly, James Der Derian relates a similar concern with the

increase in war simulations—including actual war games practiced by the

military, military training simulations, and the then nascent forms of military-

themed video games. As a way of understanding such a relationship, Der

Derian provides an example, not from the world of computers, but from the

work of Tom Clancy (whose company Red Storm Entertainment would, as we

have seen, become a critical source for military-themed shooters):

> ...the proliferation of war simulations has engendered some
> immediate policy concerns. Simulations have given rise to
> important intertexts of strategic power and popular culture.
> Take Tom Clancy and his intertextual relationship with war
> games. The best non-fictional book on the subject, *War Games:*
> *the Secret World of the Creators, Players, and Policy Makers*
> *Rehearsing World War III Today* by Thomas Allen... sports a cover
> blurb by Tom Clancy who writes that it "will be the standard
> work on the subject for the next ten years." Clancy's first
> bestseller, the *Red October* has a hyperbolic blurb from former
> President Reagan. His second novel, *Red Storm Rising*, a thinly
> fictionalized mosaic of NATO war games, was authoritatively
> cited by Vice President Quayle in a foreign policy speech to prove
> that the U.S. needs an anti-satellite capability. His third novel,
> *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*, in which Clancy plots the plight of a
> mole in the Kremlin, affirms the need to reconstruct the

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[31] Celina R. De Leon, "A Soldier Speaks: Zechariah," *AlterNet* (4 August 2005), available at: [http://www.alternet.org/wiretap/23882/].

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impermeable borders of the sovereign state with Star Wars. And
in his fourth, *Patriot Games*, Clancy magnifies the threat of
terrorism to prove that state counter-terrorism works; a view
endorsed by Secretary of Defense Weinberger in a laudatory
review of the book for the *Wall Street Journal*—which was then
reprinted in the Pentagon's *Current News* for the edification of
the 7,000-odd Defense and State Department officials who make
up its readership.[32]

While I doubt that current policy makers are actively playing games like

America's Army or *Full Spectrum Warrior*, Der Derian's example is important as

a glimpse, perhaps, of how fictional portrayals of war can have important

mediating effects for our understanding of real-world situations. For as Der

Derian describes them, the books are remarkably similar to these video games:

> Taken together, Clancy's novels stand out as strategic
> simulations. Jammed with technical detail and seductive
> ordnance, devoid of recognizably human characters, and
> obliquely linked to historical events, they have become the
> perfect free-floating intertext for saving the reality principle of
> the national security state....[33]

And in that sense, it is probably best to approach the workings of the military-

industrial-entertainment complex—including the increasing relations between

the video game industry and the military—not as groups of individuals that

actively collude to lead a nation into war, but as a complex that has come to

depend on a romanticized and idealized image of war as a source of influence,

revenue, inspiration and entertainment. This is likely the only way we could

understand the curious answer given by the makers of *Full Spectrum Warrior* in

an interview for the official guide to the game:

> Q: Even though Al Afad is in the dirt by the end of the game, we
> all know that bad guys are in no short supply in both the real

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[32] James Der Derian, "The Simulation Syndrome: From War Games to Game Wars," *Social Text* 24 (1990),
191.
[33] Der Derian, "The Simulation Syndrome: From War Games to Game Wars," 191.

world and the video game universe. Could the men of Alpha
and Bravo be deployed to another hot spot in the future?

A: We hope so![34]

Postscript

Earlier in this chapter, I had mentioned that the 'soldier' is one of the most

controversial sites of meaning when it comes to discussions over war. And it is

rather unfortunate how soldiers are often used in such debates. The

ideologically driven belief that 'pacifism,' or any argument against war,

automatically translates into 'being against the troops' is not only unfortunate

but often misleading. So is the belief that being against a particular conflict

(which can be different from being anti-war) should automatically include

criticism of the soldiers involved. In my opinion, one of the best ideas that has

come out of the debate over the latest Iraq conflict is that we (of any country)

should be fairly certain that when we send our troops into some conflict, that

the reasons for doing so are fairly good ones and that other, non-military

options are not available.

**Figure 9.1: Zechariah, while stationed in Iraq
(photo from *AlterNet.org*)**

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[34] Levi Buchanan, ed., *Full Spectrum Warrior – Prima Official Game Guide* (Roseville, CA: Prima
Publishing, 2004), 151.

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Gameography

Games listed in the table are games in the genre of the military-themed shooter category and that were specifically consulted for this study. Games that do not fall into the genre of the military-themed shooter but were useful are listed separately.

Title	Publisher	Developer	Release Date	Genre (Gameplay)	ESRB Rating	Platform	Military Influence
America's Army: Operations	U.S. Army	U.S.Army	2002	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	PC	Army (created)
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	Ubisoft	Gearbox Software	2005	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	Xbox	
Call of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward	2003	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	PC	
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	Spark Unlimited	2004	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	Xbox	
Close Combat: First to Fight	2K Games	Destineer	2005	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	Xbox	Marines (Commissioned)
Conflict: Desert Storm	Gotham Games	Pivotal Games	2003	Third-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	GCN	
Conflict: Desert Storm II Back to Baghdad	Take-Two Interactive	Pivotal Games	2003	Third-Person Action	Teen (T)	Xbox	
Conflict: Vietnam	Global Star	Pivotal Games	2004	Third-Person Action	Mature (M)	PS2	
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	NovaLogic	2003	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	PC	Army
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	Climax Studios	2005	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	Xbox	Army
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	Pandemic Studios	2004	Simulation, Third-Person Action	Mature (M)	Xbox	Army (Commissioned)
Medal of Honor	Electronic Arts	DreamWorks Interactive	1999	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	PS	
Medal of Honor European Assault	Electronic Arts	EA Los Angeles	2005	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	Xbox	

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	Electronic Arts	2015	2002	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	PC	
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	DreamWorks Interactive	2002	First Person Shooter	Teen (T)	PS2	
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	EA LA	2003	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	GCN	
Men of Valor	Vivendi Universal	2015	2004	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	Xbox	
Shellshock: Nam '67	Eidos Interactive	Guerilla Games	2004	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	Xbox	
SOCOM II: U.S. Navy Seals	Sony Computer Entertainment	Zipper Interactive	2003	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	PS2	Navy
SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals	Sony Computer Entertainment	Zipper Interactive	2002	Action	Teen (T)	PS2	Navy
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubisoft	Red Storm Entertainment	2002	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	Xbox	
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	Red Storm Entertainment	2004	First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	Xbox	Army
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	Red Storm Entertainment	2004	Third-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	PS2	Army
Vietcong: Purple Haze	Gathering	Coyote Development / Illusion Softworks	2004	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	Xbox	

Notes:

Genre: Reflects the gameplay genre as listed by publisher and how it is described by industry publications.

Platform: Indicates the platform used for the sake of this study; some games are available for multiple platforms. Legend: DC (Sega Dreamcast), GCN (Nintendo GameCube), PS (Sony Playstation), PS2 (Sony Playstation 2), Xbox (Microsoft Xbox).

Military Influence: Games that use SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) are not listed as this might include individuals who are retired or working off-duty. Military assistance is listed by branch and whether the game was commissioned or if created by the branch itself or if the branch offered significant assistance beyond the use of SMEs.

Title	Publisher	Developer	Release Date	Genre	Content Rating	Platform
Battlezone	Atari	Atari	1980	Arcade, First-Person Action	n/a	DC (emulation)
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Ubisoft	2003	Third-Person Action Adventure	Teen (T)	PS2
Black & White	Electronic Arts	Lionhead Studios	2001	Strategy	Teen (T)	PC
BloodRayne	Majesco Inc.	Terminal Reality	2002	Third-Person Action	Mature (M)	GCN
Brute Force	Microsoft	Digital Anvil	2003	Third-Person Action	Mature (M)	Xbox
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos Interactive	Ion Storm	2003	First-Person Action Adventure	Mature (M)	Xbox
Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive	2003	Third-Person Action Adventure	Teen (T)	Xbox
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	Bandai	SCEJ / Cavia	2004	Third-Person Action Shooter	Mature (M)	PS2
Halo 2	Microsoft Game Studios	Bungie	2004	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	Xbox
Halo: Combat Evolved	Microsoft	Bungie	2001	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	Xbox
Iron Storm	DreamCatcher Interactive / Wanadoo Edition	Kylotonn / 4X Studios	2002	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	PC
KillZone	Sony Computer Entertainment	Guerilla Games / SCEE	2004	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	PS2
Korea: Forgotten Conflict	Cenega	Plastic Reality	2003	Real-Time Strategy	Teen (T)	PC
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	2005	Third-Person Action Adventure / First-Person Shooter	Teen (T)	Xbox
Red Dead Revolver	Rockstar Games	Rockstar San Diego	2004	Third-Person Action	Mature (M)	Xbox

Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection	Activision	Gray Matter Studios	2003	First-Person Shooter	Mature (M)	PS2
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	Totally Games	2003	Flight	Teen (T)	Xbox
Sensha, The	D3 Publisher / Agetec	Vingt-et-un Systems	2003	Third-Person Action Simulation	n/a	PS2
Star Wars: Battlefront	LucasArts	Pandemic Studios	2004	First Person Shooter	Teen (T)	Xbox
Wings of War	Gathering	Silver Wish Games	2004	Flight Action	Teen (T)	Xbox
Zero-Shiki Kanjou Sentouki	Taito	Marionette	2004	Action (Flight)	All Ages (CERO)	PS2

Notes:

Content Rating: Games in this list include those available in North America as well as some that are imports from Japan. Those games listed as Mature (M) or Teen (T) use ratings from the ESRB (Entertainment Software Ratings Board, U.S.). Those identified by the term 'CERO' use the Japanese rating system (Computer Entertainment Rating Organization). *The Sensha* is a Japanese import title but was not rated as CERO was created in 2004.