

Holy Trinity: Nation Pentagon, Screen¹

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Watch a 12-year-old take evasive action and score multiple hits while playing *Space Invaders* and you will appreciate the skills of tomorrow's pilot. (Ronald Reagan, Disney EPCOT Center, 1983, quoted in Turse 2008: 129)

It felt like I was in a big video game. It didn't even faze me, shooting back. It was just natural instinct. *Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!* ... I couldn't believe I was seeing this. It was like *Halo*. It didn't even seem real, but it was real. (Anonymous veteran of the Iraq War and the computer games *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *Halo 2*, quoted in Turse 2008: 137)

This chapter examines the close relationship between the screen industries, nationalism, and the government in the United States of America. Despite much-vaunted claims that US culture is uniquely independent of state support and direction, I'll show that the government's violent and destructive nationalism relies on a compliant and even willing partner in the culture industries, which in turn have drawn on massive public subvention for decades. Following some brief theoretical discussion, I consider in turn the links between the US state and cinema, current-affairs television, and electronic games, focusing on propagandistic elements that develop and index nationalism.

Far from the nation disappearing with globalised commerce, hyper-nationalism and a semi-secret state presence are integral to the US media and crucial to its empire. The media are implicated with overseas projects of the sovereign-state at the levels of finance, ideology, and personnel. In this sense, the assumption underpinning much contemporary punditry – that sovereign-states and nations are declining as the global media erode national specificity – simply does not apply. In the US, it is a category mistake, for two reasons. First, the post-Cold War II, post-11th September 2001 United States is 'a new hybrid political creature, at once the leading and most sovereignty-oriented territorial state and the nonterritorial overlord of the world' (Falk 2004: 22) intent on 'displacing a domestic security problem on foreign turf' (Shapiro 2007: 298). And second, as both Althusser and Durkheim might have said (from very different political

perspectives) the distinction between state and civil society is a dubious one, especially given the productive interpenetration of public and private throughout the last century of US military propaganda (Andersen 2006). And globalisation often means more and more entertainment outlets for militant US nationalism as much as footloose finance and manufacturing capital.

Even before the current conjuncture, when Adorno and Horkheimer (1977) landed here to escape the Nazis, they were shocked to find that Germany's totalitarian statism was matched by Yanqui media capitalism in its intensity, industrialisation, and monism, if not its genocidal bigotry. Since that time, many progressive critics have been filled with pessimism by this seeming unity of business, media, and government. These concerns perhaps reach their apogee in the propaganda model, which discerns strong ties between market investment, public policy, and media content (Herman 2003). The model has been accused of underestimating the relative autonomy of democratic urges from state apparatuses and populist media from elite preoccupations, and the arms-length independence and social esteem of public-service broadcasting (Sparks 2007). But it is more than a scholarly theory: the propaganda model has become part of popular culture itself, appealing to activists and many neutral observers (Hackett 2006). This is the grand irony of a thesis that has been derided for failing to account for the productive nature of audience activity – that it is popular with so many, very active, audiences! This chapter owes much to such groundbreaking work, even as it is informed by post-structural theoretical concerns and the warp and woof of material history.

In contemporary US international relations, the media are deemed to represent 'soft power' in partnership with the 'hard power' of force and economics (Nye 2002-03). Nevertheless, their public-policy significance waxes and wanes. Republicans nearly put an end to official propaganda when they took control of Congress in the mid-1990s, dramatically diminishing funding and staffing as part of their dislike of artists and intellectuals and in response to the end of anti-Sovietism; but Cold War II was soon followed by 11th September 2001. The newly modish term 'public diplomacy' suddenly appealed to the Federal government, as it answered the plaintive cry 'Why do they hate us?' with 'Why you should love us'. The White House Office of Global Communications and a Policy Coordinating Committee on Strategic Communications were created to build trust of the US overseas, stress common interests and ideologies, and influence elites. By 2003, the State Department's cultural budget was up to US\$600 million (Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy to the Department of State 2005). The new public diplomacy is supposed to transcend the material impact of US foreign policy and corporate expropriation by fostering communication at a civil-society level, directly linking citizens across borders to 'influence opinions and mobilise foreign publics' by 'engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences' (Council on Foreign Relations 2003: 15; Gilboa 1998; Brown 2004). The idea is to work in the interest of the US government, but avoid that connotation. Initiatives are underway across a wide array of governmental bodies: the State Department, the US Agency for

International Development, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the Pentagon, and the Open Source Center (Government Accountability Office 2007). By 2008, the Bush Administration was remobilising Cold-War style cultural tactics. It even returned to a doctrine of deterrence – not the rational-actor model of mutually-assured destruction that warned the Soviets of what a nuclear attack would mean, but rather a counter-discourse to radical Islamism across the internet that stressed the negative consequences of non-state violence. This was deterrence birthed in asymmetry (Der Derian 2005: 26) – minus the grudging respect accorded to rivalrous state actors, but plus the religionist's perverse fascination with fellow fanatics.

Beyond these official policies, the intimate interpenetration of nation, state, and capital via the culture industries is perhaps best expressed in the anecdote with which Ed Halter begins his journalistic history of computer games – the moment in 2003 when Los Angeles was occupied by US Special Forces. Just two months after their ill-starred imperialist venture in Iraq had begun, these troops invaded LA's Convention Center as part of Electronic Entertainment Exposition, the annual showcase of video games. Their mission was to promote *America's Army*, an electronic game designed to recruit young people to the military via simulated first-person shooting. The game included notes to parents that stressed the importance of substituting 'virtual experiences for vicarious insights' (Halter 2006: viii-ix) – an exciting euphemism for 'cyber-boot camp' (Lenoir 2003: 175).

The Special Forces were enacting a marketing triumph in LA rather than a military one, by symbolising a malignant amalgam of state violence and commercial entertainment. For the culture industries have become part of perpetual virtual war because of the way they mixed hyper-masculinist action-adventure ideology, supinely celebratory military news coverage, and complicit new media (Deck 2004). Their method is at once collective – we are the United States and we're here to intimidate and destroy – and individual, thanks to the immersive interpellation of narrative film, current affairs, and gaming. They are crucial components of the necessarily ongoing, incomplete project of constructing the power of the nation as natural, a project undertaken through the diurnal and the cinematic, the banal and the spectacular (Puri 2004).

James Der Derian argues that the US conducts international affairs through 'a technostrategic triad of surveillance, terror, and speed' (1992: viii). The former ideological bifurcation of capitalism versus socialism and the US versus the USSR has been substituted by pan-capitalist regional blocs and a single superpower. Communications, electronics, radar, telemetry, and photography are endowed with enormous representational authority as military strategy is moulded and enhanced by cultural technologies that appear to render warfare virtual, given the use of simulation, and the low numbers of battlefield fatalities sustained by the US compared to other armies that it engages (Der Derian 1992: 4, 21, 31). In the 1991 Gulf War, the US lost just 270 soldiers, many to friendly fire, while no NATO troops died in Kosovo. The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan saw one official US combatant killed by the opposition. The engagement with the other has become less intimate: rather than flying bombardiers who are exposed to

the elements, satellites perched in the sky now guide bombs, under the distant control of 'shadowy specialists' who use pixels for surveillance and disembodied execution (Deck 2004). This is the post-industrialisation of conflict, with desktops displacing divisions (Shapiro 2007: 303). At the same time, the claim that virtual technologies make war safer and more virtual is problematic. During the first Gulf War, it was asserted that US Patriot missiles destroyed all of Iraq's Scud missiles. Independent reviews diminished that proportion to one out of ten. And the impact on non-combatants is grotesque. A century ago, eight US soldiers were killed for every civilian in war now that ratio is reversed (Der Derian 2005: 26). So how does this virtuality serve to obscure the truth?

In his 1954 testimony before an anti-leftist hearing held by the US Atomic Energy Commission, the noted physicist J Robert Oppenheimer, who led the group that had developed the atomic bomb, and which ironically included many progressives like himself who were soon removed from office, talked about the instrumental rationality that animated the people who created this awesome technology. Once these scientists saw that it was feasible, the bomb's impact diminished in intellectual and emotional significance. They had been overtaken by the 'technically sweet' quality of the technology (United States Atomic Energy Commission 1954: 81). This 'technically sweet' element is part of the love of new technology, the drive for innovation, early adoption, and the mix of the sublime – the awesome, the ineffable, the uncontrollable, the powerful with the beautiful – the approachable, the attractive, the pliant, the soothing. It makes the horror of war very distant, with casualties a blip on a screen – collateral media damage in a virtual game played by high-level strategists (Der Derian 2003: 37, 39, 41, 44). Beginning as a reflection of reality, the military sign is transformed into a perversion of reality. A representation of the truth is displaced by false information. Then these two delineable phases of truth and lies become indistinct. Underlying reality is lost. The sign comes to refer to itself, with no residual need of correspondence to the real, which it is transforming (Baudrillard 1988: 10-11, 29, 170). Using simulated systems of weaponry to win both physical and ideological battles, the US has sought to secure borders, exercise suzerainty, and rattle resistance to financial globalisation through what has become 'the only game in town' – virtual war as a model, a story, and an ideology (Der Derian 2003: 39; Turse 2008: 126). Simulation and dissimulation have become one, under the sign of the nation. Ideologically, this process disobeys the binary of private and public, because it leaks wilfully between capital and state, with material self-interest and delusional policy cloaked in a newly-installed epic binary, of good against evil (Andersen 2006: 5).

Cinema

Cinema may well be the model for the propagandistic simulation of US culture and nationalism. The government has a long history of direct participation in production and control (Hearon 1938). The notorious racist epic, *Birth of a Na-*

tion (Griffith 1915), was given official military support by order of the Secretary of War and endorsed by the President, while the so-called Western genre is a triumphalist enactment of racialisation and genocide (Shapiro 2004). From the moment the US entered the First World War, theatres across the country saw speakers and movies that purported to testify to German atrocities, while films imported from the Central Powers were banned across the US (Turse 2008: 104; Andersen 2006: 7). Immediately afterwards, the Department of the Interior recruited the industry to the 'Americanisation' of immigrants, screening Hollywood movies on ships bringing migrants (Walsh 1997: 10; Hays 1927: 50). Paramount-Famous-Lasky studio executive Sidney R Kent soon referred to cinema as 'silent propaganda' (1927: 208). As a *quid pro quo*, Hollywood lobbyists of the 1920s and '30s treated the US Departments of State and Commerce as 'message boys': the State Department undertook market research and shared business intelligence, while the Commerce Department pressured other countries to permit cinema free access and favourable terms of trade. In the 1940s, the US opened an Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) to gain solidarity from Latin Americans for World War II. Its most visible programme was the Motion Picture Division, headed by John Hay Whitney, recent co-producer of *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming 1939) and future secret agent and front man for the CIA's news service, Forum World Features (Stonor Saunders 1999: 311-312). The Office had at least one Hollywood film reshot because it showed Mexican children shoeless in the street, and was responsible for getting Hollywood to distribute *Simón Bolívar* (Miguel Contreras Torres 1942) and make *Saludos Amigos* (Norman Ferguson and Wilfred Jackson 1943) and *The Three Caballeros* (Norman Ferguson 1944). Some production costs were borne by the OCIAA in exchange for free prints being distributed in US embassies and consulates across Latin America. Whitney even accompanied Walt Disney and Donald Duck to Rio de Janeiro (Powdermaker 1950: 71; Kahn 1981: 145).

During the invasion of Europe in 1944 and 1945, the military closed Axis films, shuttered the industry, and insisted on the release of US movies, and the *quid pro quo* for the subsequent Marshall Plan was the abolition of customs restrictions, amongst which were limits on film imports (Trumpbour 2002: 63, 3-4, 62, 98; Pauwels and Loisen 2003: 293). In the case of Japan, the occupation immediately changed the face of cinema. When theatres reopened after the US dropped its atomic bombs, all films and posters with war themes were gone. Previously-censored Hollywood texts dominated screens. The occupying troops established an Information Dissemination Section in their Psychological Warfare Branch to imbue the local population with guilt and 'teach American values' through Hollywood (High 2003: 503-504).

The film industry's peak association at this time referred to itself as 'the little State Department,' so isomorphic were its methods and ideology with US policy and politics. This was also the era when the industry's self-censoring Production Code appended to its bizarre litany of sexual and narcotic prohibitions and requirements two items requested by the 'other' State Department: selling the

American way of life around the world, and avoiding negative representations of any 'foreign country with which we have cordial relations' (Powdermaker 1950: 36). Meanwhile, with the Cold War underway, the CIA's Psychological Warfare Workshop employed future Watergate criminal E. Howard Hunt, who clandestinely funded the rights purchase and production of George Orwell's anti-Soviet novels *Animal Farm* (Joy Batchelor and John Halas 1954) and *1984* (Michael Anderson 1956) (Cohen 2003). Producer Walter Wanger trumpeted the meshing of 'Donald Duck and Diplomacy' as 'a Marshall Plan for ideas ... a veritable celluloid Athens,' concluding that the state needed Hollywood 'more than ... the H bomb' (1950: 444, 446). Industry head Eric Johnston, fresh from his prior post as Secretary of Commerce, saw himself dispatching 'messengers from a free country.' Harry Truman agreed, referring to movies as 'ambassadors of goodwill' during his Presidency (quoted in Johnston 1950; also see Hozic 2001: 77). The United States Information Service spread its lending library of films across the globe as part of Cold-War expansion. John F. Kennedy instructed the Service to use film and television to propagandise, and his Administration funded 226 film centres in 106 countries, equipped with 7,541 projectors (Lazarsfeld 1950: xi; Legislative Research Service 1964: 9, 19). The title of a Congressional Legislative Research Service 1964 report made the point bluntly: *The U.S. Ideological Effort: Government Agencies and Programs*. That impulse has been renewed. Four decades later, union officials soberly intoned that 'although the Cold War is no longer a reason to protect cultural identity, today U.S.-produced pictures are still a conduit through which our values, such as democracy and freedom, are promoted' (Ulrich and Simmers 2001: 365).

Then there is the Defence Department. Since World War II, the Pentagon has provided technology, soldiers, and settings to motion pictures and television in return for a jealously-guarded right to veto assistance to stories that offend its sensibilities (Robb 2004). Today's hybrid of SiliWood (Silicon Valley and Hollywood) blends Northern Californian technology, Hollywood methods, and military funding. The interactivity underpinning this hybrid has evolved through the articulation since the mid-1980s of Southern and Northern California semiconductor and computer manufacture and systems and software development (a massively military-inflected and -supported industry until after Cold War II) to Hollywood screen content, as disused aircraft-production hangars became entertainment sites. The links are as much about technology, personnel, and collaboration on ancillary projects as they are about story lines. Stephen Spielberg is a recipient of the Pentagon's Medal for Distinguished Public Service; Silicon Graphics feverishly designs material for use by the empire in both its military and cultural aspects; and virtual-reality research veers between soldierly and audience applications, much of it subsidised by the Federal Technology Reinvestment Project and Advanced Technology Program. This has further submerged killing machines from serious public scrutiny. Instead, they surface superficially as Hollywood props (Directors Guild of America 2000; Hozic 2001: 140-141, 148-151).

Simplistic textual reflectionism, which argues that the US screen industries are free of state pressure and immune to nationalistic propaganda because cowboy-style heroes have not proliferated since 2001 as message-boys of imperialism (Douthat 2008) misses the point. The industry sprang into step with the state after 11th September 2001, consulting on possible attacks and forming a 'White House-Hollywood Committee' to ensure coordination between the nations we bomb and the messages we export. Then there were the spies: the very week before the 2001 attacks on the US, the *New York Times* previewed the coming autumn television drama schedule with the headline 'Hardest-Working Actor of the Season: The C.I.A.' (Bernstein 2001; also see Cohen 2001) because three prime-time shows were made under the aegis of the Agency. And with NASA struggling to renovate its image, who better to invite to lunch than Hollywood producers, so they would script new texts featuring it as a benign, exciting entity? In the process, the profound contradictions between pursuing profit and violence versus civility get washed away, their instrumentalism erased in favour of dramatic re-enchantment as a supposedly higher moral purpose expressed in nation and valour (Behnke 2006).

This tendency was most clearly-expressed in the shape of *24*, began in the fateful fall of 2001, and screens around the world: in 2009, one hundred million people watch it across 236 channels. The show's creator, Joel Surnow, boasts of being a 'rightwing nut job' (quoted in Aitkenhead 2009), and *24* has featured cameos by his ideological *confrères* in politics (John McCain) and the news media (Laura Ingraham and Larry Elder). It was endorsed by intellectual lackeys of the Bush regime such as the *ur*-disgraced-academic John Woo, who wrote legal justifications for inhumane brutality (Lithwick 2008). The Heritage Foundation, a reactionary, coin-operated think tank, held a press conference in 2006 in celebration of the series that featured Michael Chertoff, then the Secretary of Homeland Security, and extremist talk-radio host Rush Limbaugh, who announced that Vice-President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld were fans of the programme. *24* clearly endorses torture as a means of extracting information from terrorists, which has been a major ideological and policy distinction between US political parties since 2001. For some critics, it represents '*la suma de los miedos americanos*' [the sum of American fears] (Miklos 2008: 79). John Downing has termed the program '*the most extended televisual reflection to date on the implications of 9/11*' and an egregious argument in favour of the 'need' for immediate and illegal action in the 'public interest' (2007: 62). It's fine for the hero, Jack Bauer, 'a man never at a loss for something to do with an electrode,' to deny medical assistance to a terrorist whom he has wounded, shoot another's wife in the leg, then threaten a second shot to the knee unless her husband confides in him; and fine for the US President to subject a Cabinet member to electric shocks to interrogate him (Downing 2007: 72, 77; Lithwick 2008) as Bauer endlessly intones 'Whatever it takes'. Thank heavens for Stella Artois' Godardian spoof.²

Television

In this context, it comes as no surprise that nationalistic militarism also colours the way that US television covers news and current affairs, where the private media are in step with more formal, state-based propaganda. Consider the coverage of civilian casualties in imperialist conflicts since 2001. Lawrence Eagleburger, a former Secretary of State, who was called in to comment by CNN after the attacks on the US, said: 'There is only one way to begin to deal with people like this, and that is you have to kill some of them even if they are not immediately directly involved', while Republican-Party house intellectual Anne Coulter called on the government to identify the nations where terrorists lived, 'invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity' (*National Review* Online, October 13, 2001). Coulter was also the author of the notorious rebuke on television to a disabled Vietnam veteran that 'People like you caused us to lose that war'. She proceeded to propose that the right 'physically intimidate liberals, by making them realise that they can be killed too', and informed Fox News watchers and magazine readers that liberals desire 'lots of 9/11s' and 'Arabs lie' (quoted in Alterman 2003: 3-5). Coulter's reward for such hyperbolic ignorance was frequent appearances on NBC, CNN, MSNBC, ABC, and HBO, *inter alia* (Alterman 2003: 5; FAIR 2005).

When the assault commenced, desperate Afghans in refugee camps were filmed by the BBC, which then sold the footage on to ABC. But the soundtrack to the two broadcast versions gave them incompatible meanings:

British media presented the camps as consisting of refugees from U. S. bombing who said that fear of the daily bombing attacks had driven them out of the city, whereas U. S. media presented the camps as containing refugees from Taliban oppression and the dangers of civil war. (Kellner 2003: 125)

CNN instructed presenters to mention 11th September each time Afghan suffering was discussed, and Walter Isaacson, the network's President, decreed that it was 'perverse to focus too much on the casualties or hardship' (quoted in Kellner 2003: 107, 66).

As the 2003 Iraq invasion loomed, Rupert Murdoch said 'there is going to be collateral damage ... if you really want to be brutal about it, better we get it done now' (quoted in Pilger 2003). The human impact of the invasion was dismissed by Public Broadcasting Service *News Hour* Executive Producer Lester Crystal as not 'central at the moment' (quoted in Sharkey 2003). Fox News Managing Editor Brit Hume said that civilian casualties may not belong on television, as they are 'historically, by definition, a part of war'. In the fortnight prior to the invasion, none of the three major commercial networks examined the humanitarian impact of such an action. Human Rights Watch's briefing paper, and a UN Undersecretary-General's warning on the topic, lay uncovered (FAIR 2003a). By contrast, the Qatar-owned TV news network Al Jazeera, for example, dedicated only a third of its stories to war footage, emphasizing

human distress over electronic effectiveness, vernacular reportage rather than patriotic euphemism. But thousands of civilian Afghan and Iraqi deaths reported by it and South Asian, South-East Asian, Western European, and other Middle Eastern news services went essentially unrecorded here (Lewis et al. 2004: 14; Rich 2003; Jaspersen and El-Kikhia 2003: 119, 126-127; Herold 2001; Flanders 2001; Kellner 2004: 334; della Cava 2003; Greenberg 2003).

US viewers were treated to a carnival of *matériel* that oscillated between glorifying and denying death, privileging the 'technically sweet'. 38 per cent of CNN's coverage of the bombardment emphasised technology, while 62 per cent focused on military activity, without referring to history or politics. Civilian suffering took second place to military manoeuvres and odes. This fetishisation of the 'technically sweet' subordinated critical expertise. More than half the US television-studio guests talking about the impending action in Iraq in 2003 were superannuated white-male pundits (FAIR 2003b), 'ex-military men, terrorism experts, and Middle Eastern policy analysts who know none of the relevant languages, may never have seen any part of the Middle East, and are too poorly educated to be expert at anything' (Said 2003). During the war, news effectively diminished the dominant discourse to instrumental rationality and state propaganda. Of 319 people giving 'analysis' on ABC, CBS, and NBC in October 2003, 76 per cent were current or previous officials. Of the civilians, 79 per cent were Republican-Party mavens. And all in all, 81 per cent of sources were Yanquis (Whiten 2004; Rendall and Butterworth 2004; Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy 2005). The *New York Times* refers to these has-been and never-were interviewees like this: '[p]art experts and part reporters, they're marketing tools, as well' (Jensen 2003). But their virtually universal links to arms-trading were rarely divulged, and never discussed as relevant. Retired Lieutenant General Barry McCaffrey, employed in this capacity by NBC News, points to the *cadre's* 'lifetime of experience and objectivity'. In his case, this involved membership of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, a lobby group dedicated to influencing the media, and the boards of three munitions companies that make ordnance he had praised on MSNBC. Even amongst the thoroughly ideologised US public, 36 per cent believed the media over-emphasised the opinions of these retirees (Roy 2004; Benaim *at al.* 2003; Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2004: 15).³ Perhaps the most relevant factor is that General Electric, which owns MSNBC and NBC, is one of the largest defence contractors in the world. It receives billions of dollars from the Pentagon each year. Disney (which owns ABC) is also a beneficiary of *largesse* from the Department of Defense (Turse 2008: 3).

In addition to these complex domestic imbrications of the private and public sectors, the US government attempts to limit the expression of alternative positions on world television. To hide the carnage of its 2001 invasion, the Pentagon bought exclusive rights to satellite photos of Afghanistan (Solomon 2001; Magder 2003: 38). And the Associated Press Managing Editors sent an open letter of protest to the Pentagon, noting that 'journalists have been harassed,

have had their lives endangered and have had digital camera disks, videotape and other equipment confiscated' by the US military (APME 2003).

Consider the treatment of Al Jazeera. The US State Department tried to disrupt the network by applying pressure to Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamid bin Khalifa al-Thani, and the channel's Washington correspondent was 'detained' *en route* to a US-Russia summit in November 2001 (International Federation of Journalists 2001: 20; Hafez 2001; el-Nawawy and Gher 2003; Miladi 2003: 159). The network was assaulted by US munitions in Afghanistan in 2001 (where it was the sole broadcast news outlet in Kabul) and Iraq in 2003, and subject to then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's denunciation of it as 'Iraqi propaganda' and the Bush regime's ignorant and insulting moniker: 'All Osama All the Time.' During the US occupation of Iraq, Al Jazeera workers have been subject to violent assaults by US soldiers, culminating in murders. Rear Admiral Craig Quigley, US deputy assistant defence secretary for public affairs, justified the attack on the network's Kabul operations with the claim that Al Qaeda interests were being aided by activities going on there. Quigley's nutty proof was that Al Jazeera was using a satellite uplink and was in contact with Taliban officials – pretty normal activities for a news service (Miller 2007).

In direct opposition to Al Jazeera, the US Government selected Grace Digital Media to run an Arabic-language satellite television news service into post-invasion Iraq. A fundamentalist Christian company, Grace described itself as 'dedicated to transmitting the evidence of God's presence in the world today' via 'secular news, along with aggressive proclamations that will 'change the news' to reflect the Kingdom of God' (quoted in Mokhiber and Weissman 2003). The firm fell apart in controversial circumstances, swallowed up by God TV.

Many observers of US media coverage of the Afghan and Iraq wars argue that 'we got our media back' after the chaos wrought on the US Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 – that the catastrophe marked a recognition by the mainstream press corps that the Administration was mendacious and incompetent, having sacrificed objective technocracy at the font of post-secular enchantment. That may be so – but the real test will come the next time the US is invading somewhere, and pretextual alibis are scant and spurious. The omens remain poor. For at this moment of putative rediscovery of truth and reason, the media continue to deliver falsehoods that have a huge impact on the public. In early 2008, CBS conducted a high-profile interview with the man who had been a US military interrogator of Saddam Hussein prior to the fallen dictator's execution. The segment was predicated on Hussein's alleged failure to admit that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq prior to the 2003 invasion, which was explained as a puzzling error that had led to war. But Hussein had been interviewed on that very network five years earlier, days before the struggle began, assuring viewers that there were no such weapons! Quite clearly, CBS was seeking to give the US government a free pass after the event, rewriting its own archival history. And on the issue of Iraqis killed in the war, the valid statistical work done by top epidemiologists continues to be suppressed across television news and current affairs. Hundreds of thousands

of Iraqis have died, according to these estimates. But as at February 2007, in the eyes of the credulous US public, the Iraqi casualty figure was below 10,000 (Roberts et al. 2004; FAIR 2008; McElwee 2008).

Games

In addition to punditry, the Iraq war offered other money-making opportunities to superannuated veterans of imperialistic nationalism. Visitors to the Fox News site on May 31, 2004 encountered a 'grey zone'. On one side of the page, a US soldier in battle gear prowled the streets of Baghdad. On the other, a *Terror Handbook* promised to facilitate 'Understanding and facing the threat to America' under the banner: 'WAR ON TERROR sponsored by KUMA WAR' (a major gaming company). The *Kuma: War* game includes online missions entitled 'Fallujah: Operation al Fajr', 'Battle in Sadr City', and 'Uday and Qusay's Last Stand'. Its legitimacy and realism are underwritten by the fact that the firm is run by retired military officers, and used as a recruiting tool by their former colleagues. Both sides benefit from the company's website, which invites soldiers to pen their battlefield experiences – a neat way of getting intellectual property *gratis* in the name of the nation (Deck 2004; Power 2007: 272; Turse 2008: 137). The site boasts that:

Kuma War is a series of playable recreations of real events in the War on Terror. Nearly 100 playable missions bring our soldiers' heroic stories to life, and you can get them all right now, for free. Stop watching the news and get in the game!

Once again, a 'technically sweet' appeal fetishises *matériel* (Andersen 2006: 296).

Many critics have expressed shock that US journalists embedded with the US military for the Iraq invasion said the experience was 'like a video game' (quoted in Power 2007: 271). They shouldn't have been so taken aback, because gaming has been crucial to war and *vice versa* since the late 19th century, when the US Naval War College Game simulated Prussian and French field tactics. Such methods gained popularity after remarkable success in predicting Japanese strategy in the Pacific from 1942. By the late '50s, computers were utilised to theorise and play them (Der Derian 2003: 38-39). Game theory in 1960s and '70s political science and warcraft sought to scientise the study and practice of crisis decision-making, founded on a rational-actor model of maximising utility that was reapplied to the conduct of states, soldiers, and diplomats to construct nuclear-war prospects and counters. Then, with the decline of Keynesianism, game theory's ideal-typical monadic subject came to dominate economics and political science more generally. Utility maximisation even overtook parts of Marxism, which had tended to favour collective rather than selfish models of choice. Games were in, everywhere you looked. That notion of individuals

out for themselves remains in vogue, restimulated through electronic games (which were invented for the US military by defence contractors). The Pentagon worked with Atari in the 1980s to develop *Battlezone*, an arcade game, for use as a flight simulator for fighter pilots, at the same time as it established a gaming centre within the National Defense University (Power 2007: 276). In the early 1990s, the end of Cold War II wrought economic havoc on many corporations involved in the US defence industry. They turned to the games industry as a natural supplement to their principal customer, the military. Today's new geopolitical crisis sees these firms (Quantum 3-D, Martin Marietta, and so on) conducting half their games business with the private market and half with the Pentagon (Hall 2006).

The US military, that mismanaged, misdirected, but masterful behemoth that underpins globalisation, calculates that it needs 80,000 recruits a year to maintain world dominance. The military-diplomatic-fiscal disasters of the 2001-2007 period jeopardised the steady supply of new troops, imperilling the army's stature as the nation's premier employer of 17-24 year-old workers. At the same time as neophytes were hard to attract to the military due to the perils of war, recruits to militaristic game design stepped forward – nationalistic designers volunteered their services. Their mission, which they appeared to accept with alacrity, was to interpellate the country's youth by situating their bodies and minds to fire the same weapons and face the same issues as on the battlefield. TV commercials depicted soldiers directly addressing gamers, urging them to show their manliness by volunteering for the real thing and serving abroad to secure US power (Verklin and Kanner 2007; 'New Wargames' 2007; Thompson 2004; Power 2007: 282).

Players of the commercial game *Doom II* can download *Marine Doom*, a Marine-Corps modification of the original that was developed after the Corps commandant issued a directive that games would improve tactics. And Sony's *U.S. Navy Seals* website links directly to the Corps' own page. For the scholarly advocates of corporate culture who proliferate in game studies, this doesn't appear to be a problem: 'games serve the national interest by entertaining consumer-citizens and creating a consumer-based demand for military technology' that is unrelated to actual violence (Hall 2006; Power 2007: 277). *America's Army* is variously said to be 'primarily a ludological construct' (Nieborg 2004), or to stimulate a vibrant counter-public sphere in which veterans dispute the *bona fides* of non-military players. It is allegedly a contested site where what began as a recruitment device has transmogrified into 'a place where civilians and service folk ... discuss the serious experience of real-life war' (Jenkins 2006: 214-215).

This sanguine outlook has its own material history in the sordid links of research schools, cybertarians, and the military. In 1996, the National Academy of Sciences held a workshop for academia, Hollywood, and the Pentagon on simulation and games. The next year, the National Research Council announced a collaborative research agenda in popular culture and militarism. It convened meetings to streamline such cooperation, from special effects to

training simulations, from immersive technologies to simulated networks (Le-noir 2003: 190; Macedonia 2002). Since that time, untold numbers of academic journals and institutes on games have become closely tied to the Pentagon. They generate research designed to test and augment the recruiting and training potential of games to ideologise, hire, and instruct the population. The Center for Computational Analysis of Social and Organizational Systems at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh promulgates studies underwritten by the Office of Naval Research and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). DARPA is blissfully happy to use its US\$2 billion annual budget to examine how social networking uncovers 'top America's Army players' distinct behaviours, the optimum size of an America's Army team, the importance of fire volume toward opponent, the recommendable communication structure and content, and the contribution of the unity among team members' (Carley et al. 2005). And it refers to Orlando as 'Team Orlando' because the city houses Disney's research-and-development 'imagineers'; the University of Central Florida's Institute for Simulation and Training; Lockheed Martin, the nation's biggest military contractor; and the Pentagon's Institute for Simulation and Training.

In Los Angeles, the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT) was set up as a means of articulating scholars, film and television producers, and game designers. It was formally opened by the Secretary of the Army and the head of the Motion Picture Association of America, and started with US\$45 million of the military's budget in 1998, a figure that was doubled in its 2004 renewal. ICT uses military money and Hollywood muscle to test out homicidal technologies and narrative scenarios – under the aegis of faculty from film, engineering, and communications (Deck 2004; Silver and Marwick 2006: 50; Turse 2008: 120). Companies such as Pandemic (part-owned by that high-corporate moralist, Bono) invest. ICT also collaborates on major motion pictures, for instance *Spider-Man 2* (Sam Raimi 2004), and its workspace was thought up by the set designer for the *Star Trek* franchise. ICT produces Pentagon recruitment tools such as *Full Spectrum Warrior* that double as 'training devices for military operations in urban terrain': what's good for the Xbox is good for the combat simulator. The utility of these innovations continues in combat. The Pentagon is aware that off-duty soldiers play games. The idea is to invade their supposed leisure time, weaning them from skater games and towards what are essentially training manuals. It even boasts that *Full Spectrum Warrior* was the 'game that captured Saddam', because the men who dug Hussein out had been trained with it. And electronic games have become crucial tools because fewer and fewer nations now allow the US to play live war games on their terrain (Burston 2003; Stockwell and Muir 2003; Andersen 2007; Turse 2008: 122, 119; Harmon 2003; Kundnani 2004).

Conclusion

Let's return to where we began – *America's Army* – and its story. The Naval Postgraduate School's Modelling, Virtual Environments and Simulation Academic Program had developed a game called *Operation Starfighter*, based on the film *The Last Starfighter* (Nick Castle 1984). The next step, *America's Army*, was farmed out for participation by George Lucas's companies, *inter alia*. It was launched with due symbolism on the 4th of July 2002 – dually symbolic, in that Independence Day doubles as a key date in the film industry's summer roll-out of features. The military had to bring additional servers into play to handle 400,000 downloads of the game that first day. *Gamespot PC Reviews* awarded it a high textual rating, and was equally impressed by the 'business model'. Five years after its release, it was one of the ten most-played games on line. As of February 2008, *America's Army* had nine million registered users. Civilian developers regularly refreshed it by consulting with veterans and participating in physical wargames. Paratexts provided additional forms of promotional renewal. Americasarmy.com/community takes full advantage of the usual array of cybertarian fantasies about the new media as civil society, across the gamut of community fora, internet chat, fan sites, and virtual competition. And the game is formally commodified through privatisation – bought by Ubisoft to be repurposed for games consoles, arcades, and cell phones, and turned into figurines by the allegedly edgy independent company Radioactive Clown. Tournaments are convened, replete with hundreds of thousands of dollars' prize money, along with smaller events at military recruiting sites. With over forty million downloads, and web sites by the thousand, its message has travelled far and wide – an excellent return on the initial public investment of US\$19 million and US\$5 million annually for updates. Studies of young people who have positive attitudes to the US military indicate that 30 per cent of them formed that view through playing the game – a game that sports a Teen rating; a game that forbids role reversal via modifications, preventing players from experiencing the pain of the other; a game that is officially ranked first among the Army's recruiting tools ('AA:SF' 2008; Power 2007: 279-280; Ture 2008: 117, 123-124; Lenoir 2003: 175; Gaudiosi 2005; Nieborg 2004; Turse 2008: 118, 157; Craig 2006; Shachtman 2002; Thompson 2004). The invasion of Los Angeles by Special Forces in 2003 had worked – and it was an invasion by capitalism as much as nationalism. Meanwhile, virtual blowback was underway, with Al Qaeda reportedly learning tactics by playing these games and developing counters of their own (Power 2007: 283) and the artist Joseph DeLappe creating counter-texts on-line by typing the details of dead soldiers into the game under the moniker 'dead-in-Iraq'.⁴

But perhaps the unholy Trinity of media, Pentagon, and screen was unwittingly stimulating opponents. One thing was certain: its techniques of nationalism, from secreted state subvention to immense immersive interpellation, would continue for some time in the service of 'the disappearance of the body, the aestheticising of violence, [and] the sanitisation of war' (Der Derian 2005: 30).

Critics must bear in mind the way that war, profits, and economic restructuring are all too often obscured by the complex, multi-point nature of corporate, military, and entertainment interests and funds, working in the mutual interest of *raison Hollywood* and *raison d'état* under the brutal sign of 'violent cartographies' (Shapiro 2007: 293). Virtual or otherwise, that record of death, disablement, and destruction must be catalogued and criticised.

Notes

1. Thanks to the editors for their encouraging and stimulating feedback.
2. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/mar/23/stella-artois-nouvelle-vague>.
3. This is no surprise, given the cohort's laughable predictions about the Shi'a rising against the Ba'ath, resistance from the Special Republican Guard and security agencies, and the deployment of gas and other mass-destruction weaponry by the Iraqi military. The list of failed assessments goes on and on, in keeping with the errors many such pundits had made in the 1980s (when they welcomed the Iraqi regime as an ally).
4. See <http://www.unr.edu/art/DELAPPE/DeLappe%20Main%20Page/DeLappe%20Online%20MAIN.html>.

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