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Introduction: Media, Technology, and the Culture of Militarism: Watching, Playing and Resisting the War Society

Robin Andersen and Tanner Mirrlees

As this special issue moves into production, the world remembers the centennial of the Great War, which sadly was not the war to end all wars. Instead, WWI gave birth to modern war propaganda and established a “symbiotic relationship” between the media and the military. The art and industry of representing war through various media forms was finely tuned over the course of what became a very bloody 20th century, and the military conflicts of the present are firmly embedded in the 21st century media environment. Since 9/11, media studies scholars have analyzed the nexus of the media industry and the military and scrutinized the media products of war which result from this unity. Many military media products invite their subjects to dispassionately watch and interactively play war; some, albeit a few, display signs of resistance to it. Today, critical studies that seek to unravel the ties that bind the media to the military require multiple perspectives, theoretical formulations and material practices. This special issue presents timely scholarship at the forefront of understanding and responding to current trends in media and militarism.

The Media War

At a safe distance from the actual battles of war, civilians read war stories, hear war broadcasts, watch tele-vised war fictions and play war games. Yet this mediated field of spectacular vision and immersive narrative space is never actual war, but a partial, selective, often simulated and mostly partisan representation of it. It is something that has been constructed, scripted and produced, and over the years scholars have appreciated the disjuncture between war and its media representations and contemplated the consequences of the loss of the real. War itself refers to actual material referents: invasions, occupations, violent conflicts and coups, and the cities, deserts and jungles where people fight, bleed, kill and die. Media images, tropes, themes and myths of war often bear little resemblance to war itself. Philip Taylor contends that each time the U.S. military wages war, two kinds of war occur: an actual war and a “media war.”¹ Civilians never see the actual war but instead consume or play media-engineered stories of conflict—a media war. Indeed, the products of this media war—news clips, TV shows, films, video games and digital content—represent America at war to U.S. and world publics in ways that often do not inform or foster empathy but instead rein-

force national dichotomies and international conflicts. As Michael Billig points out, media images of nationalism often elicit viewer identification with a national self and distinguish this self from others.² Media representations of nations at war contribute to territorially-based “imagined communities,”³ showing and telling citizens who they are and who they are not in a world of warring states. The made-for media war obscures the economic and geopolitical causes of war and denies the horrors of its aftermath:⁴ when battles are scripted as bloodless entertainment and death and suffering get masked by heroic stories of spectacular victory.⁵

The real war and media war are and should be seen as distinct, but over the course of the 20th century, they grew closer due to the power of new communication technologies—radio, TV and the computer—to visually integrate the home-front and the battlefield, here and there, near and far, local and global.⁶ The new “spaces” of war lead us back to the Great War, when the ties between the military and the media were forged. In the early 21st century, “media wars” are still shaped and moulded by the very institutions they represent.

The Media-Military Complex

Since World War I, the U.S. military has woven media manipulation strategies into war’s planning, execution and aftermath, combining a mix of propaganda and censorship to sell war by engineering public consent to war policy and stifling dissent. The Creel Committee of Public Information (CPI) in World War I, the Office of War Information (OWI) in World War II and the United States Information Agency (USIA) in the Cold War incubated a “symbiotic relationship” between the U.S. military and media industries. In 1969, Herbert I. Schiller described this emerging and mutually beneficial military-media industry partnership as a “military-industrial-communications complex”(MICC).⁷ In 1970, Senator J. William Fulbright criticized it as the “Pentagon Propaganda machine”(PPM), noting the DOD’s recruitment of private media firms to make films, TV shows, media events, exhibits and more to promote a positive yet skewed image of war to the public.⁸ In the late 1990s, James Der Derian described a developing “military-industrial-media-entertainment network” (MIME-NET) and scrutinized its “virtuous wars”: a combination of virtual (war as image) and virtuous (war without human consequences).⁹ These virtuous wars aimed to “create a fidelity between the representation and reality of war,” but ultimately failed to do so. “When compared to the real trauma of war” noted Der Derian, “the pseudo-trauma of simulation pales.”¹⁰ The governmental art and business of turning war into disinformation, media image and entertainment spectacle has been finely tuned for over one-hundred years. By the beginning of the 21st-century, the military-media complex’s cadre were sophisticated specialists in symbolic violence.

The Beverly Hills Summit, circa 9/11

On November 11, 2001 two months following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Bush Administration communications strategist Karl Rove called a powwow known as the Beverly Hills Summit and four dozen members of the media industry elite showed up. Rove asked these “dream makers” to assist the Bush Administration in “helping the public to see the war on terror as a fight against evil.”¹¹ Many in the U.S. media industry were willing to listen. At the time, Rove claimed that the government would not try to directly control news and entertainment content. “Our communication with the industry will be to help answer questions they might have about, for example, access to government facilities,” Mr. Rove said. “Our job will not be to direct, not to approve and not to ask. I came with a few suggestions” not to say that this effort in any way should “be directed by or coordinated by the government.”¹² Then head of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), Jack Valenti, stressed that film and TV show “content were not on the table” but also explained his participation in the meeting with Rove as a way to kick start “contributing Hollywood’s creative imagination and their persuasion skills to help in this war effort.”¹³ Other media elites nonetheless lined up to pronounce that they would not allow the Bush Administration to control their creativity. In the words of Robert Iger, chief operating officer (CEO) for the Walt Disney Company: “We’re not going to set out to influence opinion in a manner that could in any way be construed as a propaganda effort backed by the administration.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, the links established at the Summit augmented an already massive military PR infrastructure to further cement the links between the U.S. government and the media industries. This unity has, in the words of Henry Giroux (2006), created “a constant military presence in American life” and forged a “civil society [. . .] more aggressive in its war-like enthusiasms.”¹⁵

Media Corporations, the Pentagon and the Culture of War in the 21st Century

In the decade following 9/11, U.S. media corporations rolled out many “militainment” products that mixed militaristic messages and imagery with entertainment formats. TV network news departments jumped onboard the war effort by helping the Bush Administration sell the bombing of Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq. Sourced with military-engineered pseudo-events, staffed by embedded journalists and spun by retired U.S. military generals and defense lobbyists dressed up as “experts,” the TV news media rallied the public to war by framing the war on terror’s pretext and execution in ways that aligned with the state’s PR goals.¹⁶ Supported by the Department of Defense’s (DOD) Entertainment Liaison Office and its head, Phil Strub, Hollywood studios packaged war-themed blockbuster films like *Windtalkers* (2002), *Transformers* (2007) and *Iron Man* (2008) while TV networks scheduled military-themed TV shows such as *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *Over There* (2005) and sold audience attention to advertisers by mobilizing it with paranoid “war on terror” thrillers

like the controversial *24* (2001-2010).¹⁷ The DOD and the video game industry meanwhile co-designed war games such as *America's Army* to turn citizens into virtual soldiers, deploy them in immersive battle-spaces and get them to play rituals of military training and state coercion for fun.¹⁸ Used by more than two billion people each day, the Internet and social media websites like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter were infiltrated by the DOD; in this new "battle-space," the DOD's cyborg-soldiers waged "cyber-war," attacked rival networks and delivered "influential content in order to shape perceptions, influence opinions, and control behavior."¹⁹ At annually TV broadcast NFL Super Bowl games, the AH-64D Apache, the UH-60M Black Hawk and the CH-47F Chinook choppers flew over sports stadiums to accompany the crowd's singing of the national anthem and the fireworks bursting in the air.²⁰ Even the civilians who wished to escape the war spectacle by taking a walk faced its promotion. In 2012, a gigantic billboard for the war game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*, loomed over Times Square, NYC, telling pedestrians: "There is a soldier in all of us."²¹

The military-media complex serves military ends, persuading and cajoling civilians to identify their outlook, interests and values with those of the military and national security state. This complex and its militainment forms express and sustain a growing culture of militarism. The historian Andrew Bacevich argues that American strength and well-being is currently understood "in terms of military preparedness, military action, and the fostering of (or nostalgia for) military ideals."²² Current research on the media-military complex, militainment and its culture of militarism seeks to document the ways in which media depictions of war elicit identification with military policy, personnel and practice by equating patriotism (or love of one's country) with unquestioning support for the military. Militarized media products represent state coercion—the prolonged or just-in-time deployment of troops and drones into battles with other peoples, places and cultures—as the only solution to global problems and cast U.S. military dominance as absolutely necessary in a threatening world divided between a benevolent Us and evil Them. Such militainment glorifies war's history, venerates its present and imagines its future while marveling at its institutions, worshipping its weapons systems and unthinkingly, "supporting the troops." Due to war and its complex, militarism has become "widespread in the realm of culture and functions as a mode of public pedagogy, instilling the values and the aesthetic of militarization" in society "through a wide variety of sites and cultural venues."²³

The media and communications system is a significant source and site of militarization. Yet it is unlikely that U.S. civilians conceive of themselves as targets of military indoctrination when they watch a blockbuster film at the local theatre or view a TV show from the comfort of their home, but the military promotes itself through all of these platforms. Many of the players obliterating un-American enemies in first-person shooter games are probably unaware that they are participating in a well-organized military PR and recruitment drive. Most could not fathom what an actual war would be like compared to the "realism" of combat touted by the virtuous war's designers. Digerati chatter about the Internet's challenge to state sovereignty make it seem as though the virtual sphere is exempt from military info-operations, when it is not. And while sporting stadiums and city streets do not seem obviously geopolitical, the military has worked hard to forge a presence in these spaces. Indeed,

the state of war supports a media and culture of militarism.

The War State

Throughout the 20th century, the U.S. waged war almost permanently.²⁴ Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Bush Administration declared a global “war on terror” against rogue states and terrorists, fusing military unilateralism with neoliberal ideals of free-market capitalism.²⁵ The U.S. spent trillions of dollars invading and then occupying Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite being elected as the peace candidate, President Obama continued and expanded the previous administration’s war on terror with a secret kill list, clandestine drone strikes, covert attacks by special force operatives and training and deploying non-U.S. proxy armies, local militias and insurgents to overthrow non-aligned states and waging cyber-warfare.²⁶ The Obama Administration oversaw air strikes on Libya, weapons transfers to Syrian rebels, drone operations across Ethiopia, Pakistan and Mexico, black ops in Iran, Somalia and Ukraine, and counter-terrorism initiatives in Honduras, Guyana, across East Africa, and elsewhere. Apparently, the war on terror is boundless and endless.

The 20th century growth of the U.S. as a superpower was tied inextricably to war and Congressional allocations of immense public wealth to the military agencies and private industries that prepared for and waged it. In the 21st century, the U.S. maintains the most expensive and extensive military on the planet to buttress its power against would-be rivals in a period in which its unipolar privilege has been unsettled by the Great Recession of 2007-2008, the rise of Brazil, India, China and Russia (the BRICs) and other challenges.²⁷ With a gargantuan defense budget of \$682 billion, the U.S. currently accounts for about 40% of the world’s total military expenditure.²⁸ This budget is about four times larger than China’s (\$166 billion), the world’s second largest spender and almost eight times the size of Russia’s (\$90.7 billion), the third biggest spender.²⁹ To defend and advance its interests, the U.S. runs a globe-sprawling network of hundreds of bases that stretch far and wide across many continents, connecting and linking 150 of the world’s 192 states to the Pentagon’s command and control center.³⁰ The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD)—the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard—controls almost two million troops (more than 250,000 deployed around the world), a stockpile of the most nuclear weapons (more than half of the world total) and research and development (R&D) of the most advanced war technologies. And the DOD spends billions of public dollars procuring weapons systems from arms corporations such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, General Dynamics, Raytheon, L-3 Communications and United Technologies, and even high technology civilian firms like Apple, Microsoft, and Electronic Arts.³¹

Now so thoroughly saturated with the weapons of war, the DOD supplies military equipment worth more than \$4 billion to police departments across the country and the Department of Homeland Security has distributed more than \$34 billion in “terrorism grants” allowing them to acquire drones and Army tanks.³² The militarization of the police on the

“homefront” is but one of the many ways in which foreign wars come back to Main Street America.

The War Comes Home: Countervailing Tendencies and Resistance

When police in Ferguson Missouri killed Michael Brown (an unarmed black teenager), the community protested, the police responded with a show of force, and the small town became akin to a war zone. Outsized military armoured vehicles lined the streets and officers in military-style camouflage, heads obscured by black helmets and gas masks, marched upon Ferguson streets and shot tear gas into crowds of civilian demonstrators. Photojournalist Danny Lyon observed, “It didn’t look like America. It looked like Soweto. It looked like Soldiers.”³³ The images of main street America carried the same visual icons of the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan and the shocking visual landscape did not go unnoticed. When the *Philadelphia Daily News* tried to publish a photograph of a protester about to throw what looked like a firebomb, Twitter activists—understanding the power of the implied visual signification—succeeded in compelling the newspaper to run instead a photo of a black woman in front of police seeking answers to Brown’s death.

Mass mobilizations, public protests, cultural resistances and interventions for peace—countervailing forces in the war society—exist and should not surprise readers of this special issue. As the militarized security state grows, it is fought by a wide range of pacifist-minded citizens and social movements that together, struggle for another, better kind of world. Today, the erosion of democracy, the roll-back of civil liberties, the violation of the US constitution, and the dismantling of fifty years of international law including violations of the universal declaration of human rights against torture have been exposed by a plurality of groups that have documented, investigated, filmed, photographed, exposed, published, leaked, rejected, counter-narrated, and in general, challenged the media wars of the 21st century. The many social movements against militarism offer alternative visions of society that inspire hope and enact change by contesting the dominant war narratives, subverting the myths and shattering the illusions of what would otherwise be a monolithic militarized culture. Informing local and global publics of the brutalities of war, the ambushing of international diplomacy, the excesses of the national security state and much more, courageous citizens such as Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange, Edward Snowden and Jeremy Hammond are, as long-time civil liberties lawyer Michael Ratner calls them, courageous truth tellers.³⁴ For speaking of truth to power through countervailing communication networks, they have been imprisoned, placed in solitary confinement, and exiled as enemies of the state. Because the American news media often fails to inform the public about matters of national security and elite geopolitics, “none of these truth tellers had another way to get this information out, which should afford them protections from prosecution.”³⁵ As Mark Danner says, we live in an era of “frozen scandals,” when constitutional violations go unchecked, the CIA spies on congressional oversight committees that try to foster public dialogue about torture, and representative institutions and deliberative practices are unsettled by exceptional security pow-

ers on a daily basis.³⁶

The military-media complex and militainment products sustain a war society in which anti-democratic ideas and practices flourish, but countervailing and democratizing movements and ideas continue to exist. This special issue contains articles that critique the media, technology and culture of militarism and interrogate the new manifestations of the media war and mounting resistances to it. By doing so, it adds to public dialogue about state coercion and supports efforts to foster a culture of democracy, peace and social justice.

The Special Issue

This special issue explores a cross section of formats and technologies, using case studies to track and shed light on the connections between the military and the media industry. The articles included analyze media products—Hollywood films, TV shows, video games, and social media platforms—seeking to flesh out the stories, visual rhetorics and tropes that sustain the militarization of culture, as well as the business, management and technologies of militainment. The articles featured in this issue trace and track the tangled webs that connect the military to the media industry and show how the complex pushes the frontlines of the militarization of culture forward. Though heterodox in their theoretical approaches, all articles offer *critical* analysis of how media industries, mediums and content link with the U.S. national security state, express U.S. military policy, personnel and practice and embed militarism in the American way of life. The findings showcased here uncover the economic, political and technological forces of militarization. The pernicious effects of the war society and a militarized culture—the hollowing of democracy, the loss of humane visions for a different future, and even the violent re-conceptualization of humanity and nature itself—are increasingly ignored or normalized, which make it all the more important to identify the points of pacifist struggle, the counter-narratives and the challenges posed to media products made in support of the war society.

We ask why media industries, technologies and content support a militarized cultural milieu that obscures the brutal foreign realities and domestic consequences of war. While war is being waged by the U.S. military on distant terrains, why do profit-seeking U.S. media companies reinforce the militarization of U.S. culture by annually rolling out media products that represent wars as normal, acceptable and even enjoyable to the people watching and playing with them? How do war-themed media products glorify the state at war and forestall peaceful national imaginings? Given that media corporations produce mediated representations of war which are shaped by a society that is not unified and refuses to march lockstep with militarism, how might the media react against and in some instances, challenge war? Understanding popular media's imminent potential for such opposition, we also look for significant challenges to war within militainment itself.

The Articles

The first set of articles focus on the relationship between the DOD, Hollywood and popular filmic and tele-visual representations of the U.S. military and national security state. The military has been recruiting Hollywood studios as war filmmakers since at least WWI.³⁷ As the guns of August shot across the fields of France, the military mobilized the embryonic film industry to promote the war. The Creel Committee toured propaganda feature films across the country and banned antiwar movies while Hollywood stars promoted liberty bonds.³⁸ While young and old Americans were being recruited for the killing fields of the Western Front, the military-Hollywood-made silent film *The Fall of a Nation* (1916) was screened before a large audience in New York City. A “plea for military preparedness,” the film railed against pacifists, depicting a German led European invasion reaching U.S. shores on Long Island and evil Germans rounding up and executing aged Civil War veterans and innocent children while torturing American women. *The New York Times* review described the “photoplay” as “graphic and exciting, some of it quite absurd, and all of it undeniably entertaining.”³⁹ The film was “thrilling” even though it was propaganda.

Nearly one hundred years later, the U.S. military and Hollywood continue to co-produce war propaganda films. With a budget of over four billion dollars, the DOD’s PR apparatus is well funded, highly organized, and extremely influential.⁴⁰ The DOD’s Entertainment Liaison Office is the jewel in the crown, an essential component of the military-media complex and instrumental to the DOD’s power to shape war film content. Phil Strub is the long-timed head of the office and a powerful player in the movie business. When making war films, Hollywood studios need military hardware to shoot (i.e. jets, tanks and battleships). In hopes of getting these goods, they must first submit their scripts to Strub, who reviews them and decides whether or not they are fit for military assistance. Strub openly admits that “sometimes they require script changes as a condition of providing support.”⁴¹ Strub says that the DOD only supports war films that depict military life as “realistically” as possible, inform the public about U.S. military prowess, and assist in recruitment. Scripts that do not meet these three criteria are not supported and many war movies are never made because of the lack of DOD-supplied equipment. In fact, “The Marine Corps’ film office in Los Angeles contains a floor-to-ceiling shelf of files on films that asked for assistance but were never made, most too expensive to produce without military assistance.”⁴²

In addition to vetting scripts before supplying the hardware, Strub’s office carefully monitors the filming of the productions it chooses to support to prevent on-set deviations from its content stipulations, a process that circumscribes independent content decisions. As Strub says, “any film that portrays the military as negative is not realistic to us.”⁴³ What results are Hollywood war films that are only as “realistic” as the DOD allows them to be and which ideologically align with DOD publicity goals. “Strub has been uniformly admired in Hollywood and few pictures have deviated much from the ideological consensus he fostered—patriotism, a virtuous U.S. military, glorification of battlefield exploits and masculine heroism.”⁴⁴ Hollywood studios are not forced to work with the DOD, but many choose to do so for self-interested reasons. As David Robb points out, Hollywood liaisons for the

military understand the power of feature films and actively shape them into “commercials” for the military. He goes on: “Whether they succeed or fail is largely dependent on how craven the producers are.”⁴⁵ This also depends upon the bottom line of producers, which is profit-maximization. As Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard argue, “the safest way to get these returns is to produce low-risk militaristic films that are consonant with the militaristic culture.”⁴⁶

Robin Andersen’s essay makes an important contribution to the analysis of the contemporary DOD-Hollywood complex with a case study of the production and tropes of war in *Act of Valor* (2012). For Andersen, *Act of Valor* is a notable escalation of the DOD and Hollywood’s century long project to turn war into mass entertainment. Conceived as a recruitment ad by the DOD, made by the Bandito Brothers and released to theatres, *Act of Valor* is the first feature film to star active duty Navy SEALs, and in it, these once secretive Special Forces very publically promote pro-military myths. Andersen offers a rich textual analysis of the film’s tropes and themes of military preparedness, good soldiers and evil enemies, a tortured American woman and an “absurd” war narrative. Andersen also presents a systematic critique of the ways *Act of Valor* misrepresents the “reality” of U.S. military policy (Dirty Wars), personnel (elite special ops soldiers) and practice (terror, torture, clandestine killing and more). In particular, Andersen focuses on the way the film’s aestheticization of war sanitizes and celebrates a significant yet contentious transformation in U.S. foreign policy, denies the human, moral and political consequences of this transformation and glorifies the war society.

Though the DOD claims to only support the production of films that convey “realistic” depictions of war, it frequently contradicts its own reality criteria for rejecting scripts when helping Hollywood studios to make spectacular comic book, science fiction and fantasy films. Take, for example, the DOD’s support for Marvel Studios’ *Iron Man* (2008), an action-packed blockbuster based on the 1960s comic book character, Tony Stark.⁴⁷ The DOD let director Jon Favreau shoot parts of this imperial media commodity at Edwards Air Force base and gave him access to “the great C17s and the Raptors and all the stuff.”⁴⁸ The filming resulted in a “blue-skies ballet” between Iron Man and the F22A Raptors, which combine forces to kill a group of Afghan terrorists modeled on Al-Qaeda stereotypes.⁴⁹ The DOD’s provisioning of assistance to Michael Bay’s blockbuster *Transformers* (2007) again seemed to contravene its supposed commitment to realism. In *Transformers*, every branch of the DOD teams up with a few American teenagers and some good alien robots (Autobots) to do battle with bad ones (Decepticons) and save the world. The film was shot in White Sands Missile Base in New Mexico. Army liaison, Lt. Col. Gregory Bishop, boasted: “As far as I know, this is the biggest joint military operation movie ever made, in terms of Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines. I can’t think of one that’s bigger.”⁵⁰ Even Superman now shills for the Pentagon’s militainment factory. Based on a comic book, *Man of Steel* (2013) doubles as a fantastical advertisement for the Air Force’s F-35 jet.⁵¹ In the film, this jet flew its first and only mission over the town of Smallville, Superman’s hometown. In reality, the DOD’s R&D on this jet is a farcical boondoggle; it was grounded due to technical difficulties, cost citizens \$400 billion and is projected to reach \$1.5 trillion before it is done. None of the

above DOD-supported Hollywood militainment products fit the genre criteria of a realistic combat film: comic book heroes and toy-modeled extra-terrestrials don't exist and don't fight wars alongside the U.S. military. But the DOD backed them anyway, perhaps hoping to attract teenage filmgoers to its ranks with fantastical films that "set square jawed American heroes and superheroes" on the trail of cartoonish enemy threats and terrorist villains.⁵²

In this context, Gerry Canavan's study of *Battle: Los Angeles* (2011), a DOD-supported science fiction film about a platoon of U.S. Marines fighting off a global alien invasion from the ruins of Los Angeles, is intriguing. Though Canavan places this blockbuster film within the DOD-Hollywood complex and shows it to be a product that blurs the line between entertainment and propaganda, frames the soldier as a superhero, and generally extols militarism, his reading resists the notion that this film is one-dimensional war propaganda. In a complex and close textual analysis of a film with a most unrealistic and not particular well-crafted scenario, Canavan finds that in spite of the DOD's best efforts, the film's grounding in science fiction enables a subversion of its militaristic designs. In this case, even a DOD-supported blockbuster has resisted the preferred interpretation. Canavan focuses in on the film's antinomies and highlights how they speak back to and work against the grain of the militarizing geopolitical and economic organizations that co-produced the film. Beyond a critique of *Battle: Los Angeles*'s overt status as militainment, Canavan recovers from the film an implicit anti-imperial politics of resistance. The essay shows how a DOD-Hollywood film, though designed to manipulate, remains incomplete and unable to fully achieve the ideological aims of its producers.

Like many DOD-Hollywood complex films, *Act of Valor* and *Battle: Los Angeles* got made to serve a mix of military publicity goals and Hollywood profit-maximization interests. Commenting on the Beverly Hills Summit at the time, film producer Lynda Obst said: "The box office is God. And there shall be no false gods before it. Period." Anthony Grajeda's poignant analysis of *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), *Stop-Loss* (2008), *The Dry Land* (2010) and *Return* (2011) shows how a set of "returning vet films" that were not co-produced by the DOD-Hollywood complex refused to pander to military PR goals and spit-ed the box office God. These films do not follow the industry blockbuster model of engineering multimillion-dollar action for the youthful theater goers who buy most tickets, or portray soldiers as superheroes. Such counter-narratives of war, no matter how accurate a story they tell about the military and the struggles of "men and women in uniform," would never be supported by the Pentagon, and have no hope of appealing to the box office God. But as Grajeda details in these filmic homages to the human wreckage of war, we find filmmakers, actors and directors brave enough to challenge militainment. There is no doubt that such narratives are hard to tell and just as hard to watch. In this essay, Grajeda asks what becomes of narrative itself, when the wars they frame offer no real endings?

Since its post-WWII founding, the CIA has engaged in *covert* kinetic and psychological warfare.⁵³ But the CIA's terror against groups deemed threatening to U.S. national security gave it a bad rep around the world and in Hollywood. Up until the late 1990s, Hollywood studios capitalized on the CIA's shady status in the public mind, producing many films that framed the CIA as "an outfit (1) intent on assassination, (2) comprising rogue operatives

who act with little oversight, (3) failing to take care of its own officers and assets, (4) operating on morally ambiguous and perhaps morally reprehensible grounds, or (5) bedevilled by its own buffoonery and hopeless disorganization.”⁵⁴ To counter these negative film images, the CIA opened its own Entertainment Liaison Office in the mid-1990s. Since then, the CIA has worked with Hollywood studios to improve its image with films like *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), *Argo* (2012) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) that make some headway in supporting this rebranding effort. Deepa Kumar and Arun Kundnani’s essay contributes to a small but growing body of critical scholarship on the CIA-Hollywood nexus with a nuanced interpretation of the popular TV series, *Homeland*. Their article shows how *Homeland* articulates the Obama administration’s national security doctrine and departs from Bush’s. Though *Homeland* aligns with the publicity goals of the CIA’s Entertainment Liaison Office and is therefore a product of the “complex,” it leaves behind the Bush-era’s bombastic and hubristic foreign policy. The CIA heroes of *Homeland* are not 24’s gung ho cowboys of the Bush era, but are the educated, programmatic and sober-minded liberal imperialists of the Obama presidency. These characters’ cultural knowledge, diversity, and sophistication mirror the current president’s and seem enough to convince viewers that they can trust them to secure America. Nevertheless, Kumar and Kundnani demonstrate that *Homeland*’s fictional universe expresses the same strategic vision as the post-9/11 security state: a world system threatened by a stereotype of a terroristic Muslim “Other.” Kumar and Kundnani thus offer a complicated study of the interconnections between Hollywood and the national security state, arguing that even as Hollywood uses the state, officials also make use of Hollywood’s creative magic to imagine and justify their security policy.

Hollywood films and TV shows continue to be important forms of spectacular militainment. But since the late 1970s, the DOD has been teaming up with the video game industry to make militainment products that enable citizens to not only passively watch war, but also, to interactively play it.⁵⁵ In their immersion of civilians into first and third-person battle-spaces and virtual theaters of war-fighting, digital war games are at the forefront of interactive militainment. While films and TV shows often compel citizens to lean back and consume war, digital war games demand that citizens lean forward and participate in its brutalizing spectacles. In the post-9/11 juncture, digital war games became “the medium and the metaphor by which we understand war” and many were co-designed by the DOD and game firms to enlist and experientially immerse citizens as virtual soldiers in war playgrounds.⁵⁶ At present, the U.S. is one of the world’s largest digital game markets and the DOD routinely harnesses digital war games to achieve a number of strategic goals. For example, the DOD uses video games like *America’s Army* to recruit players to the military and attract young people to its ranks. It has used games like *Marine Doom*, *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *Urban Sim* to train soldiers and thereby save on costs associated with live exercises. In some instances, it travels commercial games like *Modern Warfare* to publicity events to promote its image and make war-fighting seem as fun as war-gaming. The DOD even uses digital war games like *Virtual Iraq* to rehabilitate war veterans in hopes of preventing the 100,000 + soldiers that suffer post-traumatic disorder (PTSD) due to their actual experience of war from harming themselves and others.

At present, the DOD-digital games complex is vast and the market for interactive militainment is large and growing to be one of the most potent faces and forces of militarization in the war society. Two papers in this special issue examine interactive militainment and the convergences and divergences between video games and militarization. Tanner Mirrlees offers a holistic geopolitical-economic analysis of the military and corporate underpinnings of *Medal of Honor: Operation Anaconda* (MOHOA), a U.S. war-on-Afghanistan game released for play to the world in 2010. Mirrlees analyzes *MOHOA* as form of interactive militainment that supports the DOD's promotional goals and digital capitalism's profit-interests through a study of the game's ownership, production, TV advertisements, simulation of war and interactive war-play experience. Mirrlees shows how *MOHOA* supports a symbiotic cross-promotional relationship between the DOD and Electronic Arts (EA) and immerses "virtual-citizen-soldiers" in an interactive yet propagandistic story about the U.S.'s post-9/11 occupation of Afghanistan. While Mirrlees shows digital war games to be products and servants of the complex, Nick Morwood presents a contrasting argument in his ludological and narratological analysis of *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012), a third-person shooter game that deploys players to a virtual Dubai. Though Morwood is sympathetic to political-economic studies of the DOD-digital game complex and the scholarly imperative to fetter out and critique the militaristic ideology of war-themed games, he forwards a nuanced approach to digital militainment that is premised on the fact that not all war-themed video games offer simplistic, one-dimensional and affirmative war stories and war play experiences. Morwood's study of *Spec Ops: The Line* shows how a digital war game might be capable of turning players against war or, at least, encouraging them to contemplate its human consequences.

The software and hardware of modern video games is derived in part from DOD-sponsored research and development (R&D) geared toward innovating new weapons of war.⁵⁷ Since its founding in 1958, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has brought together major universities and corporations to "advance knowledge through basic research and create innovative technologies" to "prevent strategic surprise from negatively impacting U.S. national security and create strategic surprise for U.S. adversaries by maintaining the technological superiority of the U.S. military."⁵⁸ From the late 1950s to this day, the DOD has provisioned physical space in military colleges and elite universities, personnel, start-up capital, and grants to corporations that drive technological developments aligned with national security.⁵⁹ The DOD's overt budget for R&D is coupled with a "black budget" that funds all kinds of innovations, especially unmanned weapons technologies.⁶⁰ Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), frequently controlled by soldiers using interfaces comparable to or based upon the joystick interfaces used by civilian war gamers, are the instrument of at least 2,400 deaths since 2009 and the source of much ethical consternation.⁶¹ But the drones lambasted or celebrated in current news coverage seem like old hat when compared to those analyzed by Roger Stahl's path-breaking essay which probes the DOD's attempt to transform spiders, beetles and other living creatures into the weaponized drones of future warfare. Stahl examines how the DOD's R&D harnesses actual living or ecological systems and subjects them to integrated cybernetic control systems. Weapons systems that seem like science fiction may indeed have been prefigured in the creative

realms of popular culture, and here, Stahl provides a complex analysis of the mutually constitutive relations between military and cultural visions of future worlds in works such as *Sparrowhawk* (1990), *Bladerunner* (1982), *Minority Report* (2002) and *Avatar* (2009). As the military industries dream of weaponized life forms that “mimic nature,” Stahl’s article theorizes and analyzes *biomimetic war* tropes and rhetorics that map the martial sphere onto the ecological sphere to show how they redefine war as consubstantial with life itself. Stahl explains how this conception expands the boundaries of “war” and thus paves the way for an expanding security state.

The U.S. national security state’s expansion over the past century has been both imaginative and territorial. The military-media complex’s efforts to militarize culture on the home-front have been coupled with U.S. state efforts to manage public opinion about war with “public diplomacy” on the world stage.⁶² Public diplomacy, a euphemism for propaganda, is the way in which both U.S. government agencies and private corporations use communications media to inform and influence, directly or indirectly, the attitudes and behaviors of foreign publics in ways that support the U.S.’s strategic interests on the world stage. Throughout the Cold War, the United States Information Agency (USIA), the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe (RFE) targeted publics around the world with messages designed to shape perceptions of the American Way of Life and America at war. Following 9/11, the U.S. government launched a massive public diplomacy campaign to “sell” the War on Terror policy to skeptical publics in the so-called “Muslim World.” In a rigorous study of the U.S. state’s international TV broadcaster Al-Hurra and its efforts to sell “America” and U.S. foreign policy to Morocco, Aziz Douai conceptualizes U.S. public diplomacy as a form of state-sponsored cultural imperialism. Through a reception study of Moroccan perceptions or “eyes” of Al-Hurra’s messages, Douai carefully shows how U.S. public diplomacy is responded to and resisted, locally. Al-Hurra was recognized by Moroccan viewers as a tool of ideological warfare in Morocco (not as an independent broadcaster) and its messages confirmed instead of challenged suspicions that the U.S. was seeking to fundamentally transform the wider region. Douai’s article carefully re-thinks the power of cultural imperialism by striking an astute balance between a focus on political-economic structures (i.e. the government’s use of international broadcasting to influence and change how people think and behave) and cultural agency (the myriad ways people in their local contexts react, respond to and resist coordinated efforts to transform their hearts and minds). Douai’s study of different “eyes” suggests that Al-Hurra failed to bring about the “Americanization” of a local culture and gives us some sense of why the U.S. may be losing the global media war.

Just as the U.S. state and military wage media wars at home and abroad through many new media technologies and platforms, women within the U.S. military are organizing advocacy groups and using the Internet and social media to draw attention to and contest patriarchal ideology and its effects. In this regard, Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN) is struggling to transform a largely male-dominated military culture by “securing equal opportunity and freedom to serve without discrimination, harassment or assault; and to reform veterans’ services to ensure high quality health care and benefits for women veterans and

their families.”⁶³ Isra Ali’s article confirms that SWAN has had much success in advocating for the interests of American service-women in and through the social media and civil society. Yet, Ali points out that the feminist discourse SWAN mobilizes in support of the interests of these women does not speak about, to, or with women around the world—especially Muslim women in Iraq and Afghanistan—whose lives have been ruined by the War on Terror. SWAN’s struggle to transform the internal culture of the military has served the interests of American service women while foreclosing a larger structural critique of militarism and the role that these same women play as agents of the U.S. War on Terror and the harm this war has done to othered, mostly non-American Muslim women. At the national level, SWAN’s work has been a success and helped many American service women. At the global level, SWAN complies with the war on terror and its consequences. As Ali says, “the same racism, homophobia and misogyny that cause the military as an institution to discriminate against its own members also feed the logics that justify military action (in the era of the War on Terror) in ‘the Muslim world.’”

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