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WAR GAMES: CITIZENSHIP AND PLAY IN POST-INDUSTRIAL MILITARISM

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by

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ABSTRACT

Post-industrial war is increasingly portrayed as an object of consumption rather than civic contemplation, a particular kind of “militarism” with a strong component of play. The viewer is called into the role of citizen-soldier with ever-greater access to the front lines, though the image of this real-time war is sanitized for easy digestion. Using television war coverage as a starting point, War Games examines the stories told about citizenship in war film, military recruitment ads, video games, and toys. Two major discursive strands are identified: war as extreme sport and war as video game. Not only are the games themselves suffused with the signs of war, but official war discourse (journalism and military recruitment) is increasingly suffused with the signs of consumer play. This integration and confusion restricts possibilities for critical citizenship. War Games concludes with a discussion of strategies for dissociating the citizen from the consumer, thereby reopening spaces for critical deliberation on matters of state violence.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ vii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................... ix

## Chapter 1: Breached Boundaries ................................................................. 1
Citizens and Soldiers .............................................................................................. 3
Critical Citizenship and Media Wars ..................................................................... 10
Virtual Soldiers at Play ........................................................................................... 14
Preview .................................................................................................................. 21
Notes ..................................................................................................................... 28

## Chapter 2: The X-game and the Post-industrial Body Politic .................. 35
Fun with Death ...................................................................................................... 36
The Global Body Politics of Extreme Sports ...................................................... 47
War as X-game in Popular Film ............................................................................ 58
Beyond the Movies ............................................................................................... 78
Notes ..................................................................................................................... 80

## Chapter 3: Armies of One and Crafting the Citizen-Soldier ............... 85
Advertising and the Millennial Military .............................................................. 92
Armies of One ..................................................................................................... 97
Bodies at Risk .................................................................................................... 100
LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 2: The X-game and the Post-industrial Body Politic

Figure 1. Fear Factor cartoon from Playboy magazine.........................57

Figure 2. Extreme Ops opening sequence..........................................60

Figure 3. Extreme Ops train sequence.............................................61

Figure 4. Extreme Ops terrorist confrontation..................................63

Figure 5. xXx bridge jump..............................................................66

Figure 6. xXx, Xander Cage as extreme soldier..................................69

Figure 7. Behind Enemy Lines closing frames...................................74

Figure 8. Behind Enemy Lines infrared view.....................................76

Figure 9. Behind Enemy Lines Navy recruitment ad..........................77

Chapter 3: Armies of One and Crafting the Citizen-Soldier

Figure 1. Navy NASCAR..................................................................95

Figure 2. Army of One film cover.....................................................99

Figure 3. Ice Soldiers and Marine mountain climber ads..................102

Figure 4. Desert Run ad.................................................................103

Figure 5. Victory Tower ad...........................................................106

Figure 6. “What It’s Like to be a Soldier”........................................107

Figure 7. Air Force cliff jump ad.....................................................108

Figure 8. “War on Terror” and “Axis of Evil” TV news headers..........111
Figure 9. MSNBC’s “Situation Room”..............................................111
Figure 10. MSNBC’s “Countdown Question”.................................112
Figure 11. Air Force model airplane ad...........................................114
Figure 12. Navy ad 1....................................................................116
Figure 13. Navy ad 2....................................................................119
Figure 14. Navy surfing print ad.....................................................120

Chapter 4: Virtual Citizen-Soldiers

Figure 1. Real War and Full Spectrum Warrior...............................136
Figure 2. Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six, Moments...............................142
Figure 3. Conflict: Desert Storm and Operation Desert Hammer........144
Figure 4. Quest for Saddam and Saddam Hunt...............................146
Figure 5. Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six 3...........................................149
Figure 6. Invisible War and The London Mirror..............................150
Figure 7. Draft Card ad from Medal of Honor: Rising Sun................152
Figure 8. Freedom Fighters...........................................................152
Figure 9. America’s Army.............................................................158
Figure 10. Aerial bombardment and AC-130.................................166

Chapter 5: Reclaiming Citizenship

Figure 1. Flag merchandise...........................................................179
Figure 2. Military bears...............................................................182
Figure 3. G.I. Joe.................................................................184
Figure 4. Miscellaneous post-9/11 war toys…………………………………...186
Figure 5. Forward Command Post……………………………………………..188
Figure 6. Topps’ “Enduring Freedom Picture Cards”…………………………189
Figure 7. Bush, bin Laden, and Hussein action figures, fireworks…………….192
Figure 8. Gulf Wars: Episode II………………………………………………..203
Figure 9. Toy parodies………………………………………………………….205
Figure 10. Video game parodies………………………………………………..206
Figure 11. Velvet-Strike………………………………………………………..209
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The warrior never goes to War
War runs away from the warrior’s mouth
War falls apart in the warrior’s mind
The Conquered go to War, drafted into shadow armies, navy’d on shadow oceans, flying in shadow fire.

- Allen Ginsburg
Chapter 1

Breached Boundaries

If wars are fought, as some believe, primarily because man is “warlike,”
instinctually “aggressive,” an animal who kills for sport, for glory, for vengeance,
or for the sheer love of blood and violent excitement, then kiss those [nuclear]
missiles goodbye. – Marvin Harris

All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. – Walter
Benjamin

The word “militarism” can mean many things. A militarized society may be one
that is governed by the rule of force rather than the rule of consensual and participatory
law. The rule of force is always accompanied by the signs of power, fear, and
surveillance such as the open display of weapons, show trials, executions, and military
uniform. This is militarism as a kind of repressive discipline, the regulation of bodies in
a prison economy or police state. Here, space is colonized to the detriment of privacy,
free speech, and free assembly (or any mode of organization threatening to the ruling
structure). A second definition of “militarism” might be an economic one: the collective
mobilization of personnel and resources in times of war. This type of militarism also
entails a discipline internal to the state, but unlike the first, human and material resources
are mobilized for external purposes, not simply the maintenance of the political status
quo. Massive mobilization for twentieth-century world wars in the United States – in the
form of conscription, factory retooling, and rationing – are quintessential examples.
Perhaps the most famous commentary on U.S. militarism, Dwight Eisenhower’s 1961
farewell address, invokes both of these first two conceptions. Eisenhower claimed that a “military-industrial complex” was emerging out of technological, political, and economic trends of the day. World War II had presented the opportunity for a massive merger of state spending and private arms manufacture. Eisenhower suggested that this complex threatened to become an invisible hand – an underlying political economy – with the power to mold state policy.\(^3\) Insofar as the military-industrial complex is a threat to the rule of law and a people’s government, Eisenhower’s critique assumes the first definition of militarism. As an economic mobilization of people and material for external purposes, the critique fits the second.

A third conception of militarism is one that describes cultural development of the citizen. Of the three, one could say that this is the least material and most rhetorical as it involves language, image, and the ways political subjects recognize themselves in relation to others and a highly developed military machine. The word “military” derives from the Latin miles, or soldier. Thus militarism, in an original sense, can be thought of as the “soldiering of the subject.” In this sense, militarism is a cultural process by which the signs of martial affairs replace the signs of civic life. Patrick Regan distinguishes between militarization and militarism. The first is a material preparation for war; the second involves the appearance of military values and ideals.\(^4\) The manner in which military values and ideals appear in the civilian world dominated by electronic media is our focus here.

More specifically, this thesis is an investigation into the category of the citizen-subject and its relationship to military affairs as the twenty-first century turns. The points of reference are popular culture texts such as film, video games, toys, and recent U.S.
Defense Department recruitment campaigns.\textsuperscript{5} The events of September 11, 2001, the subsequent presidential christening of an unending war, and a dramatic spike in military spending give the study of militarism a particular gravity now. Alongside these events, there has been a marked shift in Pentagon recruitment strategy, both in medium and message. All three major military branches adopted new campaigns in early 2001, and both Hollywood film and video games have been very overtly commandeered for recruiting purposes.\textsuperscript{6} Furthermore, the synergistic interplay between official Pentagon rhetoric and various commercial forms can assist us in considering the evolving meaning of commercial war film and war-themed video games. For example, when the Army produces the *America’s Army* video game as a recruitment effort or the Navy overtly uses scenes from the 2001 film *Behind Enemy Lines* in their television recruitment ads, both war film and war-themed video games are reframed by virtue of this official stamp. The crossing of boundaries also reverberates further into commercial markets. We will follow these themes as they travel across these boundaries in order to glean what they might tell us about militarism and the formation of the citizen.

**Citizens and Soldiers**

The terms “citizen” and “soldier” are related in complex ways. By way of exploring the relationship, I will broadly sketch the civic republican and liberal models, two dominant strands of political theory. These two models are described in preparation for what I argue is a revival of a certain kind of citizen-soldier, one that thrives in a discourse of consumption.
The opportunity to act on behalf of the nation’s defense is often directly linked with the privileges of citizenship itself. One need only look to the history of civil rights in the U.S. for evidence of this. Military service has frequently been invoked as means of staking a claim to citizenship and equal rights. The notion of citizen as *citizen-soldier* can be traced back to the writings of Niccolo Machiavelli in the early Enlightenment and the nascent period of the modern nation-state. Machiavelli argued in *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy* that a militia of citizen-soldiers is much better suited to the stability of the principality than hired mercenary forces. Among other reasons, the citizen-soldier has a personal investment in the defense of the state when the state becomes part of his (and Machiavelli’s citizen-soldier is exclusively male) spiritual and material identity. The melding of citizenship and military duty was what Machiavelli described as a civic virtue that would galvanize the state: good laws, a good army, and virtuous men. Civic republicanism names a strain of political philosophy that aims to guard the state from its natural tendency to disintegrate. The notion of the citizen’s militia was the dominant version of the civic republican ideal from the early European settlements in North America and continued, though gradually attenuating, until the use of modern mass conscription in preparation for U.S. entry into World War I. Registry with Selective Service is a final vestige of the citizen-soldier ideal, though the military has opted for an all-volunteer force since the end of the Vietnam conflict.

R. Claire Snyder recognizes the other half of the citizen-soldier tradition in Rousseau, who argued for the extensive use of civic practices, especially martial practices, which continually produce and discipline the republican citizen. The role of the state, as Rousseau explains in *On the Social Contract*, is the cultivation of a “general
will” that citizens collectively share. The most important laws, explains Rousseau, are opinions, beliefs and mores “not engraved on marble or bronze, but in the hearts of citizens. [They are] the true constitution of the state.”

The citizen-soldier is indeed a double-edged sword. While in a sense democratizing military activities and providing a check against an oppressive government (as is reflected in the express intent of the Second Amendment in the Bill of Rights), Machiavelli’s vision of an uncorruptable principality and Rousseau’s general will could also be viewed as a recipe for a virulent strain of nationalism or totalitarianism.

After all, if we could point to an essential difference between the citizen and the soldier, it would exist on the level of critical political action. As Johan Huizinga points out, civil life is agonistic; war is ant agonistic. Military affairs exist at the limits of rhetoric, where society assumes the closed fist of force. Whereas the citizen is bound to speak, even on behalf of the soldier, the soldier is bound to silence.

Relying to the threat posed by nationalist militarism, sociologist Harold Lasswell in 1941 - before the attack on Pearl Harbor but a decade into the European conflict - introduced a critique in the form of what he called the “garrison state.” The early institution of the citizen-soldier had been thoroughly displaced in World War I by a professional standing army and a highly developed bureaucracy of conscription. The effective separation of the citizen and the soldier, advances in the technology of warfare (both weapons systems and bureaucratic technologies), and the rise of German National Socialism doubtless had an influence on his thinking. Lasswell argued that inherent trends in industrial societies lend themselves to the emergence of a military police state and the quiet disappearance of liberal democratic elements. The garrison state drives
toward the translation of every life aspect into a function of the military. This is a combined economic and cultural effort toward the creation of a hyper-militarized citizenry much different from the ad hoc militias of the colonial period. Alongside a highly regulated workforce, the garrison state engages in a top-down communicative mode Lasswell calls the “startle pattern,” “which is carried over to the internal as well as to the external threat of danger. This startle pattern is overcome and stylized as alert, prompt, commanding adjustment to reality. This is expressed in the authoritative manner that dominates military style – in gesture, intonation, and idiom.” Simultaneously, rulers will seek to curtail liberal democratic elements through the elimination of participatory rights, propaganda and manipulation of public opinion, and perhaps, in a brave new world, the administering of drugs (“to deaden the critical function of all who are not held in esteem by the ruling elite”). According to this hypothesis, as the garrison state advances, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is blurred, the ruling elite has an interest in diverting money toward the military machine, and the state increasingly depends on war scares. For these war threats to remain solvent, they must be nourished from time to time with a bloodletting, a spectacular exercise in war. Finally, alongside this preoccupation with fighting, there is a tendency toward repetition and ceremonialization of public martial rhetoric. Later, Lasswell clarified the model slightly to suggest that though democracy suffers under the garrison state, the appearance of democratic participation is sustained through a regular though empty invoking of its symbols.

The construct of the garrison state clearly relies on the valuation of its opposite, the liberal democratic tradition, and Lasswell makes a specific plea for the preservation
of liberal democracy. We can identify the core of this tradition in the concept of critical space. Critical space can be understood through the Greek root kritikos: judgment or the conditions for judgment. The ability or willingness for an individual to think critically entails the existence of a space for judgment. Freedom of speech, press, and assembly as described by the Bill of Rights, for example, help to circumscribe this critical space.

Perhaps the most influential theorist of critical space is Jürgen Habermas, who, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, provides an effective history of critical space as a consequence of institutional formations. Reduced to its barest narrative, *The Structural Transformation* argues that a model public sphere, which is a space for open political deliberation, emerged as the feudal system gave birth to the new bourgeoisie class. For Habermas, this period was the apogee of public deliberation. Unfortunately, the liberal public sphere was “refeudalized” as the welfare state encroached on it from one direction and highly organized private corporations encroached from the other, replacing the deliberative sphere with a generalized and unified social field. Though there are a number of objections that have been raised to Habermas’ historical-empirical focus, he does offer a compelling ideal and normative vision of functioning critical space. Habermas suggests, in tune with the liberal enlightenment tradition, that a healthy public sphere depends on the space opened by a mixed constitution and separation of powers. In practice, Habermas argues, the public sphere thrived best just as bourgeois elements began to dissociate power from the feudal aristocracy in the opening stages of mercantilism. Furthermore, Habermas provides a normative vision of the public sphere, one that is composed of private individuals who bracket their private interests and engage in open, visible, rational-critical debate for the...
common good. Hence, his description of the public sphere also describes an ideal citizen who could participate in such manner. At heart, this citizen would ideally be uninstitutionalized in order to create the discursive space that would allow her to engage in rational-critical discussion with an eye toward the common good. For our purposes, we call this position “critical citizenship.”

Other twentieth-century figures writing in the shadow of World War II have noted similar trends in regard to deliberative and discursive space, among them Herbert Marcuse and Hannah Arendt. Marcuse, a Frankfurt School contemporary of Habermas, advocates the strategy of “negative dialectics” to open up space for movement in a rationalizing and assimilating “one-dimensional” society, in which the “universe of discourse” threatens to close completely. Negative dialectics attempts to break through the iron cage of technical rationality of advanced industrialism through the reintroduction of contradiction into the one-dimensional matrix. In many ways, Marcuse’s one-dimensionality is much like Habermas’ feudalism (or refeudalism) of power, though they differ significantly in that Marcuse chooses to focus on discourse itself while Habermas’ project is the mapping of institutional-historical conditions. Both recognize that critical space stands in contradistinction to the tendency of power to assimilate, control, and provide ready-made judgments in advance.

Arendt’s *The Human Condition* can be read as a bridge between the Marxist-humanist critique and more post-human approach insofar as she recognizes the profound role of tools in conditioning the human animal. She describes this conditioning not in instrumental terms but rather as the “rhythmic unification of the laboring body with its implement.” However, Arendt still holds quite strongly to a normative vision that holds
deliberation and political participation – the *vita activa* – to the highest value; without this, a life is “literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.”

Echoing both Habermas and Marcuse, Arendt notes a closing of the spheres of action (speech/politics) and work (creative production) into a bureaucratized sphere of the labor and consumption cycle. Like Habermas, Arendt bemoans the effective explosion of the “social” into the world of mass culture, and this to the detriment of the possibility for transformative political action:

> The rather uncomfortable truth of the matter is that the triumph the modern world has achieved over necessity is due to the emancipation of labor, that is, to the fact that the *animal laborans* was permitted to occupy the public realm; and yet, as long as the *animal laborans* remains in possession of it, there can be no true public realm, but only private activities displayed in the open.

*The Human Condition* can be read as a historical answer to the question, What did modernity do to the polis? Arendt holds the idea of the citizen, insofar as this is the subjectivity animated by the *vita activa* – a “living among men” – a central value in her history.

The current study further investigates the possibility of critical space and the possibility for what I call a *critical citizenship*. Critical citizenship does not stand apart from discourse. Rather, it is a subjectivity told in a culture that values a space for judgment, political action, a negative dialectic, and ultimately a deliberative sphere. Citizenship has been and continues to be tightly integrated with martial affairs because the issue of state violence (in defense or offense, internal or external) marks the edges and is often the object of deliberation. The question of citizenship, as Harold Lasswell
suggests, is always in dialogue with the question of militarization. For Arendt, our human dignity as political creatures is always negotiating a machine whose tendency is to compromise and close the space of politics, and for her too, this machine has its militaristic telos. The task ahead, then, is to describe the nature of the new citizen-soldier with an eye toward recognizing and reclaiming a critical citizenship.

**Critical Citizenship and Media Wars**

[Gulf War I] was the last of the machine-age wars. – Gen. Robert Scales, Official Army Historian.

Technologies for waging war have undergone vast changes since World War II. Since the fall of the Soviet Bloc and the establishment of the U.S. as sole superpower, low-intensity conflict has largely replaced large-scale battle. When large attacks are waged, they are executed with increasingly smaller forces from longer distances using satellite imaging, global positioning systems, guided weapons, remote control drone planes, and even so-called e-bombs designed to knock out computer and electrical systems with airborne energy bursts. Similarly, late twentieth-century advances in communication technology have utterly transformed the appearance of war. Understanding this appearance – what we might call the rhetorical interface between citizen and soldier – is crucial in understanding the nature of militarism in advanced capitalism. In response to the proliferation of various media technologies, strategies of media management and psychological operations are becoming as important to battlefield
success as munitions themselves. Information management on the home front has attained equal importance.

Particularly since the first “real-time” war, the American intervention of Operation Desert Storm (1991), journalism, as the most visible interface between the civilian and military modes, has been a site of scrutiny. The majority of the scholarship focuses on propaganda, bureaucratic censorship, free-range reporting, and their effects on policy, strategy, diplomacy, and democracy. Jeffrey Smith’s history of twentieth-century Pentagon censorship, for example, is framed by a dilemma. Because of its prerogative to censor, the military state is able to avoid accountability and behave in a manner contradictory to the ideals it is supposedly defending.28 The two poles of this dilemma are widely recognized as Vietnam and Desert Storm, two very different experiences of conflict. Regarded as the first “living room war,” Vietnam offered American audiences a deluge of unscrubbed battlefield footage courtesy of an unregulated and roving corps of television journalists. The horrors of combat were on display in vivid form. Social unrest and dissatisfaction with the war at the time continues to be widely attributed to this portrayal, though there are those who would question this mythology.29 The 1991 Persian Gulf War, on the other hand, featured a press pooling system that was tightly monitored by the Pentagon, and reporters paid for this privilege in self-censorship. Thus, the images that issued forth were abstract and antiseptic, with a focus on high-tech precision weapons. The success of this press control strategy led George H.W. Bush to exclaim, “We have finally kicked Vietnam syndrome,” meaning the image of the clean war had finally been achieved.30 We can see this dynamic at work in 2003’s Operation Iraqi Freedom by looking to the ethical controversy surrounding the bloody broadcasts on
the Al Jazeera network and the bloodless “embedded” depictions on U.S. network news. This literature concerning the image of the grotesque body suggests that the abstraction of war is directly proportional to its technologization, and that the development of the “clean war” has clearly eased the intensity of public criticism.31

As we move beyond the machine-age wars, the electronic screen upon which the image of war is projected becomes all the more determinate. Jean Baudrillard gives us a semiotic typology for understanding the various degrees of simulation that characterize the electronic image. One of Baudrillard’s main insights revolves around a the notion of the “simulacrum,” an image that takes itself as the primary referent. The simulacrum can be understood as a semiotic short circuit that circumvents the real and thus threatens to uproot and alienate us from the events of the world and one another.32 Baudrillard carries this critique through his appraisal of the first Gulf conflict and makes the infamous claim that the war “did not take place.” In other words, the Gulf War, the first real-time televised conflict, was a war only in its simulacrum, and this picture effectively effaces the fact that in reality the military action was a one-sided, high tech massacre of one army by another three hundred times its size.33 As James Der Derian puts it, though “a little pomo goes a long way,” the project of “recovering the reality principle” is still a worthy enterprise.34 For Baudrillard, this collapse of the image into the real is necessary to maintain a docile social climate. The collapse also represents a productive site for critique, one inherited from the likes of Walter Benjamin’s “aesthetization of politics” and Guy Debord’s “spectacle.”35

Whereas Baudrillard maintains his emphasis on semiotics, Paul Virilio argues for a way of approaching militarism and technologies of conflict in terms of greater
participation, focusing mainly on issues of temporality, sight, and interactivity.\textsuperscript{36} His *Desert Screen*, for example, traces the historical movement from tele-audition (WWII) to television (Vietnam) to tele-action (Gulf War) — a trajectory of increasing technological sophistication and thus greater social engagement in war. Bruce Franklin describes a similar path, following the realism of Matthew Brady’s Civil War photographs to the propaganda films of WWI and WWII to the various incarnations of Vietnam on television, still photo, and film to the virtuality and smart bomb point-of-view shots witnessed in Desert Storm.\textsuperscript{37} Virilio refers to the Gulf War as “live theatre,” highlighting both the changing nature of temporal experience and simulation. Interactivity marks transition from industrial to post-industrial war: war that overextends itself into virtuality.\textsuperscript{38}

The overextension of the post-industrial war has come into clear relief with the September 11, 2001 attacks. Weapons, targets, warriors, and battlegrounds were fundamentally recoded in the very deed of naming the event an “act of war.” The most mundane spaces have become potential (or virtual) sites of conflict, where ideological fundamentalism clashes with what Virilio calls the technological fundamentalism of the West.\textsuperscript{39} The specter of terrorism also results in the primacy of the spectacle, the hallmark of the post-industrial war. To paraphrase Suman Gupta, war is now preceded by the image, and the image becomes the primary rationale for violence.\textsuperscript{40} This applies to both legitimate and illegitimate violence, both terrorists and the massive Western military machine. “The boiling point is reached,” notes media effects scholar George Gerbner, “when the power to create a crisis merges with the power to direct the movie about it.”\textsuperscript{41} The boiling point to which Gerbner refers is the loss of real democratic participation as it
is overwhelmed by the image. Between the agoraphobia of a fear economy and the seduction of the simulacrum, we arrive at what Paul Virilio calls “cathodic democracy” (a specific reference to television and the cathode ray tube), an electronically mediated existence and a loss of critical space that accompanies the loss of the public body. Social institutions must reckon with the primacy of the image, and this reckoning has resulted in the emergence of what James Der Derian names the military-industrial-media-entertainment network, the post-industrial cousin of the military-industrial complex. We are now at a place where we can ask questions as to the role of media, consumerism, and play in the new symbolic economy of war. In other words, who is the citizen of Der Derian’s military-industrial-entertainment network?

Virtual Citizen-Solders at Play

Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game. – Johan Huizinga

Whenever it begins, this is going to be a war like no other we’ve ever seen. – David Martin, CBS Pentagon correspondent on the television coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom

The characters are the same: The president is a Bush and the other guy is Hussein. But the technology – the military’s and the news media’s – has exploded. [It is] the difference between Atari and PlayStation. – MSNBC Chief Erik Sorenson on the eve of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The current study is an inquiry into citizenship through a significant militaristic motif: play – especially sports and video games, both of which have crossed important boundaries in recent years. But what are these boundaries, and why should war games specifically concern us now? Certainly, militarism and play have had a long history
together. Military brass have availed themselves of strategic simulations at least since chess and the nineteenth-century development of *Kriegspiel*, and this has continued through high-tech computerized versions. On the civilian end, sports and war have always been talked about in a tangle of interchangeable metaphors. Sports have traditionally provided training grounds for preparing (mostly) young men for battle. Moreover, war has been a mainstay of commercial video game culture from the beginning. War film, too, has consistently portrayed battle in terms of a heroic and exhilarating game. What is new?

Johan Huizinga, in his treatise on play of all forms, *Homo Ludens*, marks a watershed moment in the history of war and play with modernization, presumably with World War I. Traditional war games, such as the medieval duel and its elaborations, he argues, were infused with a symbolic gravity that was lost with war’s mechanization. They were games of loyalty, social honor, ritual, and, in the case of the German *Gottesurteil* (judgment of the gods), a means of divining a cosmic will. Modern industrial warfare, in contrast, is a vulgar display of expedience. This argument holds sway on one level, but it stops mid-twentieth century when the modern industrial military bureaucracy reached its apogee. What do war games mean for a post-industrial world saturated with electronic media? One answer is that the appearance of war as it is presented on the screen has once again taken up a ritualized aspect, at least on the home front, though the fighting itself is still a game of expedience. This does not quite get at the question, however, because it does not address the dominant subjectivity in advanced capitalism, the consumer awash in commercial media. Whereas the judicious game of
the duel was an exercise in a kind of public judgment, the emerging rituals of the post-industrial war game, I argue, have a dominant consumerist flavor.

As Arendt notes, the tail-end of industrial development is the “problem of leisure, that is, essentially the problem of how to provide enough opportunity for daily exhaustion to keep the capacity for consumption intact” and that in this labor-consumer cycle of late capital, “every activity unconnected with labor becomes a ‘hobby.’” Habermas makes nearly identical observations: “Because private enterprises evoke in their customers the idea that in their consumption decisions they act in their capacity as citizens, the state has to ‘address’ its citizens like consumers.”

He goes on: “So-called leisure behavior, once it had become part of the cycle of production and consumption, [is] already apolitical.” The idea that there ceases to be an ‘outside’ to a world of cyclic labor/consumption is also noted by Guy Debord in his “spectacle society”:

This worker [in late capitalism] … finds himself every day, outside of production and in the guise of a consumer, seemingly treated as an adult, with zealous politeness. At this point the humanism of the commodity takes charge of the worker’s “leisure and humanity,” simply because now political economy can and must dominate these spheres as political economy. Thus the ‘perfected denial of man’ has taken charge of the totality of human existence.

The space liberated by advanced means of production – a potential space of humanity, leisure, free time, or a deliberative sphere – is colonized because it can and must be. The tendency is for the political subject to be replaced by a subjectivity cultivated in a political economy of consumption, though this must not necessarily be so.
If we combine war and media in a post-industrial world, then, it should not be surprising to find that a dominant civilian model for experiencing military affairs is as consumer. Moreover, the discourse of war becomes a leisure time activity based on a type of simulacral pleasure. As war itself is difficult to consume, it must be replaced with an image event that fits within a consumerist framework. Christine Scodari, for example, describes the press coverage of the Persian Gulf War as framed by a predominant sports coverage motif. Desert Storm offered the catharsis, glory, and identification associated with televised sports. Scodari also points out that anchors were overcoded with the machismo normally reserved for sports stars, the war scene was described using sports metaphors, and the coverage resembled play-by-play announcing complete with instant replays. Bosah Ebo observes a similar mood of celebration in Gulf War reporting. Ebo casts much of the critique in the metaphor of the video game and highlights the alienation that accompanies its visual and verbal aesthetic, what he calls “war as recreational violence.” Fetishism of technology, the abstraction of battle into a spectacle of pretty lights, and the tendency to identify with and privilege the point-of-view of the smart bomb camera all contribute to this alienation. Ebo’s critique is based in a distrust of military public relations and efforts to package the war as a spectacular event. For example, he notes that the first sorties were planned to commence during East Coast prime time. There was also a debate among the top executive brass as to whether the event ought to be named the “five-day war” (Norman Schwartzkopf’s suggestion) or the “hundred-hour war” (George H.W. Bush’s suggestion, and the option chosen, the length of fighting adjusted accordingly). The tendency to reduce war to a spectator sport—describing it in terms of sports metaphors, adjusting the length to accommodate easy
digestion—is recognized by both Colin McInnes and Richard Keeble. Journalism scholar Robert Jensen argues that the press build-up around the U.S. military’s Shock and Awe blitzkrieg strategy used against Iraq in 2003 was similarly shot through with the pleasures of the spectacle and its anticipation. Concern for human life in Baghdad’s streets and neighborhoods was just one of the casualties of this orientation. The efficacy of this discourse depends very much on the appearance of the clean war.

Much of the critique of the spectacular war hearkens to ideas advanced by Guy Debord in his influential manifesto of the Situationiste Internationale syndicate in the late 1960s, The Society of the Spectacle. Debord, presaging Baudrillard, argued that a consumerist economy in late capitalism is replete with the spectacle: presentations (as opposed to representations) divorced from actual lived life, which operate to regulate life from above. The spectacle is an effect of the increased centrality of the commodity and its fetishization – the presentation and cultivation of new needs through advertising, staged events, the culture industry, and so on. Life in the society of the spectacle is what he calls, modifying Marx’s famous metaphor, a “permanent opium war,” that is, the spectacle serves to deaden or assimilate any critical potential that might arise. Moreover, the spectacle has a way of crowding out and subsuming spaces of public deliberation in ways that hearkens back to Lasswell’s garrison state. Debord notes, “Wherever the concentrated spectacle rules, so does the police.” As such, life occurs in reverse following what Baudrillard names “the precession of simulacra.” That is, the manufactured image precedes its original referent and goes on to find a new referent manufactured in its place. In the spectacle society, then, the search for a pure theater of the clean war might be thought of as the search for the cleanest opium.
While the “war as spectacle” construct is a powerful and useful critique of militarism, I argue that the discourse of militarism is in transition, especially in regard to citizen subjectivity. That is to say that post-industrial culture is moving away from the citizen-as-spectator to the citizen-as-player/consumer. The difference between the appearance of 1991’s Desert Storm and 2003’s Operation Iraqi Freedom serves as a prototype for this transition. The live coverage of Desert Storm was conducted through a press pool that operated predominantly off-site in surrounding camps or stationed precariously in the Al Rashid hotel in Baghdad, where some of the most striking moments of the television war transpired. Along with the reporters, who took the place of a dramatic chorus, we peered out picture windows at the anti-aircraft tracer fire reaching up to largely invisible bomber planes, walls shook, plaster fell, and reporters reached for helmets and gas masks. In contrast, the Pentagon’s press strategy for Operation Iraqi Freedom a decade later was the training of “embedded reporters” to accompany the troops themselves. Reporters now donned uniforms, helmets, and vests, rode in tanks and fighting vehicles, and radioed reports from the front lines with cell phones and newly developed satellite uplink video. The vision of the war correspondent was now bathed in the green glow of night vision equipment (U.S. and British forces preferred night attacks, using this technological advantage over poorly equipped Iraqi troops). Represented by the intrepid embedded reporter, the citizen was now integrated into battle as a kind of virtual soldier.

However, just as the cathodic citizen is taken to the front lines in what was touted as unprecedented access, coverage seemed to lose peripheral vision, resulting in what was widely criticized as a “view through a soda straw,” or, as Dan Rather opined, “There’s a
pretty fine line between being embedded and being entombed.” That is, embedded reporting decontextualizes the battle even as it brought us closer to it. But to claim a heightened, if context-free, presence is also a mischaracterization, as William O’Rourke of the Chicago Sun-Times observes: “... in this war [Operation Iraqi Freedom], even with the embedded reporters, appalling photos have been relatively rare ... both the government and the media have decided that such images are not fit for viewing.” He then asks, “But who profits from the absence of such images?” This final question is easily answered, as it is to the Pentagon’s admitted advantage that the image of the clean war is maintained, even as the appearance of greater access to battle itself is lauded. The embedded reporter is the journalistic prototype for the citizen-as-player/consumer in a war whose appearance is successfully antiseptic, readymade for uncritical consumption. The politics of the embedded system itself place the journalist and the viewer in anything but a critical position. Embedded with the First Marine Division, National Public Radio’s John Burnett remarks, “During my travels with the Marines, I couldn’t shake the sense that we were cheerleaders on the team bus.”

The move from spectacle to participation, I argue, is a reintroduction of the idea of the citizen-soldier in a post-industrial consumer society. As such, this citizen-soldier is traditional in some ways and not others. On one level, the new citizen-soldier, in the manner Machiavelli describes, bridges the divide between the living room and the battlefield, reintegrating a soldier identity into the citizen identity. This is consistent with the rhetoric of terrorism following September 11, 2001, where an act of war, as it has been interpreted, can involve no traditional soldiers or weaponry. Every civilian space is recoded as a potential battleground, and every citizen must be watchful. In a sense, the
U.S. is again a nation of Minute Men, whose war is, depending on the Office of Homeland Security’s Terror Threat Level color chart, immanent and imminent, much like the weather. On another level, this version of the citizen-soldier does not heighten citizen involvement in governmental affairs, but rather limits it, insofar as participation occurs through electronic media, a simulation generated through a lens of consumption. I am of course not arguing that the atrocities of 9/11 were a consumer event (though in many ways they were unethically taken up and used as such). Likewise, the military interventions following 9/11 were very real for the soldiers and civilians involved. However, the appearance of war, especially the clean war studded with a celebration and fetishism of technological military might, lends itself to the formation of the citizen-soldier whose role it is to participate in a militarism of consumption and pleasure. That is, this citizen-soldier (the citizen-as-player/consumer) is a direct challenge to critical citizenship, tempting the one-dimensional discourse that Marcuse describes. This is a subject position that short circuits even what critical space the spectacle provides.

**Preview**

This study is not about journalistic portrayals of war per se, but rather the stories told in various and orbiting cultural phenomena such as war film, military recruitment strategies, video games, and war toys, which tend toward a discourse of citizen-as-player/consumer. While these cultural forms are significant in and of themselves, they also provide a lens – a citizen subjectivity – through which news is read. The war-as-game motif is obviously a very old idea. What is new, I argue, are the games themselves, the unique stories they tell about citizenship, and the virtual experience they offer. In
approaching these cultural forms, I identify the twin discourses of war as *extreme sport* and war as *video game*.

Chapter 2, “The X-Game and the Post-Industrial Body Politic,” examines the symbolics of extreme sports (X-games) and the relationship between the body of the X-gamer and the post-Cold War body politic. Since the discourses of war and sports have traditionally been highly exchangeable, as Scodari notes above, this chapter asks how this relationship has changed with the emerging popularity of extreme sports and the “new kind of war” described by the War on Terror. What does it mean when extreme sports, as opposed to traditional competitive sports, are integrated into a discourse of militarism? I begin with a study of the X-game itself as a new genre of various activities that, among other things, is a pleasure-play with the possibility of pain, death, and ecstaticism at its core. The X-game is also a solo and aesthetic (rather than competitive team) enterprise infused with electronic media and an accompanying structure of virtuality that distinguishes it from traditional spectator sports. I argue that the X-game is particularly suited to (and likely a response to) the changing political scene in its geographic non-specificity and mimics the logics of globalism. At the same time, the X-game, in its play with the limits of death, is a microcosm of the logics of post-industrial war, just as traditional competitive sports are a symbolic microcosm of modern war. That is, the X-game exceeds the Cold War dialectic and enters the multiple networks of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call Empire. Alongside Hardt and Negri, I examine the post-Cold War body politic with a read of Georges Bataille and his ideas concerning violence and sacrifice as they pertain to militarism. I argue that when Bataille’s military order reaches its colonial limits (the macropolitics of the state), it turns back on itself, and
begins to work on the body itself (the micropolitics of the citizen). This body-as-body politic feedback loop is the object of the X-game. By way of interrogating the crossover, I mainly look at three films that combine the body of the X-gamer with post-Cold War discourse of terrorism, *Extreme Ops* (2002), *xXx* (2002), and *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001). These films provide initial models for the new citizen-soldier.

Chapter 3, “Armies of One and the Crafting of the Citizen-Soldier,” looks at the discourse of extreme sports as it is taken up explicitly by military recruitment campaigns initiated in 2001: the Navy’s *Accelerate Your Life*, the Air Force’s *Cross Into the Blue*, and especially the Army’s *An Army of One*. Chapter 2 built a model for this discourse, ending with the use of *Behind Enemy Lines* in the Navy’s *Accelerate Your Life* campaign. This chapter further addresses what it means when the X-game discourse is taken up as an institutional rhetoric – as a public face for the armed forces. Whereas the dominant recruitment themes, since the initiation of an all-volunteer force at the end of the Vietnam conflict, have been career advancement and self-improvement, the new crop of ads has a particular focus on play. Here I examine a common visual narrative of the crossing-over of the civilian into fantasies of battle, scenes that vividly display the pleasures of the virtual citizen-soldier. I further argue that the military’s use of contemporary marketing techniques (the move from the hard sell to lifestyle marketing and brand identification) allows for a kind of militarism that permeates the divide between civilian and soldier and takes a place within broader consumer culture. Dovetailing with the extreme sports motif, I identify another strand of the discourse of play in what I call technological fetishism and the portrayal of weapons as toys. These combined themes are evident in both television ads and alternative recruiting techniques such as the military’s extensive
sponsoring of NASCAR and its roving high-tech recruiting stations (which feature equipment simulators and climbing walls). When a rhetoric of a militaristic play is given an institutional ethos, military affairs, as they appear on the news, are reframed. Thus, throughout the chapter, I examine these themes as they resonate with television war coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The interplay of these two discursive spheres is productive of a certain kind of citizen identity – that of citizen as virtual player/participant.

Chapter 4, “Citizens and Virtual Soldiers,” tracks the relationship between militarism and video games, both commercial and non-commercial. Since the technology became available, the military has made extensive use of computer simulations for both training and the plotting of strategy. Many of these games have migrated into commercial markets. Likewise, and this is perhaps more the norm, the military has made use of modified commercial games for its purposes. While much scholarship has been devoted to the efficacy of military simulators for training, little has been said about the significance of the crossover for the notion of citizenship. This chapter examines the gradual integration of commercial-civilian video games into the real events of the so-called War on Terror. I argue that the space between war (on the battlefield and on the news) and its video game counterpart is disappearing. This is to say that one increasingly has the opportunity to play at war as it transpires, and to assume the subjectivity of the virtual soldier. The chapter specifically focuses a unique development in military recruiting (and advertising as a whole): the development and deployment of the Army’s free video game America’s Army. As the most successful marketing techniques in military history – and one of the most popular PC games ever – America’s Army
represents a dramatic development in the cultural history of the citizen-soldier. This first-person shooter game occupies a unique space that not only describes a citizen subjectivity, but also reinterprets the significance of other war-themed commercial games, begging for their close examination as discourses of citizenship. In addition to serving as a means of engaging contemporaneous wars on a level of consumption, play and antiseptic simulation, the game is a study in immersive marketing, as its effects are not only felt in increased recruitment, but also a broad enculturation. Finally, the chapter argues for a closer look at the interweavings of real-time news, video games, and a high-tech (often long-distance) war machine, and asks questions about the nature of critical space.

Chapter 5, “Reclaiming Citizenship,” probes the military-consumer complex for fissures by which critical spaces and critical subjectivities can be opened. The chapter takes the debate surrounding war-themed toys as a model. After September 11, 2001, the sale of war toys skyrocketed. Moreover, the toys themselves changed dramatically, integrating invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq into product lines issued during the conflicts themselves. The new crop of war toys also fully entered the adult market. Because of this sharp shift in a traditional sphere, debates about the nature of war and play erupted, mostly on the part of parents concerned with the possibility of cultivating violent tendencies in children. Implicit in much of this discourse, too, is a questioning of the relationship between consumerism and war, that is, the nature of the citizen. The new war toys, especially the toy soldier rendition of George W. Bush landing on the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier on May 1, 2003, sparked a rash of satire. Possibilities for reclaiming a critical citizenship are gleaned from this reactive discourse, especially
strategies for dissociating the citizen from the consumer. Here I explore the efficacy of both the generation of spontaneous deliberative publics in response to the image and resistant strategies working with and within the image.

This project begins and ends with the assumption that citizenship is a cultural construction beyond legal strictures (such as residence and the right to vote). Taking Habermas’ ideal normative vision, citizenship at its best is a culture of public deliberation about matters of common concern. In this sense, the citizen’s obligation to participate in the deliberative process precedes even the citizen’s right to vote – for an election is virtually meaningless without prior civic deliberative action. Civic life has a special relationship with martial affairs, two separate spheres that orbit one another like binary stars. Ideally, the military serves to defend the sanctity of the civic sphere, which is both useful and an end to itself (i.e. a free society). The civic sphere in turn directs the military should it need to.

The remaining four chapters are an attempt to follow the discourse of citizenship, media, and military matters through what could be seen as the gravitational collapse of these two binary stars into one another. We will chart the integration of the soldier and the citizen through the often paradoxical discourse of consumerism in advanced capitalism. Perhaps war has always been an object of consumption on some level. Susan Sontag, for example, notes that the birth of photography meant the simultaneous birth of the war photographer: “War is still the most irresistible – and picturesque – news (alongside that invaluable substitute for war, international sports.”63 This project aims to move beyond this question and ask instead, How has this consumption evolved (and
perhaps intensified)? Who is the new citizen? What kind of civic realm does this new citizen inhabit? Finally, how can the citizen be reclaimed?
Notes


3 The relevant excerpt of the January 17, 1961, farewell address is as follows: “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 Statehouse, 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.” Eisenhower is certainly not alone in this critique, and several efforts since then have sought to chronicle the relationship among economics, the military establishment, and resultant politics. See Seymour Melman, *Pentagon Capitalism: The Political Economy of War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970); Adam Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment: Its Impacts on American Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Stephen Rosen, ed., *Testing the Theory of the Military-Industrial Complex* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1973); Peter Wallensteen, Johan Galtun, and Carlos Portales, eds., *Global Militarization* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985); James A. Donovan, *Militarism U.S.A.* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970).


5 Here I use the term “popular culture” in the loosest sense to name a category of broadly marketed products of the corporate culture industry such as Hollywood film, television, and the commercial press. A more examined view of the term recognizes that there is little “popular” in this top-down administration of culture and that popular culture might be more precisely thought of as the interplay of administrative corporate culture and bottom-up local, folk, or street culture. See John Fiske’s touchstone work *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

6 This is not to suggest that a covert collusion between Hollywood and the Pentagon is anything new, though its comprehensive documentation is. See David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004).
W.E.B Du Bois, writing during World War I, for example, demanded that blacks be included in the draft as an essential part of the argument for full citizenship and equal rights. See John Whiteclay Chambers II, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 156.

In his advice to the Medicis, Machiavelli determined that a stronger principality could be crafted if a ruler would redistribute the duties of defending the principality from a hired mercenary force to his subjects. This citizen-soldier would then have a stake in government and the principality’s defense unlike the hired mercenary force, which, in times of peace, would actually constitute a real threat to the ruler’s power. They are “disunited, thirsty for power, undisciplined, and disloyal; they have no fear of God, they do not keep faith with their fellow men; they avoid defeat just so long as they avoid battle; in peacetime you are despoiled by them, and in wartime by the enemy.” Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 77. In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli expands on these ideas by offering up the citizen-soldier as the preferred alternative to the mercenary force, that there is a profound difference “between a happy army that fights for its own glory and one that is poorly organized and fights for the ambition of others.” See Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Discourses on Livy*, trans. Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113.

Iseult Honohan explains that the civic republican tradition, generally speaking, is a constellation of ideas regarding the preservation of a republic. “Emphasizing responsibility for common goods sets republicanism apart from libertarian theories centred on individual rights.” *Civic Republicanism* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1. Civic republicanism, according to Honohan, finds its seeds in classical Greek and Roman thought (Aristotle and Cicero), though it begins properly with Machiavelli and Harrington, continuing through later thinkers such as Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, and Madison.

Chapter 3 contains a more complete discussion of the history of recruitment and the draft.


R. Claire Snyder defends Rousseau against the charge of advocating the conditions for totalitarianism. Rather, she argues, Rousseau maintained a place for the exercise of individuality outside the body politic. *Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 50-51.

15 The directive to “support the troops” is interesting in this respect, as it is often is an implicit directive to silently support the initiatives of those who command the troops. Supporting the troops, in this case, means submitting as a soldier would submit, and thus it is a call for a redefinition of citizenship from “those who are subjects in government” to “those who are objects of government” – or an effective switch from citizen to soldier. This is why some find it necessary to rejoin this common admonishment in a dissociation of identity the re-establishment of citizen agency: “I support the troops. I don’t support the war.”


21 See Nicholas Garnham’s concise summary of these objections in “The Media and the Public Sphere,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 359-376.


23 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 145. Arendt’s collapse of the speaker and the spoken (184) into an external subjectivity and her peculiar definition of “power” in contrast to strength and force (200-207) seem to prefigure the discursive approach of Michel Foucault.

Arendt illustrates the contradiction between militarization and the human sphere of political action in her reference to the memorialization of the Unknown Soldier: “The monuments to the ‘Unknown Soldier’ after World War I bear testimony to the then still existing need for glorification, for finding a ‘whom,’ an identifiable somebody whom for years of mass slaughter should have revealed. The frustration of this wish and the unwillingness to resign oneself to the brutal fact that the agent of the war was actually nobody inspired the erection of the monuments to the ‘unknown,’ to all those whom the war had failed to make known and had robbed thereby, not of their achievement, but of their human dignity,” *The Human Condition*, 181. The Unknown Soldier thus becomes an attempt to recover the value of political action and humanity – a citizen – from a tragedy of a faceless, seemingly automatic, militarism.


44 Quoted in Peter Johnson, “Media’s War Footing Looks Solid,” *USA Today*, 17 February 2003, 1D.

45 Johnson, “Media’s War Footing Looks Solid,” 1D.


49 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 123.

50 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 195.

51 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 160.

52 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black and Red, 1983), Sec. 43.


57 Debord, Sec. 44. See also Douglas Kellner’s *Media Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2003) for an elaboration of the idea of the spectacle through a critique of contemporary culture industry phenomena.
Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Sec. 64.

Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 53-60.


Chapter 2
The X-game and the Post-industrial Body Politic

War and sports have always been allied in intimate ways. We might even go so far as to say that for most of human history, the two have existed on a continuum of gradations. Dario Del Corno tells us that the ancient Greek masculine form *aethlos* means both the fight of warriors and the contest of athletes, and the neuter *aethlon* means both the prize of the athletic contest and the spoils of battle.¹ Sports have been used to train young men for battle, to commemorate wars, and, in the case of the “judicious game” of the Middle Ages, as a substitute for war. It is well known that the American Civil War attracted throngs of picnicking spectators, and though this element disappeared from twentieth-century warfare, modern sports like soccer routinely break out in spectator violence as if to revive what remains vestigial and dormant in the language. It is thus not particularly revelatory to claim a close relationship between the two. The more interesting question concerns the *nature* of this relationship, especially in regard to the changing technological and political landscape.

Here, I attempt to chart the mixing of soldier and citizen identities as a function of the relationship between war and sport in the post-Cold War U.S. The space between the two as it is rendered symbolically – both in language and image – is the contested space of militarism and citizenship. This chapter argues that a significant part of recent trends in militarism involve the appropriation of the symbolics of extreme sports, a paradigm of the post-Cold War era that implicates the citizen body and the global body politic in
novel ways. Extreme sports (or, interchangeably, the X-game) is a complex discourse that weaves together issues of the body, violence, competition, virtuality, consumption, and play in ways unique to the turn of the twenty-first century. After exploring the relationship between the X-game and global politics, I examine three films that combine the figures of the X-gamer and the terrorist: *Extreme Ops* (2002), *xxX* (2002), and *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001), the last of which was used explicitly by the Navy in television recruitment ads. My purpose is to provide an initial theoretical model of the virtual citizen-soldier to serve as a basis for the examination of military recruiting techniques in later chapters.

**Fun with Death**

People say it’s not a sport, because you can’t get hurt. – Synchronized swimmers in an AFLAC insurance television ad, 2004

The term “extreme sports” names a relatively new constellation of cultural understandings and provides both new ways to think about sports as well as athlete identities. Though the term had been in quiet circulation in the early 1990s, it took a corporate commercial entity—ESPN with its 1995 Extreme Games—to incorporate and give a singular body to these disparate activities. Journalist and cultural critic Jeff Howe laments that the power of naming and self-definition was lost when his adolescent pastime skateboarding was subsumed under the rubric of extreme sports. That is to say that extreme sports was not always a self-evident reference. The term was introduced after many of these activities had been long established, and has functioned to both organize these activities and spawn new ones by virtue of its discourse.
“Extreme sports” bespeaks two things. The first rests in the ubiquity of the X in its various forms (ESPN’s X-game, Xtreme Sports, or sometimes simply X), a sign of variability, an unknown quantity or quality. The X has achieved the level of catch-all cultural iconograph since the popularization of the term Generation X in the 1990’s. Joseph Kahn of The Boston Globe explores the paradoxes of its use – somewhere between Christ and Hustler Magazine, between evolution and annihilation. We have seen the popularity of the X-Men, the X-Files, Sony’s video game station the X-Box, the short-lived XFL football league, pop tart temptress Christina Aguilera’s transformation to Xtina, and designer drugs like Ecstasy and Xanax. Advertisers in particular have caught the X-wave and cultivated its mystique. Extreme sports continue to thrive near the center of this universe and provide a bedrock referent. Infused with the indeterminacy of the X itself, the genre would appear to be malleable, resistant to attempts at canonization, and marked by a spirit of evolution. Conventional wisdom traces the family of sports to the rising popularity of surfing in the 1950s and 60s from which skateboarding was born. The 1970s saw the growth of BMX biking and windsurfing, the 80s mountainbiking, and the 90s snowboarding and inline skating. With the commercialization of extreme sports in the 1990s some of the more spectacular sports like bungee jumping, skydiving, and free climbing achieved the level of iconicity. The list has expanded to include hang gliding, mountain biking, and every possible combination: sky surfing, boardsailing, wake boarding, mountainboarding, and even what has come to be known as free-style walking. Long-standing thrill sports like spelunking, water and snow skiing, scuba and free diving, snorkeling, street biking, snow shoeing, open water swimming, tight-rope walking, and hot-air ballooning have been folded into the mix. Less often high-tech
sports such as NASCAR, powerboat racing, and motorcross find their way under the umbrella, suggesting a high-tech element.

The second apparent characteristic of the term is given away in the word “extreme,” denoting activity at or beyond certain boundaries, and there are many. In the first lines of his introduction to the coffee table book, *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Extreme Sports*, Joe Tomlinson asks, “What are extreme sports all about? What is it that gets athletes charged up enough to put their lives at risk?” Immediately, he reveals a central feature of extreme sports: flirtation with death, injury, and the accompanying adrenaline rush. Tomlinson qualifies this initial appraisal with a note about the nature of this death risk: “[Athletes] can successfully do things that could kill those unfamiliar with their particular sports because they have dedicated themselves to performing within their limits, even while they have consistently challenged themselves to redefine those limits.”

The body is the original terrain for such exploration. At its core, what differentiates extreme sports from traditional sports is the lack of a second- or third-party other and a dialectic of competition or dominance. The idea of competition (*competitio*: to meet in rivalry) is refigured or at the very least rendered secondary in extreme sports. Traditional individual sports like pole vaulting or Olympic swimming enter competition through measurements and a currency of record-keeping, a practice that Allen Guttmann argues in his *From Ritual to Record* distinguishes modern sport from premodern sport.

Extreme sports, though still concerned with firsts, rather tend to organize themselves around the spectacle or the festival. More commercialized stadium events like ESPN’s X-Games or the roving Gravity Games have attempted to retain the accoutrements of traditional competition by importing tournament structures, judges, and creative systems
of record-keeping. Extreme sports’ resistance to canonization, however, makes this a

tenuous endeavor. Arlo Eisenberg, a pioneer of in-line skating, recognizes this dynamic:
“"The television producers are defining rollerblading now; the corporate sponsors are.

The focus of rollerblading is moving away from the personal goals of the individual and
quickly moving toward winning championships and training to win championships. How
do we get it back?” Eisenberg suggests the soul of extreme sports is not competition in
the traditional sense. Rather the games are about identifying and meeting the limits of the
body more than overcoming outside opponents in whatever form they may take, whether
hand-to-hand or abstracted in numbers.

This flight into the self produces a different set of pleasures than traditional
sports. Modern sport is generally linearly structured, goal-oriented, and dependent on the
possibility of domination. Here the payoff is advancement in a hierarchy of achievement
and status. Extreme sports, though not devoid of these elements, might be said to be
more circular, process-oriented, and self-transformative. The pleasures of extreme sports
are more akin to those of ecstatic practices than what we regularly think of as sports. In
fact, the X of extreme sports and the X used to refer to the popular hallucinogenic
amphetamine Ecstasy often cross paths in popular culture. Ecstasy (ek stasis: literally
standing outside of oneself) can be understood in at least two ways. The first is as a kind
of transcendence, as the spirit might leave the body in a kind of flight, or as an excess of
energy might overcome the body. The second could be described as an existential fusion,
one that witnesses the collapse of the self-reflective capacity into animality, akin to what
Georges Bataille describes as the animal existence of “water in water” and what
psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, using another liquid metaphor, calls the “flow
Anthropologist David Le Breton finds this second narrative of ecstaticism at work in the discourse of extreme sports. Here we find the stress, pain, giddiness, and panic coupled with an adrenaline high, bliss, and an intense fusion of the actor with the action. Le Breton describes the particular ecstaticism to be a “symbolic deal with Death, with the body as the currency, nature as the site of the event and Death respected only remotely, metaphorically solicited rather than approached for real, even through sometimes it arrives on the scene with a reminder that it is the one limit that can never be exceeded.”

The ecstatic pleasures of approaching death are described with the simple elegance of the bungee jump, a sport that was revived from its ancient South Pacific origins in the early 1980s to become wildly popular in the 90s. This revival involved the New Zealand System of binding the ankles that results in a head-first freefall. In the common bridge jump, the point is to reach the end of the cord, dip one’s head in the rushing current or touch the ground with one’s hand, and snap back up again, thus experiencing a taste of oblivion.

When we begin to speak of the body in terms of the fully integrative experience—the ecstatic flow experience—we are not so much talking about “the body” as such but rather an organic combination of body, machine, terrain, and the various discourses by which a person engages an experience. Just as these sports resist modern structures of traditional competition, they put into question the modern atomistic subjectivity articulated in these relationships. The extreme sport subject acknowledges a kind of schizophrenia. That is to say, the “meeting up” of this post-structural competition occurs as a multiplicity of selves (the fully integrated body) is confronted and tested from a variety of angles in the ecstatic project. From bungee jump cable to stock car, extreme
sports consciously tries the limits of the machined-human, the cybernetic organism. In
the case of skateboarding, for example, the standardized board and half-pipe (inspired by
the half-pipes of sewer systems) or cityscape become an architecture of rules for bending
creatively and spectacularly. Higher tech games like motorcross stunt jumping are
defined by a different set of boundaries, psychological, corporeal, cybernetic, and
geophysical. These sports are much less rule-bound as situation-bound. And they make
their way, in wizardly fashion, unbinding these situations, pressing them. Thus the street-
slang term wicked (literally “to bend”) can be used to describe a particularly artful stunt
or pose in much the same way as someone might refer to a “wicked violinist.” We might
more accurately view these athletes as situational artists, exploding the boundaries of
institutional practice and sanction. Eisenberg states, for example, “I wanted rollerblading
to be rebellious. I wanted there to be an emphasis on the artistry of rollerblading as
opposed to the athleticism.”

Jeff Howe, too, finds skateboarding at the fringes of the
athletic and the aesthetic: “Skateboarding may indeed be a sport. Hell, maybe it’s even
an extreme one.” He continues, “We must also draw the lines in our portrait to account
for skating as a subculture, a cultural response, as a dance and a political act and a
religion.” The artfulness and sense of play in an immanent field (of body, tool, terrain
and culture) are hallmarks of what Donna Haraway refers to as a cyborg ontology. The
cyborg is above all immanent to itself, and it finds its occurrence and transformation as
“stress in the machine,” always an ecology in the process of questioning its own
stability.

Given the general disdain for institutionality implied in extreme sports, it is not
surprising that they have a tendency to overstep traditional notions of sport into the realm
of “lifestyle” or the broader cultural arena. In contrast to the game-on/game-off, uniform/streetclothes, stage/audience binaries of modern sport, various extreme sports express themselves as integrated subcultural pockets that are associated with particular music, fashion, and often a kind of marginal politics. Traditional mainstream sports such as football or golf certainly have massive cultural capital, but we cannot with the same precision associate golf with a “sound” or football with a kind of streetclothes. The rebel ethic of extreme sports, for example, often comes equipped with a strong bias toward independently labeled music and underground film. The extreme sports sound—second-wave punk, rage-rock, thrash metal, and electronica—suggest speed, adrenaline, and the ecstatic, crunchy, fuzz-boxed limits of intelligibility. These underground films are low-tech with a hand-held verite feel, often because they are shot by amateurs, the athletes themselves. The corporate mock-up of this style, as we might witness watching the X-Games or a Mountain Dew commercial, is often characterized by graininess, static, digital scratchwork, and the jagged discontinuity of missing frames. Fashion, too, has a corresponding aura of delinquency, typified by the skateboard kid look: hooded sweatshirts, knit caps, and baggy jeans. Colin Grimshaw of the marketing magazine Campaign paints the stereotypical X-gamer as a “disaffected, thrill-seeking young male with [a] goatee beard and a penchant for Eminem and substance abuse.”¹² A vivid rhetoric of purity and filth is certainly at play here. Extreme sports are constantly on the verge of a kind of anarchic white noise. Skateboarders often refer to themselves as “rats,” and a given culture’s avant-garde is often described in the language of political extremism, of fanaticism and insanity—gurus, messiahs, martyrs and the like. Listen to Lee Bridgers, owner of Dreamride LLC, a hard-core mountain biking retreat in Moab,
Utah: “Everyone who worships the God of Extreme and is a card-carrying member of the Church of Bikesurfing knows that one mistake can cause death.” He goes on, “Our religion is based on a litany of rituals—rituals of checking the equipment over and over.” Whether we can or cannot separate a grass roots ethos from a corporate image (to do so might blind us to an important dialectical relationship), the two seem to express a common discourse of a proud marginal politics. Kyle Kusz argues that identity in extreme sports (BMX specifically) is in part an expression of white suburban male crisis, designed to “foreground images of whiteness as disenfranchised, nondominant and marginalized,” obscuring and thus helping to normalize positions of privilege - a kind of pre-emptive vaccination of self-victimage. Kusz’s analysis may help us explain the paradoxes of extreme sports discourse as it goes mainstream. That is, it may provide a model for understanding how a discourse of alterity can sustain a dominant culture.

The activities now labeled extreme have enjoyed exponential gains in popularity in recent years. Individual ‘lifestyle’ thrill-seeking sports are up and team sports down. Between 1999 and 2000, snowboarding climbed to 7 million participants and skateboarding to 12 million, a 51 percent gain compared with tackle football, which grew 15 percent to 6 million. Baseball participation sank 13 percent from 1995 to 2000. In 2001 skateboarder Tony Hawk beat out Shaquile O’Neil and Tiger Woods for most popular athlete among American youth. After several years of sponsoring and airing its bi-annual X-games and Gravity Games, ESPN launched the first major cable network devoted to the genre in 2003, spin-off channel EXPN. FOX, too, has plans for launching its 24-hour extreme sports network Fuel in 2003. The international pay-TV syndicate The Extreme Sports Channel has been in operation primarily in Western Europe since
May 1999, and has since opened up markets in North and South America with shows like “Not Recommended Behaviour” and “Rebel TV.” Its distribution outfit X-Dream International has opened the way for EXPN and FOX’s Fuel with their vision of lifestyle programming in the spirit of MTV with fashion and music as integral elements. Extreme sports broadcasting is also paving new routes on the information superhighway with web-TV services such as X-Dream’s Extreme.com, the extreme sports syndicate Bluetorch, the EXPN and Fuel websites, and High.tv.¹⁸

With such an explosion, the term “extreme” threatens to shed its descriptive value in much the same way that the buzzword “alternative” did in the context of 1990s commercial pop radio. This prompts the eternal marketing question: How long can the mainstream play the marginal? Like the primarily white, young, middle-to-upper class demographic that “alternative” and “grunge” music captured, the demographic for extreme sports is irresistible to advertisers. The alchemy of channeling youthful rebellion into consumerism, turning lead into gold, has been the task of advertising since Coca Cola asked America to “Face Uncle Sam with a Coke in Your Hand” in 1969 or since Sprite more recently asked America to ignore the hype of celebrity endorsement and “Obey Your Thirst.” We can take soft drinks and Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) as paradigm examples of this assimilation. Major soft drinks like Coca Cola and Pepsi have opted out of the extreme sports advertising game for fear that their corporate names might interfere with their street credibility. This idea has become all but gospel in extreme sports marketing.¹⁹ Instead Pepsi has revamped the image of its Mountain Dew for its “Do the Dew” campaign to cultivate a kind of extreme consumption that itself rings of substance abuse. After a hard day of parachuting off cliffs on their mountain bikes,
Americans are urged to “slam” a special wide-mouth can of Dew. This especially successful appropriation of the extreme sports ethos has spawned not only the proliferation of slam-cans but also “slamming” (extreme consumption) as legitimate way of life at the extremities of capitalism. The marketing and presentation of sport utility vehicles (SUVs) gives us a similar example of the commercial appropriation of extreme sports, a discourse that might be characterized as “safe danger.” Coded into the advertising of the SUV are the pleasures of pressing the cultural limits of the city dweller in the process of sprawling into undeveloped territory while providing a floating fortress for the upper-middle class to safely encounter the inner-city other. In its gas-guzzling display of consumption—a transfiguration of the wide-mouthed can—we can hear the ecological echoes of the suicidal urge. The limits of the body play into the discourse of the SUV as well. Advertisements for the Nissan X-Trail, for example, feature the unlikely image of a broken arm X-ray, reflecting the danger and adventurism of extreme sports—not, apparently, a reference to SUVs’ high rollover rates. Nissan’s Xterra comes equipped with a first-aid medical kit. The oxymoronic nature of these appropriations is difficult to resolve; they are rather held in tension in a complex of fantasies: production/consumption, excess/control, danger/safety, and outsider/insider.  

As extreme sports is woven into the mainstream understanding—specifically through mass media—another broken boundary becomes visible. The pressing of this boundary gives us a clear glimpse into the changing technopolitics—a cyborg politics—of the image. Televised mainstream sports like football, basketball, or golf have an easily recognizable institutional aesthetic by virtue of a specific idiom of camera placement, shot angles, and cutting rhythm. This aesthetic has coded within it a visual rhetoric of
identity. As viewers we are afforded the gaze of a privileged audience member—one with the godlike powers of zoom and instantaneous transportation around the grandstand. We are always in a position of gazing-at, even with unconventional bird’s-eye blimp shots or cameras mounted on backboards and goalposts. The visual production of extreme sports, in contrast, tends to alter this institutional aesthetic and refigure the ground between spectator and spectacle, from a *gazing-at* to a *gazing-with*. When mobile hand-held video cameras became small and inexpensive enough, they were seamlessly integrated into many activities, especially skateboarding, snowboarding, and flat-ground BMX. The stunt film became a cultural fixture. These low-tech mini-documentaries are generally a mixture of spectacular feats, equally spectacular wipe-outs, interviews, and lifestyle bits. The camera is passed around a circle, so the point-of-view is always inclusive and familial, the identification with one who is on deck. This aesthetic was carried further into the world of skydiving and its more experimental half-sister sky surfing, a sport where the participant jumps with what is basically a snowboard attached to his or her feet. In the fall of 1990, the World Freestyle Federation staged its championships in the Texas skies, introducing for the first time the “team video concept.” In this idiom, the sky surfer jumps with a partner who is equipped with a helmet camera. The two then work in tandem to produce a video of the jump that is shown in real-time on the ground for spectators and judges. The innovation of this technique is found in the collapse of subject and object as the camera-flyer is implicated in the event. The cameraperson must maneuver and stay in-synch with the sky surfer to produce spectacular shots, angles, and an array of aerial acrobatics. The artistry of the image on the television is the object of judging, not the skydivers themselves. Beyond sky
surfing, helmet-cam technology is especially suited for television and has been particularly productive in the commercialization of extreme sports. Televised events like the X-Games feature a mixture of traditional stationary shooting techniques (mostly for establishing scene) and heavy doses of wobbly hand held and helmet-cam shots. The heart of the extreme sports televisual aesthetic is a radical identification with the body at its limits, swinging from a bungee line or hanging onto a cliff face. The stage collapses into the gallery. Thus we cannot claim that extreme sports at their most extreme are “spectator sports,” practiced by few and watched by many. If the rhetoric of extreme sports is to be read in terms its integration into mainstream commercial television, we should more accurately say that extreme sports is a visual discourse of virtual action. We are not spectators; we are made virtual subjects in the action.

**The Global Body Politics of Extreme Sports**

Disciplinary man produced energy in discrete amounts, while control man undulates, moving among a continuous range of different orbits. *Surfing* has taken over from all the old *sports*. – Gilles Deleuze

To this point, we have encountered eight main features that typify the rhetoric of extreme sports.

1. The genre is marked by an evolutionary imperative that involves constant invention, revival, and cross-pollination of various activities.

2. Testing the limits of the individual body is favored over traditional competition.
3. Aesthetics are valued at the level of or above athletics.

1. Pleasure is produced in ecstatic practices rather than domination of another.

2. These practices orbit around the symbolic (if not real) possibility of injury and death.

3. Identity is articulated as a discourse of marginal politics and mythic individualism, even as extreme sports is assimilated by mainstream commercial culture.

7. The rhetoric is characterized by a lack of institutional markers such as canons, rulebooks, uniforms and divisions between game/culture and on-the-field/off-the-field.

8. Extreme sports, in their use of media, push past the limits of spectatorship into a visual discourse of virtual action. The subject position and point-of-view of the viewer is that of the virtual actor.

Additionally, we should highlight the transgeographical nature of extreme sports. Traditional sports anchor their identities in place, regardless of whether those playing on the field have been recruited from the four corners of the earth. Teams take up the torch of the polis and are invoked metonymically in discourses of conquest: Houston takes on Chicago, LA ransacks Miami, and so forth. Cities have hometown heroes whose conquests become property of the city and the citizens who find their identities
consubstantial in this web of symbols. The modern Olympics, especially during the rivalries of the Cold War, had a pronounced and often vicious geographical politics that may have been, in some sense, a cathartic substitute for the alternative—actual geopolitical hot war and nuclear annihilation. In contrast, extreme sports do not recognize place as a part of the same structure of signs. Insofar as we might say they are kinds of mystic religious practices, the rhetoric involves the equivalent of what Mercea Eliade calls the holy city, a Jerusalem around whose wellspring and axis the cosmogony revolves.

Thus bungee jumpers, base jumpers, and endurance races have their New Zealand, surfers their Hawaii and Australia, and mountain bikers their Taos, New Mexico and Moab, Utah. These are places of origination and perhaps pilgrimage, not bases from which to mount an attack. Otherwise, we can say that the rhetoric of extreme sports is one of relative placelessness and globality.

In their seminal work *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri give us a theoretical apparatus to think about the changing nature of the global body politic: “What used to be conflict or competition among several imperialist powers has in important respects been replaced by the idea of a single power that overdetermines them all … that is decidedly postcolonial and postimperialist.” In other words, the colonial urge is beginning to feel its limits and turn back upon itself. This has an array of implications for how we conceive of political power. The idea of Empire crosses the line that separates a traditionally Marxist or neo-Marxist kind of power to a Foucauldian conception. Power, in Empire, is not conceived of in terms of internal/external, center/periphery, or First World/Third World. Empire is thus not a conventionally conceived globalism that finds its center in American hegemony (Hardt and Negri dispense with the language of
American Empire) or a shift of power from that of the nation-state to a centralized trans-
national body like the United Nations. Rather, Empire is expressed in a matrix of nation-
states, trans-national private corporations, international political bodies (NATO or UN),
and Non Governmental Organizations (NGO’s). This matrix, Hardt and Negri tell us, is
in a constant process of self-legitimation based on a rhetoric of global peace and security.
The idea of “war” is utterly transformed under this increasingly webbed structure into the
banality of routine police action—Empire regulating itself. The notion of a just war, a
right war, is then increasingly associated with a war’s expedience and effectiveness.
Universal values are subjugated by the universal fact of Empire and its need to self-
sustain. Thus Empire is characteristically post-ideological. If one can point to the
moment the politics of Empire were in full view, it would be the first major world
conflict following the crumbling of the Soviet Bloc—“world” in the sense of world
spectacle and world cooperation— the Persian Gulf War in 1991. This was a conflict
where an aggressive tyrant became “the Enemy, an absolute threat to the ethical order.”
The idea of the rogue state is a product and symptom of Empire’s rhetoric of self-
legitimation. Terrorism, too, with all its affective baggage, has achieved a place at the
apogee of this rhetoric, highlighting the powerful place of mass media and the image in
the politics of Empire. War is refigured from an us/them paradigm to a conflict between
legitimate and illegitimate violence.

As imperial power turns inward and falls upon itself, it begins the process of
intensifying its institutions and the body itself. Technological progress plays no small
part in this intensification, and advances in the sophistication of the informational
infrastructure (the World Wide Web and military global surveillance mechanisms like
C³I—Command-Control-Communications-Intelligence) have been integral in hastening the political landscape of Empire. Hardt and Negri call this intensification the move from disciplinariness to the control society, borrowing from Gilles Deleuze. The control society is that in which “mechanisms of command become ever more ‘democratic,’ ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens.”26 The notion of the control society is an extension of Foucault’s “biopower,” the regulation and administration of life through its interior.27 This kind of power does not come from the outside and is neither coercive nor repressive, but rather productive of subjectivity and modes of life. Biopolitical discourses are mobilized alongside a social architecture of visibility, a panoptic structure, which manifests in the collapse of the private into the public, dissolving the possibility of an outside to politics. This collapse changes the nature of the lived body. Donna Haraway’s cyborg ontology describes the technological end of this transformation, one that specifically entails the individual body and its integration into a network of machines, virtualities, discourses, and other social and biological structures all the way down to genome informatics.28 Because the control society complicates the idea of “the body” as a discrete unit of ontological knowledge, Hardt and Negri offer Haraway’s “cybernetic organism” in its place. Broadly speaking, we can say that whereas industrial development was a process of colonization and individual atomization, post-industrial development is a process of networking, weaving a global control matrix that fully implicates the cyborg body.

Extreme sports is a response to the transition to a control society. Just as traditional sports are a microcosm of imperial politics, extreme sports are a microcosm of the post-imperial politics of Empire. In his analysis of post-industrial war, theorist Paul
Virilio touches on the relationship between extreme sports and the vanishing horizons of globalism: “Oddly, since the expanse of the world is progressively being reduced to nothing [via communication technologies] … the individual becomes his own training ground.”⁵² Politics has at once exploded into the specter of globalism and imploded to the body. We are forced to confront again the question of death in the body politics of extreme sports. Why is death featured so prominently, indeed at the very center of the discourse? And if we are to claim a microcosmic/macrocosmic relationship between the body of the X-gamer and the global (cyborg) body politic, how are we to reconcile this apparent self-directed violence, this suicidal play?

Georges Bataille offers a way to think about the social ecology of violence in relation to global politics. Both his *Theory of Religion* and his *Accursed Share* discuss the origins and meaning of sacrifice as it arose from early societies. For Bataille, a kind of sacrificial violence developed contemporaneously with the human world of usefulness. The tool, that which for him separates human existence from animal existence, creates an ecology of subject-object divisions that constitute the world of utility. When perfectly useful goods, animals, or humans are destroyed in the sacrificial ceremony, a society gains a mystical glimpse into the unified primeval world of utter uselessness, what Bataille argues is a basic human drive: “Beyond our immediate ends, man’s activity in fact pursues the useless and infinite fulfillment of the universe.”⁵⁰ The sacrifice is the violence that fulfills a kind of holy immanence, the irrational pre-tooled merger with the divine, a method of falling into grace, so to speak, however momentary. The necessity for sacrifice, Bataille suggests, is also linked with the idea that any social ecology is suffused with an excess of energy and thus an excess of wealth. Excess wealth goads
itself into its “luxurious expenditure” in the mystical moment. Bataille further argues in 
Theory of Religion that sacrifice disappeared with the rise of the “military order,” a social 
system whose violence is projected outward upon the other (imperialism, capitalism, 
proselytism, expansion) rather than expended upon itself via the sacrificial urge: “The 
principle of military order is the methodical diversion of violence to the outside. If 
vioence rages within, it opposes that violence to the extent it can. And it subordinates 
the diversion to a real end.”31

If we take as one of the central tenets of Empire the collapse of the sense of an 
inside or outside to politics—that is, the military order approaching its limits—we can 
take Bataille’s formulation of violence a step further. Where does the violence of the 
military order turn in the case of Empire? In other words, What does war in Empire look 
like? The answer is that “war” is transformed rhetorically into an immanent and 
imminent phenomenon, occurring everywhere and always, what Virilio calls “pure 
war.”32 That is, war is bound neither by geography nor even time. The ‘War on Terror’ 
that has been conjured in presidential speeches and echoed in popular dialogue is a 
rhetorical turn less akin to the Vietnam War and more like the War on Poverty or the War 
on Drugs in its geographic non-specificity. The War on Terror is an especially potent 
symptom of Empire because it invokes these precedents, which generally imply an 
internal social regulation. This “new kind of war” takes a rhetoric of inside/outside and 
turns it inside out, taking its place in a discourse of generalized global discipline and 
control. There can only be an immanent inside to the War on Terror. Furthermore, this 
war cannot be won in any modern sense, since there is no outside entity to dominate and 
defeat. Instead this war is an ongoing process of self-transformation in the global order.
Violence appears throughout the matrix of power, the mundane everyday spaces of life—the bus stop, the World Trade Center—or, more importantly, distributed as spectacle through the ubiquitous mass media. Because the battlefield is diffuse, the mechanisms of control are equally so. “War” is increasingly a kind of police action issued forth through Rapid Deployment Forces, Special Forces, CIA, FBI and equivalent apparatuses of control in the industrialized world. These are in turn tightly woven into local, state, and other federal police bureaus as well as social institutions (banks, the stock market, hospitals, schools, libraries, prisons and so on) via legal mechanisms such as the USA PATRIOT Act of 2002. Thus war is increasingly talked about as a “job to be done,” just as one might clean a carpet. “Insane” nations and leaders must be sanitized.

The final effect of these increasingly capillary measures of control is the production of the citizen body. This body is a kind of mirror to (or a microcosm of) the institutions and discourses of which the body is a product. When the violence of Bataille’s military order reaches its limits and comes home in regard to the macropolitics of Empire, there is a simultaneous homecoming with regard to the micropolitics of the citizen. We can see this in the affective dimension of the War on Terror, where one’s everyday being is simultaneously haunted by potential disaster and the corresponding anxiety of mundane surveillance. The sacrificial urge revisits the body and provides it with a new paradigm in which violence is implied by life itself. A new discourse is invented by which the drama of control and violence is staged on the corporeal level. We find a powerful and visible manifestation of this developing economy of violence in the X-game. Just as traditional competitive sports reigned in and re-enacted industrial age war, the X-game is a way of coming to terms with post-industrial war, what amounts to a
new death ritual to replace the old, one that skirts and scours the contours of the city, the landscape, the machine, and the self. The “X-game,” ESPN’s trademark, is perhaps more relevant than “extreme sports” in that this is a popular discourse of the body as performed in the arena of mass media. The body is both the player’s in its immediacy and also a common, virtual, mediated one.

We can find a distillation of the X-game ethos, for example, in currently highly rated “reality” TV gameshows like CBS’s Survivor or NBC’s Fear Factor and their many copy cats. Survivor, having toured the world in search of exotic locations – the Australian outback, Africa, Thailand, the Amazon – operates under the pretense of wilderness survival, though its focus is often soap opera dramas and contestant in-fighting. Fear Factor dares contestants to eat disgusting foods (insects, for example), appear naked in public, and confront fearful animals, claustrophobia, and heights. The popularity of these programs is symptomatic of a social need for the spectacle of the body under stress – to witness the body flinching, shivering, vomiting, and generally confronting its limits. Francine Prose, writing in Harper’s magazine, suggests that these scenes of bodily duress are indeed manifestations of the new politics. Take for example the creator of Survivor, Mark Burnett, who served as an advisor to the British Special Air Service in Central America in the 1980s as it was ravaged by guerilla and counterinsurgency death squad warfare. Burnett went on to launch his television career as the creator of extreme sports special Eco-Challenge in the mid-1990s. Having established himself, Burnett conceived Survivor for CBS. Prose muses, “Reading Mark Burnett’s resume cannot help but make Survivor seem even more like a weekly dispatch from the Central American terrorist training camp to which he may have been headed
when he was lured off course by the siren song of Hollywood.” Among other ventures into reality television, Burnett conceived the show *Combat Missions* that aired on the USA Network over the winter 2003-04 season. *Combat Missions* featured ex-military contestants in staged special operations missions with titles like “Urban Assault,” “Tank Take-Out,” and “Pilot Down.” In a strange twist of events, Scott Halverson, a *Combat Missions* contestant who had since gone on to work for the private mercenary service Blackwater, Inc., was one of the four U.S. “civilian contractors” killed by insurgents after the brutal U.S. siege of Fallujah in early 2004. After their vehicle was hit by a rocket propelled grenade, their charred bodies were dragged through the streets in what became one of the most shocking image events broadcast on U.S. television. Halverson’s tragic journey is a case study in the closing of a feedback loop of simulation, news, entertainment, and war. The cartoon shown in Figure 1 captures these horrifying absurdities as its parodies the symbolic trajectory of this ilk of reality television, a spectacular death game that follows the same logic as a public execution or human sacrifice.
We have seen how a global body politic engenders a simultaneous politics of the body, a visual discourse played out in an information age. The televised appearance of state-sponsored “legitimate” violence (the real-time desert wars) and “illegitimate” violence (real-time terrorism) is increasingly matched with rituals whereupon the body undergoes the controlled violent experiment in the spirit of ecstatic play. The virtual body provides a site for radical identification, a flesh through which a culture lives. As pure war intensifies, so too does this synecdochic body. This dynamic would seem to predict the merger of the discourse of war and that of extreme sports. This merger and its implications are the subject of the next section.

Figure 1. Cartoon as printed in Playboy magazine. The caption reads: “Would you like one final smoke before we wrap up this episode of Fear Factor?”
War as X-Game in Popular Film

[C]inematic power [is] equal and superior to that of the industrial and military complexes, equal or superior to that of the Pentagon and of governments. – Jean Baudrillard

Los Angeles is not the “entertainment capital of the world”; Washington, D.C. is the “entertainment capital of the world.” – Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America.

Three popular films vividly display the marriage of the post-industrial soldier with extreme sports: *Extreme Ops* (2002), *xXx* (2002), and *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001). Each film provides a useful vantage point for thinking about how the visual discourses of the body, sport, violence, and global politics converge. Both the thematic content of the films and their visual rhetorics will be explored. On the one hand, the discourses of post-industrial war and the X-game seem to be a perfect fit. On the other hand, unresolveable tensions appear the moment the two discourses are introduced in the same dramatic breath. These tensions are, in many cases, essential to the movement of these texts. The films’ construction of the citizen-soldier will be of particular interest as they display a crossing over into military affairs.

*Extreme Ops* was released in theatres in November 27, 2002, to utterly dismal reviews. The reviews ranged from “Extreme Oops” to “Flick goes downhill hard” to “*Extreme Ops* doesn’t have two brain cells to rub together” accompanied by spotty acknowledgements of its scenery and stunts, which required an army of 178 experts to perform. Apart from its obvious frailties in terms of plot, continuity, and acting, the film provides a rather rich thematic and visual scheme to begin to understand how post-industrial war and extreme sports have merged in the popular imagination. It also allows
us some understanding as to how these discourses work in the context of the military recruitment advertisements that are explored in the next chapter.

At the center of the story is a team of athletes, adventure-seekers, and television producers out to shoot an advertisement for a hand-held video camera. The producers of this advertisement want footage of snowboarders and skiers racing in front of an avalanche, so the team heads up to the Austrian Alps to shoot both the avalanche and the downhill stunts. Along the way, the team accidentally captures film of an international Serb terrorist in hiding, having recently faked his own death. The terrorist group he fronts also has plans to “blow up the court in Holland in 48 hours.” Mistaken for CIA agents, the advertising team is drawn into an extreme stunts-riddled battle to the death, which eventually ends on a positive note for the team but not for the terrorists. In the melee, the team predictably triggers and must escape a real avalanche, and this sequence, caught on film, becomes the centerpiece of the original ad campaign.

The most immediately striking visual feature of the film is centrality of hand-held cameras and the aesthetic of the first-person virtual player, a staple of extreme sports. The backdrop sequence for the opening credits sets up this aesthetic immediately. We are led as viewers through a variety of hand-held camera point-of-view positions, creating an infinite hall of mirrors effect, a universe of self-reflexivity. We see, for example, a skydiver in freefall before we zoom out to realize we are viewing the scene on the mini-cam viewfinder of another diver. We see a river full of kayakers, some of whom have cameras themselves, before we are transported again out of a camera viewfinder into the body of one dangled above the river shooting the action (See Figure 2).
The visual grammar of extreme sports integrates the cameraperson into the stunt itself, thus providing the viewer with a virtual position in the action. In an illustrative scene, the team is ascending into the Alps on a passenger train. We soon find out that these young rebels have hooked ropes to the caboose and are snowboarding waterski-style behind the train, executing impossible jumps and tricks. Meanwhile one of the characters, Will, is strapped upside down under the train car shooting the spectacle. His precarious position (assumed by actor Devon Sawa, not a stunt double) is further emphasized with a point-of-view shot of the snowboarders as the train tracks peel off into the distance (See Figure 3).
The ubiquity of the hand-held camera reaches absurd levels at many points in the film. In the logic of the X-game, the more life-threatening the situation, the more necessary the camera. When this credo is taken past the point of utility, it provides a glimpse into some important visual and thematic relationships. A particularly poignant example of this occurs at the dramatic apex of the film when our heroes are stranded on a cliff face and hunted by terrorists circling in a helicopter. Finding himself dangling from a rope in a vulnerable spot, one of the X athletes decides the best course of action is to film his own imminent death. Moreover, we, as the viewers, are invited, through his hand-held camera, into his point-of-view as he stares up the barrel of his attacker’s shotgun (See Figure 4). This sequence bespeaks many things. First, it is a clear demonstration of the visual rhetorics of virtual action in extreme sports. The viewer’s gaze switches from a looking-at to a looking-with, from the third-person camera to the first-person camera, the equivalent of the helmet cam. This switch in viewer identity is
repeated enough in the film that had we not been familiar with it before, by this point we
are. As viewers, we are then asked to make substitutions. Now the death limit staring
into our helmet cam is not the ground rising up to meet us but rather an assassin with a
bead on our foreheads. This is not a run-of-the-mill assassin, but rather one specifically
designated as an “international terrorist,” a signifier that implicates the bodies involved in
a large and complex web of global-political identities. The camera=gun (shooting)
equation can now be read in terms of the post-industrial politics of surveillance versus the
rudimentary violence of terrorism. Positioning the X-gamer as a counterpart to the
terrorist also identifies the X-gamer with the soldier. Importing the discourse of terrorism
into the context of extreme sports demands that we read the encounter as a ritual of
pleasure, perhaps the ultimate extreme sport, one whose brush with death is so intimate
that it demands to be filmed – not even at the risk of one’s life, but especially at the risk
of one’s life. The visual codes of this scene are highly complex. Because they make
sense, one can presume that the idea of the extreme soldier in the War on Terror has a
popular resonance. The very title of the film, Extreme Ops, suggests as much, giving us
an alterative to the military’s Special Ops or Psy Ops with the added facet of the civilian-
turned-soldier.
The contemporaneous August 2002 film *xXx* (pronounced “triple X”) deals in many of the same themes. One critic even called *Extreme Ops* a “low-rent *xXx* with a high-altitude setting.” 38 While *Extreme Ops* was a step away from straight-to-video, *xXx* was heavily marketed, cost $90 million to make, grossed $250 million, and stayed in the number one spot for two weeks. Whereas *Extreme Ops* involved a rather amorphous and interchangeable group of characters, *xXx* was a vehicle to further promote actor Vin Diesel’s (real name Mark Vincent) Xander Cage as a next generation James Bond. The
references to the Bond film franchise in xXx are many, but there are significant
departures. As Jim Vermiere of The Boston Globe characterized it, Xander Cage is a
“brutish and inarticulate” Bond. Instead of a machine gun-bedecked Aston Martin,
Cage drives a gadgety and muscled Pontiac GTO. Instead of a tuxedo, Cage sports
massive sheepskin coats, thermal undershirts, and a host of tattoos: 3 X’s on the back of
the neck, two guns crossed to form an X on the small of the back, and a tribal band, a bull
charging out of flames, the words “dis,” “order,” and “chaos” on his arms. Cage is the
star of “The Xander Zone” website that features his own extreme sports exploits, and he
lives in what looks to be an abandoned industrial underground lair that is filled with
skateboard half-pipes, street urchins, and slinky available women. The story centers on
his transformation into and adventures as a soldier-spy. After performing a particularly
illegal stunt, he is given the chance to either run missions for the National Security
Agency or go to jail. Thus, unlike Bond, he is a reluctant spy with questionable loyalties.
Xander is sent into Prague to infiltrate a group of expatriated Chechyan terrorists
named Anarchy 99, whose goal it is to poison all of Western Europe with the new
biological weapon of mass destruction, Silent Night. He eventually saves the day by
infiltrating the group, stopping the doomsday device, and getting the girl.

While being interviewed on CNN’s Larry King Live in late 2004, New York Times
columnist Maureen Dowd referred to Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld’s new
vision of the military as a “Vin Diesel kind of light force that would speed through, and
you could intervene in more countries.” Dowd shorthand draws the lead persona of xXx
as a symbolic stand-in for the rapid response forces of Empire. From this perspective,
Xander Cage is not a “new Bond,” a new kind of spy. The spy is a relic of the Cold War.
Rather, Cage represents a post-Cold War political structure that dissolves the old dialectic boundaries. Now, ideologies are unstable and shifting; power, once binary, diffuses. Post-imperially the home front collapses into the battle front. James Bond’s drama was about crossing lines, infiltrating enemy strongholds. Xander Cage flows through the matrix of power like a hired cop through a city.

_xXx_ is interesting not only because the film integrates the X-gamer into the politics of post Cold War conflict, but also because of the politically disengaged position of the protagonist. One critic observed, “Neither words of ideology nor dialectic pass the lips of these spies good or bad – they just want to have fun and cause a little trouble, not unlike the teenagers that are considered to be the film’s primary audience.”

For example, the scene that establishes Xander Cage as a character involves stealing a senator’s red Corvette, driving off a thousand-foot bridge, and parachuting from the car at the last second, all while fleeing the police. The stunt is part of Cage’s Xander Zone project and is noteworthy for several reasons. First, the scene replays the visual rhetoric of virtual participation standard in extreme sports with the first-person “crash cam” strapped to the car, shown in the first two frames of Figure 5. This wanton act of destruction is both justified by the stunt’s immortalization on film and a by little speech Cage gives into one of the strap-on cameras. The prudish senator, Cage tells us, wants to ban offensive heavy metal and rap music and thinks that video games are ruining the minds of the youth. For this the senator must be punished – not politically, but personally. This frames Cage’s spectacular rebellion in terms of a kind of anti-citizen. This anti-citizen acts out a drama consistent with a kind of terroristic violence, without,
as the critic notes above, a substantial ideology to back it up. This is thrill for thrill’s sake.

Figure 5. xXx (2002). Xander Cage executing his spectacular anti-politics of punishment.
The virtual rhetorics of both extreme sports and video games find a common space in this scene. Our virtual thrill-ride is partially taken in defense of video games. It is perhaps no accident that the film was backed by Sony, maker of one of the most popular video game consoles on the market, the PlayStation. One critic remarks how the film itself—in its caricature, virtual feel, and continual action—feels much like a video game: “Quality mindless fun is this one, and after a while you won’t even miss that controller.” The ease with which the film combines so seamlessly the discourses of extreme sports, video games, global politics, violence, and virtual action speaks to the character of the post-industrial citizen. Though audience identification and virtual involvement in film is nothing new, we might say that *xXx*, like *Extreme Ops*, is an intensification of the virtual paradigm as it discursively aligns the citizen, the military, and the post-Cold War order.

*xXx* is most relevant here in the manner by which the border between the citizen and soldier is crossed. The visual and thematic currency of extreme sports allows one persona to look very much like the other. This crossing may be summed up in a one-liner Cage delivers as he is yanked with a rope from a moving airplane onto the ground below. While his fellow soldiers-in-training look at each other with frightened confusion, Cage spits into the camera, “I live for this shit!” Figure 6 depicts just a few of his adventures in the field. While being hunted by a helicopter gunship at a cocaine production compound in Colombia, Cage executes some of his more spectacular feats, striking poses all within the idiom of motorcross dirt biking. On snowboard in the second frame, he successfully smothers a group of Anarchy 99 terrorists in an avalanche while evading their snowmobiled pursuits. Frame three shows Cage chasing down the hydrofoil-
submarine doomsday device that would blanket Western Europe with biological weapons. Here, he launches into the air by means of an American flag-emblazoned parasail. Just before leaving the ground, he aptly frames the drama not in terms of any kind of moral imperative, but rather in terms of its potential for spectacular thrills: “I wish I had a camera!” In the very climax of the film, Cage rides the hydrofoil himself, handling bubbling green vials of biological contaminant, attempting to defuse Silent Night as conventional fighter planes close in. This is perhaps the clearest condensation of millennial politics and the collapse of the X-gamer into the post-Cold War soldier. Cage is face-to-face with a type of weapon that, though it has existed for decades, has been afforded tremendous symbolic power since September 11, 2001. We now understand biological weapons to be those that target civilians and effectively bring the battlefield home. Filtered through the eerie phosphorescence of these bio-weapons, Cage here is both rebel and g-man, both self-indulgent X-gamer and hero, both citizen and soldier. This is the character we as viewers play, with or without a game controller. We must keep in mind that *XxX*, like any of the James Bond films that presage it, is rife with fantasy, hyperbole, and kitsch. Like the Bond films, too, *XxX* provides a set of orientations for the popular understanding of political relations—a kernel that we find expressed in other cultural texts perhaps more immediately relevant to actual military affairs.
Of the three films discussed here, *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001) is the one that can properly be called a traditional war film. The film’s release date is significant. Immediately following the 9/11 attacks, the conventional wisdom in Hollywood was that all references to terrorism or the Trade Towers, war films, and perhaps all images of realistic violence ought to be tabled and postponed through an indefinite grieving period. The Arnold Schwarzenegger-takes-on-the-terrorists film *Collateral Damage* (2002) due out in October 2001 was put on hold as was John Woo’s WWII action-drama *Windtalkers* (2002), with its original November 2001 release date. Films like Jackie Chan’s
*Nosebleed* (about a plot to blow up the Trade Towers), James Cameron’s *Deadline* (terrorists hijacking a plane), and WW3.com (featuring a plane skidding through Central Park on the way to a Simon and Garfunkel concert) were never to be seen again. This initial hesitance did not last long, however. Very quickly studios learned that with the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the patriotic backlash following September 11th, audiences were primed for war and its heroic depiction on film. Several war films set for 2002 were pushed forward to meet this craving. *Black Hawk Down*, based on the 1993 debacle in Somalia, was moved from March 2002 to early January. *Charlotte Gray*, a film about an Englishwoman working with the WWII French Resistance, moved from 2002 to late December 2001. The bloody Mel Gibson Vietnam saga, *We Were Soldiers*, moved from late 2002 to March. Andy Seiler of *USA Today* notes that many of these films were sent into production piggybacking off the “trapped behind enemy lines” theme that brought Stephen Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) its successes, a survivalist motif consistent with the millennial politics of Empire. Of this spate of films, *Behind Enemy Lines* was the first to take advantage of this new wave of war film fever and was arguably instrumental in touching it off, making way for the terrorist-themed *Extreme Ops* and *xXx* that would close out 2002. The film’s original release date was to be January 2002, but after wildly successful focus group test-screenings, this date was bumped to November 2001. Bill Snyder, president of domestic distribution at Twentieth Century Fox, remarked, “I think [September 11th] may have influenced the scores and made people love the film a little more.” This was perhaps an understatement as the film received some of the highest focus group scores in the studio’s history, with audiences reportedly standing to cheer and applaud at the end.
Behind Enemy Lines is the story of Navy pilot Lieutenant Chris Burnett (Owen Wilson) who is bored with the routine of life on an aircraft carrier during the American-NATO intervention in Bosnia. Unless he gets to see some action, Burnett tells his father-figure, Admiral Reigart (Gene Hackman), he intends to resign. Reigart scolds this petulance and sends Burnett off on a Christmas Day reconnaissance flight near a no-fly zone. Ever the rebel, Burnett decides that he and his co-pilot ought to break code and take some photos in the no-fly zone. Immediately they spot a group of Serb militants, who shoot them down in perhaps the most suspenseful scene in the film. Parachuting into the countryside, Burnett finds he is being hunted by a small Serb militia bent on his execution because he had taken pictures of fresh mass graves. Back on the aircraft carrier, Admiral Reigart is thwarted from sending in a rescue team because doing so would further violate the no-fly zone. “We can’t risk destabilizing the peace process!” French NATO commander, Admiral Piquet tells him. Thus, Burnett must make his way several miles through the wilderness to a legal pick-up point, all the while dodging Serb bullets. Near the end of the film, Admiral Reigart has clearly had enough of this red tape. He chooses to disobey orders with a bellicose “Let’s get our boy back!” that echoes through the corridors of the ship and into the movie trailers. The film ends with the helicopter pick-up of Burnett and a wholesale slaughter of dozens of angry Serb militia men. Wrapping up, we learn that Burnett stayed in the Navy, and Reigart was relocated to an administrative position.

The film’s premier gala was held for the critics aboard the USS Nimitz at the San Diego naval base. This choice set the tone for the film’s high adrenaline technological fetishism. The film is the debut of advertising director John Moore, whose most visible
project had been a series of ads for the Sega Dreamcast video game module. A man who has admittedly “spent 12 hours trying to make the perfect drop of condensation go down a Coke can,” Moore brought his detailed, frenetic ad aesthetic with him.\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Behind Enemy Lines} is a film replete with music video speed cuts, freeze and flash frames, and high-speed tracking shots, all riding a soundtrack of \textit{Top Gun} power chords and electronica. As Burnett’s F/A-18 Superhornet slingshots off the carrier deck, the soundtrack lyrics go: “He’s got a brand new car/ Looks like a Jaguar/ It’s got leather seats/ It’s got a CD player.” Indeed many of the bookend and transition shots aboard the aircraft carrier deck hearken back to \textit{Top Gun}, with their slow-motion, flight-suited, helmet-carrying heroes. This look, however, is offset by sepia tones on the ground, rendered in grainy blues and grays. The Serbian landscape is foggy, devoid of sunlight, and the towns are bullet-riddled ramshackle shells ringed with rubble and twisted, corrugated metal. The effect is a dualistic feel essential to the idea that Burnett has indeed crossed a line: the clean, safe orderliness of the aircraft carrier versus the chaos and filth of a war-torn land full of chain smoking militia men and wizened civilians.

\textit{Behind Enemy Lines} was the first Hollywood film to be made about the war in Bosnia, a symptom of the contemporary war film closing ranks on the war itself.\textsuperscript{46} Moore was intent on making a movie specifically about Bosnia: “And if you think you’d would rather set it in some fictional country and avoid the eventual heat,” he claims to have told the producers, “you should hire someone else.”\textsuperscript{47} The film was inspired by the much publicized June 1995 shooting down of Air Force flyer Scott O’Grady, who hid from Serbs for six days while eating bugs and grass and drinking rainwater before being rescued by Marines. The film is an extremely loose translation of the events of
O’Grady’s time on the ground, as he did not encounter anyone in the field. In 2001, O’Grady resigned from the Air Force to perform full time as a motivational speaker. The “eventual heat” did come down in 2002 when O’Grady filed a lawsuit against 20th Century Fox for defaming his name and jeopardizing his career as a speaker. According to the suit, “Captain O’Grady was also troubled that the ‘hero’ in the Fox movie used foul language, was portrayed as a ‘hot dog’ type pilot, and disobeyed orders, unlike O’Grady.” The film amplifies its *Top Gun* inheritance; the Burnett/O’Grady character is a rebel, a detached hot shot out for a good time.

*Behind Enemy Lines* begins and ends with the question of whether Burnett wants to stay in the Navy. All other considerations are subservient. We are introduced to Burnett as a frustrated pilot who offers a letter of resignation to Admiral Reigart saying, “If we’re at war, why don’t we act like it?” When he is not allowed to fly one day, Burnett remarks to his co-pilot, “[We’re] wound up tight today – guess that’s the price of peace,” and the two go off to toss around a football on deck. The entire film is framed by this initial crisis and is always tethered to the question “Are we having fun yet?” When Burnett approaches Admiral Reigart with his resignation letter, Reigart scolds him for his childishness: “You’re a pilot in the U.S. Navy. Start acting like one!” Reigart resolves to keep the letter “in his back pocket.” When we reach the denouement following a climactic blood-bath, Reigart vindicates Burnett’s attitude by handing him the letter (from his back pocket, of course). With a smirk, Burnett crumples the letter and tosses out of the helicopter as they lift into the sky. At the end of the film, we are debriefed with a few biographical still photos overlayed with whatever-happened-to blurbs (See
Figure 7). We learn that Burnett “stayed in the Navy,” and we logically infer that he did so because he got his thrills.

Figure 7, *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001). Owen Wilson’s Lt. Chris Burnett and Gene Hackman’s Admiral Reigart celebrating after the game.

This rationale is curious. Burnett is shot down and hunted. His close friend is executed in front of him. At one point, Burnett, hiding from his pursuers, must crawl through a putrid, muddy mass grave redolent of bloated bodies. He survives a tank blast in a Serbian town that is so close it deprives him and us of our sense of hearing. These are all highly traumatic experiences, but according to the logic of the film, they are reasons for Burnett to reconsider his resignation. That is, instead of points of trauma, they are points of pleasure. This is consistent with the logic of the X-game, which, unlike *Extreme Ops* or *xXx* never finds its way into the film as an explicit reference. The codes are in place in the form of the game motif and the pleasure-play with death. Burnett is
alone in a survivalist situation, a virtual extreme soldier whom we play. This explains, too, why some commentators refer to the film’s video game feel. The viewer is drawn into this mode on the aircraft carrier, for example, as Admiral Reigart and the gang tune into an infrared satellite image of Burnett and his pursuers (See Figure 8). Here, Burnett buries himself in a stack of dead bodies while his hunters bayonet the earth around him. His brush with death here is triply significant: death closing in on him, Burnett is among the dead, impersonating the dead – and he has a third party virtual audience along for the ride. Another vivid condensation of the film’s X-game rationale can be found at the peripetetic moment when Burnett’s fighter plane is shot down, what may be the most engaging and stylized scene of the film. As the Serb fighters on the ground are preparing to launch their surface-to-air missiles, co-pilot Stackhouse asks Burnett about his possible resignation: “Aren’t you going to miss all this excitement?” he facetiously intones. Burnett replies in kind, “Oh, absolutely,” just before the first missile signals the alarm on their radar. This interplay operates like a question and answer, need and satisfaction. The scene could be read with a be-careful-what-you-wish-for moral, except that we learn that Burnett got what he wanted—a near death experience.
Figure 8, *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001). Admiral Reigart and crew watching the spectacle of Burnett and his pursuers on infrared satellite link-up.

We can gain perhaps the best insight into the shifting appearance of war when we look at how the themes of *Behind Enemy Lines* are taken up by the Navy in their recruitment efforts. The U.S. Navy brokered a deal with 20th Century Fox that they would donate military equipment and personnel (the USS Carl Vinson, Apache helicopters, fighter planes, uniforms and gear, etc.) in exchange for script oversight rights and the use of the film in their “Navy: Accelerate Your Life” recruitment campaign. The television spot was shown in theatres during the entire run of *Behind Enemy Lines* and for some time after. It was also included in the preview/ad segment of the film’s video release. The ad flashes scene after scene from the film on a bed of guitar textured electronica with the voice-over, “Wish they would make a movie about your job?” and directions to the Navy website. The scenes chosen for the ad are particularly curious. Naturally, there are the heroic shots on the deck of the aircraft carrier and the glamorization of all gadgetry. A substantial portion of the ad, however, features Wilson’s character in mortal danger—running through the woods dodging gunfire and slithering
through the muck of a mass grave (See Figure 9). That these scenes are a rhetorical enticement to join the Navy should give us pause. We are not offered the prospects of career advancement or learning leadership skill; we are awarded the prospects of being shot at. The appropriation only works as it relies on the same kind of “safe danger” that functions in an SUV advertisement featuring a broken arm. Burnett does seem to weather the hail of bullets well, drawing jeers from the critics that he may be wearing “magic underwear.”

Figure 9, “Navy: Accelerate Your Life” recruitment ad featuring footage from Behind Enemy Lines (2001). The caption reads: “‘Behind Enemy Lines’ footage provided by 20th Century Fox. U.S. Navy and Department of Defense do not endorse the movie, 20th Century Fox, or its products. 20th Century Fox does not endorse the U.S. Navy or the Department of Defense.”
Beyond the Movies

The last time there was such an explicit coupling of Hollywood and military propaganda efforts was the World War II screenings of the Frank Capra *Why We Fight* series. Beyond the use of *Behind Enemy Lines*, the Navy and Marines also produced a four-minute short promotional film entitled *Enduring Freedom: The Opening Chapter* shown in theaters nationwide. *Enduring Freedom* debuted on January 1, 2003, opening with images of 9/11 and continuing with jock-rock sequences of bellicose soldiers and heartfelt moments of flag-waving mothers. According to Lt. Col. James Kuhn, *Enduring Freedom*’s producer, “The purpose of the film is to powerfully communicate to the American public what the Navy and Marine Corps team is and who we are.” In style, name, and venue, *Enduring Freedom* resembles a movie trailer. Both the Navy’s use of *Behind Enemy Lines* and the short film are what Ed Halter of the *Village Voice* calls “the next generation of wartime propaganda.” These promotional efforts represent the bending of frames for understanding the image. As the genres of film and film trailers are appropriated, the lines between fiction and very real military interventions are blurred, thus naturalizing the idea that war can be consumed in the same manner as a war film – perhaps what Halter tacitly refers to when he speaks of the “next generation.”

The line between citizen and soldier is implicated in this blurring as wars increasingly come home to colonize the spaces of civilian life, albeit in the form of safe danger. This chapter explored extreme sports a model for this crossing over, one that is taken up in chapter 3 in a fuller examination of a new series of military recruitment ads unveiled in 2001. The war-as-extreme game motif is a shift that naturally responds to
changes in the geo-political and technological relations: the virtual closing of the space between battlefield and living room, the rise of the new global order, and the corresponding re-ordering of the body and mundane civilian terrain as places of conflict. This shift has implications for citizen subjectivity and its militarization. For one, this discourse is a recoding and integration of the citizen from spectator to virtual player, insofar as extreme sports calls one into a virtual subjectivity. The three films discussed above all have their versions of this – a calling that is inseparable from a discourse of play, and consequently, consumption. *Extreme Ops* vividly displayed the cross-over of extreme games and the War on Terror through the eye of the camera. *xXx* followed the transformation of the civilian to soldier as the main character finds his ultimate playground. *Behind Enemy Lines*, too, retranslates war into an intense thrill-ride as our soldier plunges in and out of a survivalist situation that satisfies his need for speed. Each case presents a blurring of certain boundaries – between safety and danger, war and play, citizen and soldier. The Navy’s use of *Behind Enemy Lines* as a discourse of recruitment not only highlights these broken boundaries (“Wish someone would make a movie about your life?”), but also provides these themes with an institutional legitimacy, a compounding factor explored more fully in the next chapter. This discourse frames war in virtual fantasies of play, a militarism that implies a certain kind of citizen. This player is the new citizen-soldier.
Notes


9 Eisenberg, “Psychotic Rant,” 24.


12 Colin Grimshaw, “Living Dangerously – It is Not Always the Advertisers You Would Normally Expect that are Trying to Associate Themselves with Extreme Sports,” Campaign, 29 March 2002, 35. Paul Virilio also associates the ecstaticism of extreme sports with an ‘addiction’ to hallucinogens in Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light, trans. Michael Degener (New York: Continuum, 1991), 30. The popularity of so-called “energy drinks” (laced with taurine, ginseng, guarana, ephedra and caffeine) like Red Bull, Erectus, and Venom has furthered this association. The easy semiotic cross-over between the X of extreme sports and the X that is often street slang for the hallucinogenic rave drug ecstasy is demonstrated, for example, in the sports/rave energy drink Liquid X.


*Sports Marketing* magazine states this maxim this way: with extreme sports “money doesn’t necessarily impress, and corporate size is likely to work against you.” Advertisers are urged to keep an eye on the hardcore trendsetters, but look to the ‘wannabe’s’ as the market itself. Thus, in marketing terms, extreme sports is less an activity than a fantasy, more about selling ‘softwares’ than ‘hardwares.’ See “Surfing the Wave,” 14.


26 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 23.


35 *Playboy*, July 2003, 141.


40 Maureen Dowd on Larry King Live, 6 November 2004, CNN News Network.

41 “‘XXX’treme Action Blurs Good, Evil, Fuels Diesel’s Unlikely Hero,” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 9 August 2002, 4E.


44 Quoted in “Movie Theatres of War,” The Advertiser, 8 November 2001, 40. Film critic John Patterson also goes out of his way to note the phenomenon of audience cheering and applause at the film’s opening. “Bottom Gun: John Patterson Takes a Look at this Week’s US Movies, and Finds Behind Enemy Lines Serving up Jingoistic War Film Cliches,” The Guardian, 3 December 2001, 12.

45 Quoted in Jim Slotek, “Making War Look Good: Behind Enemy Lines Director Admits the Camera Exaggerates,” The Toronto Sun, 3 December 2001, 38.

46 The Bosnian-produced No Man’s Land (2002), an elegant Kafka-esque drama, appeared roughly the same time.

47 Quoted in Slotek, “Making War Look Good.”


49 The head of the Pentagon’s liaison office, Phil Strub, made numerous changes to the script of Behind Enemy Lines, mostly regarding technical matters and the function of the chain of command. Says Strub, “Top Gun was a recruiting video for the navy. It really helped their recruiting. People saw the movie and said, ‘Wow! I want to be pilot.’ You create these images and young men pick them up and they become important images for them. They want to imitate them.” Concerning the reincarnation of Top Gun in Behind Enemy Lines, Strub commented, “The movie should do for them what they thought it would: to show a brand-new generation that being a pilot is really fantastic, unless you get shot down.” The paradox of the Pentagon’s use of Behind Enemy Lines is that the
main character is shot down, and this is coded as an inducement to enlist. See David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 181.


53 Halter, “War Games.”
Money can’t buy this kind of recruitment campaign. – Marine Major General Jim Mattis, speaking of the value of embedded reporters, March 2003.¹

The modernization of the American military is a product of the first modern war, World War I, when industrialism had begun catch full stride. The assembly line had then given birth to tanks, large cannons and other ballistics, automatic weapons, and chemical agents such as chlorine gas. The potential for military air power was beginning to be explored seriously, and communications technology in the form of radio had begun to change the way these other technologies were organized. The stalemate of trench warfare with its unfathomable human toll was the first taste of a number of crises—real, potential, and symbolic—brought on by advances in military technology. The twentieth century can be plotted along the flashpoints of the atom bomb, more deadly chemical agents, and the biological weaponry of the genetic age.

While World War I marked profound advances in the state of technology, it also was marked by changes in the technologies of state, one of which was mass conscription. Historian John Whiteclay Chambers II tells us that these were processes of State-building that had emerged as early as the 16th century in Europe. The continual strengthening and centralization of the modern nation-state was greatly accelerated in the period leading up to The Great War and resulted in its political-technological gridlock. A primary factor in the rise of the nation-state was the ability to mobilize a massive national military force.
Post-revolutionary Napoleonic France was the first to develop an army of mass conscripts in the late 18th century. In the latter half of the 19th century, both monarchic Prussia and republican France developed systems of universal military service that made possible total war. The more democratic nationalist spirit that followed the fall of the aristocracy, Chambers suggests, played a major role in the feasibility of mass conscription in Europe. Mass conscription came much later in the United States mainly because of its federalized structure and Jeffersonian suspicion of centralized control. Whereas a centralized bureaucracy preceded a nationalist consciousness in Europe, the reverse was true of the U.S., and this foreshadowed a gradual—and not uncontroversial—change in state structure and philosophy. Chambers follows the development of the American military from what he calls the Settlement Model (local militias in the 1600s) to the Colony Model (local defenses and ad-hoc expeditionary forces from 1650s-1700s); the Confederation Model (temporary multi-state forces during the American Revolution); the New Nation Model (local and national combinations in the 1800s); and the Nation State Model (mass centralized mobilization for WWI). The Nation State Model survived through the Vietnam Conflict to be replaced in 1973 with the World Power Model when the draft was abandoned in favor of a less controversial, all-volunteer, professional standing army. This final model, heavily reliant on the success of recruitment campaigns, has in large part succeeded in maintaining the expansive global web of U.S. military and economic dominance, though infused with the constant pressure to meet ever-increasing recruitment quotas.

Since 1973 and the deactivation of local draft boards, there have been only a few attempts at maintaining a skeletal draft infrastructure. In response to the Soviet invasion
of Afghanistan, the 1980 Carter administration reinstated compulsory draft registration. In 1982, the Reagan administration sought to openly prosecute those who refused to register, though he had campaigned on the issue that a peacetime draft was an infringement on civil liberties. Later Reagan would link registration with the ability to receive federally-supported student loans. More recently, in January 2003, congresspersons Charles Rangel of New York, John Conyers of Michigan, and Pete Sark of California, all Democrats, advocated *universal* military service in response to the Bush II administration’s ambitions in the War on Terror following September 11, 2001. Calling the gadfly legislation a statement against war, they argued that universal service - akin to that in more socialist Western European nations - would provide a more equitable racial and economic arrangement, since, they claimed, blacks, the poor, and even men shoulder an unfair military burden. Further, Rangel and Conyers suggested that universal service would promote a more enlightened public dialogue that would acknowledge the gravity of the decision to make war. Rangel, a decorated veteran of the Korean War, stated, “If those calling for war knew their children were more likely to be required to serve, there would be more caution and a greater willingness to work with the international community in dealing with Iraq.” The measure was soundly defeated by a 402-2 vote on October 6, 2004, with even Rangel and Conyers, in a rare congressional moment, voting against it.

The specter of a real draft surfaced for brief time in late September 2003, when, in response to forces strained by the ongoing occupation of Iraq, the U.S. Defense Department posted an online call for possible volunteers to serve on local draft boards, a move toward draft reactivation and the first of its kind since the end of the Vietnam
conflict. When news of this obscure notice hit the press, it was quickly pulled from the website, and administration officials from White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan to President George W. Bush vehemently denied that plans for reintroducing the draft were underway.\textsuperscript{6} The draft became a hot potato in the lead up to the 2004 presidential elections. While Bush continued to deny plans for a draft, his challenger, Senator John Kerry, accused the administration not only of implementing a “back-door draft” with military stop-loss policies, but also harboring secret plans for a post-election draft.\textsuperscript{7} The specter of a new draft played a major role in the non-profit Rock the Vote’s mobilization of young voters. In September, 2004, the group sent out 650,000 shock campaign emails that read, “YOU HAVE BEEN DRAFTED. You are hereby ordered for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States, and to report at a polling a place near you on November 2, 2004 at 7:00 a.m.” Though both candidates voiced opposition to a draft, the ads were interpreted by the Bush camp as hostile and biased.\textsuperscript{8}

Conscription has always been unpopular to a significant degree, and resistance to the draft was a prominent feature from the Civil War to the intervention in Vietnam. Apart from the anti-war reverberations since the late 60s and early 70s, what George H.W. Bush later called “The Vietnam Syndrome,” there are practical reasons why conscription is a controversial means for raising a military. For one, the post-Cold War military is a far cry from even that of Vietnam, where the nature of war demanded actual fighting bodies. As David Segal reminds us, the post-industrial military is increasingly a high-tech, highly integrated machine comprised of specialists. Because of technological advances, the foot soldier has been largely replaced by the technician. This professional military must emphasize a technical training that is incompatible with the immediate
mass mobilization of untrained conscripts. As Segal puts it, the military has “moved from a principle of equipping the man to a principle of manning the equipment.”

Moreover, these same technological changes have brought the battlefield near in terms of both time and space, necessitating – or at least creating the conditions for – wars of rapid deployment. In other words, the luxury of time for mobilization has given way to Virilio’s notion of a “pure war” brought on by the technological collapse of time and space. If an ongoing, unending state of war is to be publicly acknowledged and thus implemented, as it has since September 11, 2001, then the continual cultivation of a professional army would seem indispensable. For these reasons, an all-volunteer force has a particular relevance to high-tech war.

As the U.S. military modernized technologically and evolved from armed local militias to a federalized and then centralized bureaucracy appropriate to the nation state, the relationship between citizens and soldiers also evolved. This relationship is often discussed in terms of the citizen-soldier, an idea central to the tradition of civic republicanism. The civic republican tradition is by no means monolithic and historically contiguous. Iseult Honohan nonetheless notes that there are recognizable strands of thought common to its modern study. All, for example, recognize Machiavelli as pivotal. The two major contemporary touchstones are the works of J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Pocock emphasizes the fragility of the state, marking the birth of civic republicanism with Aristotle, following it through the Renaissance thought of Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Harrington, and continuing through the American Revolution. Skinner marks the birth with Cicero, and casts these same thinkers in a liberal humanist light that emphasizes individual freedom and limitations on the
dominating state. At its core, the model holds that a principality’s power and stability rests on the connection of men to their property, as outlined by Machiavelli in both *The Prince* and *The Discourses on Livy* and Rousseau mainly in *The Social Contract* and *The Discourses*. Loyalty to the principality and identification with a fatherland can be achieved when men are charged specifically with collective defense of property. Thus if a strong state is to be forged, the connection between property and martial affairs must be forged. This solved a particular problem with the dominant aristocratic mode of conducting martial affairs. The aristocracy typically relied on a standing military force composed of professional mercenaries that, R. Claire Snyder notes citing Machiavelli, posed a double threat to the order. Professionals were expensive and in times of peace could potentially turn against the ruling class and terrorize the people. The ideal of the citizen-soldier and a certain kind of republican common good is born from this exigency.

Various incarnations of the citizen-soldier ideal can be followed through Chambers’ historic taxonomy in American military history. In the early republic, there was much resistance among the colonists to a centralized force, as it was generally viewed to be the province of kings and despots. Chambers characterizes the pre-Revolutionary War Zeitgeist: a large professional army was a “vehicle for political corruption, manipulation, and tyranny of the State.” Participation in the citizen militia – the Minute Men – had an economic rationale at the time, but it was also highly ideological, relying on a foundational rhetoric of the citizen-soldier animated by a love of liberty and beholden to a kind of public virtue. This rhetoric drew heavily from classical and enlightenment ideas of civic republicanism. Initially the idea had a great deal of momentum, but was incrementally overcome as the state expanded both economically
and geographically. The 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, Chambers tells us, was a period of increasing nationalism and military centralization that was held in tension with a prevailing classically liberal distrust of these processes. The crisis rhetoric of the Spanish-American war at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century and World War I marked a change in this arena, and the army was redesigned “to an extent commensurate with [American] status as an economic world power.”\textsuperscript{14} This late modern industrial Nation State Model was succeeded by the World Power Model – the all-volunteer force – after Vietnam, and remains so. Thus, the enlightenment idea of the citizen-soldier that so animated the colonial spirit has been gradually uprooted. Indeed, Honohan notes that intellectual attention to civic republicanism in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century had been eclipsed by a liberal-communitarian debate goaded by the rise of socialism and its conflict with an accelerated enclosure movement of private ownership. The civic republican ideal is tenacious, however, and for Honohan is primed for a revival as a third way between liberalism and communitarianism – one that, though infused with the potential for vicious nationalism, emphasizes a civic virtue of participation.\textsuperscript{15}

The current study explores the notions of the citizen and the citizen-soldier in the late World Power stage of military development. Chambers suggests that “the nature of military formats has in the final analysis been shaped not by the military, but primarily by civilians in the public arena.”\textsuperscript{16} Snyder advances the opposite but complementary view that the public citizen is at least partially constituted through a set of symbolic martial practices. We step into this feedback loop and ask not only how public deliberation shapes the meaning of the military, but also how the military shapes the meaning of “public” and the possibilities for citizenship in a republic-gone-empire that nonetheless
retains a strong liberal democratic tradition. The hyphenated interface of the citizen-
soldier deserves careful study.

In approaching the rhetoric of citizenship, this chapter examines a series of newly
appointed military recruitment campaigns whose advertisements have aired on
commercial television since early 2001. These include the Army’s “An Army of One,”
the Navy’s “Accelerate Your Life,” and the Air Force’s “Cross Into the Blue” campaigns.
Recruitment ads texture the face of the citizen, though we should not confuse them with
“propaganda” if this word implies a linear or arborescent metaphor – a rational
indoctrination. This word “enculturation” (from Greek, kyklos, circle) more
appropriately describes the process. As advertising in advanced capitalism moves from
the hard sell to the fostering of lifestyle, brand identification, and synergy among various
media, the military has followed suit. That is, the marketing of the military is an image-
oriented enterprise, involving the integration of television, film, print, road shows, and
interactive media. Though we will be considering television ads here, they occupy a
place within a constellation of events that resonate within a broader cultural context.
Here we will interrogate the ads as to the vision of the citizen and military affairs they
create.

Advertising and the Millennial Military

The face of the U.S. Army changed dramatically in early January 2001 with the
christening of its new advertising campaign, An Army of One. Army recruiting had been
waged under the famous slogan “Be All You Can Be” after January 1981, roughly since
the military was transformed into an all-volunteer force. The switch in campaign themes
was accompanied by the near doubling of the advertising budget – from $85 million in 2000 to $150 million in 2001.\textsuperscript{17} After falling short of ever-increasing recruitment quotas at the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, Louis Caldera, then Secretary of the Army, created a marketing office at the Pentagon that hired McKinsey & Company and the RAND Corporation to do research into current youth attitudes. The decision then came down to end the Army’s 13-year relationship with Young & Rubicam and hire marketing giants Leo Burnett, whose clients had also been McDonald’s, Walt Disney, and Coca Cola. Leo Burnett’s strategy was first to create a stronger brand identification for the Army in accordance with current marketing wisdom. This included a new logo, a white star with gold and black edging, which would make its way into the Army’s product line of sports gear.\textsuperscript{18} The new strategy also included the seamless melding of a series of television spots with the newly-launched website, GoArmy.com, the suffix of which is an indicator of a new marketing philosophy. The TV spots are in many ways advertisements for the website, which offers a more integrative experience. One series of spots give us glimpses into the lives of various recruits, and directs us to the website to view mini-documentaries, in the idiom of reality-based television, of recruits undergoing the travails of basic training. We are invited to watch boys become men, trainees overcome their fears, and more. The website also features a significant section devoted to the new video game developed by the Army entitled \textit{America’s Army}, a highly successful venture that is addressed more thoroughly in the next chapter. The key to Leo Burnett’s strategy was intense market research. “We dug into our target and really understood them,” notes CEO Linda Wolf, echoing Caldera’s vision of marketing as “an ongoing part of how the army thinks about how it communicates with young people.”\textsuperscript{19}
Beyond television and web-based marketing, the Army allotted $16 million for NASCAR as well as $5 million for Top Fuel dragster sponsorship in an appeal to fans of one of the fastest growing (extreme) sports. The Air Force and Navy followed suit, raising the total military expenditure on NASCAR sponsorship to $30 million (see Figure 1). Director of strategic marketing for the Air Force, Donald Carpenter, comments, “When [the showcar] pulls up in a high school parking lot, it definitely attracts a crowd for the recruiters.” The Army has also produced a fleet of high-tech mobile recruiting traveling shows called the Army Recruiting Tool, or ACT in acronymed military parlance, that visit college campuses. The 53-foot interactive trailers contain interactive gaming modules, displays of futuristic soldiers, and a nine television video wall that plays the new Army of One advertisements. The trailers also offer activities such as a 25-foot rock climbing wall, a virtual reality skydiving experience, and a “motion simulator ride” that gives an “action-adventure experience in a jeep off-road course.” Students who visit the trailer are rewarded with a copy of the new America’s Army video game, a CD case, and personalized dog tags. According to Recruiter Journal, a professional publication, the road show generated a record-breaking number of leads. “Our goal,” says Thomas Nickerson, Director of Strategic Outreach of the U.S. Army Accessions Command, “is to help recruiters penetrate this very productive market.” World events also figure into the strategy. Media wars increasingly come and go, and recruitment strategies must adjust to ever-changing conditions. Says Paul Boyce of the Army press office, “We have all sorts of contingency plans, but we don’t try to predict before events happen. We can respond pretty quickly with media and on the Internet.”
The military is also venturing further into the high school market. On the tails of this new ad campaign was an obscure and controversial provision in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which states that along with military access to high school facilities, federal money earmarked for education could be used to leverage access to student records. Schools that refused to give up these records for student recruitment are denied much needed funds. Army advertisements are also aiming for a younger market, broadening its venues not only to *The Simpsons, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, MTV, Black Entertainment Television, Comedy Central, and Channel One, the last of which is broadcast exclusively in high schools to a captive audience. In 1999, the Army
announced the expansion of Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) to include units at an additional 250 high schools over the next five years, many to capitalize on conditions of urban poverty. The first all-JROTC public high school appeared in Chicago in 1999 under the name Chicago Military Academy at Bronzeville and is run by the Illinois National Guard, with two more Chicago area schools set to become such schools. JROTC officials make special efforts to assert that the school programs are not recruiting tools, but rather in the business of creating good citizens. Commander Rich Steinespel of the Pasco High School in Dade City, Florida states, “I don’t care whether you join the military or not. That’s not my purpose. We’re a citizenship program.”

Though there is much demand for JROTC programs and a long waiting list of schools, there is still a good deal of controversy. Laura K. Rhodes, a dissenting voice on a Maryland school board that eventually adopted an Army JROTC program, questioned the legitimacy of JROTC student survey results, claiming that they were doctored. She added, “I have great issue with bringing the military into our schools. To me, I think they should be separated.”

In Colorado, where there are 21 such programs as of 2003, there is also a public campaign underway to purge the public schools of military influence by the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker peace group. The changes in recruitment bear all the signs of marketing strategies evolving to meet the demands of the post-industrial economy: data-mining, personalization, and the colonization of public schools. The changes in the recruiting infrastructure and strategy are not independent of, but serve to compliment, the symbolic production of the citizen in the new ad campaigns.
Armies of One

One of the obvious early reactions to the new Army of One motif was bewilderment. After all, a fundamental tenet of raising a fighting force is the erasure of individuality in favor of teamthink, and initially the campaign drew the ire of the old guard. Kevin Baker writing in *Harper’s* magazine comment, “Surely this has to be one of the most disingenuous recruiting slogans that has ever been devised, for no army has ever been about promoting individualism but rather its exact opposite, bending the wills of many individuals into a single, blunt instrument of incredible violence.”

What does the new slogan mean, then, and what rhetorical purpose does it serve? There are two closely-related senses in which we can understand the idea of An Army of One. The first is expressed by Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera, the figure in charge of the new campaign. Caldera, who has a master’s degree from Harvard Business School, describes the strategy with respect to the target demographic: “It’s the me-now group. … They are going to get the ethic of selfless service, duty, honor and country in basic training and in every unit they are assigned to. But you’ve got to get them in the door to try selfless service. And you’ve got to let them know that even though it is about selfless service, they are still individuals.” Here Caldera justifies the means with the end of the army’s educational and socializing potential, a common *topos* in the public conscription debates from the Civil War forward. Perhaps most importantly, Caldera appears to understand the structure of feeling in advanced capital, of an audience routinely addressed in the role of consumer. This explains the paradoxical double sense in which the term “An Army of One” is used. At the same time it refers to the hyper-individual, it gives a nod to the unified machine; and even as it acknowledges some themes central to the civil republican
ideal, such as a martial sense of selfless service, it describes these themes in tension with
the consumer subject of advanced capitalism.

From a second perspective, the Army of One motif has special significance in a
post-Cold War context. As U.S. military spending rapidly approaches that of all other
countries combined, there is increasingly “one army” casting its broad shadow on nearly
every topic of international import. It is precisely this moment when the specter of
terrorism and the threat of weapons of mass destruction appear in the popular
imagination. The terrorist – the singular suicide bomber – is the likely counterpart of the
one army, and the language has changed to reflect this new rhetorical fact. In presidential
speeches and U.S. media, resistance movements in invaded and occupied states such as
Iraq and Afghanistan are routinely referred to as “terrorist,” though their targets are
predominantly military. This language further underscores the idea, explored in the last
chapter, that in Empire, dialectical distinctions of inside-outside are largely erased.31 In
other words, this is not a vision of two armies in combat, but rather one comprehensive
structure, Empire, acting to control its internal rogue elements, which are coded as
expressions of evil.

Moreover, the term “Army of One” has a liquid existence that is able to flow past
ideological constraints and play both sides of a post-Cold War conflict. The lone soldier
or terrorist can take on this designation. The first significant appearance of the term
Army of One appeared in 1994 with the release of the film of the same name featuring
small-time action star Dolph Lundgren (see Figure 2). In this film Lundgren plays an
embattled bank robber on the run from the police and other thieves. This army of one is a
criminal, a rogue element. An Associated Press article draws similar lines when it
highlights the comments of Murphy, North Carolina Mayor Bill Hughes, who described a local abortion clinic bomber as an “army of one.” Thus the army of one is the counterpart to the one army – either a homunculus or solitary outsider.

Figure 2. Dolf Lundgren in *Army of One* (1994).

Within these structures, we explore the meaning the new spate of Army, Navy, and Air Force recruitment ads issued in 2001 and what stories they cultivate about citizenship in relation to the military. We pay specific attention to the ways the citizen is integrated with the soldier in this institutional rhetoric. The function of play and the extreme sports theme is particularly dominant, but we also explore themes of safe danger, consumption, and technology fetishism.
Bodies at Risk

One of the first and most visible ads produced by the Leo Burnett agency for the Army was entitled “Ice Soldiers.” This was shot in the mountains outside Fort Lewis, Washington, and features a lone figure in climbing gear making his way up a snowy mountain peak. The scene vacillates among circling helicopter fly-by’s, close-ups of the figure’s face and frozen bluing lips, and character point-of-view shots. The soundtrack is punctuated with heavy breathing, snowy footsteps, and computerized blips as the character checks his high-tech watch and global positioning device. At first, there is no apparent indication that this person is in the army. “I am a soldier,” he tells us. “An army of one. Even though I am a part of the strongest army in the world, I am my own force.” He continues, as perhaps a half a dozen similarly dressed figures appear and link ropes with his, “And when it comes to me and my team, every link in the chain is strong. I am Sgt. First Class Brian Berkebile, and you can see my strength.” The final five words appear as a banner across the screen (see Figure 3).

According to the Army’s Recruiter Journal, “the meaning behind the two-sided slogan” is portrayed here. “Our strategy since we launched the campaign,” says Leo Burnett’s Pat Lafferty, “has been to focus on individual benefits. Young adults knew the Army was a big team. What they didn’t know is how they could benefit from that experience and not be lost in a sea of people.”33 Despite Leo Burnett’s claim that they “don’t make up … the jobs that soldiers do,” it is difficult to ascertain what the job is in this case, other than scaling and descending of a mountain. We can perhaps glean more from the ad if we read this climb metaphorically alongside the ice soldier’s own words. The emphasis is not that he belongs to a team, which appears briefly and incidentally, but
rather that this is an individual struggle of body against the elements, and that proving one’s strength in the face of danger is the eventual point of the feat. This is a survivalist motif. We do not need to make much of an effort to read into the ad the themes of extreme sports, with all of its bodily stress and accompanying pleasures.

These themes are repeated point-for-point in another ad that enjoyed heavy rotation. In “Desert Run,” we are treated first to expansive shots of what look to be the Nevada desert lit by lens flares and again attended by sounds of sandy footsteps, swirling arid winds, heavy breathing, and the occasional disembodied radio voice that utters ambiguities like “Come in alpha six.” The scene eventually narrows to a sky shot of a tiny figure moving through the rippling heat toward the camera. This time the soldier is wearing fatigues, some equipment, and dog tags. We are not told to or from where he is running. He moves deliberately and shows no sign of having broken a sweat. A voice-over chimes in: “I am an army of one. Even though there are 1,045,690 soldiers just like me, I am my own force. With technology, with training, with support, who I am has become better than who I was.” At this point we see the shadowy figures of a few other soldiers running in a group in the opposite direction. “And I will be the first to tell you, the might of the U.S. Army doesn’t lie in numbers.” A helicopter flies overhead. “It lies in me. Corporal Richard Lovett; I am an army of one. And you can see my strength” (see Figure 4).
Figure 3. Scenes from “Ice Soldiers” produced by the Leo Burnett agency for the “An Army of One” campaign. (Below) Scenes from a Marine ad featuring similar images.
This trek across an unforgiving landscape might well be one we would see on ESPN’s *Eco-Challenge*. The team of which this character is a part offers “technology, training, and support,” it seems, in much the same way as a support team would in this type of endeavor, that is, in a secondary sense. Again, absent from the ad is any reference to a larger purpose or ideology beyond “You can see my strength.” This is not true of all of the recruitment advertising after 2001, but it is overwhelmingly dominant. In contrast to the Be All That You Can Be of the previous twenty years, which told a story of training for and success in the civilian market economy, An Army of One presents an alternate story in which the characters are consumers of a survivalist
experience. This story is consistent with the maturation of the consumer economy and sells the thrill of danger and bodily stress consistent with the post-Cold War body politic. In doing so, these ads allow us to glimpse a partial answer to the question of citizenship. The story of the military and citizen-soldier here, as it asks us to be virtual players in the X-game drama, is one of play.

The drama is continued at the GoArmy.com website, where we can witness more such feats through “an original web series” entitled “Basic Training: The Making of An Army of One.” A television advertisement for the series features Richard, a young man who must cross a gauntlet called Victory Tower, a three-story wooden structure that must be scaled after climbing a rope ladder and braving a rope monkey bridge. The drill sergeant barks, “Your duty today is personal courage.” Richard tells us that his “biggest fear is climbing down” and we see several shots of his anguished face and hear cheers from an invisible audience and the usual sound of Richard’s heavy breathing. “The tower is going to be a rope and me, and I’m going to have to come down on my own,” he says. A voiceover narrates, “Today, Richard will climb victory tower. It’s forty-five feet high. Once you get to the top, the view … breathtaking. Especially if you’re afraid of heights.” In a line reminiscent of George W. Bush’s characterization of the War on Terror as a “war between freedom and fear,” our announcer exhorts, “Log on [to the website], and see if courage conquers fear,” and these words flash across the screen. The drill sergeant sums up the message: “This is the only place you can do this, in basic training, so enjoy the ride.” In the final scene, the fish-eyed camera plummets headlong down the rope toward the ground in the idiom of the helmet-cammed bungee jump (see Figure 5). In other ads, the Leo Burnett agency displays their affinity for rope ladders. The top panels
in Figure 6 lead us through a fantasy of the citizen-soldier as he, in his street clothes this time, climbs the ladder and prepares to skydive with a group of paratroopers, all the while a look of ecstatic apprehension on his face. The bottom panels from give us instructions as to how to read these scenes.

Similarly, the Air Force’s new $30 million “Cross into the Blue” campaign, managed by GSD&M of Austin, Texas, also makes use of falling bodies. A 2002-03 ad features a young man on a family hiking trip, walking along a river. His sister loses a backpack in the water, and as it floats downstream, the young man pursues it, stopping briefly to watch as it falls over the lip of a fifty-foot waterfall. With only a hint of hesitation, he jumps after it, and several frames of falling later, we are underwater with him as he plunges in. The words “We’ve been waiting for you” appear. As he rises to the surface, the scene has changed. Now he is bobbing in a stormy sea wearing a black wetsuit and snorkel. The camera zooms out and we see that he is clinging to a harness and being airlifted by helicopter. The new Air Force logo appears, and we are asked to Cross into the Blue and into the Air Force (see Figure 7).
Figure 5. “Victory Tower.” Produced by Leo Burnett for “An Army of One.”
Figure 6. Panels from the Army’s “An Army of One” campaign. The panels at the top are from the promotional video “Inside Army: What It’s Really Like to Be a Soldier.” The bottom set of panels are from other similar ads.
Figure 7. From the Air Force’s “Cross into the Blue” campaign. Produced by GSD&M (2003).
The story here is arguably more heroic and altruistic. After all, the young man is apparently after his little sister’s backpack. The dominant theme of the ad, however, is a rite of passage, insofar as he is running away from home and leaving his family. Here, crossing into the blue – whether this be the archetype of the sky or the deep blue sea – suggests escape, liberation, and freedom. Though Secretary of the Air Force James Roche claims that the ads demonstrate that “the variety of Air Force specialties is broad and rich with opportunity, ranging from flying sophisticated satellites to putting up portable hospitals,” we can also read here an adventure story, replete with the pleasures of bodies at risk. Moreover, this advertisement operates precisely at the interface of citizen and soldier. We are invited along for the fantasy of transformation, to translate and cross images of civilian life with martial affairs. The virtue of this virtual crossing is play, from one kind of play to another.

**Techno Fetishism**

At first glance, the choice to use NASCAR as a flagship for this new wave of military advertising might seem strange. Within the rhetorics of post-industrial warfare, however, the two are quite complementary. NASCAR is appropriately synecdochic for a number of reasons. First, the spectacle represents a fusion of traditional sports and extreme sports, a cross-over point. That is, NASCAR is a peculiar amalgam of traditional competitive modes (winners, losers, and hierarchies) and the human vs. machine/environment mode of the extreme game death ritual. Likewise, the rhetoric of war is undergoing a similar transition from that of traditional us-them competitive mode (battle, traditional warfare) to the managerial language of Empire (police action).
Second, NASCAR represents the kind of technological fetishism that underscores the value system in Empire. The value of military action in Empire is judged according to expedience, whether or not it can be done. Feasibility relies heavily on technological sophistication. Paul Virilio, writing soon after Desert Storm (1991), remarks that the post-Cold War geopolitical scenario is that of the “ideological fundamentalism” of rogue elements versus the “technological fundamentalism” of the West. This vision is captured vividly in a graphic Fox News flashes across the screen to announce “War on Terror” coverage, a familiar template for the 24-hour war networks. The word “Terror” is cast in a jagged typewriter font, standing in contrast to the high-tech sleekness of “War on” (Figure 8). MSNBC designed a high-tech “situation room” complete with a line-up of model fighter planes serving as a shrine to U.S. technological superiority (Figure 9). The subject MSNBC’s gratuitous “Countdown Question” (Figure 10) offers up a showcase of aircraft carriers. By the time the countdown-to-war clocks were rolling, all other questions as to the legitimacy or larger meaning of the invasion – if they were ever dealt with thoroughly – were subordinated to the “inevitability” of war and worship of the awesome might of the military machine in motion.
Figure 8. The jagged typewriter font of “terror” and “evil” highlight a technological value system. Fox News, January, 2003.

Figure 9. MSNBC’s War Room, a set specifically designed for coverage of the lead up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Anchor Lester Holt (right) stands in front of line-up of model fighter planes (March 19, 2003). The invasion commenced the next day.
The Air Force takes up these themes of techno fetishism and play in an ad that enjoyed repeated airings in the lead up to this invasion. The ad opens with a pre-adolescent boy playing with a paper airplane in a bucolic, even nostalgic, farm setting. As the plane brushes the screen, we see it has transformed into a styrofoam glider. This morphs into later scenes of the same boy, now a teenager, flying a powered model airplane on a tether, and then operating a radio-controlled airplane. Again, the words “We’ve been waiting for you” appear on the screen, and the scene shifts to the character,
now an adult, behind a console carefully maneuvering a joystick and looking into a monitor (see Figure 11). The plane that flies by the screen now is an unmanned Predator Drone aircraft, a line of hardware newly commissioned during the Bosnian intervention and stepped up under the Bush II administration. The Predator Drone is particularly useful for reconnaissance and assassination missions, and was famously used in late 2002 to remotely destroy, with the help of two on-board Hellfire Missiles, an SUV in northern Yemen that contained a suspected Al-Qaeda operative wanted in connection with the bombing of the USS Cole. Controlled from 600 miles away, the Drone incinerated the six occupants of the vehicle, five of whom were “less important Al-Qaeda figures,” and one of whom was an American citizen. This violated a U.S. agreed prohibition from the 1970s outlawing political assassination, and signaled a significant change in at least the public acceptance of such measures.37
We again return to the notion of crossing over the citizen-soldier divide, what results in a symbolic interweaving. This time, the divide is mediated quite expressly by a toy, with the Predator Drone weapon – indeed, the experience of warfare itself – cast in
terms of virtual play. The forging of the citizen-soldier is taken up in depth in the next chapter as we explore the military’s use of video games for recruiting purposes. For now, we should note that this advertisement gives an official stamp to the “Situation Room” images on MSNBC that feature a pantheon of model airplanes, the highest symbols of military dominance and abstracted, high-tech, long distance warfare. If we read these ads not only in the narrow, instrumental terms of recruitment, but also as fantasies of brand identification and enculturation, the implications reach further yet. The advertisement works through our identification with the young man through this gradual and seamless crossing from a harmless, relatively mundane activity to what would seem to be its logical conclusion. Thus, the story not only codes military affairs as modes of play, but also codes mundane civilian life as an expression of militarism.

**Acceleration: The Navy and War as High-tech X-game**

The notion of “safe danger” is a plastic one. The term sits an intersection between the distance that technology affords and the real death ritual of extreme sports. Insofar as the X-game is a virtual event – a helmet-cammed experience – it is safe. The Nissan SUV ad spotlighting a broken arm is a testament to this. The Air Force model plane advertisement, though on the safer side of safe danger, still trades in this currency, insofar as the plane is a cybernetic extension of the controller. In Chapter 2, I discussed the Navy’s use of the film *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001) in its Accelerate Your Life recruitment campaign and drew attention to its use of this *topos* as Owen Wilson’s character dodged bullets and a narrator asked in the language of virtuality, “Wish they would make a movie about your life?” This and an accompanying set of commercials
were produced by the Warren, Michigan agency Campbell-Ewald, and are described by 
Adweek as “in your face” and relying upon “extreme sports-type training” footage. The 
$40 million campaign was launched in March 2001 with the first ad airing, appropriately 

enough, on CBS’s Survivor. G.E. Voelker of the Navy Recruiting Command states the 

marketing philosophy of the ads: “Our research revealed a proud and determined 
generation – individuals who are eager and determined to be a part of something big.”

The series uses a consistent set of images, blending the themes of technological 

fetishism and extreme sports over a hard-rocking soundtrack, the song “Awake” by the 

band Godsmack. The scene here is less narrative and more impressionistic, as we are 

beset with a barrage of highly-stylized rapid-fire scenes: soldiers jumping waves in 

Zodiac boats, plunging into the ocean from helicopters, and aiming rifles; controllers 

steering fighters across carrier decks, planes taking off, people examining radar screens, 

and so forth. Everyone is highly equipped. In one ad, the announcer asks in a variation 

of the Behind Enemy Lines spot, “If someone wrote a book about your life, would anyone 

want to read it?” He goes on, “The stories of tomorrow are being written today in the 

U.S. Navy. You’ll do more in a few years than most people do in a lifetime. Check out 


appears to be quantity – doing “more” – and this doing is intimately connected to the 

thrill of battle and access to high tech equipment (see Figure 12).
Figure 12. From a Navy “Accelerate Your Life” television recruitment advertisement (2001).
In a similar and perhaps more thematically pointed ad, we spend time exclusively on an aircraft carrier. This ad is more aggressively masculine as a lot of attention is paid to images of bombs and missiles on deck. We see the afterburners of a fighter jet constrict like the pupils of a pair of eyes, a quick signal from the fighter pilot, and the traffic controller with a little dance sends the plane screaming off the over the open ocean. The narrator chimes, “Life … liberty … and the pursuit of all those who threaten it,” as the plane heads right for a camera positioned in the sky, eventually blocking out the frame (see Figure 13). The choice at the end to make the viewer the apparent target is curious. This would seem an unwelcome and threatening gesture on the part of the Navy. The choice makes sense, however, considering the demands of safe danger. Unlike the previous ad where we could jump from planes and helicopters, there is no opportunity here for the viewer to risk life and limb. To become a target at the end of the ad, or, as our announcer tells us, one of “those who threaten it,” satisfies this desire. The ease with which we are asked to do this as viewers is a testament to the fluidity of the characters in the drama. The ad implies that the viewer ought to be content both as the pursuer and the pursued. This is particularly obvious when we consider the phrase “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and how, with a twist, it is turned into an ad slogan. What remains is a “happiness” that is indistinguishable from the drama of high-tech war and the death ritual. This is the happiness of safe danger and high-tech weaponry, a happiness to be pursued, or, more correctly, consumed. A print ad for the campaign draws this idea into clear focus, where an image of a surfer and a solder are united by the caption, “When the weekend is over, say hello to Monday morning” (see Figure 14). The ad equates the two
activities and implies that the weekend never ends, and that military affairs are to be understood as an extension of playtime with all of its attendant pleasures.

Figure 13. From a Navy “Accelerate Your Life” recruitment advertisement (2001).
An Army of Fun and the New Citizen-Soldier

Part of the An Army of One campaign is a toll-free number that allows one to obtain a free video entitled “Inside Army” as well as a T-shirt that identifies the wearer, in large letters, as An Army of One. In the video we explore, all on a bed of adrenalized music, the options available to the recruit, pay, housing, and fulfillment in the military. One female air cavalry soldier in a helicopter says, “The mission of the cav is to spot the enemy. It’s cool, too, because we get to engage the enemy as well with the guns and everything on our aircraft. It’s a challenge and it’s really, it’s a lot of fun. Heck what other job can you fire weapons in?” Another soldier in a tank remarks, “We got the biggest toy in the world.” Yet another boasts, “Basically, I get to play James Bond in the army.” Norman Solomon, writing in The Humanist, captures the mood with the article
title, “An Army of Fun.” “Sometimes,” Solomon notes, “the screen fills with helicopters, intrepid soldiers rappelling through the air, men advancing across terrain as they carry machine guns – always accompanied by plenty of rock ‘n’ roll – all in the service of a country much more comfortable dishing out extreme violence than experiencing it.”

The perspective of this analysis has been that these ad campaigns have tremendous penetration into and recognizability within U.S. culture. To a large extent, second to journalistic media and film, they are the real public face of the military. The ads are rhetorical touchstones and anchor points, offering up official means by which military affairs can be framed and read. On another level, the ads are profoundly interlaced with other recruitment media. As we saw in Chapter 2, the ostensibly fictive film *Behind Enemy Lines* has been woven into the official rhetoric, and many of the themes appear in other war films and television news shows. Chapter 4 explores the appearance of such themes in the relatively new genre of the video game and the Army’s marketing of its own. For these reasons, the ad campaigns ought to be viewed not only in terms of their target market – potential recruits – but a broader audience, one that is immersed in a rhetoric of enculturation and exposure.

We have seen that the visual rhetoric of extreme sports joins with a technological fetishism that produces a mode of textual engagement that can be named “safe danger.” This term is only paradoxical when considered outside the context of electronic media. Speaking in virtual terms, these ads provide martial fantasies where thrill-seeking and play trump other possible thematic directions, including, for example, the Be All That You Can Be campaign of the 1980s and 90s that emphasized getting an “edge on life” and acquiring experience valuable to a booming economy. What has been shown to be
noticeably absent in the new safe danger paradigm is a driving ideology. There are a few ads that do exhibit a patriotic appeal. Perhaps the most visible of these is an Army ad that weaves together still photographs of WWII soldiers with those from Operation Desert Storm along with the tagline, “Every generation has its heroes; this one is no different.” The appeals to heroism, liberty, freedom, and honor do not go significantly beyond George W. Bush’s mantra that the War on Terror is a war on those who “hate freedom.” Nor should we expect these ads to present complex ideological arguments.

We have become used to a limbic politics, where the horrendous attacks on September 11, 2001, serve as justification for an accelerated international interventionism of any kind, legal or illegal according to international law. The five-minute short film financed by the Navy and Marines entitled Enduring Freedom: The First Chapter - the first military promotional film to be shown in commercial theaters since WWII - displayed such a storyline to a nationwide audience just as troops began to amass on the Iraq border in 2002. Violent footage of planes slamming into the World Trade Towers gives way to a high-energy troop mobilization and much flag waving. “It’s not a question of if we go to combat; it’s a question of when,” says one soldier. Ed Halter of The Village Voice notes, “Enduring Freedom blunts its techno-jingoism with jockish ‘Army of One’-type sloganeering by unwaveringly self-actualized soldiers … but the screenings’ fall timing makes it impossible to see this as anything but a teaser trailer for Gulf War II.” What is significant about this new wave of military rhetoric is the manner in which ideological questions are conspicuously absent, replaced with a consumer-minded story designed to direct this new-found political energy into image-experiences that render critical discussion of military matters irrelevant. As Lieutenant Colonel James Kuhn suggests
concerning the film, “The piece doesn’t ask anyone to make a judgment or take an action. It’s just saying, you’re a taxpayer, here’s a meaningful look at the military.”

What do these ads tell us about the citizen’s relationship to the military? The ads offer a new set of fantasies mediated by the symbolics of extreme sports and technofetishism. Plain-clothes folks translate their day-to-day pleasures into the ultimate pleasures that the military offers. The Enlightenment understanding of civic republicanism rested on cultivating a sense of obligation and connection in a nation’s citizens, and this was carried through late modernity as more formal bureaucratic institutions developed in time to participate in the two world wars. As the 21st Century turned and cast a global shadow, the U.S. military has cultivated a new rhetoric. In this economy, the citizen increasingly finds identity as consumer in this new story of military affairs. The citizen in this media universe has traded in a critical capacity for the uniform of the virtual soldier. This soldier, in Lt. Colonel Kuhn’s words, is not asked to “make a judgment or take action,” but rather to consume in and be consumed by the spectacle.
Notes


12 Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers and Many Warriors*, 21.


14 Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 10.

15 Honohan, *Civic Republicanism*, 12.

16 Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 7.


20 Quoted in Weaver, “Advertising for an Army.”


22 Quoted in Weaver, “Advertising for an Army.”

23 The relevant section of the 620-page Act is Section 9528, “Armed Forces Recruiter Access to Students and Student Recruiting Information.” It states that “each local educational agency receiving assistance under this Act shall provide, on a request made by military recruiters or an institution of higher education, access to secondary school students [sic] names, addresses, and telephone listings.” Public Law 107-110, 107th Congress, January 8, 2002. David Goodman of *Mother Jones* magazine notes that in 1999, recruiters were denied this information on a total of 19,228 occasions, according to the Pentagon. Author of the provision, Louisiana Representative David Vitter, said such


34 Slogans for other military branches during this time had similar themes of accomplishment and preparation for the job market: The Air Force’s “Aim High,” the Army’s “Get an Edge on Life,” the Navy’s “Full Speed Ahead” among them.


Solomon, “Media Sizzle for an Army of Fun,” 40.


Quoted in Halter, “War Games.”
Chapter 4

Virtual Citizen-Soldiers

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

In their 1993 essay “Cyberwar is Coming!” John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt of the RAND Institute predict that the future of conflict is ripe for a technological paradigm shift. No longer does war depend on manpower and artillery, but rather on reconnaissance and intelligence, “who has the best information on the battlefield.” War in the cyber-age, they argue, will challenge modern centralized military institutions and eventually replace them with diffuse and decentralized networks. Deception will outpace destruction as a means of dominance. The methods by which these strategies will be tested will not necessarily be “military” as we understand the term. They will increasingly work within economies of trade and information exchange, including psychological measures (media, propaganda) and the subversion of business. In short, “Netwar,” as Arquilla and Ronfeldt call it, is about “turning the ‘balance of information’ in one’s favor.” Thus to see, in a panoptic sense, is to dominate. Arquilla and Ronfeldt take the Mongols of the thirteenth century – with their horse-powered reconnaissance “arrow riders” – as the initial model that communication technologies have vastly accelerated. Netwar will largely be non-violent, consisting of a series of low-intensity conflicts and the regulating of ideological and communicative elements. This
conception is consistent with Paul Virilio’s notion that wars of the information age are not so much about “capturing the enemy as captivating him.” It is also consistent with the information-age idea of Entropy Based Warfare, or success based on the maximization of enemy disorder with the maximization of order among one’s own forces.

Absent from this account of cyberwar is the question of the homefront and the nature of the citizen. Even in his provocative discussion of war in *Cyborg Citizens*, Chis Hables Gray says very little about the idea of citizenship itself, though he does acknowledge the close relationship between citizenship and military service and its ancient Greek origins. Like Aquilla and Ronfeldt, Gray chooses to focus on cyborg soldiers, infowar, and the political alignments following the nuclear threats of the Cold War. As war cybernetically diffuses through populations, Gray notes, the shift in casualties from soldiers to civilians will accelerate (as it has since WWII), but he leaves open the question of the quality of civilian culture. Here, we pose the question specifically in regard to the realm of interactive video games. The idea of the “homefront” – as it implies a division between the battlefield and civil life - is challenged by Netwar. If we look back to the advent of mass conscription before WWI, one of the main developments that made the Great War even possible, we can see that political practices orbiting the idea of citizenship have much to do with what war would look like. What is the nature of these civilian practices in the days of Netwar? One answer is that many of the features identified by Aquilla and Ronfeldt have their counterparts in the arena of civilian life, what we might call a civic Netwar. The importance of the civilian experience is heightened when we consider that much of the power to determine whether
the U.S. will continue policies of global intervention rests not in the ability of other
nations to resist, but is rather largely in the hands of U.S. citizens. The orientating and
texturing of the citizen is the other half of Netwar.

This chapter explores a rapidly developing venue by which we are learning to be
Netwar citizens – the seemingly innocuous world of war-themed video games. We
should be quick to acknowledge that war and games have a long history together, and the
boundaries separating the two have always been permeable in both Western and non-
Western societies. Warrior training in the form of fierce hand-to-hand combat is
commonplace in Ancient Greek literature. The Roman Empire had its spectacular blood
sports. Jousting in the Middle Ages, the judicious game, was often used as a substitute
for battle. The abstract game of chess further evolved into the 19th Century Prussian
strategy game of Kriegspiel, which featured toy soldiers, cannons, and other
emplacements on a table-top map. In the 20th Century, board games of world domination
such as Risk were popular in the U.S. as the earth shrunk in size and communication
technologies went global. As video games developed in arcades and elsewhere, violent
battle became a staple. The home console and the personal computer brought them into
our homes. In 1999 game sales outpaced movie ticket sales, and in 2004, the age of the
average gamer had climbed to 29.6 A brief glance at history seems to argue that war
games are part and parcel of being human and living in complex societies - that war
games are perhaps as essential to human nature as war itself is often argued to be. All
that has changed is the level of technological sophistication.
We will interrogate these assumptions by looking specifically at what has changed. How are war games developing technologically and structurally? What positions are players asked to inhabit? What are the larger stories told about history, ideology, and the nature of war itself? How, specifically, do these practices relate to public arenas and institutions? What claims can we make about the emerging culture of citizenship in light of these phenomena? Here we examine the crossover between the military’s use of training simulators and the commercial war-themed video game market. We also look into the condition of temporality in post-industrial war and how video games, television news, and military affairs are gradually achieving simultaneity. Finally, we explore the Army’s deployment of the America’s Army video game for recruiting purposes. In doing so, we will advance three complementary arguments. The first is that war-themed video games offer a discourse that displaces the citizen with the virtual soldier. Second, this virtual displacement presents a version of war – sanitized and enjoyable – increasingly designed for easy consumption. Finally, the identity of the virtual soldier obscures the realities of war, context, and space necessary for a critical citizenship.

**Simulating War**

Will computer games win the war on terrorism? – Michael Medved, Entertainment Critic

It was like the best video game I have ever played! – Gunner with the American Bravo company to war correspondent Mathew Fisher of CanWest News Service after engaging Iraqi forces outside Baghdad in 2003.
Gentlemen, you can’t fight in here! This is the War Room! – President Merkin Muffley in Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)

One way of addressing the issue at hand is to begin, as James Der Derian does, with the use of video games and combat simulation by the military establishment itself, what he calls the military-industrial-media-entertainment network (MIME-NET), expanding on Eisenhower’s famous coinage of the modern military-industrial complex in his 1961 farewell address. Whether Der Derian wanders the Mojave Desert and the first fully digital war simulation in 1994, interviews personnel from the virtual training military base in Los Angeles, STRICOM (Simulation, Training, and Instrumental Command), or observes teams of soldiers play *Marine Doom*, he purposefully offers questions without answers. As a kind of critical journalist, his stated goal is to “intrigue rather than instruct.”9 The questions are variously intriguing. Will military simulation work? Is the dream of perfect war simulation just that – a dream? What does it mean for military strategy? Beyond efficacy, he has deeper concerns about the digitized and militarized collective psyche: “[L]ike reality’s most intimate counterpart, the dream, virtuous war requires a critical awakening if we are not to sleepwalk through the manifold travesties of war, whether between states or tribes, classes or castes, genders or generations.”10 By “virtuous,” Der Derian means both “virtual” – the disembodied simulation – and “good,” as high-tech war increasingly appears bloodless, surgical, and abstract, both to soldiers and the television audience. Throughout his investigation a thread of suspicion seeks to bind these ethereal endeavors to the earthly body and the brutal reality of war.
Since the Cold War, virtual training games have undergone a revolution. What used to be limited to large and expensive shooting range, flight, or tank simulators (some costing up to a quarter of a million dollars) has now penetrated almost every aspect of training with the help of PC’s. As Amy Harmon of the *New York Times* puts it, “What is new is both the way the games are filtering down through the ranks to the lowest level of infantry soldiers, and the broader vision that is being contemplated for them at the highest levels of the Pentagon.” ¹¹ Or as Chris Morris, the technical manager for warfighting experimentation at Qinetiq, Britain’s Ministry of Defence testing establishment, notes, “We’ve been using flight and vehicle simulations for a long time now. However, it is far more difficult to create a realistic synthetic environment for foot soldiers. We decided to concentrate on the mental and procedural issues, so we started to look for a computer game we could modify.” ¹² The idea is presaged in films like *War Games* (1983), in which teenage hackers infiltrate the Pentagon database and nearly trigger a nuclear war, and Orson Scott Card’s sci-fi novel *Ender’s Game* (1977), again in which a group of teenagers battles aliens in a computer game only to find out they have in reality saved the earth. Says Michael Macedonia, director of the Army’s simulation center in Orlando, Florida, “‘Ender’s Game’ has had a lot of influence on our thinking.” ¹³ Macedonia has plans to create a “virtual Afghanistan” that links thousands of PC’s for 24-hour training on a virtual battlefield.

Sophisticated digital simulation in preparation for imminent war can be traced back to the period just before Operation Desert Storm (1991). Then General Norman Schwartzkopf held a week-long simulation exercise in late July at Elgin Air Force Base entitled Exercise Internal Look ’90. 350 high-ranking military officers gathered in front
of a large bank of screens to plot out various strategies in the event of an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Two years earlier, U.S. military intelligence had reportedly learned that Iraq itself was running simulations for the attack with technology purchased from a U.S. consulting firm. Only days after Internal Look, on August 2, Iraqi tanks rolled into Kuwait. On December 9, 2002, U.S. Central Command led by General Tommy Franks, along with around 1,000 military brass, assembled this time in Doha, Qatar, filled stadium-style bleachers in front of an IMAX-sized video screen for another Internal Look simulation session a few months prior to the March 2003 overthrow of the Iraqi government.¹⁴

Between desert wars, in 1997, defense contractor OC, Inc. developed a military strategy simulation game entitled Joint Force Employment for the Joint Chiefs of Staff designed to teach “joint doctrine” or the coordination of military branches. The game was prophetically set for commercial release on September 11, 2001, under the name Real War but was delayed a few weeks to the 27th (See Figure 1). Real War and its sequel Real War: Rogue States are Real Time Strategy (RTS) games that feature “god’s eye” control of military forces in the field. Real War is premised on the hypothetical existence of the Independent Liberation Army (ILA), a terrorist group that has access to a Russian-style arsenal. Players, who can take the role of the U.S. or the ILA, engage in conventional warfare as well as psychological operations (leaflet-dropping), propaganda, and media campaigns. A spokesman for Simon and Schuster Interactive, the game’s distribution outlet, says that the game was received well after 9/11, “You get to blow terrorists up. Some people think it’s a good release.”¹⁵ Real War is very similar to the strictly commercial RTS game Command and Conquer: Generals, which offers players
the chance to battle the Global Liberation Army (GLA) in the streets of Baghdad as they drop anthrax bombs on civilians. Another high-profile commercial game that originated in the military is *Full Spectrum Warrior*, which was developed in 2001 as simulated training for foot soldiers after the failed mission in Somalia. *Full Spectrum Warrior* is set for release in the Xbox commercial market in 2004 (See Figure 1). The game is a “tactical decision-making trainer” that involves the fictitious Middle-Eastern nation of Zekistan and the overthrow of the character Mohammad Jabbour Al-Afad, a supposed former Mujahideen leader and current dictator and his band of “Taliban and Iraqi loyalists.”¹⁶ In the midst of the initial U.S. invasion of Iraq – April 2003 – gamemakers THQ had been investigating public sensitivities to a possible Gulf War-themed video game. The research seemed to suggest that such a game would be very popular.¹⁷
Figure 1. Promotional ads for *Real War* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*, both originally military training simulators later released for the commercial market. *Real War* was originally developed for the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, a selling point noted in the upper left panel.
One would naturally assume that cooperation between military and commercial entities would follow a path similar to *Real War* – from cutting-edge military use to the home. This is the standard course for many civilian technologies. In the realm of war games, however, the opposite appears to be the norm. Take for example the strange case of Sony’s PlayStation2 home console, which was banned in 2000 from Japanese export for fear that it could be used for a rudimentary missile guidance system. More widespread is the military’s use of modified civilian market games (mods) for training foot soldiers. The most visible of these is the Marine’s use of the popular first-person shooter (or what some have called a “mass murder simulator”) *Doom*. The mod, *Marine Doom*, was developed by Marine Lieutenant Scott Barnett and Sergeant Dan Snyder, who were asked to comb the civilian war game market for something that could be used for soldier training. Barnett recounts that after finishing tech school, he was assigned a position in the Modeling and Simulation office at the Quantico, Virginia, base. He was initially reprimanded for having a copy of *Doom* on his office computer. Barnett recalls, “They read us the riot act. Now, I’m institutionalizing *Doom* in the Marine Corps.” Since the game was found to be a successful exercise in repetitive decision-making, its 1997 introduction served as a prototype. In 1999, the Navy used the commercial release of *Fleet Command* by Jane’s Combat Simulations. In 2001, the Army commissioned Ubi Soft Entertainment’s *Tom Clancy’s Rogue Spear: Black Thorn* for help in training soldiers to fight terrorists on urban terrain. The Secret Service, FBI, and other law enforcement agencies are interested in similar ventures. The Marine Corps is developing an upgraded version of *Marine Doom* using another popular first-person shooter called *Quake*, which has a reputation for easy networking. The British Ministry of Defence is
also using a mod of the sci-fi shooter *Half-Life* in a project known as DIVE (Dismounted Infantry Virtual Environment).  

The military routinely fields questions as to the training effectiveness of these simulations. What if the soldiers become reckless, desensitized, or confuse the real thing for the simulation? In a *New York Times* op-ed, an infantry soldier writes of the games, “Those seeking realism in war games must become … cold, tired, hungry, sore, sleepy, bored and lonely. Then they must add something I was lucky never to experience: sudden, arbitrary, shocking violence. Computer war games are a poor simulation of a soldier’s real experiences.” The pragmatic value of the games is usually justified on the grounds that soldiers can gain experience in “mental and procedural issues.” Ralph Chatham, defense technology specialist, explains, “Virtual games won’t teach you how to walk through thick grass, but they will teach you what to think about when you walk through thick grass, and you’ll be a lot better off when you get to that grass.”

Questions of efficacy often give way to questions of ethical and social effects. Responding to the same article as the infantryman above, another editorializes in the *New York Times*:

In recent weeks, how many times have we heard interviews with American soldiers on the Iraq battlefield [Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003] who described combat as being “just like a video game”? That the military is adapting retail versions of combat-related video games for training is a powerful admission that such games do indeed teach users how to kill. It should spur parents to think
twice about allowing children to buy such games. It’s time to re-examine what constitutes entertainment and what represents a threat to peace and security.\textsuperscript{25}

These are the seldom-asked but equally pressing questions that lead us out of the training grounds and into the public sphere. The writer here essentially asks what the crossover between military and civil affairs means. We glean from the piece that he is perhaps worried about the origins of Columbine-like violence – that games do indeed “teach users how to kill.” There are many ways of killing that do not necessarily involve pulling a trigger oneself, however, such as the collective condoning of state violence. These are the most rare questions: In the “how” of killing, what do video games reveal – or better yet conceal – about the “why” of killing? This is an especially urgent question in the age of a militarized culture that consistently exhibits the ideology-free qualities and the consumption of safe danger.

\textbf{Recruits: Public Virtue and Virtual War}

We’ve always held [that] there’s considerable physical and psychological distance between our games and the reality of current events. – Jeff Brown, spokesman for Electronic Arts, a leading game publisher, whose games include \textit{Medal of Honor: Rising Sun}, \textit{Battlefield: Vietnam}, and \textit{Command and Conquer: Generals}.\textsuperscript{26}

I played [war-themed video games] less [during Operation Iraqi Freedom], but when I did play I played the shooting games. I wanted to feel better by winning the war in the game so it would make me feel better about the war in Iraq. – Zachary Viahos, Piedmont, CA high school student.\textsuperscript{27}

I alone have the fifth freedom – the right to spy, steal, destroy, and assassinate to insure that American freedoms are protected. If captured my government will disavow any knowledge of my existence. – Television ad for \textit{Tom Clancy’s Splinter Cell}.
The introduction of the real-time televised war with Desert Storm in 1991 established CNN and lent a feasibility and necessity to 24-hour news programming. 2003’s Operation Iraqi Freedom was in large part the vehicle for the establishment of the Fox News Channel as the most popular among the 24-hour networks. The move from the press pooling system in 1991 to the training and use of front-line embedded reporters further integrated those at home with the scene of action. In the case of these visible wars (and there were other less publicized interventions in this time period), the interface between citizen and soldier became progressively more “virtual.” That is, rather than watching the strafing and firefights from the window of the Al Rashid hotel in Baghdad, viewers tag along for the ride with the soldiers themselves, and reporters give minute-by-minute updates of the action via satellite uplink video phones. In the initial invasion, before President Bush declared the “Mission Accomplished” on May 1, 2003, we know that 140 U.S. and British soldiers, perhaps ten thousand Iraqi soldiers (the U.S. military does not do body counts), and approximately ten thousand civilians were killed.\textsuperscript{28} Despite this, network news scrupulously avoided airing images of the dead or wounded in coverage that supposedly brought us closer to the action. So while the media war took us to the virtual front lines, the appearance of war was virtually bloodless.

The TV war was accompanied by a boom in the popularity of war-themed video games for the civilian market, especially after September 11, 2001. \textit{Wired} magazine notes that the popularity of these and other war games reached new heights during the Christmas 2003 season.\textsuperscript{29} Among these are titles like \textit{Prisoner of War} and the highly successful sequel \textit{Medal of Honor: Frontline}, both of which take place in WWII. \textit{Medal of Honor} sold 1.2 million copies, ranking fourth in 2002.\textsuperscript{30} Others play with more recent
conflicts. Spurred by the Jerry Bruckheimer film of the same name, *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*, takes us on a tour of the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, in search of warlords. The War on Terror, with its increasing reliance on police forces and special operations, has generated a slew of what might be called terrorist hunting games. The two most visible names in this genre are the Tom Clancy series (*Splinter Cell, Rainbow Six, Ghost Recon, Raven Shield*) and *SOCOM: Navy Seals*, the last of which earned its popularity by implementing voice recognition software for use with the player’s headset so that team members can communicate in much the same way as real soldiers. As a player of *Tom Clancy’s Splinter Cell*, one is a part of a secret National Security Agency team called “black ops,” which has its real-world counterpart in the increasing U.S. military use of private mercenary forces, notably the Blackwater U.S.A. corporation. One of the very few gruesome scenes from the war played out in U.S. media was a March 31, 2004, incident in which four U.S. “civilians contractors” were killed, burned, and dragged through the streets of Fullajah. (Even so, the majority of newspapers in the U.S. opted to print photos of burning SUV’s instead of bodies.) The four were Blackwater U.S.A employees. 31

In the virtual, post-industrial war, there is a new discourse of time. The action of real-time media coverage has intensified at the expense of distance, historical context, and critical perspective. The administration trumped continued UN weapons inspections with claims that we are “running out of time” as countdown clocks multiplied on the 24-hour television networks. Likewise, war-themed video games thrive on the here-and-now of immersive action, which is the reason behind the complaint that the contemporary television war often reads like a video game. An advertisement for the *Tom Clancy’s*
*Rainbow Six* series of games underscores this temporality in what it calls “defining moments” – moments of perfection, awareness, focus, and of truth. The gamemakers admonish, “Make your moment count” (See Figure 2).

Moreover, one of the striking developments in the arena of virtual war games is that the games are catching up with the wars themselves. In other words, the lag time
between the conflict as it plays out on the news and the mobilization of the game has gradually disappeared. Take for example one of the most popular desert war games to hit the market, *Conflict: Desert Storm*. This game achieved its notoriety in late 2002 and early 2003 as the U.S. made clear its intentions to invade and overthrow Iraq. Flipping through the TV dial, one could see sandwiched between the deadline clock and troop mobilization stories an ad for the game that ended with what looked to be the mustached face of Saddam Hussein in the crosshairs. (In the game, this character is named Gen. Aziz, an apparent reference to Tariq Aziz, Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister.) The sequel *Conflict Desert Storm II: Back to Baghdad* was released in October 2003, while massive numbers of U.S. troops still occupied the country and were fighting to install a U.S.-friendly government there. The slogan for the sequel, “Freedom Will Endure” acknowledges this temporal relationship – that the game is intended to appear in the midst of battle (See Figure 3). In another attempt to capitalize on the war, PlayStation manufacturer Sony attempted to trademark the phrase “Shock and Awe,” which it did on March 21, 2003, the day the Shock and Awe strategy – what many were calling one of the largest concentrated air assaults in world history – was unleashed over Baghdad. Sony, the largest of the thirty-odd companies who attempted such patents, had planned to use the slogan to market video games but dropped the rights a month later to avoid what looked to be a brewing scandal.32
Figure 3. Ads for *Conflict: Desert Storm*, *Conflict Desert Storm II*, and *Gulf War: Desert Hammer* all of which were advertised during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The final ad for *Gulf War: Desert Hammer* reads, “Finish it. Once and for all! Ripped straight from the international headlines. America goes back to finish a job it started with Desert Storm. The passing of a new millennium has witnessed significant turmoil and unrest. Political zealots, under the leadership of an insane dictator, have attacked all Western military and commercial sectors in the Middle East. As commander of the new prototype M12 tank, nicknamed ‘The Hammer,’ it is up to you to clear the path to Baghdad and liberate the world from its malevolent oppressor.”
Throughout the build-up and the war’s commencement on March 20, 2003, a number of rudimentary online Bin Laden/Saddam games appeared, often mods or Flash animations (See two examples in Figure 4). A more sophisticated version called *Blood of Bin Laden* was released for the Macintosh in 2002. Another Gulf War game appeared in December 2002 entitled *Desert Combat*, which was designed to give a real-life taste of what was to come. As of April 2003, the game had been downloaded over 250,000 times and had a regular online player base of 2,000-3,000. Frank DeLise, Vice President of the design company Rtzen, was not unselfconscous about the timing of the game: “It stinks that we’re in a war. I definitely think it’s an avenue to get out frustrations … you can be with or against the war, you can play either side,” he says, echoing the for-us-or-against-us template that has come to frame debate in the War on Terror. 3DO’s *Gulf War: Operation Desert Hammer*, a tank-based game that allows players to storm Baghdad to “finish the job,” tripled their sales during the build-up to and invasion of 2003 (See Figure 4).
Figure 4. Online games, *Quest for Saddam* and the less sophisticated *Saddam Hunt*. *Saddam Hunt* allows one to shoot and roll over tiny Husseins while they blurt nonsensical Arab-esque syllables.
Given their proximity to real ongoing international events, it is not surprising that many of these games mobilize rhetorics consistent with the War on Terror. A dominant recurring theme is a strong disdain for diplomacy, which can be heard in George W. Bush’s continuing insistence that “we will not negotiate with terrorists.” The War on Terror, in contrast with the Cold War, is especially suited for such rhetoric. The U.S. relationship with the Soviet Bloc, while hostile, did not occlude negotiation. The new enemy, the rogue state, is often coded as “insane” and thus beyond the reach of reason. The subtitle to *Conflict: Desert Storm* in both ads and on game boxes is “No Diplomats. No Negotiation. No Surrender” (See Figure 2). Ads for *Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six* series offer a more complex version of this rhetoric. A series of magazine ads for *Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield* begin at the top with faux newspaper clippings whose headlines read “Foreign Ambassadors Report Peaceful Face-to-Face Negotiations with Terrorists in Venezuela” and “Diplomacy is Primary Weapon in America’s Quest to End Indonesian Crisis.” The clippings are torn away to reveal the real situation under the press veneer: troops of armed special operations soldiers doing business by force (See Figure 5). The ads are on one level a kind of antithetical joke. On another, they reveal a disarming cynicism about the nature of the fourth estate. Prospects for peace are played off as unrealistic and naive lip service, while the true role of the state is to conduct secret missions out of sight and out of mind. While this may have been the reality of many of the covert U.S. military interventions since WWII (including, incidentally, both Indonesia and Venezuela) the message here is one of legitimization rather than critique. The bumper sticker slogan “Freedom Isn’t Free” that frames the ad suggests that secret wars beyond public view are necessary for the preservation of “freedom” and thus beyond
criticism. A television ad for Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six features black clad soldiers, both actors and game characters, sneaking through a building and blowing one another up. The ad’s soundtrack is a young child singing “America, My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” and again at its close, we are told “freedom isn’t free.” The series continued with a similar ad that also aired during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This time the child recites the Pledge of Allegiance. The juxtaposition of the child’s voice alongside scenes of violence is disturbing enough. Perhaps more importantly, this ad presents a patriotism for the new generation, one where uncritical play, violence, and citizenship are neatly melded. The slogan “Freedom Isn’t Free” implies many costs: the cost of soldiers’ lives, the cost of innocence, the cost of a critical sense (for the freedom to continue with a certain way of life), and lastly, the cost of the game itself (for the freedom to buy/play it). The frailty of citizen action is on display in an advertisement for Deus Ex’s Invisible War, which depicts an apocalyptic vision of a “future war on terror” and whose subtitle is “Unseen Unauthorized Unstoppable” (See Figure 6).
Figure 5. Ads for *Tom Clancy’s Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield* in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, November 2003. The ads play with the juxtaposition of newspaper clips announcing attempts at diplomacy and violent action.
Figure 6. Ad for *Invisible War* (‘The Future War on Terror’) for the Sony Xbox in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, November 2003. (Below) CNN reviewing the headlines, this one for the London *Daily Mirror*, March 18th, 2003.
The notion of service takes on a special meaning regarding the virtual citizen-soldier. The box cover and television ad for Conflict: Desert Storm admonishes, “All Americans Pledge Allegiance. A Select Few Show It.” Though dealing in a nationalist rhetoric, “showing allegiance” in this consumer mode would seem to imply a kind of brand loyalty. A print advertisement for the WWII game Medal of Honor: Rising Sun takes this idea a step further. On card stock paper is printed a draft card and the slogan “Remember Pearl Harbor.” The next page remarks, “You don’t play. You volunteer” (See Figure 7). EA Games’ Freedom Fighters – borrowing Ronald Reagan’s name for the American-supported Contra squads that waged a terror war on Nicaragua’s elected Sandinista government in the 1980s – revolves around a future in which Manhattan is occupied by outsiders. In this scenario, the freedom fighters constitute a resistance of American guerillas. The ad tells the story: “In our nation’s darkest hour, true Americans cry out for a hero to free a war-torn Manhattan from invading forces. Rise through the ranks of the resistance, and recruit an army of Freedom Fighters to take the war to the streets. They’ve taken away our freedom. Now it’s time to take it back” (See Figure 8). This game is certainly an odd mix, containing elements of the fall-of-Rome and a neo-American Revolution along with the War on Terror’s insistence that the goal of terrorists is to strip Americans of their freedom. The banner, ‘Recruit Accordingly,’ grounds the ad in a metaphor particular to the new crop of war-themed games – that to play is to be a virtual recruit in a war consumed.
Figure 7. “Draft Card” ad for Medal of Honor: Rising Sun in Electronic Gaming Monthly, November 2003.

Figure 8. Print advertisement for Freedom Fighters.
As games migrate to the Internet and assume the form of online environments, games like *Kuma: War* will likely become more prevalent. *Kuma: War* is the name for an independent New York based commercial company begun in 2004 by a group of retired military officers, a website ([www.kumawar.com](http://www.kumawar.com)), and a first-person shooter. The game, of which one may become a subscriber for ten dollars a month, is a unique vision of media fusion. Its target demographic is the tech- and media-savvy adult. CEO Keith Halper explains, “What we are trying to do is be a news organization.”

*Kuma: War* gives players a chance to re-enact dramatic military scenes just weeks after they play out on television news. Players are briefed with newswire articles, television clips, interviews, satellite imagery, and weapons specifications. The field of play for a specific mission is researched and painstakingly re-created in 3-D. For example, one of the more popular missions was the U.S. siege of the Iraqi city of Mosul, where Saddam Hussein’s sons Uday and Qusay were eventually killed. The neighborhood where this drama of urban warfare took place was simulated down to the detail of staircases and balconies. Players are invited to play the part of Airborne squad members whose job it was to flush the brothers from hiding while eliminating defending Ba’athist soldiers. Before going in, players view actual news video of the battle, an interview with a retired Marine Corps general, and what Hiawatha Bray of *The Boston Globe* calls a “pregame analyst, who dispenses tips about the best ways to deal with the hostile forces the player is about to encounter.”

Not all news battles make good gaming fodder. The 2004 U.S. assisted coup of Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide, for example, was deemed not game-able by the designers at *Kuma: War*. “It just didn’t seem that there was anything going on of any tactical importance,” explained Halper, revealing the marketing limits of this
new kind of interactive news. As *Kuma: War* evolves through its “broadcast cycles,”
the pressure to keep up with current events is enormous. According to Halper, the
company has “a team of researchers which does nothing but pore through information
related to the war on terrorism.” The goal is an allusive simultaneity that matches real-
time network news. “We’re starting to get a very specialized knowledge which helps us
guess the next thing that’s going to occur.” The game is a logical extension of the
idiom of the embedded reporter, satisfying an embeddedness even the reporter cannot
offer. In doing so, the myopia of embedded journalism is compounded. According to
Halper, “the idea is that we go very deep on just a few events, rather than shallow over
the broad news agenda like other news sources.”

Josh Sims of *The Independent* calls it
“CNN with an itchier trigger finger,” implying a difference of degree, not kind.* Kuma:
War* begs the question of how temporal relations figure into the crafting of the virtual
citizen-soldier, especially in a pay-to-play consumer environment. This citizen-soldier is
born in the consumption of real-time war. Whether it is marketed as a game or a news
source, *Kuma: War*, like mainstream news, would compromise its own profit-making
potential if it were to become “too authentic,” especially in a critical sense. That is, so
long as *Kuma: War* is to be consumed, it cannot betray its own absurdity. As games
critic Suneel Ratan notes, “it will have to be a fun game too for people to use it, which
may sound an odd thing to say about something dealing with war …”

*America’s Army*

In WWII, it was movies and newsreels, and then it was television advertising.
Now, we see that gaming is a popular tool to reach young Americans. – Lt. Col.
Casey Wardynski, director of the U.S. Army’s Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis, the office that produced the first military recruiting video game.⁴³

The game is an educational tool. – Marisol Torres, a representative showing off the new Army recruitment video game “America’s Army” at its May 22, 2002, unveiling at the Los Angeles Electronic Entertainment Exposition.⁴⁴

It’s the only education we got. – Vin Diesel’s character Xander Cage, speaking of his generation’s relationship to video games in the 2002 film xXx.

In May 2003, two weeks after George W. Bush had triumphantly declared the invasion of Iraq had been a “Mission Accomplished” aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, the Army appeared at the Los Angeles Electronic Entertainment Exposition, the E3. There were more than 30 soldiers present, with members of a Stryker brigade manning the armored vehicle. National Guard soldiers rappelled down zip-ropes from a helicopter hovering outside the Staples Center and down from walls inside. Green Berets hung from a Humvee. This was not a raid on a possible sleeper cell but rather a massive $500,000 spectacle designed to draw attention to America’s Army, a video game developed by the Army for purposes of recruiting. It had been a tremendously successful year since the game’s initial unveiling at the E3 in 2002.⁴⁵

America’s Army is a monumental step into 21st Century military-consumer culture. The game initially cost $7.5 million over three years to produce, about three times the industry average. The game looks to be a permanent and evolving fixture in the Army’s advertising arsenal, and as new “operations” are added to the initial platform, the Army anticipates a yearly maintenance cost of $4 million. “We’re going to be pushing out new versions of the game as fast as we can build them,” says game director Lt. Col. Casey Wardynski. “This same [development] team will be building missions, weapons,
and new features for years to come.” The money goes to both game development ($2.5m) and a nationwide server network that can host 5,000-6,000 online players at a time ($1.5m). America’s Army is promoted in conjunction with television ads and GoArmy.com website, from which the game can be downloaded for free. Several million freely distributed game CDs have not only left the desks of military recruiters but also appear in gaming magazines and as extras in store-bought software packages. The mass marketing of the game for the home consoles Xbox and Play Station 2 is set for 2005. Though costing taxpayers millions, America’s Army is a relatively cost-effective method of recruiting. The Pentagon spends around $15,000 on average wooing each recruit, so if the game results in the enlistment of just 500 recruits in the first year, it has paid for itself.

The game was an immediate and resounding success. The July 4 debut saw 50,000 downloads alone, and in one year the game had 1.3 million registered players. By September 2003, it had 2 million players. This increased by December to 2.4 million, and the game had been downloaded 6 million times, thus making the list of popular games for the Christmas season. Major Chris Chambers, deputy director of the game, was clearly enthused. “Experts told us before we started that a runaway hit in this space is 250,000 registered users in a year. We beat that in the first two months.” America’s Army is consistently in the top five action games played worldwide on the Internet. According to military research as of May 2003, the game ranked fourth among things creating “favorable awareness” of the Army, behind the war in Iraq, homeland security, and tensions with Korea. When first released in 2002, America’s Army originally featured two parts, one training simulation entitled Soldiers, which includes boot camp,
and another more traditional first-person shooter game called *Operations*, in which players work in online teams to carry out missions. As promised, the Army introduced a new version in late 2003 called *Special Forces*, which had more than 200,000 people playing in its first week (See Figure 9).

The ostensible politics in *America’s Army* are ambiguous. One mission in the initial release of *Operations* was modeled after a raid conducted in Afghanistan. Other missions involve defending (or capturing) prisoners of war and defending (or capturing) the Alaskan Oil Pipeline. When communities of players engage online or via a server, teams will take either side of a scenario such as these. Gamers cannot play the role of terrorists for obvious reasons, but this has the unavoidable effect of American soldiers fighting one another. When not playing in team-on-team mode, gamers do battle what *America’s Army* names “terrorists” at times, but other times they are called by more ambiguous names like “insurgent forces,” “hostile forces,” and “enemies.” The Army took great care with the appearance of these hostile forces. “We’ve got blonde guys who are bad guys, black guys who are bad guys,” Lt. Col. Wardynski notes. “Usually, they’re not well-shaven.” *America’s Army* is notably pliable and ideology-free, apart from scattered references to, say, the Afghan landscape. (An insurgent camp is described as “high desert with rolling sand dunes and wadis,” for example, where “wadi” is Arabic for “valley.”)

One of the reasons for the tremendous popularity of the game is its cutting-edge design. Dan Morris, a game review for *PC Gamer* magazine, commented that the game is of “Triple-A quality,” that it is “ahead of the technology curve,” and that it would display a high-end price tag of $60-70 if sold in stores. “I wish more civilian
development shops would display the kind of ambition realized in this game,” he comments. The *America’s Army* section of the GoArmy.com site boasts that “No one gets the Army like the Army” and the gamemakers have gone to pains to deliver a kind of “realism.” All equipment is reproduced in detail, for example. Grenade explosions vary by grenade type. The training grounds at Ft. Benning, Georgia are carefully mapped. When firing a weapon, one’s breathing and rate of fire affects accuracy. If a soldier breaks the Rules of Engagement by firing on his own men, he is likely to wind up at Ft. Leavenworth for a 10-minute prison sentence, listening to the lonesome drone of his cellmate’s harmonica.

Figure 9. *America’s Army* web page (top) and three screenshots from the game. The game is what is known as a “first person shooter” for obvious reasons. The caption on the first image reads, “What is it? The U.S. Army has developed a highly realistic and innovative PC video game called *America’s Army: Operations*. You’ll face your first tour of duty along with fellow Soldiers. Gain experience as a Soldier in the U.S. Army, without leaving home.”
The realism does not extend to include the gruesome realities of war, however. The game has earned a “T” rating, indicating it is suitable for teens thirteen years of age and up. When humans are hit with gunfire, they crumple noiselessly to the ground. Sometimes a small puff of blood escapes an invisible wound. The victim neither flails nor cries. Bodies have the tendency to disappear after a while as if caught up in the rapture. The level of bloodlessness is on par with commercial games like Conflict: Desert Storm and many others. On its face, this appears to be a positive attribute of the game, predictably cited by its promoters as proof of legitimacy. The point is “not to promote violence,” says Army Major Bret Wilson, one of the game’s developers, “it is to promote the jobs that are done by the Army.”

A recruiter at a Times Square office, Staff Sgt. Dennis Kelly elaborates, “It’s a good game. You can’t just go out there and shoot people. It’s about training.” Much of the institutional talk about the game highlights the training aspect, which is most visible in the simulation phase of the game, Soldiers, where cyber recruits undergo a virtual boot camp. “The game does include violence, but only in the same way the real Army uses force in defense of our country,” argues Michael Capps, one of the game’s designers. “We wanted to portray [the Army] as a value-laden organization.”

Major Chris Chambers, the game’s deputy director stresses in the same language as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld talks about the virtues of precision-guided weapons, “The game is about achieving objectives with the least loss of life. It doesn’t reward abhorrent behavior.” The game promoters also are quick to point out the parental control feature that turns all gun fighting into laser tag, an apt metaphor for the processing of wars for mainstream news consumption.
The question of the game’s level and kind of violence is a tricky one. It would seem as though the Army is responding to multiple concerns. A gory game where limbs are shot off would not only rouse the easiest kind of reactionary criticism, it would also limit the audience for the game by virtue of a stricter rating. Moreover, a game that seriously approached the horrors of battle would undermine the recruitment effort in the same way that Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* might make one think twice about the glamour of war. Thus, the game finds its equilibrium in a sanitized vision that approximates mainstream American news coverage of the desert wars. And like the embedded news coverage during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the game’s “realism” is emphatically extolled. We know that the major American news media exercised strict self-censorship during the major part of the invasion in terms of not airing or printing images of both soldier and civilian casualties. They were nowhere to be seen, and in the very rare case where images of casualties did appear in the news media, their very visibility was derided by the administration, competing press, and often the public as an anti-war statement. The Bush administration even engaged in overt censorship when it banned the press from photographing the coffins of returning U.S. soldiers on all military bases on the eve of war. The directive came down from the Defense Department stating, “There will be no arrival ceremonies for, or media coverage of, deceased military personnel returning to or departing from Ramstein [Germany, where many of the American wounded are also treated] airbase or Dover [Delaware] base, to include interim stops.” Game designers, too, must follow the spirit of these directives.

Perhaps the game’s stated goals are among its most interesting aspects. *America’s Army* is the brainchild of Lt. Col. Casey Wardynski, director of the Army’s
Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis, who hatched the idea in 1999. Wardynski recognized both the significance of video games in his own sons’ lives and the need to tap the market for technologically savvy recruits. 1999 was also a low water mark in terms of meeting recruitment quotas, which had since rebounded to acceptable levels before plunging again due to disillusionment with the drawing out of the Iraq conflict. Despite this, Wardynski and others such as his second in charge, Maj. Chris Chambers, insist that the game is “definitely not” a recruiting tool. “Essentially, *America’s Army* is a communication tool designed to show players what the army is – a high-tech, exciting organization with lots to do.”

“The idea is to make initial contact with all Americans about what the Army does,” notes Chambers. “There’s no unwanted emails or spam. You play the game and see how the Army operates. We figure that’s a good education.”

Chambers tells the *Chicago Sun-Times* that “[the game is] meant to break the ice and teach [players] about what soldiering is as a profession. We wanted to break down some of the barriers that there may be to communication and try to connect with them realistically and honestly.” The GoArmy.com website’s description of the game’s purpose has a similar tone: “The Army’s game is an entertaining way for young adults to explore the Army and its adventures and opportunities as a virtual soldier. As such, it is part of the Army’s communications strategy to leverage the power of the Internet as a portal through which young adults can get a first-hand look at what it is like to be a soldier.”

Wardynski and Chambers suggest that the game is something other than the traditional hard sell of recruitment campaigns past. In *America’s Army* there are neither demands from Uncle Sam nor promises to pay for college. What the game represents instead is more akin to what has come to be known as “lifestyle marketing,” the creation
of a universe of identity that orbits a brand name. This is the dominant marketing mode of late twentieth-century consumer capitalism. Advertisements no longer sell products, but rather lifestyles, of which the brand is the common currency. Much energy is then expended on investing brands with symbolic capital, a feeling, a mode of being, and a sense of community. The use of interactive technologies to craft and market this brand universe – *the video game as advertisement* – is surely novel and can be counted among the military’s many firsts. *America’s Army* is not described even as an advertisement, insofar as that would imply hard-sell persuasion, but rather it is characterized as “education” and “communication.” There are no arguments made per se. Rather, the game is in the business of crafting a subject. A more proper word for this process is “enculturation.”

The next question might be “What kind of culture?” Even before this question is asked we must note some significant changes that occur by virtue of this novel communication structure. The very idea that the military can be approached as a brand has implications on its own. If we understand consumer branding as the creation of a world in which consumers are invited to live out brand identities – a turn from the selling “to you” to a selling “of you” – then we can say it is a more totalizing symbolic scheme. A successful brand would recreate the everyday world in its image, perhaps best exemplified by the 1990’s campaign Planet Reebok. The Army’s attempt at branding – with *An Army of One* and *America’s Army* – has special implications. After all, the military is not a line of sports gear (or perhaps now we should say not only a line of sports gear). The difference is in the military’s special relationship with the meaning of citizenship. In its simplest terms, *the soldier cannot speak while the citizen is bound to*
speak. While we often say that the soldier protects the citizen, it is equally true that, in the case of a questionable military venture, for example, the citizen protects the soldier. This is to say that the citizen ought to be invested with a critical position that allows for a liberal democracy to function, and ideally this critical position provides some check on power and its abuses.

The immersive nature of America’s Army provides a ready-made subjectivity that displaces the citizen subject. With respect to matters of war, the citizen becomes the virtual soldier. In other words, the military institution has cybernetically overcome the space of separation, the space of difference, that allows for the citizen as such to be. As Major Chambers suggests, the business of America’s Army is not to engage in recruitment, which would involve an argument – a dialectical exchange – that might or might not result in an individual’s change from civilian clothes to fatigues. The stated purpose of the game is education, communication, and information. Lt. Col. Casey Wardynski says it succinctly: “The Army’s not a game, but we use war games in our training and this is kind of an extension of that. It’s just a new way of connecting with young Americans.” The spatial metaphors of extension and connection overcome those of distance and critical space. This idea is on vivid display in the hosting of America’s Army tournaments by recruiting offices and high schools. In January 2003 while troops were running through readiness exercises on the Iraqi border, the Kansas City Recruiting Battalion hosted gatherings at a technical college, with some 120 high school students breaking into teams to play one another at America’s Army. Gary Bloomfield, advertising and recruiting director, notes, “Of all the programs we’ve done, this has been the biggest success.” Some high schools have been hostile to the idea, but others have
gladly integrated it as an extracurricular activity. “We’re not about blowing anybody’s head off,” says Bloomfield. “There are guns and there is shooting, but it’s all about teamwork. These kids bond. It’s hard to get them to leave at the end of the day.”

Wardynski’s claim that *America’s Army* is an extension of training simulators highlights another crucial aspect of the militarized citizen. The connection between civilian video games and war training was made in the campy sci-fi film *The Last Starfighter* (1984) where a young man who excels in the video arcade is recruited by space aliens to fight an intergalactic battle. Like the novel *Ender’s Game*, the cyber-warrior and the cyber-citizen meet and become indistinguishable. The situation in the U.S. at the turn of the millennium appears to be less of a difference in kind than degree, and even then not much of a difference at all. When we consider the powerful opening salvo that overthrew the Iraqi government in 2003 was in large measure conducted by planes at 20,000 feet and cruise missiles launched from off-shore – with only a third of the troops used in Desert Storm a decade earlier - this new paradigm comes into focus. Long distance warfare and police action have largely replaced conventional ground battle in what we now consider “war.” The impact of air power on both soldiers and civilians was noted by Harold Lasswell as far back as 1941:

> The growth of aerial warfare in particular has tended to abolish the distinction between civilian and military functions. It is no longer possible to affirm that those who enter the military service take the physical risk while those who remain at home stay safe and contribute to the equipment and the comfort of the courageous heroes at the front.”
Just as air power abolished the physical fronts of warfare, cyberwar abolishes its psychological fronts.

One of the most striking images to come out of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2002 was of the aerial bombing of suspected Taliban agents, a Pentagon-released video that was circulated widely on network news (See Figure 10). The black and white frame shows the bomber’s infrared view from a AC-130 Gunship flying high firing large tank shells onto the terrain below. Running between buildings and vehicles are “hot” images of people frantically dodging blasts. The cool, crackling voice of the bombardier on the radio avenges for us the comparatively “cowardly” acts of the September 11th suicide bombers. “Another one going into the mosque.” “Got him.” This kind of combat video is a far cry from Vietnam-era footage of real planes and real napalm blasts gouging the jungle. Not only is the action abstracted and dematerialized, but we as viewers are placed in front of the crosshairs rather than in the spot of a third person observer, a position that allows for critical space. That this is acceptable footage for television news, and scenes of broken bodies and concrete human suffering are not, is a testament to the managed, sanitized appearance of war. And though the Pentagon is not tapping Last Starfighter pinball wizards on the street, the differences between playing America’s Army, training with the military, watching a television war, and engaging in actual cyber-battle are increasingly blurred. As Wardynski describes America’s Army, “The missions will have some of the same elements as the things that we are seeing in the news today.”
Figure 10. Fox News clip of aerial bombardment of Afghanistan by the AC-130 Gunship, nicknamed “Azrael,” the angel of death described in the Koran. (Left) We can see trucks and buildings here including a mosque on the upper right. The clip is an infrared image, and throughout we see white figures scrambling to escape howitzer shell explosions.

Clip Transcript
Anchor: The gunship targets buildings and all the Taliban down below, even to the degree of chasing one ghostly figure running down the road. [Radio: He went down to the ground. He still on the ground … moving again.] One Taliban escapes by heading to a mosque. [Radio: He went into the mosque.] The hunt intensifies. [Personnel … personnel right there.] And the order comes to level buildings earlier passed by. [The big square building. Level it.] Then the gunship moves to destroy the last hotspot. [I see a single hotspot there. That’s the key for a tunnel entrance. Yeah, direct hit right there.] The gunship finishes up the job. [There come the other guys. Okay, you got the other guy.] One last look, and back to base. [Yeah, go ahead and head on back, Tom]. At the Pentagon, Major Garrett, Fox News.

Virtual Citizen-Soldier in Real Time

This chapter set out to explore a significant constellation of various media as well as re-map the field of battle. In the process, we see that various genres once thought to be
discrete are forging new and strange alliances. Wartime news looks like a video game, but video games also restage the news in near real-time. Advertisements sell video games, but video games also become advertisements. Official military training simulators cross over into the commercial entertainment markets. Commercial video games are made useful for military training exercises. Moreover, the official institutional rhetoric of military recruiting remolds itself to take its place alongside branded commercial entities. The business of play works closely with the military to replicate all of the tools of state violence. The business of state violence in turn capitalizes on playtime for institutional ends.

Where does the citizen fits within this constellation? Perhaps the question ought to be What kind of citizen does this architecture of interests and images cultivate? The question becomes more complex when we consider that this constellation appears to be in the midst of a synergistic gravitational collapse. That is, there appears to be very little space for the kind of reflection and pause that is the very being of a critical position. By virtue of its invisibility, this space ceases to be acknowledged as valuable. The images move too quickly, and we are suddenly on to the next firefight or suicide bombing report. The subjectivity demanded by 24-hour war coverage at the turn of the millennium is much the same as that demanded by the war-themed video game: the virtual soldier. The virtual soldier, much like the soldier on the ground, inches across the battlefield and is not afforded the means to question the wisdom of orders as they trickle down.

The differences between the soldier and the virtual citizen-soldier are as significant. What allows the virtual soldier to play at war is not only the fact that the war is presented in the guise of a game, but also that the presentation is absent the horrors a
high-tech military machine can affect. One could have sat through the virtual U.S. television war from March 19 to May 1, 2003, and not seen a single charred body or hospital teeming with the wounded, shell-shocked, and grieving. In this sense, to be a virtual soldier means that one is fighting a war without consequences, whether the virtual soldier is fighting with America’s Army or MSNBC. The virtual soldier has intimate knowledge of the whir that the $3000 night vision goggles make when he or she virtually flips the switch, as this was meticulously reproduced for the America’s Army, but he or she does not see through those goggles “little girls with smashed up faces,” as one commentator from the Ottawa Citizen observes. Amer Ajami, an editor for Gamespot.com, inadvertently describes the alienation of the virtual soldier as he applauds America’s Army. He states, “You see all these commercials on TV with catchy phrases, but nothing beats going in and seeing what the Army really does, without actually having to do it.” The virtual soldier is as paradoxical a character as is the phrase “war game” in the age of devastating weaponry. We need to understand the virtual soldier as the product of a certain kind of doing, one that abstracts the mind into the military machine at the expense of the body and the humanity of others. This is as true for the B-2 pilot punching in coordinates for a two thousand pound laser-guided JDAM bomb as it is for the “couch-potato commando.” The citizen’s integration into a sanitized fantasy of war is a seduction whose pleasures are felt at the expense of the capacity for critical engagement in matters of military might. This is especially troublesome when we consider that the target market for many of these games, including America’s Army, are teenagers at a formative life stage in the development of a sense of citizenship and relationship to others.
in the political process. Of course, these concerns do not strictly apply only to teenagers, particularly now when video games are appealing to an increasingly broader age group.

Media effects scholar Arthur Asa Berger writes, “Games aren’t models of reality and don’t claim to be; what they do is represent an emotional reality that generates the desired fantasies in the minds of players. Thus, criticizing games for not being real or realistic misses the point.”73 This is a wise suggestion on one level. The litmus test for what ought or ought not be subjected to “the reality principle,” as James Der Derian calls it, should depend on what the art form “claims to be.” A news program that claims to be “fair and balanced” ought to be held to that standard. When a war-themed commercial game begins to make claims about authenticity, or better yet, when a state institution like the Pentagon begins to make claims about authenticity (And what is America’s Army without this claim?), then we have entered another reality altogether. What was once a fantastical and entertaining sidebar allies with the news in profound ways. War-themed video games, armed with this newfound legitimacy, then make the transition from presentation to representation and gain a rhetorical force much like “reality television.” But unlike reality television, video games provide ready-made personae through which the new citizen, the virtual soldier, is born.
Notes


7 Michael Medved, “Zap! Have Fun and Help Defeat Terrorists, Too,” USA Today, 30 October 2001, 15A.


10 Der Derian, Virtuous War, xvii.


14 Jack Fairweather, “US Top Brass Gather for Giant Computerized War Game,” The Irish Times, 9 December 2002, 11; “In Airconditioned Comfort, War Games Get Deadly

15 Quoted in Marc Saltzman, “Army Enlists Simulation to Help Tackle Terrorists,” USA Today, 2 October 2001, 3D.


18 “Export Controls Put on ‘Military’ PlayStation2,” Electronics Times, 25 April 2000, 4; See also “Military Fears Over PlayStation2,” BBC News Online, Asia-Pacific, 17 April 2000, Online [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/716237.htm].


20 Saltzman, “Army Enlists Simulation to Help Tackle Terrorists,” 3D.


Coalition military deaths have been well documented in U.S. media, though casualty rates, which outnumber the deaths by a factor of five, have not. As of December 19, 2003, 457 troops had been killed, 2,273 wounded in action, and nearly 11,000 medical evacuations of U.S. soldiers were made from Iraq. Mark Benjamin, “Medical Evacuations from Iraq Near 11,000,” United Press International, 18 December 2003, Online, Lexis-Nexis database. Iraqi soldier deaths are unknown. Pentagon spokesperson Marine Corps Lt. Col. Dave Lapam commented, “It’s not a useful figure to us. It’s not a measure of effectiveness.” As of April 2003, Central Command estimated 2,000 Iraqi soldier casualties, but this figure is likely very low. Deirdre Shesgreen, “Pentagon Says it has No Count of Iraqi Battle Deaths,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 9 April 2003, A13. Iraqi civilian casualties are easier to estimate from press reports, interviews, and hospital records. Iraq Body Count, a coalition of civilian and academic researchers [http://www.iraqbodycount.net] has documented between 5000 and 10,000 civilian deaths, perhaps 2,356 resulting from the battle in Baghdad alone. See Jeffrey Simon, “War May Have Killed 10,000 Civilians, Researchers Say,” The Guardian, 13 June 2003, 18. As of December of 2003, the British wing of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (MEDACT), who won a Nobel Prize in 1985, estimated that 5,708-7,356 civilians died in the invasion and an additional 2,049-2,209 died in the occupation. Derrick Z. Jackson, “U.S. Evades Blame for Iraqi Deaths,” The Boston Globe, 12 December 2003, A35. In a report issued by MEDACT on October 20, 2003, the organization estimated that the total Iraqi civilian and soldier deaths were between 21,700 and 55,000 (http://www.medact.org).


A search for “Shock and Awe” was done of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office database at http://www.uspto.gov. “Shock and Awe” has been trademarked for products ranging from “The Shock and Awe Tour” for music promotion to sportswear, mugs, umbrellas and greeting cards. Media coverage of Sony’s actions was sparse and mostly

33 For a list of popular online war games, see Michael Medved, “Zap! Have Fun and Help Defeat Terrorists, Too,” 15A.


38 Quoted in Bray, “Online, They’re Already Fighting the Last War,” C1.

39 Quoted in Bray, “Online, They’re Already Fighting the Last War,” C1.


42 Quoted in Sims, “When Reality is Just an Illusion,” 5. What “fun” means and what kind of violence games are likely to adopt in the future is an open question. Eidos Games will introduce *ShellShock: ‘Nam 67* in the summer of 2004, which “dares to go where no other war game has gone before” to deliver an “uncensored depiction of the Vietnam experience.” See Brian D. Crecente, “Fighting Reality: Military Games Entertain, Disturb with Creative Depictions of Modern Warfare,” 29D.

43 Quoted in Lucio Guerrero, “Play All that You Can Play: Army Releases PC Game,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 22 May 2002, 12.

45 Stanley A. Miller, “Army Deploys to L.A. to Capture the Attention of America’s Gamers,” The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 12 May 2003, 1A.

46 Quoted in Jacob Hodes and Emma Ruby-Sachs, “‘America’s Army’ Targets Youth,” The Nation, 23 August 2002, Online [http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20020902&s=hodes20020803].


52 Stanley A. Miller II, “War Game: Army Deploys to L.A. to Capture the Attention of America’s Gamers,” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 12 May 2003, 1A.


54 Brian Kennedy, “Uncle Sam Wants You (To Play this Game),” G6.

55 Brian Kennedy, “Uncle Sam Wants You (To Play this Game),” G6.


Quoted in Woolley, “Video Game Hits its Target, ‘America’s Army’ is a Hot Recruiting Tool,” E7.


The identity politics of brand-based marketing is discussed thoroughly in Naomi Klein, No Logo (New York: Picador USA, 2000), 3-61.


Guerrero, “Play All that You Can Play: Army Releases PC Game,” 12.


Quoted in Brian Kennedy, “Uncle Sam Wants You (To Play this Game),” G6.

Chapter 5

Reclaiming Citizenship

as freedom is a breakfastfood …
as hatracks into peachtrees grow
or hopes dance best on bald men’s hair
and every finger is a toe
and every courage is a fear
    -long enough and just so long
will the impure think all things pure
and hornets wail by children stung …
but love is the sky and i am for you
just so long and long enough

-e.e. cummings

On September 11, 2001, Wal-Mart reportedly sold 116,000 American flags. The numbers stayed strong thereafter. By May 2002, another 4.9 million had passed through the Wal-Mart checkout aisle and untold millions had sold elsewhere.¹ They showed up on porches, picture windows, as license plate frames, decals, bumper stickers, magnets on cars, and flew from radio antennae coast to coast. Paper flags were distributed in office mailboxes and on desks. Websites popped up offering printable flags for download, and local newspapers printed full color centerfolds for home display. Near where I live, the hamlet of State College, PA, someone painted an entire barn wall with the stars and stripes and the words “These Colors Don’t Run” whitewashed on the roof. Alongside city streets, the transportation department posted digital roadside warning signs that flashed alternately “God Bless America” and “Proud to be an American.” The shock of the atrocities of 9/11 ushered forth an undeniable ebb of solidarity, and the flag was a
symbol through which this shock, sympathy for the victims, and outrage could be expressed. 9/11 immediately made the rhetorical transformation from “crime of the century” to “act of war,” and as it rushed through every capillary of communication, it found in every niche of civilian space a potential war zone. This is one of the main tenets of the rhetoric of the War on Terror. As such, the flag also took on the aura of a talisman, a magical totem that one could hang, like a horseshoe over the door, to protect one’s property, family, and livelihood.

The popular upsurge was followed by a more cynical opportunism by those who saw dollar signs in the flag mania. Every national television news network had integrated the flag somewhere on the screen, each vying to become “America’s News Source.” Advertisers ran memorial messages in hopes of positive exposure through association. The range of flag-draped products exploded. Almost anything with a printable surface became an object of this freely-available, uncopyrightable icon: coffee cups, key chains, cell phones, coasters, shampoo, potato chips. Upon renewing my license plates at the Department of Motor Vehicles, I saw one of the office workers pulling facial tissue from a box emblazoned with the flag, a bald eagle, and the smoking twin towers. As an unwitting collector of this new wave of war memorabilia too, I have in my possession hastily-shipped plastic flags with the words “Made in China” printed on the flag itself, free flag decals from long distance calling companies, and a pizza box with a flag with the words “God Bless America” on top (on the sides, “Land of the Free,” “Home of the Brave,” “United States of America,” and the usual check boxes for olives, pepperoni, and onions). Upon witnessing the pizza box, I recalled e.e. cummings’ poem that starts “as freedom is a breakfastfood,” whose point is to rouse the most absurd images and compare
them to the idea that the speaker’s love for the world might end. The misuse of the flag is one of the more interesting paradoxes of the day. The proliferation of plastic flags flapping from car windows invariably left many of them torn and strewn in roadside ditches. This and the crass appropriation of the flag in merchandising contradicts everything I was taught in Boy Scouts about proper flag etiquette – that the flag, right or wrong, is to be an object of contemplation, a symbol of civil, not commercial life. In the course of things, the flag has been recoded with an entirely new set of contradictions appropriate to post-industrial America. While ostensibly serving as an expression of solidarity and civic identity, it has been infused with the signs of mass production (and waste), the merger of civil and commercial spheres, unregulated overseas outsourcing of U.S. jobs, and a consumerism that threatens to overwhelm citizenship.

If the flag is a metonymic symbol of contestation between citizen and consumer identity, the critical task could be said to again separate the two – to rescue the flag from the hands of the marketplace. While the flag serves as a convenient image, here I will approach the confluence of the consumer and the citizen through another the arena of consumer goods - war-themed toys - and their surrounding controversies. War toys, which are not just for kids anymore, combine many of the themes already discussed in this project. In Chapter 2, I discussed the changing relationship between sports/play and the global body politic through what I take to be the emerging sports metaphor – extreme sports. The merger of the themes of the War on Terror with the X-game gives us a model by which the new “war game” is played out, and this war game extends into and through those venues discussed in subsequent chapters: the institutional rhetoric of recruiting, video games, TV news, and war-themed consumer goods. In short, the X-game is the
dominant pleasure structure through which the consumption of war happens in its varied virtual forms. The hallmark of this model is a focus on the how of war to the exclusion of why. That is to say it is an enacted in an ideology-free zone that privileges the dramatic consumption of the event. In Chapter 3, we ask what it means when the X-game model is given an institutional ethos as it finds its way through a new paradigm of military recruiting advertisements. In an era of branding and lifestyle marketing, these ads not only speak to potential recruits but also have a profound role in defining the cultural relationship between citizen and soldier. The citizen is asked to fantasize about consuming the thrills of a military that is good not in its instrumentality but rather as an end in itself. I suggest that these are fantasies of crossing over, of a fluidity between citizen and soldier that is mediated through consumer pleasures. This is a military selling itself by means of extreme play and fetishism of weapons as toys. The subjectivity presented – the soldiered citizen – is duplicated in the way we are hailed to participate in live wars on television news, and the two complement one another to naturalize this position to the detriment of a critical citizenship. Chapter 4 takes the plunge into virtuality proper and investigates the crossing over between Pentagon-sponsored America’s Army recruitment video game and war-themed games in the commercial sector. In the case of America’s Army, the citizen experiences the full immersion in a particular kind of soldier – one who fights in a clean war in safe danger. At a time when war-themed video games gain an institutional stamp, commercial-sector games catch up with the virtual wars playing out in television news. In the crossing of these boundaries, militarism goes fully commercial, and in important civic matters, such as the use of military force, the consumer displaces the citizen. The discourse tells us that the citizen-
soldier that so animated the republic has been to some extent replaced by the virtual consumer citizen-soldier of the empire.

Here we conclude with a discussion of traditional war toys, because they fold in many of the themes addressed in the preceding chapters: play, sports, weapons fetishism, military and military contractor crossover, real-time integration with television news, simulation, and enculturation. War toys also have presented some interesting controversies that bear the seeds of hope for addressing the issue of citizenship. Thus the chapter ends with an exploration of the possibilities and strategies for reclaiming the citizen from the consumer, what I argue is the project of critical citizenship in matters of post-industrial militarism.

Figure 1. Post September 11\textsuperscript{th} flag merchandising. (From upper left) Pizza box, Made in China, and long distance carrier solicitation.
Gulf War II: The Movie, The Ride, The Action Figure

“G.I. Joe, obviously, is riding a crest of, you know, American patriotism, and we’ve tried to open on every front possible there.” – Hasbro CEO Alan Hassenfeld

“From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August.” – Andrew Card, White House Chief of Staff, in a candid comment to the New York Times regarding the selling of an Iraq invasion, August 2002.

As Operation Iraqi Freedom approached, the marketplace was flooded with war-themed consumer goods. This was certainly the case with Operation Desert Storm a decade earlier, but by 2002 the marketplace had fully adjusted to a new sphere of enterprise in much the same way as new 24-hour war networks had taken the lead of CNN. Some of the more bizarre merchandise appeared in the form of collectables for adults, namely teddy bears (it is difficult to say whether Roosevelt would have been honored). The Hamilton Collection issued a military bear complete with M-16 and desert combat gear, striking a pose somewhere between unconditional love and killing machine (See Figure 2). One ad proclaims the bear to be “On the Front Lines of Freedom!” and that the figure is a “Solute to America’s Military Heroes.” Gemmy Industries of Irving, Texas, stepped up its Chinese imports of military-garbed plush hamsters. Of the more popular items from the specialty stuffed bear dealer WeMakeBears4U.com is a pair entitled The Shock and Awe Bears, which are listed among The Tooth Beary, The Prayer Bear, The I Love You Bear. Arriving as a pair, one is named Shock and the other Awe in reference to the U.S. blitzkrieg-style opening bombardment of Baghdad whose “sheer size” had “never been seen before, never been contemplated before,” according to a Pentagon official interviewed by CBS News. The website advertises them,
understandably, as a means to cope with the unfathomable: “While the world seems to be engulfed in ‘Shock and Awe,’ this company tries to soften the effect …” Many other vendors sold Army-, Air Force-, Navy-, and Marine-themed teddy bears. The military teddy bear market became so visible that it became the object of satire. One manufacturer produced a mock up, dressed in fatigues, wearing a T-shirt reading “Give us your OIL! Or we will kill you.” (Figure 2)
Figure 2. Military-themed collectable bears: (From top) The Hamilton Collection’s Faithful Fuzzies, the Army of One Bear, the Shock and Awe Bears, and the “Give Us Your OIL or We Will KILL YOU” satire bear.
The collectable market pales in comparison to the boom in war-themed action figures since September 11, 2001. With 2002 sales up 21% over 2001 (in contrast to Barbie, which lost ground by 2%), war toys have become the prize of the traditional toy – that is, non-video game – industry. “A whole new generation has discovered G.I. Joe,” declares Hasbro’s director of communications, Audrey DeSimone, noting a massive 46% increase in 2002 G.I. Joe sales.6

The new crop of post-9/11 war toys is more than an inflation of a long-standing market. The toys themselves have changed in significant ways. Thematically, like video games, recent toys have a much closer symbolic relationship to real-world events. Hasbro’s G.I. Joe, as the quintessential war toy, is a model for this development. Since its introduction in 1963 as a kind of generic toy soldier, G.I. Joe has gone through a half dozen transformations, many of which reflected the times. After a highly successful four years, the toy became a casualty of its very own Vietnam Syndrome, and for a period of time Hasbro was forced to distance Joe from any kind of military activity, instead focusing on jungle or space exploration. This went even so far as to take the “G.I.” out and replace it with “Super Joe.” Joe became part of the Adventure Team, which was more successful than its original military line. After again faltering for a few years, G.I. Joe resurfaced as “The Real American Hero,” a smaller 3-3/4 inch version to compete with Star Wars figures. Like Star Wars, The Real American hero was mainly a set of fantasy comic-book characters, good and bad (G.I. Joe vs. COBRA Command), with arguably a loose Cold War analogue. Again, after sales faltered in the early 1990s, the original twelve-inch figures were reintroduced for collectors, presumably a response to the first Gulf War, and collector’s versions persisted through the 90s. While Hasbro
experimented with a “desert arena” collection in 1991, 9/11 precipitated a full new wave of products, like the Strategic Operations Forces and the Navy Seals collections, all highly realistic forces equipped for desert and high desert terrain. In January 2003, as an invasion with Iraq appeared imminent, Hasbro launched a “desert Tactical Advisor” figure modeled on the Army’s Delta Forces (See Figure 3). For these new lines of toys, however, there is no accompanying “evil” set – no Cold War COBRA Command with accompanying storyline – thus putting players in a similarly awkward position to online players of the America’s Army video game. That is, they must engage in imaginative friendly fire scenarios and make up reasons to fight among themselves in sanctioned ideology-free play zones.

The top sellers of 2002, however, were not G.I. Joe, but rather a line of toys from the Hong Kong-based Dragon Models, Ltd. entitled “American Freedom Fighters: Live from Afghanistan’s Frontline.” One of these figures goes by the name of “Tora Bora Ted,” whose job, according to the makers, “is centered around Tora Bora, a mountainous
stronghold, riddled with caves, where U.S. soldiers battled Taliban fighters in their anti-terror campaign in Afghanistan.” J.C. Penney offered the “World Peacekeepers Playset,” which, despite its name – or perhaps appropriate to its name - is entirely constituted by American military forces. Blue Box Toys issued a line called “Freedom Force” action figures to accompany the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Small Blue Planet, another large toy retailer, introduced a series entitled “Special Forces: Showdown with Iraq.” Small Blue Planet’s president, Anthony Allen, describes the marketing process: “We started work when the ‘Showdown’ buzzword hit the airwaves. There’s fierce competition among manufacturers to get the new things out first.”

(See Figure 4)
In 2003, as the March march to war gained speed, war toys appeared to have crossed a line. At the center of one controversy was the J.C. Penney’s stocking of the “Forward Command Post” playset. The playset resembled a bombed-out dollhouse complete not only with home furniture, but also with bullet holes, torched walls, sandbags, and armed soldiers – a metonymic vision of post-industrial war “coming home” (See Figure 5). J.C. Penney was met with criticism and angry letters from individual consumers and watchdog groups like the Lion and Lamb Project, which compiles toy advisories for parents. Comedy Central’s The Daily Show even suggested that the toy makers introduce “War Widow Barbie” to accompany the set. Another controversy surrounded the 2003 marketing of war toys in Easter baskets at Walgreens, K-Mart, and Wal-Mart. Due to press exposure and consumer complaints, Walgreens opted to pull the baskets from shelves. Karen Burk, a Wal-Mart spokesperson, explained why its baskets would not be pulled: “We share in the pride of Americans toward our service men and women.” K-Mart’s justification was less ideological: “We wouldn’t continue to sell action figures if they didn’t sell well.” Much of the reason for the visibility of these controversies – beyond the soiling of the Easter holiday – is the fear that children may be conditioned into violent behavioral patterns. While this is always a concern, the question of the construction of citizenship is also thrust to the fore. If it is true, as William Hamilton of The New York Times suggests, that “Today’s troops received their basic training as children,” and that the new citizen-soldier is mainly a consumer-soldier trained on a virtual playground, what is the fate of critical citizenship?
The revolution in war toys is not just a children’s issue. Much of the market is geared toward adults. This is not limited to Civil War re-enactment gear, collectable G.I. Joes and stuffed animals. In November 2001, the trading card company Topps issued a set commemorating the events of 9/11 and cheerleading the Afghan invasion entitled “Enduring Freedom Picture Cards.” Though almost exclusively a sports trading card company, a decade earlier Topps had marketed a similar line of Gulf War cards. Enduring Freedom includes heroic pictures of firefighters scrambling over the wreckage of the Twin Towers mixed with player cards featuring characters in the president’s cabinet and weapons lines used in the invasion (See Figure 6). U.S. Trading Cards, LLC, rolled out a similar but more bellicose set soon after, containing 42 terrorist cards featuring the likes of Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden, Yassir Arafat, and Moammar
Ghadafi. Other cards depicted the president’s cabinet and staff and weapons systems along with tag lines like “Kicking Some Serious Butt is the Only Thing these Terrorists Understand!”

Figure 6. Topps’ “Enduring Freedom Picture Cards,” issued November, 2001.

In the adult toys market, website retailer HeroBuilders.com made a name for itself with talking Vladimir Putin, Jacques Chirac, and Gerhardt Schroeder dolls, the leaders of the three largest and most vocal U.S. allies opposed to the Iraqi invasion. Protect and Serve Toys of Indiana released the “head of Osama Bin Laden” to “allow enthusiasts to enact what it may be like when we finally catch” terrorist #1.12 The most popular of these collectables by far was the Blue Box Toys “Elite Force Aviator” figurine of George W. Bush’s May 1, 2003, landing on the longest deployed nuclear powered aircraft carrier,
the USS Abraham Lincoln (See Figure 7). This was the site of his subsequent speech declaring an “end to major combat” in Iraq under the controversial Mission Accomplished banner. The photo-op itself drew alternate praise for its solemnity, magnificence, and professionalism, and jeers for its unnecessary cost, contrivance, silliness, and hyper-masculinity. It also served to draw attention to Bush’s questionable record of actual military service. On Good Morning America, former Clinton advisor George Stephanopoulos critiqued its choreography: “For those who grade Presidential photo ops, this was an A++. I mean, look at the pictures of the President on the flight deck. He looks like one of the pilots. I'll say one thing, he was very careful to take that helmet off before he got out on the flight deck,” thus avoiding an embarrassing replay of Michael Dukakis’ 1988 campaign tank ride, which was expertly exploited by the Bush campaign image makers to portray Dukakis as unfit for command. The 12” Aviator, the first ever presidential action figure of its kind, was stocked at KB Toys stores with a product description that carries Stephanopoulos’ enthusiasm:

On May 1, 2003, President Bush landed on the USS Abraham Lincoln in the Pacific Ocean, and officially declared the end to major combat in Iraq. While at the controls of an S-3B Viking aircraft from the “Blue Sea Wolves” of Sea Control Squadron Three Five, designated “Navy 1,” he overflew the carrier before handing it over to the pilot for landing. Attired in full naval aviator flight equipment, the President then took the salute on the deck of the carrier.
After the carrier landing, K.B. Toys’ customer service lines were overwhelmed by requests for an image-toy of some kind. They found a place for it in Blue Box Toys’ (the makers of the “Hello Kitty” line) Elite Force action figures. Upon receiving complaints from veterans groups, Blue Box issued a statement: “We don't condone or endorse the president, but he fit the criteria of our Elite Force collection. It would have to be somebody in a uniform, a military hero of some kind, or depicting a military uniform.”\(^{14}\) In contrast to the hyper-masculine Bush figurine, toy manufacturers HeroBuilders.com released the popular “S&M Saddam” and “Osama in Drag” dolls. The sexual politics speak for themselves, and in fact are a natural fit, as the cruelties of the Hussein regime were often characterized in terms of sexual pleasure, Saddam became “Sodom” in the Bush family pronunciation, the connections between Hussein and Bin Laden routinely inferred, and Fox News for a time referred to Iraqi insurgents as “Saddamites.”

Later, in 2004, photos of abuse and torture at the U.S.-administered Abu Ghraib prison would bring these fantasies of power and humiliation into clearer relief.

For Independence Day, 2004, the Missouri based company Crazy Debbie’s Fireworks distributed a package entitled “Game Over” that featured “Exploding Head Terrorist” fireworks, all manufactured in China. The featured four are “Rag Hat Arafat,” “ Sadly Insane Hussein,” “bin Laden Noggin,” and “Cannibal Gadhafi.” When lit, the effigies emit screeches and blood red fountains before their heads blow off. Though somewhat controversial, the set has sold very well. Keith Christensen, owner of the large Nebraska retailer Stars and Stripes Fireworks, said he had trouble keeping them stocked (See Figure 7).\(^{15}\)
Figure 7. (top) “Elite Force Aviator: George W. Bush” action figure produced by Blue Box Toys and distributed by K.B. Toys stores. (bottom left) HeroBuilders.com’s set of emasculated enemies. (bottom right) “Exploding Terrorist Heads” from the Game Over fireworks package distributed throughout the Midwest for July 4, 2004 (from the left, “Rag Hat Arafat,” “ Sadly Insane Hussein,” “ bin Laden Noggin,” and “Cannibal Gadhafi”). 
The Military-Consumer Complex

The list of military toys and consumer goods – for both children and adults – goes on. To an increasing degree the toys mimic televised and real world events. George Gerbner’s appraisal of militarism that “a boiling point is reached when the power to create a crisis merges with the power to direct a movie about it” has been exceeded.16 The movie has already been made, and as the synergy loop requires, action figures have indeed followed. Toy makers and retailers recognize this dictum. Christian Borman, president of Plan-B Toys, relates a piece of advice from a potential buyer: “He told us we should wait until the war starts, and whatever logos we saw on CNN, to put that on our toys.”17 The consumer demand for this is a testament to a post-industrial environment where war and play seamlessly merge into one another through a marketplace of images. The “military-consumer complex” is a term that is thus both descriptive (of the political economy of the image) and diagnostic (of a citizen pathology).

The new economics of militarism have also demanded a much tighter integration between toy manufacturers and the military establishment itself. In this way, the traditional toy market parallels the commercial video game market. A good deal of this collaboration occurs through The Institute of Creative Technologies (ICT), a research facility founded in 1999 at the University of Southern California. The ICT was established with a $45 million grant from the Army as a kind of clearing house for military, technical, and creative interests. Here, military contractors, academics, Hollywood producers and directors, amusement park industries, and video game creators swap ideas. The ICT is literally the future of the cybernetic war. It was here that the Army drew from its staff of Hollywood creative talent to brainstorm for future potential
terrorist scenarios after 9/11. It was also here that game makers collaborated with military training officers to invent various battle crisis simulators. Military contractors and toy makers are similarly symbiotic and integrated. Toy manufacturers have increasingly demanded precise specifications for military hardware. Hasbro, for example, works closely with defense contractors to gain information regarding future weapons systems for its toy lines. The “Objective Force Warrior,” a prototype of a futuristic wired cyber-soldier, is being considered by both Hasbro and the Army. “It’s kind of cool to see this stuff being fielded by G.I. Joe,” one defense contractor told *The New York Times*. Zodiac of North America, the company that manufactures dinghies for the Marines, even licensed its name, logo, and design to Hasbro. Weapons manufacturers also benefit as the military is on the lookout for ideas on smaller, lighter systems. A 15-inch remote controlled truck called the “Dragon Runner” was developed through just such collaboration. It has a remote controller designed after that of the Sony PlayStation 2 with the very reasonable assumption that incoming soldiers would already be partially trained on it. The “Dragon Eye,” a remote-controlled reconnaissance aircraft, was inspired by model airplanes. As the *Times* notes, if it is then released on the toy market, the process will have come full circle.

Rapid changes in the war toy industry serve as a useful model for thinking about the integration of the visual rhetoric of war, TV news media, and play. Evidence for these broken boundaries can be found throughout the complex where model planes and video game graphics appear on MSNBC’s “situation room” set, military recruitment ads use X-game scenes from Hollywood cinema, video games enter the rhetoric of recruiting, and toy makers closely monitor the newest TV war for new products. The genre-crossing
is bewildering. Leisure time is infused with the signs of war and its intricate
machinations. War as it plays out on television is infused with the signs of leisure time.
What is lost in the midst of the whirlwind of consumer images is a sense of the
possibilities or necessities of deliberative action (that war is inevitable, for example) – or,
even further, the desirability of deliberative action itself.

**Contested Consumption: Reclaiming the Citizen**

Reality is up for grabs. The real needs to be remade by us. – Anne-Marie
Schleiner, maker of Velvet Strike, a protest hack for the online game *Counter
Strike*.

The approach of Operation Iraqi Freedom offered one of most astonishing
displays of misleading presidential rhetoric in recent decades. All of the necessary
ingredients were in place: the shock of 9/11, a cow-towing nationalism, a docile
 corporate press, an economy of everyday fear, and the anticipation of a retributive and
spectacular war or two. The long list of inferences, misstatements and outright lies told
by the Bush administration has been painstakingly documented – from claims about the
threat Iraq posed to the world, to claims about stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction,
yellow cake uranium and aluminum tubes, to the connection between Al Qaeda and the
Hussein regime, to the extent of world involvement in the “coalition of the willing.”

Nearly as astonishing was the U.S. mainstream press’s willingness to be a mouthpiece,
rather than a critical fact-checker, for these claims, most of which were immediately
disputed by independent and international media outlets. *The New York Times* was one
of the few to issue any kind of acknowledgment, let alone apology, for such uncritical
journalistic practice. Even the apology was evasive, buried on page A10 and placing the blame on the same Iraqi defectors quoted by the President Bush, the Defense Department and the State Department in their spurious claims. Says the Times, “[W]e have found a number of instances of coverage that was [sic] not as rigorous as it should have been” and “Editors at several levels who should have been challenging reporters and pressing for more skepticism were perhaps too intent on rushing scoops into the paper.”24 The largely uncritical press environment had an enormous impact on public opinion, and it was revealed in polls of basic public knowledge. Knight Ridder released a poll before the invasion in January of 2003 documenting that 41% of Americans believed Iraq had nuclear weapons, and only 24% could answer correctly that Iraq did not. Moreover, 60% answered that one or more of the 9/11 hijackers were Iraqi, and only 17% gave the correct answer, “none.”25 The University of Maryland’s Program on International Policy Attitudes released a poll in October 2003 that asked many of these same questions. Between June and September an average of 57% of respondents answered that Iraq was either directly involved in 9/11 or gave “substantial support” and 69% believed it was either somewhat or very likely that Saddam Hussein was personally involved. In May, 22% believed that Iraq used chemical or biological weapons in the war, though this had not been the case. The poll also predictably found a high correlation between the holding of misperceptions and support for the invasion.26 The perceived link between Hussein and Al-Qaeda persisted into 2004.27 The reasons for these misperceptions are complex, involving not only official rhetoric, but also cultural factors and the political economy of mainstream journalism. I reference them here not to make cause-effect claims but instead to highlight the urgency of the most basic kind of citizenship, one that can separate itself
from the consumption of military matters in order to assume a critical stance. What follows are two perspectives (perhaps strategies) for the reclamation of citizenship.

For the first perspective, we look to Rosa Eberly’s *Citizen Critics* and her approach to Habermas’ master narrative in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Habermas’ narrative, in short, says that freely deliberating public bodies of the Enlightenment were gradually supplanted with the top-down public relations model of the modern welfare/corporate state. This explanation is compelling, but it is a familiar story of decline, and Habermas offers precious few well-articulated solutions. One strategy for revitalizing the public sphere, he tells us, is to again subject the refeudalized corporate-state apparatus to the “requirements of publicity,” just as the emerging bourgeois class pried open and publicized the apparatus of aristocratic power. If public relations is most successful in its very invisibility, the solution lies in not only its exposure but the publication of its object as well. This cannot be captured in the phrase, “speaking truth to power,” because for Habermas publicity depends on the creation of amenable institutions, and this is quite difficult given institutional inertia. Eberly’s project in *Citizen Critics*, on the other hand, “posits an alternative history of criticism in the twentieth century” to that of Habermas and others who put forward a narrative of decline. By examining spontaneous “literary public spheres” (a Habermasian term) that have arisen in response to a range of controversial books, Eberly argues that citizens “seem more able to question the sources of publicity than Habermas imagined.” Her examination gives hope to the idea that a critical publicity is difficult to quash and is perhaps is, in some cases, intensified in times of controversy by the ubiquity of electronic
media. That is, “Habermas underestimated the extent to which publicity would become a *topos* for critical publicity.”

The marketing of war toys for Easter baskets for 2003 offered just such a point of contested publicity. Like Eberly’s case studies of publicity and the eruption of literary public spheres in response to controversial books, the Easter case is layered. The most obvious layer of controversy was the compromising of the sanctity of the holiday, and this found two forms: Easter’s commercialization and militarization. “It’s all commercialized,” quotes one mother in the *Columbus Dispatch*, referring not only to the war toys but to all of the merchandising unrelated to Christ’s resurrection. “Easter was never meant to be like this.” Another pushes the question of militarism: “Isn’t Easter supposed to be about hope and life?” The question of the meaning of Easter itself opened up space for a second level debate on the new generation of war toys and their potential to cultivate violent children. Much of the public discourse of war toys hinges on this point of controversy, and this is where the question of Easter baskets bleeds into other war toys as well – especially the Forward Command Post dollhouse. Here, citizen groups like the Lion and Lamb project put forward their yearly “Dirty Dozen” violent toy advisory, and arguments of violent mimicry go up against arguments that “boys will be boys” - that violent fantasy has a long history that is both cathartic and natural. This debate gives way to a third level of contestation intimately woven into questions of violent fantasy, which is not just whether realistic war toys are fomenting another Columbine-type tragedy, but a question of what kind of political culture the toys are generating and reflecting. Helen W. Stein, a practicing psychologist writing for *The Boston Globe*, ties the question of war toys in with that of citizenship: “We look to our
leaders to make wise decisions to protect our country and our way of life. It is, however, our responsibility to raise the next generation of leaders. We’re the ones who must teach them how to get along with one another and how to be thoughtful citizens of the world. The potential for the spontaneous creation of new rationally deliberating publics is heartening, but we should also ask What are the mechanisms of publicity that allows for their creation? We might ask the woman in the bunny suit who in March 2003 was arrested outside of a Manhattan K-Mart passing out leaflets; or we might ask those who protested outside a Grass Valley, California, an act which greatly fed into the store’s decision to pull the Easter baskets from the shelves. We are led, it seems, to the notion that not only can rational deliberation be a response to the image, but the image itself can be a response to the image. Politics in the information age is profoundly dependent on questions of visibility, and this idea culminates in a second strategy for addressing militarism and critical citizenship.

Public deliberation is most often a response to a crisis of the common good, and at its best, sometimes generates a public crisis out of invisibility. Thus, it is necessary to ask how the cross-colonization of leisure time and military – the military-consumer complex – treats the inherent crisis of war, the quintessential object for questions of public and civic good. Paul Virilio, in a reference to chaos theorist René Thom, suggests that the enemy of the True is not so much the False as the insignificant. In a public scene dominated by the images of mass media, the Truth of war and its magnitude is a consequence of what is visible and invisible, what counts as a sign and what does not. Nick Ut’s famous photo of the naked napalmed Vietnamese girl Kim Phuk, the My Lai Massacre, and Eddie Adams’ photo of the execution of a Vietcong suspect represented a
mere sliver of the actual atrocities, yet became prime signifiers for public opposition to the war. Likewise, photos of U.S. torture in the Abu Ghraib prisons provoked critical discussion not because they were representative of a destructive invasion, which took tens of thousands of Iraqi lives, but because they became significant (the public shock manifesting not only in the context of the Geneva Accords and the widespread idea that American soldiers are above these cruelties, but in contrast to an apparently bloodless clean war). Kevin DeLuca, in his book about radical environmental activism, *Image Politics*, suggests that the playing field of public discourse – indeed, of rhetoric itself – has been undeniably altered by electronic media and the preponderance of the image. Resistance and reinterpretation must then happen by means of a resistant image – an “image event” – such as a redwood tree sitting or a spectacular Greenpeace standoff with a whaling ship. Image events, DeLuca argues, are not destructive of discourse, but constitutive of its contemporary occurrence, whose underlying model is precisely not one of transmission but rather a mosaic of appearances. From this perspective, the dire diagnosis of the fate of the sign as disembodied simulacrum is, contra Baudrillard, at least two-edged. That is, while Baudrillard’s critique of the image is tenable on one level, an acknowledgment of an image politics opens up space for rhetorical action, not just rhetorical destruction. Walter Benjamin famously suggested that the media of photograph and film removed art from its “cult value” (with a ritualized community and authorial aura) and replaced it with “exhibition value” (a disembodied existence). DeLuca’s image politics might be said to go beyond even exhibition: a treatment of the rhetorical possibilities in a polity re-ritualized, albeit in a different way, by a wash of
images. Thus, one answer to the problem of Benjamin’s “aesthetization of politics” is to aestheticize back, or, fight fire with fire.

The realities of war are not compatible with consumer-oriented play. An enlistee enticed by the *America’s Army* video game to join an occupying force in a hostile land would experience this fact as would a civilian watching U.S. television war coverage when confronted with the rare image of a hospital filled with child amputees. The task of reclaiming critical citizenship is the task of re-signifying the battlefield of images – of creating what Kenneth Burke calls “perspective by incongruity” by initiating a dialectic that unseats the static knowledge frame, thus creating the conditions for crisis and judgment.38 This kind of witnessing – of *signifying* – was taken up in 1924 by German Friedrich Ernst and his publishing of a book of photos entitled *Krieg dem Krieg! (War Against War!)*, a book that is now out of print though it went through ten editions in several languages. As Susan Sontag characterizes it in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the book was “shock therapy” even for a Europe whose every home had been marred by World War I.39 *Krieg dem Krieg!* is built chronologically, starting with photos of war toys and children’s games and ending with photos of war cemeteries and monuments. Destroyed villages, homes, and mutilated bodies fill the space between. A particular chapter entitled “The Face of War” is particularly gruesome and well-known, detailing soldiers’ and civilians’ facial wounds, many with jaws partially or fully blown off. The book was a compilation of photos displayed in Berlin at Ernst’s Anti-War Museum, which was established in 1923, ironically destroyed and turned into a notorious site of torture by the Nazis in 1933 to be finally reopened in 1981. The re-signification of war has traditionally been a *post hoc* project. These difficult realities are generally
suppressed early on (as was the case with the WWI images of *War Against War!* only to gradually rise into visibility. This is generally the case too with post-industrial conflict. However, images have gained a more fluid existence thanks to a decentralized Internet. Just as it is easier for CNN to bring the war home, it is likewise easier for human rights witnessing groups like Voices in the Wilderness to do so.

Since martial affairs are increasingly the object of an economy of play, pleasure, and consumerism, then a central strategy in reclaiming a critical space would naturally be to dissociate war from a consumerist framework. We might take the “Give Us Your Oil! Or We Will Kill You” bear or *The Daily Show*’s suggestion for a War Widow Barbie discussed above as prototypes for the use of perspective by incongruity - or Burke’s alternative name for the strategy (more appropriate here), the “comic corrective.” The absurd and macabre juxtaposition of the bear and its T-shirt is enough to jaggedly dissociate the two. The bear exists as an impossible consumer object, and it is ironically and incongruously sold as such. Taking a cue from George W. Bush’s Chief of Staff Andrew Card, who remarked in reference to the Iraq invasion that “from a marketing point of view, one does not introduce new products in August,” *Mad Magazine* issued an image that became one of the most popular and circulated parodies of the invasion on the Internet. The image is a coming attractions blockbuster movie poster that is obviously referencing the *Star Wars* franchise. This one goes by the title of *Gulf Wars II: Clone of the Attack*, and positions George W. Bush as alpha-hero, Condoleeza Rice as heroine, Saddam Hussein as arch villain, and a host of minor recurring characters: George H.W. Bush positioned as father/mentor, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, and Dick Cheney. The credits read among other things, “With Osama Bin Laden as the Phantom Menace.
Produced by the military-industrial complex in association with Texaco, Mobil, Exxon, et al. The success of this military action has not yet been rated” (See Figure 8). Positioning a high-stakes military action as a consumer product – a pop sci-fi film in this case – the poster hyperbolizes our televised experience of post-industrial war. As readers recoded, we are asked to rethink our absurd positions as consumers of war, of the coming media spectacle.

Figure 8. Parody film poster for Operation Iraqi Freedom issued by Mad Magazine in 2002 and circulated widely on the Internet.

In like manner, the political satire website InfiniteJest.org offered a set of printable war-themed trading cards entitled “American Crusade” that rode the tail-end of the war trading card craze. The cards feature their own corporate anti-heroes from the
mainstream media and the administration along with weapons systems juxtaposed against photos of civilian dead. Captions ironically frame the images with Orwellian doublespeak like “double-plus-good.” Also in heavy Internet rotation is a flash animation parody of the Bush Elite Force Aviator action figure called the “Dishonest Dubya Action Figure” was produced and circulated by AngryCandy.org. The action figure comes with remote control that allows one to change outfits as well as trigger questionable presidential quotations and Bush’s trademarked brand of nonsensical utterances (See Figure 9). Though these artifacts by themselves have likely had limited exposure, the collective Internet folk-art attention paid to matters surrounding the Iraq invasion has been widespread. As Stewart Kirkpatrick of The Scotsman notes, “it’s almost impossible to write about the Internet without mentioning Dubya. The man’s an online cultural phenomenon, having inspired a greater creating outpouring than all the female nudes, bowls of fruit and vases of sunflowers you could wish for.” The online news service About.com listed hundreds of links to homemade visual parodies of Bush and Iraq foreign policy. Much of this culturework can be counted as Bush-baiting and perhaps serves to stifle real discussion rather than provoke it. There is no shortage, however, of clever attempts to dissociate the war itself from its wholesale consumption.
Figure 9. Playing with playing at war. (top) “American Crusade” satirical trading cards by InfiniteJest.org. (middle) George W. Bush “Lying Action Figure” flash animation by AngryCandy.org and a statement about militaristic play by cartoonist Steve Sack in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. (bottom) Satirical action figure scenario.
Apart from the parodies in Figure 10, there are ongoing attempts to work to address the war gaming phenomenon. Mikel Raparaz held an online fundraising campaign to buy the president a PlayStation 2. As of October, 2003, Raparaz had raised the $370 to buy the console as well as copies of *SOCOM: Navy Seals* and *Conflict: Desert Storm*. Upon receipt, the White House gift office responded that the console was “being worked on” because of recent anthrax scares and that they would be sending a different response than usual. Raparez writes that he hopes “different” does not involve black helicopters.42

![Figure 10. Video game parodies. Grand Theft Iraq II: Baghdad City courtesy of Mark Kaufman/Artomat.](image)
Other such enterprises seek to address war-themed video games from the inside. The prototype for online first-person shooters, *Half Life: Counter-Strike*, has been a site of contestation. *Counter-Strike* is a first-person shooter that allows players to take on warrior-characters, both “terrorist” and “counter-terrorist” (they are essentially the same), in an ever-evolving online 3D environment. For some time, players have had to contend with “hacks,” or software modifications that allow some players to cheat on the battlefield. A hack might make a player invincible or able to fire without missing a target. They are freely available on the Internet and, according to *The Guardian*, represent an “epidemic” that has infected the most popular online games: *Quake III*, *Diablo II*, *Warcraft III*, and *Battlefield 1942*. *America’s Army* is also battling the scourge with anti-cheating software and punitive measures for cheaters. The Army has received a deluge of angry letters from gamers. “For this not to be addressed is a slap in the face to all of us who are busting our humps to get honour points,” writes one gamer.\(^4\) Though cheats generally serve to destroy the gaming experience for everyone, some have used them for creative ends. Anne-Marie Schleiner, a researcher and designer at San Jose Museum of Art in Silicon Valley and co-editor of the online journal *Switch*, has been a leading scholar of so-called “hacker art” in online environments. As a kind of gadfly subculture, hack artists redefine online games with new sets of characters and spaces. These hacks—whether purely playful, artistic, or critical—act, according to Schleiner, “as a means of talking back to the industry and as well as amongst [programmers] themselves, and as an alternative gift economy flourishing in the crevices of the dominant consumerist system.”\(^4\) In 2002 Schleiner herself released a program patch for *Counter-Strike* called Velvet-Strike that allows players to enter the *Counter-Strike* environment
armed with virtual spray paint to scrawl anti-war and nonviolent slogans on the floors and walls. Protests have been de rigueur in role playing games since the popularity of their text-based ancestors. After September 11, 2001, players of *Everquest* and *Anarchy Online* called a ceasefire and held virtual candlelight vigils. Velvet-Strike, however, is perhaps the first to explicitly address the potential effects of the game by working within it. Using the patch, players have tagged rooms with unlikely scenes. Figure 11 shows screenshots from just a few of these exaggeratedly sentimental virtual peace demonstrations, including the drawing of hearts on the wall and a child’s hopscotch game on the floor. A team of activists named Graphical User Interface has devised a series of “intervention recipes” or strategies that use the mechanics of the game without hacks. The tactics range from “love and peace” sit-ins to group suicide missions, thus drawing comments on Schleiner’s message board that folks who do this are “hippies with nothing better to do” or even bona fide terrorists.45
One development that lends credence to the idea that video games can be a powerful political force is the manufacture and distribution of the first Arab made 3D war video game, Under Ash, which was released in 2002. Under Ash is a direct response to video games like Jane’s Israeli Air Force, where the goal is to bomb Arab cities, and Delta Force, where Americans fight an enemy force comprised of Arabs. Hassan Salem, director of the Syrian publishing company Dar el Fikr, says that no American company would sell them the basic graphics engine for the game, so it was built from scratch.
Game players take the form of Ahmad, a young Palestinian, who has decided to resist and join the Intifada. Ahmad begins by throwing rocks at tanks and gradually progresses to armed conflict, engaging in missions to raid Israeli bases and settlements, and take down Israeli flags. He rescues wounded Palestinians who have been shot by “Zionists” while praying at mosque. The game is framed by its opening sequence, where Ahmad’s grandfather tells the story about the rise of the Intifada and the restoration of hope while photos of conflict and repression grace the screen. Under Ash has characteristics that set it apart from many first person shooters. There is no “winning” the game, so the struggle is portrayed as just that. Ahmad is not superhuman in any sense, and there are no medical kits that can magically restore his life. When he gets hit, he dies. If Ahmad shoots civilians, the game is over. There are no suicide bombings. Responding to complaints that the game is too difficult, the designer Radwan Qassmiyya states, “Under Ash is about history. In our modern history there is no solution to the conflict, so the game is a mirror. There is no solution for Ahmad’s case. At the last level of the game, there will be no major victory, no reclaiming land or anything like that.” Qassmiyya suggests instead that the game is about experiencing what it is to be a Palestinian in Jerusalem and a tool for those who sympathize with the struggle but cannot help – what he calls a kind of “self-salvation.” The first pressing of ten thousand copies sold out in a week.

Under Ash is a piece of culturework that only obliquely addresses the question of war’s consumption. On one hand, the game has been scrutinized by Israel and other Arab governments for incitements to violence and has been criticized as a possible terrorist recruitment tool. The game, after all, is not predicated on diplomacy but rather the
reproduction of conflict. One could argue that this does more harm than good, even in
the extreme case of the ongoing Israeli oppression. From this perspective, Under Ash
ought to be viewed in the same critical light as, say, Israeli Air Force. On the other hand,
insofar as video games have become a means of historicizing conflict, like history, they
are often written by the winners. If we approach Under Ash from inside this economy,
we can see that its meaningfulness, in part, comes when it successfully turns the tables.
Under Ash forces war-themed video games to confront themselves as modes of uncritical
consumption. That is, as the game spontaneously generates a sphere of public discussion,
the spell that something like Israeli Air Force is a transparent, private matter, is broken.
On one level it is an “image event,” in DeLuca’s language; on another, it provokes a
critical public that is forced to finally acknowledge and discuss the social role of such
games.

Critical citizenship is not a teleological ideal. It is rather one that positions the
citizen as a meaningful participant in a process that values a space for action. In this
agonistic space other ideals can make conversation, evaluations, and judgments. As a
process, the fronts of possible action evolve. As we have seen, the marketplace, a front
typically viewed as inimical to civic life and collective consideration can become a place
(or at least generative of a space) of civic contestation. Consumption has the ability to
turn on itself at times and ask reflective questions. At a point in Western political life
when the branded marketplace appears to be crowding out and colonizing community
centers, other spaces of critical action become visible. This is where sit-ins go virtual, to
take one example. Though the dynamics of control are intensified in an advanced
consumer economy, these same dynamics can be set in motion in intense ways, as the
dual face of publicity allows. I will not deny the usefulness of a kind of capillary, parasitic politics of resistance, but there also need to be ways citizens can join to act collectively and positively. This means the regeneration of “big spaces” and institutions of public action. This also means the generation of a kind of citizen subjectivity that is able to think in these terms. Because the military is a prime object of civic practice, a prime seat of power and its abuses, and exists at the limits of deliberation (insofar as war is a failure of deliberation), the relationship between the citizen and the military is as important as war itself. These structures are cultivated discursively through a variety of media and contexts. I have addressed only a few in this project, though I take them as symptomatic of a trend toward a certain kind of militarism that dissolves of the critical divide separating citizen and soldier. The distinct consumer flavor of this dissolution crowds out the most pressing issues a society must confront in the decision to use military force – its devastating effects on real people.
Notes

1 “Patriotism Fuels Flag Purchases,” *USA Today*, 10 September 2002, 1D.


6 Bartosiewicz, “From G.I. Joe to Tora Bora Ted.”


8 Quoted in Hamilton, “Toymakers Study Troops, and Vice Versa,” 1.


12 Quoted in Bartosiewicz, “From G.I. Joe to Tora Bora Ted.”


26 “Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War,” Study conducted by the Program on International Policy Issues at the University of Maryland and Knowledge Networks, a research firm based in Menlo Park, CA (October 2, 2003), Principal investigator: Steven Kull. The study can be found at [http://www.pipa.org].
PIPA found in April of 2004 that 57% of Americans still believed that Hussein gave ‘substantial support’ to Al-Qaeda before the war. See Frank Davies, “Many Americans Still Misperceive Conduct of War: Poll Finds they Believe Saddam-Al Qaida Tie,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 23 April 2004, A6.


Eberly, *Citizen Critics*, 162.

Quoted in Mary Mogon Edwards, “Military Easter Baskets Come Under Fire,” *Columbus Dispatch*, 12 April 2003, 1B.


42 See Raperez’s site, “The Buy Bush a PlayStation 2 Campaign,” Online [http://www.evilninja.net/buybush.htm].


47 Ghattas, “Video Game Features Virtual Intifada.”
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**VITA**

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**Education**


Dissertation

*War Games: Militarism and Play in Post-Industrial Militarism*

Thesis Committee: Thomas Benson (chair), Rosa Eberly, Stephen Browne, Charles Scott (Philosophy).


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