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Article *in* Bodhi An Interdisciplinary Journal · March 2010

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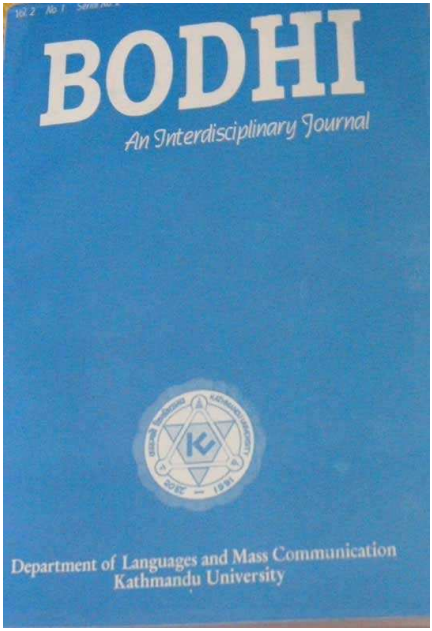
BODHI: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Vol. 2, No. 1, Serial No. 2, 2008



Published by

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND MASS COMMUNICATION

KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY, DHULIKHEL, KAVRE, NEPAL

http://www.ku.edu.np/media

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Targeting the Audience: Video Games as War Propaganda in Entertainment and News

- Rune Ottosen

Introduction[1]

This article will discuss video war games as propaganda, and the possible impact of video games on war reporting in news broadcasting. It will analyse computer games based on real wars in the light of Steven Poole's approach to computer games as modern mass media, and of Johan Galtung's theory of peace journalism. I will also draw upon earlier works on the military-industrial complex, to understand how the new generation computer games emerged from research within the armed forces in order to develop training videos for military personnel (Held, 2000; Lenoir, 2000).

In a globalised economy, the market and distribution of video games has a huge influence all over the world and I will argue that peace researchers must take youth culture more seriously in order to build a defence, among young people, against the potential danger of a culture of violence (Galtung, 1990). An important element of my approach is an understanding of how digital technology in the entrainment industry has blurred the border between the real and imagined worlds, and how, in the long run, this will affect our notion of reality and of fantasy. The successful film 'The Matrix' offers an interesting example. It projects a world in which 'real' world objects are simulations

[1] This article was first presented as a article presented to the conference: The Philosophy of Computer Games, Reggio Emilio, Italy, 25-27 January 2007. Parts of this article are also published in Ottosen, Rune (2008). "Video Games as War Propaganda: Cane Peace Journalism Offer and Alternative Approach" in Peace *& Policy*, vol 13 pp. 73-85, and in the forthcoming article "Targeting the Audience Video Games as War propaganda" in Entertainment and News in *Nordicom Review*.

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emerging from streams of bits. At one point, the hero finds himself on a roof, a helicopter his only means of escape. He asks his guide if can fly it. "Not yet," is the answer, as she calls their home base systems administrator for software that uploads in time for the take-off (Lenoir, 2000, p. 289).

Although my approach is critical of the content of computer and video games based on imagined and real wars, I have nothing against computer games as such. On the contrary, I support Toby Miller's warning against the moral panic that sometimes affects the debate about these new media along the same lines that, historically, has struck other new media, whether books, theatres, the cinema, radio or television, when they first arrived (Miller, 2006, p. 6-7).

Gaming is a social activity that is the passion of many people of all ages – but it is first and foremost a youth culture. It can offer tremendous pleasure, or it can be a social disaster if one gets hooked and spends most of the day and night in front of the screen. Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG) offers a social, intellectual and technological way of life to many people and brings new people together, both virtually and in reality. As the Norwegian media researcher Espen Aarseth has pointed out, this arena should be taken seriously as a social field, and there is really no need to moralise over the technology because some people misuse it (Aarseth, 2001). Thus games *can* be resources to provide pleasure, knowledge and skills, but it should also be noted that they can be a tool for propaganda. In the best tradition of peace research, it is preferable to use these new media to create positive alternatives, rather than moralise over them.

Johan Galtung's Model as a Back-drop

Peace journalism, as suggested by Johan Galtung, defines war as a problem in itself, and promotes non-violence as a means of conflict resolution (Galtung, 2002). Galtung's model builds on

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the dichotomy and contrast between what he calls 'war journalism' and a 'peace journalism' approach.

The model includes four main points where he contrasts the two approaches: war journalism is violence-oriented, propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented and victory-oriented. This approach is often linked to a zero-sum game where the winner (as in sports journalism) takes all. It is a prototype of what one might call traditional mainstream war coverage, without the journalists reflecting the fact that the media themselves are playing a role in the conflict, often escalating conflicts by reproducing propaganda developed as part of media strategies and PR campaigns by the parties involved (based on Ottosen, 2007).

The peace journalism approach assumes a moral and ethical point of departure, acknowledging that the media themselves play a role in the propaganda war, intentially or unintentially. The peace journalism approach may make the conscious choice to identify other options for the readers/viewers by offering a solution-oriented, people-oriented and truth-oriented approach. It means focusing on possibilities for peace that the conflicting parties might have an interest in hiding. Peace journalism is people-oriented in the sense that it focuses on the victims (often civilian casualties) and thus give a voice to the voiceless. It is also truth-oriented in the sense that it reveals untruth on all sides and focuses on propaganda as a mean of continuing the war (Galtung, 2002, p. 261-270).

In their book *Peace Journalism* (2005), Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick have further developed Galtung's model and turned it into a practical tool for journalists. They offer an analytical model in the form of techniques of how to practise peace journalism, demonstrated with examples from their own journalistic practice. They argue that the peace journalism option accepts that every war takes places in an atmosphere of propaganda in which the parties often offer confrontation as the only path. By pointing in the direction of a peaceful solution, journalists can offer the audience a broader perspective in a

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given conflict by using "insights of conflict analyses and transformation to update the concepts of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting" (op.cit., p. 5). They see the potential of peace journalism as the provision of a road map "tracing the connections between journalists, their sources, the story they cover and the consequences of their journalism" into what they call the "ethics of journalistic intervention" (ibid.). In summary, their ambition is to raise "awareness of non-violence and creativity into the practical job of everyday editing and reporting" (ibid.). The challenge for game developers could therefore be to create thrilling alternative games that offer as much entertainment as do destructive, violent and propagandistic games (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005, in Ottosen, 2007).

Computer Games as Mass Media

In his book *Trigger Happy*, Steven Poole argues that computer games must be analysed within the context of mass media. It is impossible to understand mass culture among youth and ignore the growing computer game industry. By 1999, Americans had named computer games three years in a row as their favourite home entertainment. Twice as many people preferred video games to watching television. Three times as many preferred video games to going to the movies and six times as many preferred video games to renting movies. By the turn of the century, Sony had sold five million boxes a year of its PlayStation brand in the United Kingdom alone (Poole, 2004, p. 6).

A closer look into the PlayStation concept reveals that one of the most successful characters is Lara Croft, the pistol-toting, pony-tailed, hot pants-and-shades-wearing superwoman digital star. The most successful Lara Croft game, 'Tomb Raider', has sold more than 16 million copies of the first three versions of the series. Lara Croft as a ritual super-babe is living a commercial life of her own. She has been on the cover of 'The Face' and has been the subject of thousands of articles in

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newsarticles and magazines (op.cit., p. 7). Nowadays, computer games also generate a large spin-off industry into music and other forms of entertainment. For example, David Bowie wrote and performed, with guitarist Reeves Gabrels, an entire concept album for the soundtrack to the 1999 video game 'Mikron'. Video games are also increasingly merging with other form of entertainment platforms:

> In the late 1990s, you could already play CDs on a PlayStation, but that's small beer. Sony's PlayStation2 plays DVD movies through your TV, and various interface ports allow the connection of digital video cameras for editing home movies, printers, scanners, storage devices and much else. PlayStation2 sold 980,000 units on its first launch weekend in Japan in March 2000, and by mid-2001 Sony had shipped 15 million of consoles worldwide (…) Meanwhile, Microsoft's Xbox already had a hard drive and broadband connectivity built-in, as well as being a domestic DVD player. Consoles today and offer more different types of entertainment than ever before (op.cit., p. 11).

Online games are, of course, the fastest growing niche in this market. Estimates from 2003 showed that sales from consoles and software reached 17 billion dollars in the United States and Europe alone. Figures from the companies dealing with market analyses of games show that income from subscriptions to online games alone have increased from US$500 million in 2002 to US$2 billion in 2005, and the estimates are that this figure will increase to US$6, 8 billion by 2011. The newest trend is to buy characters and objects in the games for real money. The game 'Project Entropia' is linked through a figure of yourself to your own credit card. The most popular games like 'Everquest' and 'World of Warcraft' are money machines (Stordal, 2006). So let's face it: video games are not going to go away. Peace researchers should therefore take their messages more seriously.

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The influence of video games today can be compared to other media revolutions such as the movies, and jazz music before World War II – popular but despised. There is, however, a big difference and an argument that should be take seriously: you *play* the video games, and the interactivity makes them even more influential on hearts and mind (op cit., p. 13).

Culture of Violence in Computer Games

The quality of the video games developed together with the growth of the violent content of the games, and the violence has become more and more realistic. 'Street Fighter II' was launched in 1991 with a three-dimensional, lifelike character. It featured enormous blue light trails from swishing limbs and fireball attacks, while 'Mortal Kombat' from 1992 caused debate among politicians because of its terrifically featured death moves, in which a victorious character would rip out the opponent's spine and display it triumphantly, with all its bloody details (Poole, 2004, p. 31). With a 'motion capture' technique that films real martial artists and digitises the results as a movement code that can be applied to the imaginary, game fights between characters, and war, are portrayed in an increasingly realistic manner (op.cit., p. 33).

Steven Poole makes a point of why war games have been so successful in the video-game industry. The military logic fits well with the logic of the game itself:

> Armchair generals are well catered for by the God's game's sibling genre, the real-time strategy game. Its natural milieu is that of war. Again in a godlike position (single-handedly overseeing all military operations), the player is briefed by advisers (actors and video clips), and must the carry out certain missions by issuing commands to numerous small troop units on the battlefield. The player clicks on a certain unit and, for instance, tells it to move somewhere, to

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> attack another unit, to defend or to scatter" (op. cit., p. 35-36).

The successful 'Command and Conquer' series offers real historical events explained by the logic to be found in a militaristic approach to history. The game concentrates on the 'action' in real 'theatres of war'. Rather than challenge the player to think in terms of conflict resolution, how to avoid war or peaceful conflict resolution, the game offers hi-tech weaponry with which your troops can pick up and bash the 'enemy'.

The 'winning solutions' of the war games fits well into the concept of war journalism in Johan Galtung's above-mentioned model for war and peace journalism. It's a zero-sum game with two parties and one 'winner'. The very logic of the game fits well into a Cold War logic with a good and an evil side. Their formal root is Atari's panic-inducing arcade game 'Missile Command' from 1980. This game originally grew out of a military simulation to see how many nuclear warheads a human radar operator could track before overload set in. As the games became more and more complex and hybridised, the essential elements of real-time strategy, the control of multiple games pieces and tactical calculus, may also crop up in other genres but it was originally developed for the war games (Poole, 2004, p. 36).

Creating Illusions of Life after Death

Besides constantly producing stereotype images of 'your' side and the enemy, the conception of life and death in video games is worth a study in itself. Usually, death differs, depending on which side you are. It means one thing for your side but it's a totally different matter for the others. If you destroy a space invader it's gone for ever. If you are able to kill a dungeon in the game 'Zelda 64' it disappears into dust, but if you leave the room and return it has regenerated and must be fought all over again. If your own space ship is hit by the aliens, it's bad news,

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of course. But luckily a brand new ship appears at your disposal at the bottom of the screen.

In reality, life is something sacred, to be protected. But in video games, life is redefined as an expendable part of a larger campaign. Of course we can see a parallel to real wars here. For generals, even the lives of their own soldiers are expendable enough to take calculated risks and sometimes send soldiers into battle – with a potential fatal outcome. The video games offer a multitude of lives to each individual, depending on the circumstance in which it operates, and in most games you are have several lives before you finally are out of the game. 'Life' in a video game is not just a resource, it's also a possible reward:

> Games such as 'Defender' or 'Space Invaders' offer 'extra lives' when a certain score is achieved (usually a multiple of ten or twenty thousand). It resembles an ethically inverted form of Buddhism. In the Eastern philosophy, if you commit wrongs, your growing karmic debt means you are constantly rein carted into a new existence in order to suffer anew. But whereas Buddhism's final aim is to jump off the exhausting carousel of constant reincarnation and to be no more, life in a video game is always a good thing, and killing is the morally praiseworthy action required to resurrect it. The fact that simple survival edges the player closer, as the score increases, to an extra life argues that – as Nietzsche would have growled through his moustache after half an hour at the Robotron controls – what does not destroy you makes you stronger. (Poole, 2004, p. 55-56).

Besides creating a confused and unrealistic image of 'lives', the video games present a concept of 'health' that is just as disturbing. In many games, 'health' is a full 'account' at the start of the game, and is gradually reduced after the receipt of punches and kicks. The player whose energy is reduced to zero

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first is the loser. In real life, any one of these kicks or punches could be fatal. It addition, the game creates the illusion that a kick to your foot is just as dangerous as one to your head, since it generates the same amount of reduction to your 'health scale'. Most games featuring a 'health bar' also provide means for the player to restore health by allowing the subject in the game to pick up healing devices. Bullet wounds are healed and injuries forgotten by picking up mysterious 'medikits'. Sometimes these items offer extra energy in addition to restoring health or granting an extra life (op.cit., p. 56-59).

The Relationship between Computer Games Violence and Real Violence

The debate about whether a connection between video games and social behaviour can be proved surfaces from time to time. Patricia Greenfield's 1984 study, *Media and the Mind of the Child*, concluded that it could not. Later studies have suggested that video-game playing temporarily increases aggression (Griffiths, 1997) but despite evidence of such a connection I will argue that the ideology of the games should be evaluated. Even though there is no proof of a direct link between the content of video games and children's behaviour, their content does somehow influence the way children look at themselves, at other people and at human relations in general.

Questions were asked in the British Parliament on the 1993 release of 'Mortal Kombat'. Worried voices have been raised about 'Grand Theft Auto' (1997) a game in which the player steals cars, runs people down, shoots cops and indulges in other unsocial behaviour. Even worse is 'Silent Hill', in which a girl disappears and is subjected to torture.

In the U.S. there has been a questioning of possible connections between violent computer games and childhood violence. When, in the spring of 1999, two teenagers shot twelve students at Columbine School in Littleton, Colorado, the media made a point of the fact that the shooters were avid players of the video

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games 'Doom' and 'Duke Nuke'. The year before, 14-year-old Michael Carneal had killed three students and injured five others at his school in West Paducah, Kentucky. The parents of the three murdered children filed a 130-million dollar law suit against 24 video-game and Internet companies. Carneal was apparently a heavy user of 'Doom' and the claim was that the game turned had him into an "effective killer without teaching him any of the constraints or responsibilities needed to inhibit such a killing capacity" (quoted from Poole, 2004, p. 208). The case was eventually dismissed, in May 2000, by a federal court jury, but the argument over video games continues.

Evan Wright, the author of the book *Generation Kill*, spent two months living with 23 Marines from First Recon, the elite unit which spearheaded the invasion of Iraq. In his book Wright refers to a Marine soldier who talks about the game 'Grand Theft Auto: Vice City' at the same time that they are about to attack a unit of alleged insurgents: "I was just thinking one thing when we drove into that ambush: 'Grand Theft Auto: Vice City'. I felt like I was living it when I see the flames coming out of windows, the blown-up car in the street, guys stealing out around shooting at us. It was fucking cool," (quoted from Herbst, 2005). Wright explains how the violence in video games is related to experiences on the battlefield. He compares the war in Iraq with earlier wars, and concludes that the soldiers seem to be more trigger happy than previously. With reference to the book *On Killing* by Dave Grossman, Wright makes the point that in past generations only 15% to 20% of combat infantry were willing to fire weapons, whereas in Wright's unit he saw no resistance to firing, and he believes that this change of attitude owes something to the experience of violence in entertainment (Matera, 2005). In another article, Wright tells how soldiers in the unit were quite open about killing civilians, one even saying that it was authorised by the priest in the unit – so ong as they didn't enjoy the killing. Quoting this soldier, Wright writes: "By the time the unit reached the outskirts of Baghdad, this sergeant was certain he had killed at least four men. When this commander praised the unit for "slaying

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dragons" on the way to Baghdad, the sergeant later told his men, "If we did half the shit back home down here, we'd be in prison," (Wright, 2004b).

Another aspect of the masculine culture in the unit was to reward Iraqi boys with pornography for information. This made one village elder so furious that he wanted to attack the unit with a rocket launcher; the old man was almost killed in a return of fire – so the clash of cultures had many aspects (ibid.). The violent masculine culture transferred from fiction in video games and pornography to the battlefield in Iraq is hardly a good basis for drumming up support for George Bush's experiment in creating a 'new' Iraq.

Gender

Video games should also be analysed within the context of gender. The most common argument about gender and video games is that the aggressive, destructive and violent nature of many games fits into a traditional masculine role. It has been argued that this should be seen as partly the result of the fact that most game designers have been male (Haddon, 1999, p. 320). In addition, I will argue, in the context of Galtung's model for peace journalism, that the war-oriented media representation is dominated by men. Women, who are often more open-minded about finding peaceful resolutions, and more likely to appreciate the process of conflict resolution, are less likely to adopt a traditional war journalism approach. War games will probably uphold traditional patterns of stereotypical gender behaviour. This picture must, however, be nuanced by the fact that there is also an enthusiastic minority of female players who will contest my arguments and claim that this is also a form of stereotyping. The picture also became more complicated when, in the late 1970s, the game 'PacMan' was found to be very popular among women. Some video-game designers have suggested that when video games moved from the arcades into homes and personal PCs, they became more socially acceptable to women since the atmosphere in the

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arcades and other public places where games were played had not been attractive to women (ibid.).

Using feminist theory, Claudia Herbst explained that the need for more female recruits in Iraq would create the need for more female gaming figures like Lara Croft, heroine of the game 'Tomb Raider'. Partly because of her toughness, Lara Croft has been noted in discourses about the gendering of war, and has been likened to the classical female warriors, Amazons (Goldstein, 2001, p. 19 in Herbst, 2005). The propaganda story of Jessica Lynch is interesting in this context. When the Pentagon doesn't have a real female heroine, it creates one. Jessica Lynch had been wounded in a car crash but the myth was put out that she had taken part in a supposed gun battle with Iraqi ambushers, had killed several attackers and had sustained gun wounds. This false story was used to recruit more female soldiers (Herbst, 2005, p. 313). Herbst warns about more female heroines of computer games in times to come:

> At the crossroads where real and virtual battle meet, where violence that is portrayed for the sake of entertainment takes on the appearance of violence that comes at the cost of living beings and their sustaining communities, at a time of a nationally and internationally criticized war that is running low on troops – at this volatile junction the virtual heroine makes her entrance. Her appearance deserves critical exploration. (op.cit., p. 311).

The Cooperation between the Military and the Entertainment Industry

The origin of video games can be traced back to the Cold War, and the technology behind them can be traced back to the U.S. government's nuclear research facility, the Brookhaven National Laboratory, and an engineer who had designed electronic devices for the Manhattan Project's atomic bomb (Herman, 1997).

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Another dimension in the relationship between entertainment and war coverage is the significance of the strategic cooperation between the military-industrial complex and the entertainment industry. In a 1996 policy article, the U.S. National Research Council (NRC) acknowledged the importance of cooperation between the Department of Defence (DODD) and the entertainment industry on issues suuch as modelling and simulation technology. The report makes the following statement:

> In the entertainment industry, such technology lies at the hearth of video games, theme park attractions and entertainment centres, and special effects for film production. For DODD, modelling and simulation technology provides a low-cost means of conducting joint training exercises, evaluating new doctrine and tactics, and studying the effectiveness of new weapon systems" (quoted from Burston, 2003, p. 163).

The significance of this cooperation manifests itself in computer games in the commercial market. In 2002, the game 'Desert Storm' was launched, more than ten years after the Gulf War and one year before the next war on Iraq. It could be argued that the timing here was not a coincidence; it might be helpful to recreate the sense of winning the war of 1991 in the same country where a new war was going to take place. To be a winner in this game you have to act as the American soldiers did in 1991. If you are on the Iraqi side you lose and get killed. What message does this send to young people (mostly boys) in a pre war situation? (based on Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2005).

The game 'Battle of 73 Easting' went a step further. It was launched by the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) in their project to reconstruct a real battle based on the debriefings of 150 survivors of a key battle during the 1991 Gulf War. The idea was to reconstruct how the protagonists acted and felt in a real war situation – this could replace a physical visit to the site to reconstruct events, and the IDA brought together the soldiers who had actually taken part in the battle, to reconstruct the

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events. Oral reconstruction, diaries and personal tape recordings were used. Tracks in the sand gave the simulators precise traces of movements. Satellite photos were used, and a digital map of the terrain was put together. Data was used to build a test model and the soldiers were invited back to adjust this version. The 'Battle of 73 Eastings' was presented to high-ranking military on 50-inch TV screens as a video game, but also as an accurate historical reconstruction of a battle with a known outcome. This was costly, of course, but once the job was done it could be used to construct different battles with different outcomes. It was converted into commercial games – 'Marine Doom' and the even more successful best-seller 'Quake', and once income was secured it remained an adaptable tool for battle training (Lenoir, 2000, p. 330-331).

The Political Economy of the Game Industry

To understand the political and economical roots of the war game industry I will draw upon the work of Tim Lenoir (2000). Lenoir's point of departure is that he is intrigued by the notion that we are on the verge of a new renaissance similar to that of the 14th and 15th centuries, deeply connected with a revolution in information technology. But unlike the renaissance of the 14th century, which fostered humanism as one of its achievements, the present renaissance is heralding a post-human era in which the human being is merged with the intelligent machine. As Lenoir puts it, "In the post-human state, there is no demarcation between bodily existence and computer simulation, between cybernetic mechanisms and biological organism" (Lenoir, 2000, p. 290).

Lenoir links the technological revolution behind the computer game industry to research agencies such as the DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency), several private companies such as Xerox Parc and research universities. Since 1996, the DARPA Smart Modules programme has been developing and demonstrating new ways of combining new technologies (such as microprocessors) and using lightweight,

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low power, module packages to simulate realistic battlefield situations (op.cit., p. 291). Lenoir links the military's need to develop simulation and training programmes to the entertainment industry, and uses the development of Ivan Sutherland's head-mounted display project as an example of cooperation between the academic and industrial sectors. The history starts 40 years ago. Sutherland had a Harvard background but the funding for the project came from different sources: the military, universities, industry and the CIA. The CIA provided US$80,000 in 1966, and funds were also supplied by APRA, the Office of Naval Research, and Bell Labs. The Helicopter company Bell provided equipment, while the Air Force put at the disposal PDP-1 computers. MIT Lincoln Labs, under an ARPA contract, provided an ultrasonic head–position acoustic sensor, which became an important component in the new video-game technology. In 1968, Sutherland left for Utah, where he joined the Computer Science Department at the University of Utah, which subsequently became an important environment for the development of new computer technology and computer graphics (op.cit., p. 293-297). The new animated technology has also been used in films such as 'Jurassic Park' and 'Toy Story'. The science-fiction movie 'Ender's Game' by Orson Scott Card provides an example of how this desire for merging the digital and real preceded the availability of the technology. It was written in 1977, the year before flight simulators were invented. 'Ender's Game' conceives of a boy who saves the world from aliens in a war game where the video-game situation becomes the training ground for real world warriors. It was used by the Marine University in Quantico, Virginia, and this was just the beginning of a long-lasting trend of military use of the new computer game technology. Soon, the economic benefits would ensure that the military was an important customer of the games industry.

The commercial breakthrough came in 1993, when Silicon Graphics, NEC and Nintendo announced a partnership and the world's most powerful game machine was launched. In 1997,

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the game 'Super Mario64' captured a worldwide base and sold US$2-billion worth of games.

Lenoir uses Steven Woodcock's career as an illustration and concrete example from the military-industrial complex. Woodcock has been, since 1995, a lead software engineer for Gameware Development at Lockheed-Martin Real3D. He began his career in the development of game simulations for the Martin Marietta Information Group, National Test Bed (NTB), where he was responsible for testing, integration and documentation for ARGUS, the Advanced Real-time Gaming Universal Simulation, working, *inter alia*, with command-and-control simulation focusing on ballistic missile defence (BMD). Between 1995 and 1997 he switched from military network simulations to the interactive game industry, and became lead programmer on the Sega-produced Model 2 arcade game 'Behind Enemy Lines'. He has himself noted that his previous experience at Martin Marietta proved invaluable in designing the real time 3-D multiplayer games he has developed since 1995. He has also developed games for other companies, including the Sony PlayStation project 'Thundering Death'. Woodcock's work is a illustrative example of how technology and development originating in the military are used in the entertainment industry to create products like 'Doom II' for Id Software and 'Falcon 4.0' for Spectrum Holobyte's video games (Lenoir, 2000, p. 321-322).

What the CIA as a partner and funder hopes to get out of this cooperation is not quite clear, but Lenoir suggests that the evolution of new technology in the private sector might move development and new information technology faster than in traditional government agencies (op.cit., p. 334).

The success of 'Doom II' led the Marines to look ahead to the next step in the commercialisation of war-games. Cooperation with the company MÄK Technologies led to the design of a tactical operations game built to Marine specifications. According to the contract, the game should eventually go on

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sale as an official Marine Corps tactical training game. In addition to its work in the defence community, MÄK's software has been licensed for use by several entertainment firms, such as Total Entertainment Network and Zombie Virtual Reality Entertainment, to develop 3-D, multi-user video games such as 'Spearhead'. 'Spearhead' was published by Interactive Magic and can be played over the Internet, taking distribution a step further. Its networking technology is similar to that used in military simulations. This became a new standard for all Department of Defense simulations, part of a DOD-wide effort to establish a common technical framework to facilitate the inter-operability of all types of models and simulations. MÄK benefits from working with both the military and commercial markets, taking advantage of close to US$500-million spent by the U.S. government to develop this technology. The contract between MÄK and the Marine Corps led to the contract for MEU 2000, a computer-based tactical decision-making game for the Marine Corps as well as a game for the commercial market, a multiplayer game in which each player assumes a position in the command hierarchy of either American or opposing forces. This became a prototype of later games where a military version boasts more accurate details about tactics and weapons than does the civilian. Both versions, however, allow multiple players to compete on the Internet (op.cit., p. 324-326).|

Simulating Real Wars

In many cases we see that the games' technology is the same as that which various branches of the armed forces use in their simulators, training their own soldiers. Here, the SIMNET concept is essential. The combination of federal funding, university research and research in government-funded laboratories is essential to an understanding of SIMNET, for the development of hardware critical to the fields of 3-D graphics, simulation technology and virtual reality is impossible to understand without seeing it in the context of the military-industrial complex. Simulators developed prior to the 1980s

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were quite expensive, with a budget of between US$30-million and US$35-million. The cost of developing simulators was twice as high as the systems they were intended to simulate (Lenoir 2000:308). The question of how to finance this was, of course, crucial. Jack A. Thorpe, from American Defense Department's Advanced research Project Agency (DAPRA), came up with the idea of financing the simulators by converting the technology to commercial products. Lenoir explains it like this:

> (Thorp's) idea was that aircraft simulators should be used to *augment* aircraft: they should be used to teach air-combat skills that pilots could not learn in peacetime flying, but that could be taught with simulators in large-scale battle-engagement interactions. Thorpe proposed the construction of battle-engagement simulation technology as a twenty-five-year development goal. Concerned about the costs for such as a system, he actively pursued technologies developed outside the Department of Defense, such as a video-game technology from the entertainment industries. In 1982 he hired a team to develop a network of tank simulators suitable for collective training. (Lenoir, 2000, p.309).

The team that developed SIMNET consisted of retired military personnel and designers from Perceptronics of Woodland Hills, California. Perceptronics had pioneered the first overlay of computer graphics on a display of images generated by an analogue video disc, as a part of a tank gunnery project in 1979 (ibid.).

We saw the result 25 years later in games like 'Battle Zone', which has been controversial because of its beauty but also its representation of real-life destruction. Atari was initially commissioned to build an enhanced version of 'Battle Zone' from the DARPA, as a simulator for real tank drivers. This was the start of a new trend – growing symbiotic relationships between video games and the Pentagon. The warplane company

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Lockheed-Martin invested in the technology of arcade video games, thus accelerating their development. Recruits to the U.S. Marines have used 'Doom' in their practice, and the U.S. Navy has used a custom hack of Microsoft's Flight Simulator to help pilots fly a T-34C Turbo Mentor, the aircraft used for primary flight training (Poole, 2004, p. 208-209).

Another agency on the scene is the joint military/film industry-funded Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT). In the light of the new military practice of creating teams of military personnel, industrial strategists and academics, Lenoir suggests that ICT is more interested in modelling training behaviour than in developing 'realistic agents' for video games and films. Here, Atomic Games is a realistic partner. The company was founded by Keith Zabalaoui and became a subsidiary for Microsoft Games. Zabalaoui had a background in the Johnson space-based robotic retriever for recapturing equipment for astronauts. Popular games like 'V for Victory' and 'Utah Beach' were developed; in 1992 the latter was selected as Game of the Year by Strategy Plus. Atomic Games' most successful game was built on real historical facts, and called 'Close Combat 2: A Bridge too Far', based on a real German-American tank battle in World War II (Lenoir, 2000, p. 332).

In 1999, Intel Corporation announced the first of a new series of network processors designed to solve bandwidth problems to help create network devices for local and wide area networks as well as Internet-based networks. The future lies in Internet games that involve several players at the same time (op.cit., p. 335).

U.S. Army – A Success Story

One of the biggest successes on a global scale in the computer market is the official U.S. Army computer game. Its available free of charge on the Internet and reproduces the image of courageous American soldiers. We can read from the introduction on their home page: "The Soldiers in Special

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Forces are a reflection of the Army within which they serve. They are courageous, intelligent, and resourceful and dedicated individuals". The game was launched in 2003 (the same year that the invasion in Iraq took place), at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles, 13-16 May, in a combination of real and virtual events. Real tanks were placed outside as Air Force Division 101 launched a simulated attack (Pilet 2003). Inside the Expo the new game was introduced as a tool to recruit more soldiers to the real U.S. Army at the same time as it was introduced free of charge as a video game on the Internet. By November 2003 it already had 2, 3 million users; by November 2006 the number had increased to over 6.7 million and it was the fifth most used computer game on a global scale at the time. Again, we must ask what kind of influence this has on the young people using the game (based on Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2005). The narrative of this game fits well into Galtung's model for 'war journalism.'

The question is, of course, why the game is offered free when it has such global potential. A tool for recruitment in the American market is the most obvious answer. In an interview with Army News Service, Col. Casey Wardynski, director of the OMEA, project director of 'America's Army' and associate professor of economics at the USMA, made clear how efficient a tool it is: "The game has generated interest in the Army and has taught people about soldiering," he said. In a survey given to youths aged 16 to 21, 29% said that 'America's Army' was the most effective method of generating interest (Petemeyer, 2004). Nor should the game should be under-estimated as a global instrument of propaganda. The game is, of course, extremely one-sided in its approach and offers the military solution as the only solution to a conflict. In addition, all issues are seen through an American perspective. And it is not the only such game on the market. I have already mentioned 'Falcon 4.0'. Others are 'Counter Strike' and 'Real Wars'. One of the newest games, 'Full Spectrum Warrior', was also initially developed as a training game, then recycled and released to the public. It is set in the fictional country Zekistan, whose dictator

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has been accused of 'ethnic cleansing and terrorist sponsorship'. The idea behind the game is to survive in a hostile environment. It operates in an atmosphere of fear where cars are exploding around you and there is potential death around every corner. Rather than controlling each soldier, you are given overall command of two 'fire teams' of four men. Enemies bed themselves down and you tell one team to give covering fire, and guide the other to a position where they can get a clear shot. Your soldiers swear and joke, and if you leave them out in the open too long, one after the other eventually gets shot and wounded – then it's a race to get him to the nearest medical unit. In the heat of the battle the game forces you to take multiple executive decisions. Variation comes with the ability to call in strikes and command snipers to 'take out' the enemy soldiers. I am sure that any similarity with Iraq or Afghanistan is a pure coincidence.

Kuma Reality Games is offering a series of games based on real events, including the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Liberia. Even the killing of the sons of Saddam Hussein and his hunt and arrest are available (Thomas and Virchov, 2005, p. 30). And guess what? You can now download and the play the invasion of Iran. In times when news media all over the world are querying U.S. policy young people who use few newsarticles and television news are guaranteed of getting a one-sided, militaristic and propagandistic presentation of world events – available free of charge on the Internet.

What are the counter forces?

The game market is a mass market with a variety of attractive offers to fill the spare time of young people. They seem reluctant, nowadays, to spend much time on the news media, and their knowledge about the world comes from entertainment in movies and games. We can only speculate about what kind of worldview young people acquire in the long run, after playing games developed by the military industrial complex.

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As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, the challenge is to develop alternatives – games in the same arena but with a different message, games inspired by the spirit of peace journalism, and which are as entertaining as the war games. It is, of course, hard to compete with the quality of the technology in which the military industrial complex has invested such resources as have been documented, but the effort should be made. There have already been attempts to develop games with non-violent contents – one is 'A Force More Powerful' (http://www.afmpgame.com/).

A game that had an effect on public opinion was the Australian game 'Escape From Woomera'. According to Gonzalo Frasca, in an interview with the Norwegian weekly *Ny Tid*, it was developed in 2003 as a joint effort by artists, game developers and a journalist, in an attempt to draw attention to Australia's immigration policy. By creating a 3D model of the refugee camp Woomera, based on maps smuggled out of the camp, the game draws attention to the inhuman conditions inside the camp. According to Frasca, the game became an eye-opener, generating discussion among the public, and eventually conditions in the camp improved (Holen, 2006).

Newsgaming

Newsgaming was an attempt by Gonzalo Frasca to create an alternative strategy to meet the challenge from the violent commercial game industry. Through the website www.ludology.org, and the ideology of ludology, an attempt is made to create computer simulators based on actual events such as 9/11 and Madrid, with alternative perspectives on current events. The website itself defines newsgaming thus:

> "What is newsgaming? Newsgaming is a word we coined for describing a genre that is currently emerging: videogames based on news events. Traditionally, videogames have focused on fantasy rather than reality, but we believe that they can be a great tool for better understanding our world. Since newsgaming is so new,

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> it has to find a voice of its own. Therefore, most of our games will be in part experimental."

According to Frasca, "Ludology is most often defined as the study of game structure (or gameplay) as opposed to the study of games as narratives or games as a visual medium" (Frasca, 2003).

To my mind, ludology, and websites such as www.ludology.org offer an interesting platform for creating alternatives to the games coming out of the military industrial complex. 'September 11' is a good case study because it fits well into Galtung's model for peace journalism. It has no narrative but is open-ended. The idea is to make visible the consequence, for civilians, of a military solution. If you target an Arabic-looking person equipped with a gun, you are just as likely to hit civilians in the street close to the target. Or you can accidently hit a civilian target in the city centre. There is no winner in this game but it's evident that a military solution causes a lot of damage. This can stimulate the player to choose alternatives to war. I am in some doubt, however, as to whether this is as exciting, and as attractive as a game, as the more traditional videogames described in this article.

Video Games as War Preparation in News Media

I want to make a final point linked to the economic, technological and cultural influence of the 'military entertainment complex' (to use Robin Andersen's phrase) on war reporting in ordinary news media (Andersen, 2005). A lot has been written about the failure of the news media to critically investigate the propaganda of the alleged weapons of mass destruction during the period leading up to the war in Iraq in March 2003 (Solomon, 2004). Quality newsarticles like *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* have apologised to their readers for their part in promoting the war effort by uncritically repeating the lies of the Bush administration (Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2004). Robin Andersen suggests that

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an additional problem is that the same techniques in the video games are also implemented in the war reporting of the major news channels. Thus, the core components in the imagery in the video games create the same kind of illusions as in real wars portrayed on televison. In the run-up to the war in Iraq, all major networks showed digitised pulsing graphics that simulated the ongoing war. Andersen uses an example from the local Fox station in New York: a news story about new sophisticated weapons was introduced on the screen with pulsing graphics of the headline 'PLAN OF ATTACK'. In the introduction to the news story, the announcer explains that "to take the so-called butcher from Baghdad" will require some "serious weapons". After boasting that the channel Fox 5 has acquired access to information about these weapons, the announcer introduces the reporter Linda Schmidt. The viewers are then shown a grainy, monochromatic field with squares and rectangles transforming into white blurs. The reporter tells the viewers about new weapons introduced into Afghanistan that will soon used in Iraq. Live footage supplied by the Air Force from Afghanistan is accompanied by station banners on the screen which read 'WAR GAMES', and viewers are told: "Watch closely and you can see a person running on the ground … a white dot moving across the centre of your screen … they're firing at him … and then they nail him". This actual footage of real killing is framed in a video-game setting, the reporter enthusiastically demonstrating to the viewers a weapon called the 'meat grinder' and boasting, as she holds it on her shoulder and aims it at the screen, about how light and easy it is. Robin Andersen makes the point that the new visual rhetoric of war –the digital image – builds a bridge between entertainment violence and real war violence. News reporting looks and feels more like entertainment these days, and entertainment has a particular type of sensibility:

> "News reports resemble video games. Media celebrates war and its weaponary, not only for the raitings and patriotic fervor, or even because of pressure from the White House public relations teams; Positive reporting on high-tech war has

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> become fundamental to an industry highly invested in creating and profiting from the very same technologies used in weapons-the computer-based digital simulations at the core of video games. Such simulations are now seen across the media spectrum and have become fundamental to news representation of war (quoted from Andersen, 2005, p. 357)".

The economic basis for this process is, of course, the merger between the military and the media industries. When media through their ownership have common interests with the military-industrial complex it is doubtful whether they are capable of independent and critical war reporting (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 156). The entertainment industry and the military-industrial complex not only share economic interests, but a common digital technology has resulted in war reporting that shares the graphic styles and sensibilities of video games (Andersen, 2005, p. 362).

Conclusion

Even though it's difficult to estimate the impact of these real war video games on the behaviour pattern of the users, the content should nevertheless be analysed in terms of war propaganda. The digital technology emerging from the research laboratories in the military-industrial complex serves as a simulator, preparing soldiers for real wars, whereas the same technology – and in many cases the same games – are also converted into commercial video games. The long-term impact of millions of users playing within the narrative of war propaganda is unclear. Some disturbing evidence from the battlefield in Iraq suggests that the violent male culture of the video games inspires soldiers to inhuman and violent behaviour on the battlefield.

The economic, technological and cultural links between the entertainment industry and the defence industry makes it

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impossible for the major news channels to serve as a critical watch dog in issues of war and peace. Not only are the major news organisations reluctant to criticise the Pentagon and the White House in war preparation, but in some cases they use the same digital technology as the game industry in their news reporting, in a manner that blurs the difference between fact and fiction in military affairs. The hope is that peace researchers inspired by the analytical tools offered in the concept of peace journalism, and game designers inspired by ludology, can create a counter force and promote popular games based on peace-building and non-violence.

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