### Part One is the Annulment

#### *Sleep life, real life*

#### *Los Angeles and New York City*

#### *Late nights, bread knife*

#### *Prices so high, it’s a pity*

### Part Two is the Game

#### Our interpretation is that debate is a game and the affirmative should have to defend the implementation government action grounded in the resolution.

#### This does not require any use of a particular form of argumentation, type of evidence or the assumption of the role of the judge – the resolution is especially meant to limit the form of debate, and that’s pretty neat!

Hoofd’07|Ingrid M. Hoofd, National University of Singapore, “The Neoliberal Consolidation of Play and Speed: Ethical Issues in Serious Gaming” in “CRITICAL LITERACY: Theories and Practices Volume 1: 2, December 2007,” p. 6-14, 2007|KZaidi

Serious games are a fascinating next stage in the continuous exploitation of digital media technologies over the last decades for training, learning, and education. As formal education and training always involves the transmission and repetition of certain culturally and socially specific sets of skills and moral values, it would be of paramount importance to ensure that developments within the serious gaming industry are in step with the effects of the good intentions of nurturing people within a social framework that emphasises a fair, culturally diverse, and blooming society. In this light, it is interesting that from the very advent of the information society, digital technologies have been depicted as central to the development of a more just and equal society by harbouring the promise of bridging gaps between classes, races, and genders locally as well as globally. Driven by the vision of this utopian potential of new technologies, the education industry and larger policy organisations have been exploring the pedagogical possibilities of these technologies both in- and outside the traditional classroom for the last twenty-five years. Indeed, the implementation of increasingly more sophisticated and technologically mediated methods and tools for learning and education, takes as its starting point the techno-utopian assumption that (new) interactive technologies themselves are the primary harbingers of a fair and blooming society through facilitating (student) empowerment. This paper takes issue with this widespread techno-utopian perspective by seeking to shed light on the larger ethical implications of serious gaming. It will do so through foregrounding the relationship between global injustices, and the aesthetic properties and discourses of serious gaming. So while reframing serious games themselves in a new ethical perspective constitutes the main objective of this paper, it is equally important to situate serious games within a larger political discourse on the teaching of new skills. Firstly then, policy papers and academic studies on serious games all display an assumption of the inherent neutrality of gaming technologies, as if these technologies were mere tools equally suitable for all. What also becomes apparent in the language used in these studies and proposals, is how this instrumentalist vision of gaming technologies for learning goes hand in hand with a particular neo-liberal assumption of what constitutes a fit individual, and by extension of what the hallmarks of a ‘healthy’ society may be. For instance, in the European Union study “Serious Gaming – a fundamental building block to drive the knowledge work society” by Manuel Oliveira on the merits of serious games for education, justification runs along the lines of gaming ‘encouraging risk-taking and a winning attitude’ and creating a ‘performance-oriented individual.’ Similarly, Michael Guerena from the US Orange County Department of Education proposes in one of the Department’s web-casts that serious games instil “twenty-first century skills” like risk-taking, adaptability, self-direction, interactive communication, and ‘planning and managing for results’ in the students through the “channelling of fun.” Likewise, the UK-based Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association last year published their white paper Unlimited learning - Computer and video games in the learning landscape, in which they argue that serious games will “create an engaged, knowledgeable, critical and enthusiastic citizenry” whose “work practices will be geared towards networked communication and distributed collaboration” (49). Concerns around the ethical implications of serious games regarding their entanglements with larger social (gendered, classed, and raced) inequalities have until now largely been coined in terms of game content or representation. In a recent case in Singapore, the government’s proposition of using the RPG Granado Espada in secondary school history classes was followed by an outcry from various local academics condemning the stereotypical characters and simplistic representation of medieval Europe in the game. Likewise, various authors have critiqued current serious games not only because of simplistic representation of characters and surroundings, but especially because simulations generally tend to oversimplify complex social problems and situations. Gibson, Aldrich, and Prensky’s Games and Simulations in Online Learning (vi - xiv) for instance discuss these demerits of serious games. While such a critical analysis of how game content contributes to the reproduction of dominant discourses is definitely helpful, I would argue that the aesthetics of serious games involve much more than mere content. Instead, this paper will argue that the formal quest for instantaneity that research around digital media has displayed through the development of interactive technologies for education is already itself by no means a neutral affair. This is because the discourses that inform this quest and that accompany this search for instantaneity arguably enforce the hegemony of a militaristic, masculinist, humanist, and of what I will call a ‘speed-elitist’ individual. Moreover, I suggest that the propensity of current games to have sexist or racist content, is merely symptomatic of gaming technology’s larger problematic in terms of the aesthetic of instantaneity. In short, (serious) computer games have become archives of the discursive and actual violence carried out in the name of the utopia of technological progress and instantaneity under neo-liberal globalisation. This archival function is possible exactly because cybernetic technologies promise the containment and control of such supposedly accidental violence, while in fact exacerbating these forms of violence. This leads me to conclude that such violence is in fact structural to new serious gaming technologies, rather than accidental. I will elaborate this hypothesis by looking at various theorists who seek to understand this structural imperative of new technologies, and their relationship to the neo-liberalisation of learning and education. In turn, I will look at how this problematic structural logic informs the two popular serious games Real Lives and Global Warming Interactive. Secondly, the advent of serious gaming interestingly runs parallel with the contemporary dissemination and virtualisation of traditional learning institutions into cyberspace. While the existence of learning tools in other areas of society besides actual learning institutions has been a fact since the advent of schools, the shift of methods of learning into online and digital tools is symptomatic of the decentralisation of power from ‘old’ educational institutions and its usurpation into instantaneous neo-liberal modes of production. I am summarising the work of Bill Readings on the university here, because it sheds light on the shift in education tout court towards virtualisation, and its relationship to the ‘new hegemony of instantaneity.’ In The University in Ruins, Readings argues that the shift from the state-run university of reason and culture to the present-day global knowledge enterprise must mean that the centre of power in effect has shifted elsewhere. More important, says Readings, is that the function of the new ‘university of excellence,’ one that successfully transforms it into yet another trans-national corporation, relies on the fantasy that the university is still that transcendental university of culture in service of the state and its citizens. So the invocation of the fantasy of an ‘originary’ university of reason and progress, that produces unbiased knowledge for the good of all, facilitates the doubling of the production of information into other spaces outside the university walls proper. While Readings surely discusses only higher education institutions in The University in Ruins, I would argue that the logic of a shifting centre of power from the state into the technocratic networks and nodes of speed operates quite similarly in the case of primary, secondary, and other types of formal education. Indeed, the current virtualisation of learning and the emphasis on lifelong learning marks a dispersal of traditional learning institutions into online spaces. This dispersal works increasingly in service of the ‘speed-elite’ rather than simply in service of the nation-state. The heralding of serious games for education can therefore be read as a symptom of the intensified reach of the imperatives of neo-liberal globalisation, in which consumption enters the lives of locally bound as well as more mobile cosmopolitan citizens of all ages through harping on the technological possibility of the confusion of production and play. Through the imperative of play then, production increasingly and diffusely colonises all niche times and -spaces of neo-liberal society. In other words, (the emphasis on) play allows not only a potential increase in production and consumption through the citizen-consumer after her or his formal education of ‘skills’, but starkly intensifies flows of production and consumption already at the very moment of learning. While such an integration of play and production is generally understood within the framework of the neo-liberal demand for the circulation of pleasure, it is useful here to widen the scope from understanding the learner as a mere consumer of pleasure into the larger set of problematic interpellations that marks subjugation in contemporary society. Intriguingly, a host of research has emerged over the past years pointing towards the intricate relationship between subjugation, military research objectives, and videogame development. Such research suggests an intimate connection between the C3I logic and humanist militaristic utopias of transcendence, which incriminates interactive technologies as inherently favouring culturally particular notions of personhood. In the case of computer- and video-games for entertainment, researchers have argued that the aesthetic properties of gaming technologies give rise to so-called ‘militarised masculinity.’ In “Designing Militarized Masculinity,” Stephen Kline, Nick DyerWitheford, and Greig de Peuter argue for instance that interactive games open up very specific subject positions that “mobilize fantasies of instrumental domination” (255). This specific mobilisation that video-games invoke, is not only due to the remediation of violent television- and film- content, but also due to the intimate connection between gaming- and military industries which grant these technologies their particular cybernetic aesthetic properties (see also Herz 1997). This element of militarisation partly informs my concept of ‘speed-elitism.’ I extrapolate the idea of ‘speed-elitism’ largely from the works of John Armitage on the discursive and technocratic machinery underlying current neo-liberal capitalism. In “Dromoeconomics: Towards a Political Economy of Speed,” Armitage and Phil Graham suggest that due to the capitalist need for the production of excess, there is a strong relationship between the forces of exchange and production, and the logic of speed. In line with Virilio’s argument in Speed and Politics, they argue that various formerly the less connected social areas of war, communication, entertainment, and trade, are now intimately though obliquely connected. This is because all these forces mutually enforce one another through the technological usurpation and control of space (and territory), and through the compression and regulation of time. Eventually, Armitage and Graham suggest that “circulation has become an essential process of capitalism, an end in itself” (118) and therefore any form of cultural production increasingly finds itself tied-up in this logic. So neo-liberal capitalism is a system within which the most intimate and fundamental aspects of human social life – in particular, forms of communication and play – get to be formally subsumed under capital. In “Resisting the Neoliberal Discourse of Technology,” Armitage elaborates on this theme of circulation by pointing out that the current mode of late-capitalism relies on the continuous extension and validation of the infrastructure and the neutral or optimistic discourses of the new information technologies. Discourses that typically get repeated – like in the policy papers – in favour of the emerging speed-elite are those of connection, empowerment and progress, which often go hand in hand with the celebration of highly mediated spaces for action and communication. Such discourses however suppress the violent colonial and patriarchal history of those technological spaces and the subsequent unevenness brought about by and occurring within these spaces. I would claim that Armitage’s assessment of accelerated circulation, and the way new technologies make play complicit in the techno-utopian endeavour of speed, is crucial for understanding the larger ethical issues surrounding serious games. It is helpful at this point to look at Paul Virilio’s and Jacques Derrida’s work because this helps us understand the complicity of the aesthetics of interactive and visually oriented gaming technologies in speed-elitism. In “Cyberwar, God, and Television,” Paul Virilio talks about the simulation industry’s function of “exposing [one] to the accident in order not to be exposed to it” (322). What is according to him ‘accidented’ through the virtualisation of accidents and violence, for instance in video-games, is reality itself. This ‘accident of reality’ that virtuality brings about, argues Virilio, is due to the fact that simulation technologies fragment space through their property of instantaneous connection with previously far-away places. The hallmark of this fragmentation is therefore that it brings about an intensification of forms of in- and exclusion through actual disconnection. Eventually, there will be “two realities: the actual and the virtual” (323), and I would claim that consequently the privileged speed-elite will be able to live in the illusion of engaging with social reality that the virtual grants, at the cost of the (s)lower classes who will suffer the social and ecological effects of the accidents of virtualisation. The illusion of mastery for Virilio consists in the sense of the “incorporation of the world within oneself” that “real time technologies permit” (328) due to their militaristic compulsion that seeks to “reduce the world to the point where one could possess it” (329). I maintain that these statements spell out exactly the function and logic of serious gaming. Virilio elaborates the idea of the ‘museum of accidents’ later in his infamously apocalyptic “The Museum of Accidents.” His evaluation of certain visual simulation technologies as ‘museums of accidents’ and in particular in how these accidents involve the increasing stratification of individuals within a new global imperative of speed, resonates well with Jacques Derrida’s work on the ‘archiving’ properties of new technologies and their implications. In Monolingualism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin, Derrida parallels the concept and the technique of memory and archiving with these new technologies. He argues that the tragedy of the disappearance of various cultures calls forward a desire in the R&D community – like teachers and developers of serious games – to prevent this from happening by using the immense possibilities of presentday archiving technologies. However, he cautions that this scientific quest to rescue through archiving languages and cultures from going extinct due to ongoing globalisation processes, once more presupposes that cultures and peoples are pre-given static entities, or simple identities, that can then be simply ‘stored’. Moreover, it falsely presupposes that archiving technologies are neutral tools, as well as that the ideology behind this archiving desire is a universal or neutral one. But since the very technicity of archiving is one that is already entangled with the same dominant culture that archives, the necessary translation or recognition of materials fit for archiving will have as its logical parameters this dominant culture. This kind of messianistic desire, as much as the quest for understanding the other (or rather, the claim that one does empathise with and understand the other), is therefore actually a violent, neocolonialist, and possessive sort of encapsulation. Similarly, the well-intended pedagogical aim to ‘salvage otherness’ from the tragedy of disappearance under globalisation works completely in accordance with that very tragedy. One could compare this well-intended encapsulation for instance with the anthropological display of artefacts of certain cultures in Western museums. It may be far more important to save actual humans than to salvage, understand, and store their perceived culture or language, and Derrida warns that the choice for one generally does not imply a choice for the other. This ‘virtual empathy’ that new simulation technologies endow, which sadly works in accordance with the ‘structural accident’ of disenfranchisement under neoliberal globalisation, is indeed present in the aesthetic of many serious games currently available. The widely praised and sympathetic game Real Lives is a good example of this. The pedagogical objective of Real Lives, as its website declares, is to “learn how people really live in other countries.” The producers maintain that Real Lives is an “empathy-building world” which will grant the students an “appreciation of their own culture and the cultures of other peoples.” The game opens with assigning a character who just got born at any place in the world to the player. Since the attribution of the character is based on actual statistical possibilities of place of birth and economic status, the character has a high propensity of being born poor in countries like India, Mexico, or in other highly populated places. During the course of the game, the player can take actions like deciding to go to school or staying home to help her/his parents, which hobbies to take up, what job to take, and so forth. The game time takes one-year leaps in which the player can see the outcome of outside events, like disease or floods, and of his or her own actions. The software shows a map of the character’s birth region and its statistics, like population density, gross annual income, currency, health standards, and etcetera. The character is also assigned traits, like happiness, athleticism, musicality, health, and so on. While the player’s actions definitely influence the health and economic status of the played character and her family, the potentially interesting part of the game lies in the fact that events and situations that are ostensibly beyond the player’s control influence the outcomes. Such a game structure potentially endows the student with a sense that simple meritocratic discourses are flawed. However, what is also obvious in Real Lives, is that the attribution based on statistical facts may very easily lead to a simplistic view of a country and its inhabitants. While India for instance surely has many poor people and girls often are not allowed to go to school, to have the student chance time and again on these representations can easily lead to the repetition of stereotypes and a failure to grasp the complexity of Indian society. More serious however is the formal technological mode of objectification and its distancing effects that the game generates. This objectification resides in how the ‘clean’ interface – the ‘flight simulator’ like visual layout on the screen with the overview of categories and character attributes, the major actions and events in the character’s life induced at the stroke of a few keys – in reality grants the player a sense of control by engaging with a machine programmed in such a way that it appears to let the student identify with and act out his or her empathy vis-à- vis a ‘real’ child in need. This discursive confusion of reality and virtuality is for instance also present in the web-game Darfur Is Dying, in which the player and virtual character get confused through the problematic claim that you can “start your experience (as a refugee)” and that it offers a “glimpse of what it is like” (emphases mine) to be a refugee. At the same time, the actual children in need on the ground disappear from the player’s radar, turning them into a distant and vague large group of ‘others’ who are effectively beyond the student’s reach of immediate responsibility. As Virilio suggests, the time spend through engaging in virtual empathy eclipses the ‘real accidents’ from the student’s view and experience. What is more, Real Lives eclipses the larger social and economical relationships between the material production and consumption of such virtual engagement and the continuous exploitation and ‘museumising’ of peoples on the brink of (social, economical, and environmental) accident, disenfranchisement, and even death. While relatively well-off youth may indulge in turning other peoples’ distress into a ‘fun’ educational game, such indulgence is precisely based on a neo-liberal structure that exploits the environment, especially of the poor, and allows for the outsourcing and feminisation of ever cheaper third-world labour. As Derrida proposed, the archiving into visual technologies of certain cultures and peoples threatened with extinction does not at all imply saving these actual people and their cultures – in fact, it may very well do exactly the opposite. Long-term minor attitudinal changes in the student notwithstanding, the disconnecting properties of the new cybernetic technologies of speed that Real Lives is part of therefore displace the effect of the producer’s and student’s good intentions and empathy into an instantaneous technocratic violence that effectively ‘plays with lives.’ Another telling example of this displacement of well-intended interactive play is the environmental game Global Warming Interactive – CO2Fx. This web-based game, funded by the United States National Science Foundation and developed by a group of people from various American consultancies and educational organisations, aims at teaching the student about the kinds of decision making involved in global warming. The game invariably starts with a map of the country of Brazil in the 1960s, and gives statistics about the carbon emission, air temperature, and general welfare of the population. The player can then control government budget expenditures for science, agriculture, social services, and development initiatives, after which the system jumps ten years into the future, generating results based on these expenditures. The game eventually ends by showing the relative increase in temperature in the virtual year of 2060, warning the player that more international cooperation is required to really tackle global warming. The major issue with Global Warming Interactive is once more that it completely obscures the relationship between the computing technology itself that allows the CO2Fx simulation, and global warming. A telling moment of this dissimulation is when the game urges the player to “switch off the television!” because television uses quite a bit of energy, while the energy consumption of the infrastructure, mode of production, student consumption, and tools that sustain the game itself is being blissfully ignored. Armitage’s claim that increasingly modes of thought, learning, and exchange are formally subsumed under capital through the new technological infrastructure certainly rings true here. The game is also a stark simplification of how government decisions affect a complex issue like climate change, and is fraught with problematic and often techno-utopian assumptions about how to tackle the climate change problem. A good example of this assumption is the recurring recommendation throughout the game to the player to spend more money on scientific research, as this expenditure supposedly promises to solve or alleviate the warming problem. The speed-elitist, humanist, and techno-utopian discourses that permeate American academia and consultancy firms are clearly reflected in Global Warming Interactive, leaving the student inculcated with a currently dominant belief system that lies precisely at the base of environmental pollution and economical disenfranchisement that urges certain groups of poor people in a country like Brazil to survive on environmentally unfriendly business solutions, like slash-burning the forests. One is also left to wonder why the game uses the country of Brazil in the first place, and not the United States – arguably the largest global polluter today. There is indeed a problematic (neo)colonialist undertone to the current one-country version of Global Warming Interactive. Extending the content of the game, as the developers seeks to do, by including more countries in the simulation, would not alleviate this problem, but would simply concur with the actual contemporary shift from previous colonialist social hierarchies into speed-elitist hierarchies. But more seriously, giving the player simulated government omnipotence through the Virilian ‘museumisation’ of the economical and social structures underlying global warming in that ‘other’ country of Brazil, grants a the player an illusion of mastering and of dealing constructively with the major ‘accident’ of climate change and its impact on the (s)lower classes while actually fuelling it. Meanwhile, player or student empathy is displaced into instantaneous networks of ever increasing neo-liberal circulation and production. Scholars like David Leonard in “’Live in your world, play in ours?’: Race, video games, and consuming the other” and Lisa Nakamura in “Race in/for Cyberspace” have in the past argued that many entertainment games contain elements of racial and gendered stereotyping allowing the gamer to engage him or herself on the basis of what Nakamura calls ‘identity tourism’ and Leonard calls ‘blackface.’ These problematic modes of (dis)identification allow the user not only to enter the game via dominant modes of representation, but also entail a form of ‘safely experiencing the other’ through cybernetic technologies, where the (imagined) other effectively becomes consumed through the high-tech prosthesis of the self. Neither Nakamura nor Leonard however elaborate how and why this element of a ‘safe prosthesis’ appears to be a central aesthetic of gaming technologies. After all, much media content suffers from stereotypical representation, and one could argue in line with Derrida’s Monolingualism of the Other that media are always prostheses to the self. I would argue that what is specific about serious gaming technologies that emerges from my interpretations of Derrida’s, Armitage’s, and Virilio’s assessments is the illusion of control by the self that these technologies facilitate, due to their element of interactive instantaneity. It is the new technologies’ aesthetic properties themselves – rather than simply a narrative and its repetition of dominant ideologies – that grant a ‘fantasy of connection, wholeness, and mastery’ through interactivity as if it was an immediate and transparent property of the gaming subject. What is therefore at work in serious games like Real Lives and Global Warming Interactive is a form of double objectification. The illusion of constructive engagement with a pressing social issue through these seemingly ‘clean’ and ‘neutral’ technologies, combined with the distancing effect brought about by these technologies from their actual (social and environmental) implications, make the gamer complicit in the neo-liberal endeavour that paradoxically precisely leads to contemporary speed-elitist disenfranchisement. In short, interactive technologies like serious games bring about a displacement of good intentions through claims of technological progress and empowerment for all. So despite (or perhaps because of) the good intentions of game designers and publishers, these games then in fact exhibit the doubling of the colonialist logic that inspired humanist narratives of progress. This doubling runs parallel to the virtualisation of learning that is taking place under neo-liberal globalisation and its speed-elitist modes of intensified in- and exclusion this shift incurs. These games can therefore, in line with Virilio’s argument, be understood as attempts at (eventually unsuccessfully) containing the accident of the real and its social repercussions brought about by these technologies of speed. To conclude, the development of serious games is implicated in what Derrida in Monolingualism refers to as a ‘disappearance’ of those cultures, idioms, and ways of being that do not conform to these tightening particular hegemonic structures of acceleration. ‘Healthy’ personhood becomes singularly understood through a restrictive and stratifying emphasis on mediated learning as more pleasurable, as well as on humanistic character traits like creativity, activity, risktaking, mediated empathy, mobility, and competitiveness, as the rhetoric in policy papers and optimistic studies also shows. Such particular valorisations are problematic because they recreate a meritocratic, masculinist, militaristic, and speed-elitist hierarchy between economically as well as otherwise diverse groups and communities within a global community which understands individuals solely in terms of active and productive citizenship. In line with this, serious games themselves can in their very form be understood as Virilian ‘museums of accident.’ This means that the virtualisation of social engagement and sense of social and environmental ‘accident control’ that these games call forward is obliquely yet intrinsically related to new modes of ‘accidenting’ material reality. This potentially disenfranchises those who are not (positively) addressed within these properties of subject-formation, and leads to increasing levels of stress and competitiveness in individuals and students as it becomes progressively more imperative for individual survival to conform to the demands of the speed-elite. Without doubt, this paper has analysed only a few serious games currently available and surely more analyses need to be conducted. I suggest nonetheless that since the problematic of speed, which gives rise to double objectification, is structurally present in all visual interactive technologies, it is by default at work in all serious games. As I suggested at the start, the pedagogical and ethical enterprise of serious gaming is therefore serious indeed, as its aesthetic properties become increasingly implicated in precisely the opposite of what serious gaming promises to help make possible – the fair, culturally diverse, and blooming society that we all want.

#### Failure to defend topical action decimates the quality of reality. Three reasons –

#### a. Fairness – it’s like, really important. I promise.

#### b. Implosive violence – we are gorged with meaning and it is killing us and only hypothetical government action can solve it!

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What hence becomes crucial to a new feminist politics of representation is to read anew the content of certain old and new media in conjunction with the new post-colonial and globalized mode of accelerated economical production of which the new media form should be taken as the main instrument and exponent. The crisis in feminist theories around media representation is therefore also indicative of the larger impasse or crisis in feminist and liberal humanist thought as such. This is because such feminism’s inability to effectuate subversion has to do with its larger assumptions around the nature of social reality and emancipation of which the idea of representation is constitutive, in particular in relation to the role of the subject of emancipation – as if the subject can ‘authentically’ represent him- or herself at all. Basing this thesis largely on the work of Baudrillard to investigate these assumptions around the feminist subject and their possible alternatives, I then claim that much contemporary feminist theory has finally failed to raise the stakes under speed-elitism – a condition of the ongoing and accelerated transmutation of signs as capital – that has become the primary ideological and material nexus under neo-liberal acceleration. This thesis agrees partly with Jodi Dean’s argument in ‘Communicative Capitalism’ that consumer technologies have usurped political activity, but disagrees on the point that this entails a de-politicization; instead, I hold that doing politics and being political are in fact essential to technological acceleration. As the high-tech exponent of Eurocentrism and the humanist utopia namely, speed-elitism is that state of affairs that fosters an oppressive sort of unity of struggles through the fantasy of allowing for radical difference and multiplicity in the sphere of media and political representation in which the politically active subject supposedly coincides with her socio-technically assigned identity. The problem with any contemporary feminist politics of identity and visibility is then that this apparent freedom of expression and signification – in short, the subjective freedom to communicate – that especially new media allow for, is mistaken for actual emancipation. But instead of emancipating, sexist as well as feminist images become all equally complicit in the violence of speed-elitism. The circulation of images seeks to render all forms of radical alterity transparent to the humanist-capitalist logic of the accelerated circulation, which simply requires the active participation by the feminist subject. In effect therefore, feminist subjectivity is turned into one among the many image-objects within the realm of media representation.

Baudrillard explicates this implosion of ‘old’ ideals of emancipation and representation into capital circulation especially in The System of Objects, where he argues that at issue is no longer simply (patriarchal) representation or (sexist) content, but an entire political economy built on a patriarchal modeling of the semiotic-economic sphere. This sphere today crucially relies on the reproduction of the ideals of identity, representation, visibility, and voice. The abundant circulation of realistically gendered images hence creates an appeal to ‘phantom collectives’ like ‘women’ or ‘feminists,’ while in actual fact those collectives are radically absent from the social (if we can speak of a ‘social’ at all.) It is for this reason that Baudrillard stresses in Radical Alterity that we should speak here of a compulsion to a ’sociality’ which is emphatically ‘no longer society (2008:43).' What is more, the general nostalgia for identity and its political attempts to ‘unearth’ it or to make it speak, are the main mechanisms for the fragmentation and individualization of persons under this economy. This situation of what Baudrillard famously calls ‘simulation’ – a general enmeshment of the fake with the real – therefore entails, he claims in ‘The Implosion of Meaning in the Media,’ a ‘recycling in the negative of the traditional institution (1994:80).' The insidiousness of such a system resides in the way it obliges, precisely in the way Joseph also outlines in Against the Romance in relation to queer activism, the production of ‘political’ content based on an illusion of ‘radical’ collective identity and desire. In terms of the production of feminist responsibility, this obligation in turn also translates itself into a call to set up ‘feminist’ content over and against ‘sexist’ content so as to indeed ‘play the ... liberating claim of subjecthood (2002:85).' Baudrillard here posits that old ways of social and political mobilization are nowadays caught in a phallic functionalism which has supplanted or come on top of phallic symbolism. Such phallic functionalism can effectively be understood as a mechanized abstraction of this symbolism, entailing in addition the mechanization of binary oppositions and ‘false’ differences for the sole purposes of technological acceleration. Under such new conditions, says Baudrillard in The System of Objects, the media’s representative content now simply appears as this form’s ‘allegory’(1996:60). This symbolic realm or realm of sexist representation constitutes moreover a proper simulacrum of power due to the fact that it simulates (sublimates) and dissimulates (conceals and renders indecipherable) the ‘true mechanism’ of power (Ibid.,60). The media form hence functions as a ‘camouflage’ by way of which ‘long-lost traditional values reappear as signs (Ibid.,62)' in order to ‘make up for the symbolic void of [phallic] power (Ibid.,54).'

#### c. Clash – Tailoring arguments to the format of switch-side deliberation promotes self-reflexive openness – that’s the best way to cause wide-scale opinion shifts over time which have absolutely no impact on the real world. Absent normative meta-consensus on procedural terms for debate that guarantee switch-side deliberative testing within mutually-understood constraints, we encourage dogmatism and group polarization. And none of that matters at all.

Artrip and Debrix 18 [Ryan E. Artrip & François Debrix, 2018, *The viral mediation of terror: ISIS, image, implosion*] Ronak

The generalized exchange of digital/viral media, on ISIS’s side or through western media networks, renders possible what we call a principle of reversal of today’s media. Reversal here is an expression of the fungibility of meanings, truths, and facts. Reversal, or the principle of reversibility of today’s digital/viral media, is not limited to what ISIS’s own media networks and image platforms seek to unleash. It is also not just about a targeted response by the west to ISIS’s viral productions of terror/horror. Again, reversal is a generalized principle of truth’s operationality; it hints at the modalities of deployment—aleatory and unpredictable as they may be—that are available for the truth-effects and truth-claims that are produced to circulate, without a referential core, throughout the global media circuitry. Take, for example, the onslaught of responses to an interview of Kellyanne Conway wherein she referenced “the Bowling Green massacre”—a fabricated terrorist event/non-event—in an apparent effort to justify Trump’s first executive order for a travel ban on seven predominantly Muslim countries in January and February 2017 (Schmidt & Bever, 2017). Conway misspoke about, misremembered, or misunderstood a 2011 occurrence in which two Iraqi citizens were arrested in Bowling Green, Kentucky and federally charged for material support of Al-Qaeda. In this iteration of what several of Trump’s advisors and spokespersons labeled an “alternative truth,” Conway claimed that the massacre was unfamiliar because it had not been widely covered by U.S. news media. Ironically, the Bowling Green Massacre soon gained widespread coverage as the media response to this “alternative event” became a spectacular (non-)event in itself. It was not long before people went to social media to circulate memes like “Never Forget Bowling Green” or to reproduce “Kennedy moment” types of expressions such as “where were you when you heard about the Bowling Green Massacre?”. One site (www.bowlinggreenmassacrefund.com) even appeared to solicit donations for a Bowling Green Massacre victims’ fund, although the link was redirected to the American Civil Liberties Union’s donation page (Seppala, 2017). A frenzy of reactions related to the “alternative event” swarmed the mediascape. These took the form of (social) media responses one would expect to find after an actual tragedy (supposing one could still think in terms of an “actual” tragedy). Yet, they also signified the non-eventness of the initially identified event/massacre. Moreover, the anti-immigrant and Islamophobic public relations function (intended or not) of Conway’s interview became an event in and of itself. But what might have been an “alternative” strategy to produce a media event such as this also underwent a profound and profuse reversal. At once, it became capable of shifting from fact to fake news, from non-event to viral media event, and from pro-immigrant ban strategy to a proliferation of viral/virulent media tactics aimed at deviating the possible ideological/policy intention behind Conway’s statement. This “alternative” terrorist event is more than a simple parody of the new “alternative fact” regime of U.S. power and its media strategies and effects. The mode in which this event/non-event unfolded online and offline was nearly identical to the mediated display of the aftermath of an “actual” terrorist event or tragedy, such as the unfortunately more and more frequent attacks on civilian lives by ISIS sympathizers in places like Barcelona, Berlin, Istanbul, London, Manchester, Nice, Paris, or Turku, among others. The Bowling Green Massacre took place primarily through the mediation of its likely absence. The non-event/alternative fact, through its imminent reversal—one minute it is fake, the next minute it is real; in one instant it is about an ISIS attack, in the next it is about the US needing to adopt aggressive immigration and anti-Muslim policies to fend off such an attack—became hyper-real by way of some of the above-mentioned memes and other digital/viral expressions of its presence, but also through ceaseless political commentary and truth politics accompanied by a frenzy of images inscribing it with meaning(s) and truth(s) (some of these images in western media at the time of the Bowling Green pronouncement were arbitrarily borrowed from previous ISIS scenes of terror/horror, also). Not unlike many reactions to beheadings by ISIS in western media, the terrorist attack and its shadow are subjected to mechanisms of potentially endless re-mediation. Thus, they are capable of (re)producing the same types of outputs, effects, and affects, including a contagion/virulence of meaning and truth. Perhaps this is, as Baudrillard might suggest, because the real of the event is always already absent, or at least rendered unknowable as a result of hyperreality. Might it be that the real of the November 2015 ISIS attacks in Paris, for example, is as inaccessible as the (un)real of the Bowling Green Massacre? By posing this question, we do not mean to be insensitive about or dismissive of the sense of loss felt by many as a result of what took place in Paris (or in any other recent terrorist tragedy). Rather, we wish to bring to the fore a puzzling yet eerily uncomfortable and disturbing commonality, the result of the principle of reversal/reversibility of media events, about contemporary modalities of mediation shared by both the event and the non-event, something that may lead to their possible indistinguishability/non-differentiation. At the moment when a terrorist attack irrupts into the western mediascape and, often, into a western cityscape too, its immediacy has already virtually disappeared. The instantaneous global mediation of such an event—driven, perhaps, by some impossible will to articulate its irreducible horror—provokes a mass desire/need to capture the atrocity. Yet it also helps to render such a capture virtually impossible. The phenomenon is caught in/by real time (media time), virulently disseminated across the global informational circulatory system, all the while exponentially amassing a collection of content in the form of news and social media commentary, visual media documenting the terror/ horror, and various other hyper-reactive inputs and outputs of networked sharing (all of this often before the violence has even ceased). Again, as we intimated in the previous section of this article, this is something that ISIS’s own images of terror/horror count on. Diffusion and, indeed, profusion, and their likely pathway onto reversal/reversibility of meanings and truths, are more urgent than precision or accuracy about ideological claims and messages. ISIS’s work gets done by taking advantage of the virality/virulence offered by the prevalent global media circuitry and by what, within and through it, the principle of reversal/reversibility (with its truth-effects, fact-checks, and meaning-claims) does to the event. Thus, suffocated by the weight of its own image reflected back, the event becomes engorged with meanings. Its reality becomes indeterminable. And, in this fourth order simulacrum (going back to Baudrillard’s theory of simulation), the media system’s own response to the image of terror is to (re)circulate it in infinite exchange, that is to say, to subject it to the constant gauntlet of semiotic profusion. The sum of effects from the (re)mediation of the violent terrorist (non-)event enables an almost cinematic proliferation of images of terror/horror also. This may explain, in part, the well-documented sentiment that the 9/11 attacks somehow appeared to be staged. Indeed, the 9/11 terrorist event itself seemed too unreal, too much “like a movie,”

as the attacks took place in (tele)- visual real time (Debrix, 2008; Rickli, 2009). Thus, what characterized the hypermediation of 9/11, as Baudrillard (2005) once remarked, was “the feeling that seizes us when faced with the occurrence of something that happens without having been possible” (p. 130). One might suggest that the choreographed or stylized (as some have argued; see Stern & Berger, 2015) effects of ISIS’s videotaped beheadings of westerners in Syria or Iraq around 2014 and 2015 may also be one of those “somethings” (perhaps “something” is a better term than event today) that “happen[ed] without having been possible.” The media operations involved in the capture, processing, and transmission of meaning via the terrorist event or image produce effects well beyond their representational functions. Thus, like terrorist attacks perhaps, they explode the event’s meaning/truth into image-fragments scattered throughout a global mediascape of interminable and indeterminable exchange, throughout the global media circuitry. Image fragments, the “something” of a terrorist event as we suggested above, are “upvoted,” “retweeted,” and “status updated” on the same networked interfaces as cat memes, online TV series and films, YouTube videos, or corporate advertising. Images of mediated terror and horror, radically abstracted from what little originality or immediacy of the event might have been possible in the first place, become globally fungible, fused and confused with all other types of digitally and virally mediated images. The irruption of the terrorist attack/act/fact is reduced to a series of infinitely reversible yet still exchangeable/distributable meanings and images that are folded into the very functions and processes of the west’s globally mediatized (and mediatically globalized) meaning and value systems. This is perhaps what the principle of reversibility of the “event” (and its truth-effects) is meant to achieve: an effort to flood the system to the point of the collapse of meaning/ truth. Reversibility and oversaturation feed each other’s energies.

#### The topical version of the aff solves all their offense – the only option is a radical mimicry of the forms of the system, one that accelerates them to the point of their obvious vacuity. Fatal theory seeks to restore the symbolic space of mystery by operating in the margins, issuing the ironic force of the object in lieu of mastery of it. The will to transparency in language and learning is what makes the university a system of control, meaning that our only choice can be to make enigmatic what is far too clear – we must infuse education with symbolic exchange, breaking open the determinism of language and penchant for falsifiability that grounds political violence. Our paradoxical politics dwells in the poetic aporia of hyper-commodification, issuing signs against signs in a bitter but happy duel with reality as such

Pawlett 13 (Dr. William Pawlett, Senior Lecturer, University of Wolverhampton, *Violence, society and radical theory: Bataille, Baudrillard, and contemporary society*, Classical and contemporary social theory, 2013, Ashgate Publishing, p. 33-35)

Symbolic Exchange and Death begins with a remarkably strident and politically radical preface: it declares that symbolic exchange is the only effective means of challenging or defying the capitalist system at a fundamental level. The capitalist system, for Baudrillard, is a vast and insidious system of control, adept at neutralising critique and political contestation. Critique may be neutralised by suppression or mis-representation, but increasingly critique is assimilated as commodity and as information/data through electronic solicitude. Taking its place within the general information overload, critical thought becomes just another link on the home page of the sort of person who ‘likes’ critical thought, one of your endless options on a Kindle or something you are made to read on an unpopular module during a university degree. That is, critical thought does not succeed in challenging the capitalist system; the cheap and abundant availability of works of critical thought, on Amazon for example, not only provides profits to a tax-dodging mega-corporation, it also demonstrates (or rather, simulates) the openness, tolerance and freedoms of the consumer capitalist system.

How does symbolic exchange embody a greater or more successful defiance? Taking up Mauss’s notion of gift exchange as a concept “more radical than Marx’s or Freud’s”, Baudrillard insists that symbolic exchange does not merely describe the traditional practices of certain archaic cultures but is also “taking place here and now” (Baudrillard 1993a: 1). According to Baudrillard, symbolic exchange “haunts” capitalist social relations, it is present in them (in the sign – the medium of exchange) and it “mocks” these structural significations “in the form of their own death”. To understand what Baudrillard might mean by this it is important to stress that symbolic exchange is not a concept to be deployed as critique, symbolic exchange is, in itself, the practice of defiance; it is the living reversal of the system’s order. Symbolic exchanges, in Baudrillard’s sense, are the practice or act of reversal of the system’s priorities and values and so, in this sense, spell death for the system: not ‘real’ but symbolic death and symbolic death is more fundamental and humiliating than ‘real’ death. It is the enormity and reach of the system that makes it so vulnerable, like a much larger opponent being thrown by the momentum of their own weight in martial arts. The system is eminently vulnerable because it is built upon the sense of its own invulnerability, and specifically on its sense of irreversibility: the irreversibility of rationality, of progress, of (Western) dominance, the irreversibility of technological advancement. Given these conditions, according to Baudrillard, even a small or “infinitesimal” injection of reversibility can threaten the entire edifice; the system has no defences against symbolic reversion while it is more than capable of neutralising a frontal attack. Such reversions, the reversion of all the system’s ‘gifts’ include: the reversion of power in the sudden, unanticipated defiant acts of the apparently weak; the reversion of technological supremacy in the breakdown or computer virus; the reversion of rationality in the experience of the irreducible irrationality of rationality; the reversion of official meanings and sense into nonsense and mockery; the reversion of control in catastrophic failures. The effect of symbolic reversibility then consists in sudden, catastrophic reversals suffered by power and by the powerful which reveal, perhaps momentarily, the system’s deep vulnerability.

Baudrillard’s position on symbolic exchange is not to be confused with the strategies of the Situationists, though he remained sympathetic towards this movement with which he was involved in the 1960s (Baudrillard 2004a: 15-20). An egg or custard flan thrown in the face of someone powerful and captured by the same media channels which the powerful usually dominate, can be far more effective in countering power than an unwieldy political statement. However, if the Situationists sought meaningful spaces for self-assertion in the gaps, lapses and dead zones of the capitalist system, Baudrillard’s approach is quite distinct. It seeks the setting in motion of a chain reaction or a chain failure through the rippling effects of symbolic humiliation by counter-gift or potlatch. The counter-gift may well be more effective when it is immediate, unplanned, or more specifically when it is not the result of subjective desires and considered beliefs – which can generally be accommodated by the system through simulation. One example might be the sudden, unexpected haranguing of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher by an elderly lady in 1983. Yet, this example does not really capture the sudden escalation that is involved in placing one’s life and death as a stake against the system. The tragic suicide in December 2012 of a nurse, Jacintha Saldanha, who worked at the private hospital in London favoured by the British royal family and was tricked into revealing information about a royal by two ‘journalists’ working for a Australian radio show, captures something of this fatal escalation. She had been humiliated by the journalists, yet her suicide vastly escalated the stakes and re-directed the humiliation back at the journalists, the media and wider society, generating a truly devastating, ‘potlatching’ humiliation of the journalists responsible (who seemed to crumble inwards), it further weakened the reputation of the so-called ‘free’ press and also brought to a close the British royal family’s ‘bounce’ in popularity after the royal wedding, jubilee and the London Olympics. Each of these powerful interests suffered an immediate reversion of their standing, a symbolic death ; and although the British media partially succeeded in limiting these symbolic effects to the designated sacrificial scapegoats consisting of the two journalists, the fundamental nature of the sacrificial or symbolic sphere became, temporarily, brutally obvious.

In a sense we could say that the system cannot suffer a ‘real’ death in any case, not only because it is not a discrete, finite organism but because, in Baudrillard’s terminology, it is already dead, it has no genuine life or vitality and is kept alive only by its life support systems of simulation. The vampiric nature of capitalism was, of course, already a prominent feature of the Marxist critique (Marx Capital Vol. 1). For Baudrillard, the capitalist system does not only draw the life-blood of its exploited workers, it condemns its citizen-consumers to a life-less survival, a living-on in a state of humiliation and dependence, a ‘life’ that is shaped by the system, a life that is made to seem a gift of the system. Though suicide is expressly forbidden by both religious and secular law, that is the system exerts ownership over our death as well as our life, the point of biological termination does represent the absolute limit of the system’s control. Given these conditions the only fundamental strategy of defiance, for Baudrillard, is to reverse this humiliation, to refuse the ‘gifts’ and imprecations, to reverse this derisory life through a symbolic death hurled back at the system. This may take the form of the reversal of the poisonous gifts of consumer goods and information through a greater counter-gift of “hyper-conformity”: the absorbing of anything and everything the system gives while refusing the proper use of these ‘gifts’. One example given by Baudrillard is obesity, the indiscriminate absorption of food to a degree that becomes a social problem; this involves a (literally) internal revolt against the cult of physical fitness and the body beautiful, a rejection of the injunction to compulsory sexuality and sexual enjoyment (Baudrillard 1990b: 27-34). A further example is the reversal and cancellation of the overload of information through its spontaneous “poetic dispersal” into paradox and ever greater uncertainty: only in the correct dosage does information aid understanding, in excess it creates an absolute uncertainty. These forms of internal reversal reveal the ambivalence hidden within the system. It is not ‘real’ (or biological) death, nor ‘real’ violence, which has the power to challenge the system, it is death as symbolic form which is excluded from the system, and it is the symbolic death through the reversion of its systems which may be re-introduced into the system to subversive and fatal effect.