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#### We begin our story with a requiem for the battlefield:

#### Until the 15th century, the pinnacle of ranged combat in Europe was the crossbowman. During the Great Italian Wars it was replaced by the *arquebusier*, an infantryman armed with one of the earliest handguns. Its arrival precipitates the expansion of the battlefield, as the range of guns far exceeded that of crossbows at the time. By the conclusion of the Italian Wars their adoption was widespread across Europe. Warfare was changed forever.

#### A question arises from the advent of the *arquebus*, demanding an answer: when one can target from anywhere, do the limits of the battlefield simply expand, or disappear entirely?

#### The story of war is always the story of its disappearance and reappearance – combat is no longer fought on a stable battlefield but is dispersed by its own logistical planning and systems of targeting. War is no longer an event, but the absence of such – real violence subsumed by its own image.

Öberg ‘19

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If we look closely, we see that the real world begins, in the modern age, with the decision to transform the world, and to do so by means of science, analytical knowledge and the implementation of technology – that is to say that it begins, in Hannah Arendt’s words, with the invention of an Archimedean point outside the world (on the basis of the invention of the telescope by Galileo and the discovery of modern mathematical calculation) by which the natural world is definitively alienated. This is the moment when human beings, while setting about analyzing and transforming the world, take their leave of it, while at the same time lending it force of reality. We may say, then, that the real world begins, paradoxically, to disappear at the very same time as it begins to exist. (Jean Baudrillard, *Why Hasn’t Everything Already Disappeared?*)

Antoine Bousquet’s excellent and much anticipated book *The Eye of War: Military Perception from the Telescope to the Drone* traces how the history of the rationalisation of vision and the mathematisation of space during the Renaissance have enabled an ever expanding martial gaze. Herein the reader, among many things, gets an in-depth look at the changing fields of military perception and the subsequent attempts to hide from its view. As the author notes, this development leads towards the dispersal and disappearance of the battlefield in its traditional sense. In this intervention, I would like to put forward a complementary view of the battlefield in relation to the trajectory traced by the author. This view can be summarised as an insistence that from the end of the 18th century and onwards, the traditional battlefield starts to disappear as it is operationalised through military doctrines, planning, and conduct. Moreover, as a direct consequence, the battlefield reappears, refracted through military attempts to model space and time. Below I attempt to sketch out this dual process of disappearance and reappearance by engaging with the history of the military imaginary which both sees and targets, and which arguably corresponds to that martial gaze of which the book speaks so well.

As *The Eye of War* illustrates, often through fantastic pictures and drawings from historical times, the introduction of new weapon-systems and their social interpretation influence the possibility of targeting and the remits of the battlefield. Historically, we may perhaps argue that varying conceptions of the battlefield have been part of warfare for as long as there has been strategic dispositions in war, evident particularly in attempts to connect tactical means with strategic ends. At times such connections have been drawn on spatially and temporally demarcated battlefields. However, at other times, we find examples of how the conception of the battlefield challenges such remits. For example, in medieval warfare when a strategy of attrition was employed to starve an opponent, the target was crops and the tactics was to put your army in the field, aggressively devastate the countryside, and live off the land. Here the battlefield expands and the target shifts from the enemy soldier to the milieu in which a system of production is established. Or when the strategy was one of plunder, the target was likely to be a poorly protected enemy fortress and the tactics assaulting its walls and exciting pay, while avoiding surrounding armies through manoeuvre. Consequently, the attempt to operationalise the tactical means into strategic ends, that is, the attempt “to target”, potentially constitutes and challenges the remits of the battlefield.

That said, the characteristic of the classical battlefield was often a combination of disparate units, tactical conducts, and weapon-systems in gradual transition. One such transition during the Great Italian Wars (1494-1559) between two types of “targeteers”: the crossbowman and the arquebusier, is captured in Charles Oman’s classical work History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century. Oman (quoting Gascon Montluc) writes as follows regarding the French army:

Arquebusiers were known, but there were very few of them in the early years of the war: it was only in the second generation that the arquebus superseded the cross-bow. Montluc remarks that in 1523, when he was ensign in the company of Monsieur de la Clotte, he had only six arquebusiers with him, and they were all deserters from the Spanish army. ‘Encore en ce temps la il n’y avait point d’arquebusiers parmi notre nation’. He then proceeds to remark that he wishes that the arquebus had never been invented. ‘Would to God that this unhappy weapon had never been devised, and that so many brave and valiant men had never died by the hands of those who are often cowards and shirkers, who would never dare to look in the face those whom they lay low with their wretched bullets…’ The day had gone by when a certain commander used to order that quarter should never be given to men carrying firearms, but they were still hated and despised, and it took some time to teach French generals that they must rather be encouraged, and introduced on the largest scale possible.’

This quote illustrates the shift from when the arquebus was rare and firearms were seen with hatred and contempt, towards a gradual acceptance of “their wretched bullets”, until we reach the point where their use was encouraged as part of all major armies. Beyond the fact that methods of warfare change due to the introduction of new weapon systems, this historical example illustrates an important aspect of the constant contestation of the traditional battlefield. The arquebusier doing the targeting (and thereby efficiently killing “so many brave and valiant men”) is present at the field of battle and at the same time hated, accepted, and encouraged. That is, the character of the battlefield is negotiated through the direct relationship between targeteer and target and their corresponding tactical means.

Arguably, such negotiation between targeteer and target changes drastically in character from the Napoleonic wars and onward. With the risk of simplifying matters, we may say that from the medieval times up to the 18th century, the battlefield was characterised by a gradual homogenisation of units and their array. From a situation where warfare was dominated by disparate units and weapon systems, we move towards standardised infantry and cavalry based units and the use of firearms and bayonets. This is a homogenisation that mirrors the rise of modern society in a more general sense. However, it is not until the next century, with the French Grande Armée, particularly due to the administrative care of Lazare Carnot (1753-1823) and the military thinking of the likes of Comte de Guibert (1743-1790) that the military imaginary starts to view the battlefield as a consequence of military analysis and planning. That is, as an operational model. As is well known, the operational dimension of warfare comes up in part as a result of the levée en masse, responding to practical needs to oversee and manage a system of national mobilization with the training and movement of large-scale units. Technological innovations such as the railroad and the telegraph among others, also helped ushering warfare into this new era. It is from this time onward that the battlefield expands through logistics, new intelligence, new command structures, and the administrational machinery of which the most obvious examples are the improved staffs and corps and the divisional system.

While the culminating battle of the Napoleonic wars, Waterloo, was fought at a battlefield where 140,000 [soldiers] men and 400 guns were crammed into an area of roughly 3,5 miles, the latter half of the 19th century becomes characterised by the dispersal and implosion of the battlefield. As Bousquet has directed our attention to in his work, after the birth of modern warfare the battlefield dissolves due to the increased range of weapons systems. Its disappearance is also facilitated by how the military logistics of perception conditions the appearances of targets, particularly through how the “eye of war” manages to move from the commander occupying a high-point next to the field of battle, to being facilitated by balloons, binoculars, aerial reconnaissance, satellites, algorithms, and cloud computing. It is as part of this process we eventually reach the contemporary era where targeting is characterised by polar inertia, as targets arrive as digital images from anywhere on the globe in front of a stationary targeteer. However, I would like to argue that, parallel to this, there is a corresponding process taking place, which erases and remodels the battlefield as a result of the military disposition that is born with the operational dimension of warfare.

To grasp this disposition and its consequences we need to ponder the fact that it is no coincidence that the operational dimension emerges at precisely the time when the traditional battlefield is starting to disappear. As The Eye of War outlines, global targeting is enabled by a logistics of perception. However, the demand for maps and images as well as the attempts to make sense of the battlefield arguably receives its impetus and frame of reference from elsewhere. It finds its nexus in standard operating procedures, regulations, instructions and manuals, military working groups, administrative ideals, organisational routines, and bureaucratic rituals. And, as the battlefield is managed, coded, and homogenised, it simultaneously starts to become an external point of reference, enacted through operational analysis and planning far from the battlefield itself.

Let us not forget here that “to analyse” literally means “to dissolve”, as the perception of the operational analyst subsumes the field of battle into compartmentalised objects and relations. Moreover, as Carl von Clausewitz reminds us, operational planning is necessarily a reductive enterprise. That is, it subtracts from the world, when reducing this said world to a theater of war. We may therefore say that the battlefield receives its force of reality through operational analysis and planning and appears as an “alienated” entity dominated by range, trajectories and a territory coded through a military grammar. Nevertheless, it seems that when the battlefield reappears as a concept or scenario, that is, as a model, it also starts to vanish. Therefore, it is arguably in the development of operational models of warfare: the doctrinal handbooks, the logistical apparatus, and the staff meetings on what to target, we find a corresponding erasure of the battlefield.

If we return to the introductory quote, particularly to the insistence that the real world begins with the invention of an Archimedean point outside the world, we may say that it is with the introduction of the operational level of war that military practice and theory find and substantiate its own external point of reference. It finds it at the start of the Napoleonic wars, in the introduction of an operational military machinery which gradually starts to think warfare independently of the army in the field. It substantiates it through a code that strives to make war an efficient and integrated version of its own programmatic execution. This code outlines how to arrange and rearrange, compose, coordinate, and manufacture targets and effects. It also works as a method through the tasking and employment of tactical units, the translation of rules and diagrams into select weapon systems, and the integration of protocols into a concentration of force, making fires and bomb drops preplanned responses to problem situations.

In the final chapter of The Eye of War we encounter a battlefield that is spatially and temporally boundless, what the author calls a “Global Imperium of Targeting”. What relationship between targeteer and target characterises this limitless battlefield? I will end by briefly introducing two alienating reference points that I have discussed elsewhere: the operational environment and the battle-rhythm as examples of a military modelling of space and time.

According to the military imaginary, the operational environment consists of: ‘the composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of military capabilities’ (see military doctrine). This term imposes a set of spatial relations that are conditioned through military concepts and functions: logistical routes and lines of communication, the range of weapon-platforms, perceived centres of gravity, the margining of targets, their weaponeering, and so forth. This spatial concept transmits relations through reductive doctrinal denominators such as “target-sets”, “undesirable systems” or “future end-states,” often visualised through PowerPoints.

Corresponding to the remits of the operational environment, the ‘battle rhythm’ is the ‘combination of procedures, processes, and actions which facilitates extended continuous operations’. It is synchronised zulu-time: a coordinated 24 hour universal clock time enabling warfare to endure in real-time and coordinate fires and manoeuvres into tactical effects. The battle-rhythm is anticipatory, relating to ideas of dynamic actions, particularly in so called dynamic targeting. But it is also pre-planned as it forecasts and codes future time to shape its unfolding and becoming in accordance with the preparation and execution of warfare.

So, as the traditional battlefield and its conceptualisation and contestation by crossbowmen and arquebusiers alike disappears due to the operationalisation of a martial gaze, what reappears is an abstract model of military space/time. This model perceives of the battlefield as that which facilitates military capabilities as extended operations as it targets for action. This means, I think, that in the Global Imperium of Targeting that The Eye of War portrays, the soldiers embodying the martial gaze assumes the roles of managers over our world as if it were this abstract and homogenous space/time. This points to a world that is indeed, a ‘battlespace in potentia’ watched over by ‘glacially indifferent machines’, as the author so eloquently puts it. However, it also points to the role of the military imaginary which oversees this gaze and which refines the modelling of space and time to impose a point of view on that which it sees.

In short, the traditional battlefield may be dead, but we continue to live under the eye of its operational model.

#### The space race is the final chapter in this story of warfare– bombarded with fetishized media images of the space-age military and social systems of tomorrow, military logistics has finally solved the problem of risk by encircling the globe itself. After all, if all the world is a battlefield, why not remove yourself from it entirely?

#### Ecological failings have forced the algorithmic data mill to search for new domains to terraform – Mars and asteroids are all that we have left – these neo-colonial paradigms instill us with the drive to fly, to render mappable and transparent the stars and to grid the sky in order to achieve total visibility – thus, warfare becomes as boundless as the cosmos, a total genocide of alterity expanding infinitely to the very universe’s limits.

Grove ‘19

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In this emerging epoch of capitalism, we will witness en masse and at the end of the barrel of a gun Glen Coulthard’s reworking of “accumulation by dispossession” as rare earth minerals, dwindling petroleum supplies, and water all become significantly more important than human labor. Coulthard’s point in Red Skin, White Masks, which we should take quite seriously, is that “primitive accumulation” was never primitive; it was ongoing particularly in settler societies, and it is now accelerating. In this diagram of resource- rather than labor- intensive capitalism, we end up with Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics, or the affirmative and productive industrialization of death and annihilation.

Contra Balakrishnan’s hope of falling profits, the liquidating rather than proletarizing of populations can still produce capital accumulation. This can be accomplished by selective displacement and murder such that new infrastructures for flows like oil pipelines or access to the rare earth minerals necessary for technological transformation become available to support cognitive economies less constrained by labor. What populations remain, driven mad by anxious consumption, are sufficient to maintain adequate consumer demand for increasing profits. In this diagram of capital accumulation, we have dispossession and platform transformations for new means of consumption, from the internet, to the internet of things, to the projected internet of spiritual machines—it stacks platform on top of platform. In what Benjamin Bratton has called the black stack or stack geopolitics, the successor of Donald Trump is the slicker and more sophisticated Elon Musk or Peter Thiel, for whom inventing gadgets and electric cars is already being projected out to interplanetary schemes for asteroid mining, Martian colonization, and a universal income guarantee for the few who will follow the intergalactic pathway of  human development and commerce.

What we can already see in the excitement over Donald Trump by the alt- right wing of tech enthusiasts is precisely this ruthless disregard for human life in the name of getting things done. And this has been a long time coming. In 1989 Félix Guattari had this to say about Donald Trump: “Just as monstrous and mutant algae invade the lagoon of Venice, so our television screens are populated, saturated, by ‘degenerate’ images and statements. In the field of social ecology, men like Donald Trump are permitted to proliferate freely, like another species of algae, take over districts of New York and Atlantic City; he ‘redeveloped’ by raising rents, thereby driving out tens of thousands of poor families, most of whom are condemned to homelessness, becoming the equivalent of the dead fish of environmental ecology.”45 We should repeat Guattari’s social ecological judgment of Trump for Musk, Bill Gates, and others whose toxic ecology is now pursuing an interplanetary scale of conquest.

Peter Sloterdijk, Vilem Flusser, and Lewis Mumford, in response to the cybernetic zeal for the future, refer to what they call posthistory. Each of these thinkers is attempting to understand a culture that is built around the idea that a particular race of humans, moderns, has escaped Marx’s warning that “men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please.”46 Posthistorical humans believe that they do have the power to determine their own circumstances. Posthistory then is not meant in a Hegelian way. For each of these thinkers, the post marks an aspiration and state of exhaustion that ensues from the failure to make good on its promise. Euro- American world making— terraforming— has reached a limit with the seeming permanence of global interconnectivity and programming. As Flusser puts it, moderns now face the problem of programming where the capacity to program returns each of us to the question of who or what programs us. The aspiration of totality eats itself but continues anyway. Even the dark spots that periodically emerge in the world without exteriority are at best interruptions— wars, catastrophic accidents, acts of nature. Seceding, much less disappearing, is no longer possible as the globe is currently enacted and perceived. There is nowhere to hide. “History brings about the catastrophe of local ontologies.”47 Mumford adds to this formulation the concern that the state of exhaustion and the presumption of a programmed order simultaneously inflates the hubris for global- scale management and creates a sense that there is nothing to be lost or gained as everything is transferable, malleable, useful or not. For Mumford, with the eclipse of animism and the sacred, we also lose the capacity to understand value beyond instrumentality. In this sense, we are done with history because what does happen is not historical, not an event; everything is modulation. Therefore, for all three thinkers it is possible that we are not a “we” in any meaningful moral sense but that we are nonetheless stuck: a global condition without a global people.

Those not completely alienated by the state of affairs swing to the other extreme, hell- bent on renewed expansion. Elon Musk’s desperation to take globalization on the road to Mars is the result of the same stuckness, but he rallies resources for a vicious exit strategy. Just as those ground up, lost at sea, or stolen for labor were, Mars is the horizon of possibility for another great age of exploration. Whether anyone makes it to Mars or if most of us are left behind is secondary to the redoubling of Euro- American terraforming.

Posthistory, stuckness, dreams of planetary and species transcendence— this is what I have in mind for this book’s subtitle, “Geopolitics at the End of the World.” Transcendence in this industrial and instrumental register seeks another savage ecology, a new planet to saturate, another surface to render spatial at the cost of regions and places of contour and difference. Whether life is discovered on Mars or not, the aspirations of colonization are dreams to once again transform “lifeworlds into locations.”48 For Sloterdijk, the global approach transplanted from one planet to the next still captures the difference between the metaphysical age of antiquity and the modern age in the geometric difference between ascending and flying. Ascending was the imagination of escape velocity—to leave Earth and continue on and away. Flying requires mapping and following a surface, making a planet by flattening the planet epistemologically. Even those who wish to ascend to Mars actually want to fly, that is, resurface another sphere rather than cast off into the mysterious void of space. Mars is desired because it is useful; it is what is next. Mars is an effort to postpone the end rather than begin again. And so the pursuit of a savage ecology continues well beyond the contradictions of terrestrial capitalism.

If neither the planetary limits nor the limits of capital accumulation hedge against capitalism’s expansion, then we cannot take seriously Moore or Balakrishnan’s even half- hearted hope that contradiction will produce “grave diggers,” or that civil wars may return to fracture capital.  There will be grave diggers, but they will be automated by an algorithmic hunger for which there is no satiation. To put it another way, civil society, humans, and the political are— for a capitalist metabolism run on minerals and regulated by lethal automated force— luxuries, not necessities. The cozy relationship of Google and the state, as well as the vast network of joint ventures between defense departments and technology firms around the world, suggests that the state has new forms of innovation and control that do not require either Hegel’s or Marx’s visions of social order and social control.49 The horror show of the next  century, if not derailed,  will be entrepreneurs and resource tyrants all the way down. In a world of necropolitical accumulation by dispossession, the reproduction of capitalist social relations may matter in the short run but not significantly in the longer term.

Labor automation in both economic and security sectors, vastly augmented by heuristic machine learning, can quite literally live off itself. This is assuming “the self” can continue to expand to asteroids and nearby planets. The limits and the catastrophe that we have been reduced to hoping for may be temporally and spatially out of reach. For those in what McKenzie Wark has called the vectoralist class, there is no catastrophe.50 The ecological population growth apocalypse is an opportunity for an upgrade. The vectoralist class, or those for whom interest, and benefit is not directly limited by the logic of capital, is even smaller than the dwindling size of the labor class. Further, unlike labor, they are better prepared for adaptation and reinvention than Marx would have suspected possible in the nineteenth century. As such, Peter Thiel and other paleo- accelerationists who funded and now celebrate the election of Donald Trump are coldly indifferent to the possibility of race wars, ecological collapses, and territorial displacement.

#### The guns fire, targeted by space-based tracking systems, fully autonomous and too quick to comprehend. Resources are accumulated by space-faring mega-corporations to fuel infinite expansion of infinite violence. The war fights itself. How can you possibly fight back?

#### When the whole world is a target, where can you hide?

#### This is the violence of the simulacrum, the absolute liquidation of Otherness in the name of transparency – a spectacular genocide against alterity, conducted in the name of nothing at all.

Guignion ‘18

[David, M.A. at the University of Western Ontario. 2018. “The Mirror of Humanism; or, Towards a Baudrillardian Posthuman Theory”, <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7739&context=etd>] pat

Baudrillard’s two books on war, The Gulf War did not take place and The Spirit of Terrorism propose that war has been engulfed by the mass media. According to Rick Roderick, in his eight-part lecture series: The Self Under Siege: Philosophy in the Twentieth Century, Baudrillard wanted to cover the Gulf War on “CNN where it would really happen” (Roderick), because as the “media promote the war, the war promotes the media, and advertising competes with the war” (Baudrillard, Gulf War 31). For Baudrillard, the degree to which these wars were broadcast over television networks attests to a transformation of the nature of war itself. As he explains, “when it has been turned into information, [war] ceases to be a realistic war and becomes a virtual war” (41). The system of war is not the only one affected by this turn toward virtuality. Those fighting, if on the side of the invader, find a great deal of safety in the war zone itself. As Baudrillard writes, “A simple calculation shows that, of the 500,000 American soldiers involved during the seven months of operations in the Gulf, three times as many would have died from road accidents alone had they stayed in civilian life. Should we consider multiplying clean wars in order to reduce the murderous death toll of peacetime?”

(69). Still, Baudrillard’s remarks overlook the enormous casualties suffered by the losing side. In this case, the term “war” does not capture the essence of these military movements as well as the term “invasion,” indicative of a form of neo-colonialism. The transformation of these wars from the domain of reality to that of the virtual performs a dual function for the neo-colonial efforts of the West. First, there is a virtual violence, a violence of the image. In this operation the real events of these wars are substituted for the image of these wars: “The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption” (Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism 27). This process not only replaces the real with the virtual, but filters which images and messages are distributed. The images distributed operate to convince the viewer of the reality of these wars, or, more precisely, their virtual reality. Second, these wars function to destroy the other, virtually and symbolically. The West’s drive toward global hegemony “is a giant project meant to symbolically liquidate all values through consensus or force” (Baudrillard, The Agony of Power 67).

Global power, for Baudrillard, “is the power of the simulacrum” (66). Under the code of the simulacrum, where people are reduced to the status of cybernetician, the other poses an avid challenge to global hegemony. Global hegemony responds to this roadblock by declaring war on “the alterity of the other” by either converting or annihilating it (Baudrillard, Gulf War 37). The simulating machine dabbles in the affairs of reality when zones of resistance that do not subscribe to its oppressive logic emerge. In many ways, Baudrillard’s theorization of war bridges the gap between simulation and reality, pointing to a milieu—the war machine—that simulation mobilizes in the service of eradicating difference.

Baudrillard’s writing on war points to the erasure and eradication of those points on the globe that are outside of the purview of “our truth” where “nothing is true unless it is desecrated, objectified, stripped of its aura, or dragged onstage” (Agony 67). The West strives to make everything seen, everything tangible, everything real through the “museification” (Baudrillard, The Vital Illusion 40) of the other. The virtuality of the scenes of war exist to convince the viewer that the war is real; that there is something to be fought over, as opposed to neo-colonial genocide. The role of the museum in this process is, in a sense, to deliver the final blow to the objects of this neo-colonial effort. Those affected literally die from the bombardment of artillery strikes and drone strikes, but they also die “from being transplanted from a slow order of the symbolic, master over putrefaction and death, to an order of history, science, and museums, our order, which no longer masters anything, which only knows how to condemn what preceded it to decay and death and subsequently to try to revive it with science” (Baudrillard, Simulacra 10).

#### Thus, a final question arises: How do you oppose war when war opposes itself?

#### When every move is tracked and there’s nowhere to run, why not stand still?

#### If the battlefield disappears, why not disappear with it?

#### “I have no message. I am not a messenger” – instead of attempts to resuscitate war’s rotting corpse, you should instead affirm a deeper “No” not just to warfare, but the very ordering that produces it.

***\*advocacy text***

Öberg ‘14

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Baudrillard is often read as being ‘neither for, nor against’ war, as his writing tends to question the possibility of reality rather than how it is conceived (Baudrillard 1995: 58, 67, see also Shapiro 2014 in this special issue). But perhaps we can find, in his notion of ‘fractal war’, a ‘deeper No’, not to war as such but to the virtual ordering of past, present and future consensus which contemporary war obscure: ‘(t)his no, which comes from the depths, should not be understood as a work of negation or of critical thought. It is simply the response of defiance against a hegemonic principle descending indifferently from a great height for the consent of the people’ (Baudrillard, 2006a). Where does this ‘no’ take us with regards to war? Perhaps we might say (with the risk of oversimplifying) that war, despite its disappearance as symbolic act due to virtualization and processing, returns as a radical challenge. This would be a war which has little or nothing to do with Clausewitzs’ “war as a continuation by other means” (or the Foucauldian reversal of this) but rather refers to a duel between a systematic and technocratic globalist challenge (often exemplified by, but never reducible to, Western interventions) and a radical refusal of this expanded as resistance and counter-violence. This duel should not be confused with a clash between the West and Islam but is rather one which potentially involves us all (Baudrillard 2010: 68-70): a duel beyond the end of war where the past, present and future of events and singularities are constantly at stake.

V. Postscript: ‘I am not a messenger’

I was fortunate enough to witness Baudrillard speak at one of his many visits to Japan. The event took place in early October 2004 in a very hot lecture hall at Waseda University, Tokyo. It was packed to the brim with students, researchers, and media, some of whom were literally hanging in from the windows to catch a glimpse. During the Q&A after the lecture Baudrillard was asked by one of the professors whether he had a message to all the young people in the audience. The professor argued that since many students were born in the 1980’s and thereby steeped in the era of virtualization which Baudrillard spent more than three decades criticizing, he might have some advice on how they should navigate the future. Baudrillard’s response to the question was swift. He simply stated ‘I have no message. I am not a messenger’ (Baudrillard cited in Tsukahara 2004: 70-71). Although Baudrillard followed this up with a lengthy discussion on the topic it was one of the most memorable parts of the lecture for me. Particularly because it would have been so easy for him to pose as the well-intending messenger by engaging with present social concerns of the students: unemployment, societal insecurities or the precarious aspects of global life. In hindsight it seems to me that his “no” was not so much a refusal to talk about the future of the students, as it was a “no” to the blackmail that the well-intended question entails: a “deeper no” directed towards the ordering of reality.

So if Baudrillard was not a messenger in that lecture hall in Waseda University what was he? One of the characteristics of Baudrillard’s thought is illustrated by this constant attempt to disengage from the issues at stake while at the same time orbiting around them, working to dissolve or displace them in return. Ryan Artrip and Francois Debrix (2014 this special issue) discuss the violence of the representation of war in relation to dissemination and proliferation and urge us to learn how to ‘recognize the symptoms’ of this representation in the very things we cherish, such as democracy and the progress of digital technology. Taking in this dual aspect of images and language they outline how each representation of war at the same time thickens the “fog of war”. Acknowledging the tension that they make explicit and at the same time ask Baudrillard for a ‘message’ (be it on war or on the future of Japanese university students) would be akin to missing the crucial insight that the response always inadvertently participates in making reality appear real (Öberg 2014 this special issue). On the other hand, what is the role of theory if it is not at the same time a message? Moreover, does not invoking Baudrillard’s critique also imply a paradox since it demands acceptance while at the same time urges us to refuse the role of messengers “simulating Baudrillard”? As Gerry Coulter put it at the ‘Baudrillard and War’ colloquium at the Swedish Defence College in Stockholm: ‘Baudrillard had no choice to be Baudrillard, but we cannot choose to be Baudrillard’. So what can we be as (Baudrillardian) theorists of war?

Perhaps the most important point of Baudrillard’s three critiques of war (outlined in this introduction) is how they aim to challenge the alleged irreversibility of contemporary imaginations of war or warfare, while refusing to reify them as real. At the end of his life, Baudrillard himself acknowledge that this was something he always had struggled with, stating that writing is ‘like trying to walk in the snow without leaving footprints’ (2007b: 125). The question ‘do we still have a theory of war after Baudrillard’, absurd as it might seem to the mainstream theorist of war, should therefore not be shrugged off too easily. What if contemporary war studies – in its fervor to explain and understand war – leaves us with the ‘rotting corpse’ of a ‘dead war’ (Baudrillard 1995: 24, 23), that not only media but also theorists do their best to revive and resuscitate? The question would then be, not what Baudrillard’s theory of war is, but what a theory of war that differs from war could possibly look like. Such ‘anti-empiricism’ might be hard to stomach for many mainstream students of war. But when listening to the former General Rupert Smith stating to public acclaim (two decades after Baudrillard) that ‘war no longer exists’ (Smith, 2008) one is left wondering if the theory of war is not already more spectral and hollow than its proponents would care to acknowledge.

#### The Role of the Judge is to be a fatal theorist.

1. We don’t have any pre/post fiat distinction.
2. Procedurals and the roj are on the same level since nothing interacts in a vacuum
3. The winner is the debater who creates a better relationship towards communication – if you prove that our theory of communication is wrong/bad you win under the roj.

#### Illusions are cool and logic sucks

Shapiro ‘17

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In other words, Trump is the candidate of the era of simulation. Invoking “the truth” against him does not work as a strategy. Trump is already more advanced than the discourse of truth. We are in a hyper-reality where there is no more truth and no more falsehood. Carl “The Truth” Williams, a former heavyweight boxing champion of the world, passed away in April 2013.

Alan Cholodenko comments: If hyper-reality was born for Baudrillard during or just after the Second World War, then there have already been several simulation-Presidents: JFK the first televisual President, Reagan the Hollywood actor and first TV show host (of the General Electric Theatre)-President. Trump takes his place in this lineage. He is the second TV show host (of The Apprentice)-President, the first live show, reality TV show CEO host become live show, reality TV show CEO host-President of the live show, reality TV show America, Inc.)

The mistake of the multitudes of journalists and editorialists like the Washington Post’s Greg Sargent is to not understand that the system of “truth and lies” is not some eternal, ahistorical or “scientifically objective” reality. It is an historically constructed cultural discourse or arrangement tied to an epoch which is finite in time. As Foucault might say, the concern with “true” and “false” is an epistème – an epistemological a priori, an expression of a specific power-knowledge constellation within an era – whose time has come and gone. The insistent belief in “truth and lies” is also embedded in the Plato-initiated “metaphysics” of the “human subject,” the subject-centered worldview, the sovereign (democratic or scientific) subject who “knows” and can therefore judge and determine when “knowledge” or a “fact” has been betrayed.

In the new epistemological system beyond “truth and lies” to which Trump is finely attuned, of which he is the master, and which liberals do not get, the object itself is the hot thing. The spotlight is on objects (conceptual not physical), and they are a relationship, an association which knows nothing of whether they are real or fake. They transcend and straddle true and false. “Things have found a way of avoiding a dialectics of meaning that was beginning to bore them: by proliferating indefinitely, increasing their potential, outbidding themselves in an ascension to the limit, an obscenity that henceforth becomes their immanent finality and senseless reason.” (Baudrillard, Fatal Strategies; p.7) Trump will change what he says on any given topic from day to day, or on any given Sunday. The liberal media will “prove him wrong” with evidence, but this demonstration will have an effect exactly the opposite than that intended upon and for the “silent majority” of half of Americans for whom they are the liars. When did this happen (when was the “Canetti point”)? Impossible to say. To know the point of origin of that would be to overstate the claims of knowledge, to violate the methodological recursivity of our awareness of being lost within the culture of simulation (as Baudrillard has taught us in his fascinating lengthy discussions of the “Canetti point,” and as Gerry Coulter has taught us, for example, in his essay on America).

When Trump said that thousands of Muslims were celebrating on rooftops in Jersey City, New Jersey on 9/11, he was right. 100% right, as he later tweeted. Within the epistemology (theory of knowledge) of the humanist-democratic subject and of truth, the alleged rooftop event of course “did not take place.” Yet in the hyper-modernist epistemology, the rhetorical and emotional power of the words invoked and the mental images evoked by Trump (the advent of hyper-imagination) carry the weight and dynamic force of the image-immersed beyond-chimerical “object” of those evil Muslim celebrators. Probably Trump saw on TV in September 2001 some cynical celebrations in the Palestinian territories. The clandestine wormhole connection between physically remote points in space is plausibly extant. In the culture of virtual images, it is perfectly OK to transpose the bin Laden-sympathetic revelers from one geographical location to another, the hyper-space of Trump’s creative memory mingled with the hyper-dimensional expanding televisual space on the interior of the flatscreen.

Fantasy is possible in a world that is still real. A fantasy could be said to be not true, some sort of illusion (in the non-Baudrillardian meaning of this word) or deception. But when images are everywhere, and they are universally exchangeable with each other, the made-up mental images become hyper-real. Which now (literally) means (hyper-means) more real than real. Meaning becomes hyper-meaning.

Would not the ubiquity of video documentation and recording devices of every kind increase the availability of truth? Whipping the cam around, looking amazing from every angle? No, the effect is just the opposite. When documentation and recording are everywhere, then they are nowhere. They cease to exist in any meaningful sense. They serve no purpose whatsoever anymore. They are pure technology fetish in the bad sense, decoupled through their excess from what they were supposed to enhance or invent. As a hybrid radical-leftist-and-mainstreamer, I do believe that there is a good side to surveillance, a deterrence of crime. But if surveillance is everywhere, then this good side no longer functions. This is the same paradoxical logic that is operative for all virtual and digital media technologies. Yes, all of these wonderful new things are available to us, but we omitted the step of thinking carefully about the appropriate measure of their application. We forgot to humanly judge this. Hybrid posthumanist and humanist. We never took seriously the great thought of Albert Camus, that in almost every area, we need to have a sense of limits (as Dominick LaCapra pointed out). Academic referentiality – which Baudrillard was opposed to – is like this too. If you overdo it, become obsessed with footnotes, then you enter into the twilight zone of hyper-referentiality and then the whole business does not function anymore. You do it because you have to do it and the original purpose is lost.

The “proof” (ha ha!) is now upon us that Baudrillard was right all along. We are now fully in the era of simulation and telemorphosis, of the New Truth of the omnipresent image (both picture-image and word-image – the multi-media of the screen having transformed written words from texts into images). The New Truth is not a lie – that would be too easy and the claim is retrograde. The New Truth institutes its own hyper-reality, which is at present our only reality. The only way to contest simulation and the New Truth would be a strategy or perspective of “taking the side of objects” (see, for example, my most recent IJBS essay, for an elaboration of this). We would have to get to know the codes which underlie and instantiate simulation and reverse them. Reversibility of the code comes from “objects” within the code which want more objecthood. Until we can start to do that, to paraphrase David Cronenberg’s Videodrome: LONG LIVE THE NEW TRUTH!

#### Radical knowledge within spaces like debate will only ever be funneled into the increasing legitimacy of the contemporary university. Instead, bet on a form of radical illusion that strays away from reality and SCREAMS

AnarchistNews 10

(“The University, Social Death, and the Inside Joke,” http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=20100220181610620)

Universities may serve as progressive sites of inquiry in some cases, yet this does not detract from the great deal of military and corporate research, economic planning and, perhaps most importantly, social conditioning occurring within their walls. Furthermore, they serve as intense machines for the concentration of privilege; each university is increasingly staffed by overworked professors and adjuncts, poorly treated maintenance and service staff. This remains only the top of the pyramid, since a hyper educated, stable society along Western lines can only exist by the intense exploitation of labor and resources in the third world. Students are taught to be oblivious to this fact; liberal seminars only serve to obfuscate the fact that they are themselves complicit in the death and destruction waged on a daily basis. They sing the college fight song and wear hooded sweatshirts (in the case of hip liberal arts colleges, flannel serves the same purpose). As the Berkeley rebels observe, “Social death is our banal acceptance of an institution’s meaning for our own lack of meaning.”[43] Our conception of the social is as the death of everything sociality entails; it is the failure of communication, the refusal of empathy, the abandonment of autonomy. Baudrillard writes that “The cemetery no longer exists because modern cities have entirely taken over their function: they are ghost towns, cities of death. If the great operational metropolis is the final form of an entire culture, then, quite simply, ours is a culture of death.”[44] By attempting to excel in a university setting, we are resigning ourselves to enrolling in what Mark Yudoff so proudly calls a cemetery, a necropolis to rival no other.  
Yet herein lies the punch line. We are studying in the cemeteries of a nation which has a cultural fetish for things that refuse to stay dead; an absolute fixation with zombies. So perhaps the goal should not be to go “Beyond Zombie Politics” at all. Writes Baudrillard: “The event itself is counter-offensive and comes from a strange source: in every system at its apex, at its point of perfection, it reintroduces negativity and death.”[45] The University, by totalizing itself and perfecting its critiques, has spontaneously generated its own antithesis. Some element of sociality refuses to stay within the discourse of the social, the dead; it becomes undead, radically potent. According to Steven Shaviro’s The Cinematic Body, “zombies mark the dead end or zero degree of capitalism’s logic of endless consumption and ever expanding accumulation, precisely because they embody this logic so literally and to such excess.”[46] In that sense, they are almost identical to the mass, the silent majorities that Baudrillard describe as the ideal form of resistance to the social: “they know that there is no liberation, and that a system is abolished only by pushing it into hyperlogic, by forcing it into excessive practice which is equivalent to a brutal amortization.”[47]  
Zombies do not constitute a threat at first, they shamble about their environments in an almost comic manner and are easily dispatched by a shotgun blast to the face. Similarly, students emerge from the university in which they have been buried, engaging in random acts of symbolic hyperconsumption and overproduction; perhaps an overly enthusiastic usage of a classroom or cafeteria here and there, or a particularly moving piece of theatrical composition that is easily suppressed. “Disaster is consumed as cheesy spectacle, complete with incompetent reporting, useless information bulletins, and inane attempts at commentary:”[48] Shaviro is talking about Night of the Living Dead, but he might as well be referring to the press coverage of the first California occupations.  
Other students respond with horror to the encroachment of dissidents: “the living characters are concerned less about the prospect of being killed than they are about being swept away by mimesis – of returning to existence, after death, transformed into zombies themselves.”[49] Liberal student activists fear the incursions the most, as they are in many ways the most invested in the fate of the contemporary university; in many ways their role is similar to that of the survivalists in Night of the Living Dead, or the military officers in Day. Beyond Zombie Politics claims that defenders of the UC system are promoting a “Zombie Politics”; yet this is difficult to fathom. For they are insistent on saving the University, on staying ‘alive’, even when their version of life has been stripped of all that makes life worth living, when it is as good as social death. Shaviro notes that in many scenes in zombie films, our conceptions of protagonist and antagonist are reversed; in many scenes, human survivors act so repugnantly that we celebrate their infection or demise.[50]  
In reality, “Zombie Politics are something to be championed, because they are the politics of a multitude, an inclusive mass of political subjects, seeking to consume brains. Yet brains must be seen as a metaphor for what Marx calls “the General Intellect”; in his Fragment on Machines, he describes it as “the power of knowledge, objectified.”[51] Students and faculty have been alienated from their labor, and, angry and zombie-like, they seek to destroy the means of their alienation. Yet, for Shaviro, “the hardest thing to acknowledge is that the living dead are not radically Other so much as they serve to awaken a passion for otherness and for vertiginous disidentification that is already latent within our own selves.”[52] In other words, we have a widespread problem with aspiring to be this other, this powerless mass. We seek a clear protagonist, we cannot avoid associating with those we perceive as ‘still alive’. Yet for Baudrillard, this constitutes a fundamental flaw:  
"at the very core of the 'rationality' of our culture, however, is an exclusion that precedes every other, more radical than the exclusion of madmen, children or inferior races, an exclusion preceding all these and serving as their model: the exclusion of the dead and of death."[53]  
In Forget Foucault, we learn the sad reality about biopower: that power itself is fundamentally based on the separation and alienation of death from the reality of our existence. If we are to continue to use this conception, we risk failing to see that our very lives have been turned into a mechanism for perpetuation of social death: the banal simulation of existence. Whereas socialized death is a starting point for Foucault, in Baudrillard and in recent actions from California, we see a return to a reevaluation of society and of death; a possible return to zombie politics. Baudrillard distinguishes himself as a connoisseur of graffiti; in Forget Foucault, he quotes a piece that said “When Jesus arose from the dead, he became a zombie.”[54] Perhaps the reevaluation of zombie politics will serve as the messianic shift that blasts open the gates of hell, the cemetery-university. According to the Berkeley kids, “when we move without return to their tired meaning, to their tired configurations of the material, we are engaging in war.”[55] Baudrillard’s words about semiotic insurrectionaries might suffice:  
"They blasted their way out however, so as to burst into reality like a scream, an interjection, an anti-discourse, as the waste of all syntatic, poetic and political development, as the smallest radical element that cannot be caught by any organized discourse. Invincible due to their own poverty, they resist every interpretation and every connotation, no longer denoting anyone or anything."[56]

#### Don’t evaluate the necessity of the resolution based off the skills and education it provides. Debate acts as a serious game that indoctrinates participants into becoming “skillful” workers that can master and visualize the globe through world order. The educational landscape of this space makes question of communication impossible. The debater thus becomes complicit in the project of the speed elite, of complete neo-liberal globalization.

Hoofd 2007 (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,” 2007)

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.’