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Moving Image as Political Tool: The impact of neoliberalism on the role of the moving image in postmodern warfare

Abstract

This research critically examines the interrelation of neoliberalism, the moving image, and postmodern warfare with the intention of determining the impact of the neoliberal influence on the increasingly important role of the moving image in postmodern warfare. Through analysis of a selection of contemporary films, this research attempts to decipher how neoliberalism is pervading culture, both in the West and abroad, and why this is important in the context of postmodern war. As image and screen-based technologies are a dominant element in contemporary culture, it is vital to understand the extent of societal manipulation delivered via these platforms to perpetuate potentially harmful political economic agendas and military incentives.

Key words: neoliberalism, post-modern warfare, warfare, moving image, moving image technologies

Introduction

This paper intends to evaluate the ramifications of the Western political establishments' conformation to the politically applied neoliberal ideology on the utility and increased dependence of moving image technology in the arena of postmodern warfare, as both a weapon and a societal tool. With a focus on the modern wars that have been the consequence of the neoliberal agenda, this paper will consider the function of the moving image within this political context, with particular emphasis on cultural control. This will allow for comments on the counteractive capacity of artists' moving image and the necessity of activating an engaged spectatorship in the face of increasingly immersive technologies and manipulative images. The intricate

interrelation of neoliberal ideology, war and the film industry is a complex subject of study, as each factor facilitates and necessitates the other. Each element is historically and developmentally interwoven, with political and economic issues being a direct effect and result of motivations in conflicts and industry, and contrariwise. Due to the impact of neoliberal ideology, it has further become increasingly difficult to distinguish between these aspects in order to study their relation, as the resulting oligarchical control has amalgamated government, war and film into one indistinguishable, powerful businesses.

American hegemonic domination of the international film industry and the country's presiding role over modern global politics and warfare certify the importance of examining the role of Hollywood and mainstream American cinema when investigating the neoliberal impact on moving image within postmodern warfare. As the U.S. government launched the post-9/11 'Global War on Terror' to initiate invasions and substantial military campaigns in various locations in the Middle East, filmic endorsement was necessary in order to mobilise public support and maintain the advantageous governmental position over a society seized by fear. Two examples of films conforming to the contemporary propagandised depictions of the recent American military endeavours in the Middle East are Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* (2013) and Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012). *American Sniper* details the exploits of Navy SEAL Chris Kyle during his four tours of Iraq, as he accumulates the 160 confirmed kills that earned him the honour of 'America's deadliest sniper'. The CIA hunt for Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and Pakistan is portrayed in *Zero Dark Thirty* through the motivations of a young, female CIA operative, Maya. The delivery of these war films in the slick narrative characterised by mainstream and Hollywood cinema exemplifies the passive consumption and neutralisation of on-screen violence that is arguably promoting a dangerous complacency of conflict in contemporary society. The inactive spectatorship encouraged by such narratives allows for a governmentally valuable platform for simultaneously administering glorification of both neoliberal values and the military violence that comes with it. Critical evaluation of *American Sniper* will focus on the film's portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as a form of mobilising and maintaining public support for military action in the Middle East through fear and misrepresentation. Examination of the characterisation of gender in *American Sniper* will allow study of the definition and promotion of the 'neoliberal man' in relation to a neoliberal state. This will lead into analysis of the function of the female protagonist in *Zero Dark Thirty* and the production's associations and appropriations of feminist rhetoric. *Zero Dark Thirty* will further provide the basis for a dissection of the film's formal arrangements in regards to invalidation of the impact of on-screen violence, and the resulting consequences on its commentary of militarised torture.

The neoliberal ideological model supports a process of globalisation in order to internationalise economic structures and embrace a global free market. An idealised impact of international subscription to neoliberalism would ensure a globally competitive market, increased international productivity and consumerism, and minimisation of state controls on trade and economy. This economic and financial

motivation is the foundational incentive of contemporary warfare in the neoliberal age. Other than allowing for the implementation of a plunderable economic structure, globalisation has proven a valuable vehicle for delivering a dominating cultural paradigm through the international export of American film, known as ‘soft power’.¹ The impact of the cultural imperialism of globalized American cinema, in tandem with the enforcement of political and economic neoliberal ideologies, is exemplified in Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014). Both films focus on the aftermath of the Western-backed Indonesian coup d’etat led by General Suharto in 1965–66, which directly resulted in the deaths of over one million people. *The Act of Killing* thematically centres on the influence of American cinema on a group of gangsters unrepentantly responsible for a multitude of the genocidal killings as they re-enact the massacres through various cinematic genre conventions. *The Look of Silence* acts as a contextualising counterpart that follows the family of one of the victims of the genocide as the younger brother utilises his role of optometrist to confront the perpetrators. Analysis of the content and formal arrangements of *The Act of Killing*, with notes on similar methods used in *The Look of Silence*, will allow for considerations on Oppenheimer’s self-reflexive deconstruction of the role of film as mode of delivery for ideological sentiments and cultural reinforcement of military and economic force, in a direct critique of the impact of globalised American cinema. Character analysis of key participants in *The Act of Killing* will allow the examination of the ramifications of neoliberalism on a societal level and question the rewarded personality traits under a neoliberal regime.

The increasing internationally globalised interrelation of Western political aggression with Hollywood and American mainstream cinema has necessitated calls for a counteractive utility of the moving image to provoke a politicised dissidence in spectators. As militarised screen-based technologies are rapidly evolving and leading to eventual implementation as culturally accessible technology, society is becoming progressively more dominated by screen culture and advancing immersive and interactive moving image technology which multiplies the effectiveness of passive consumption. Experiential participation in simulated and immersive visual technology allows a situation in which the penetrative ideological impact of images pervades the mind at a deeper cognitive level.² Through these technologies, such as video games and virtual reality, the brain is being trained to function in conjuncture with neoliberal anticipation. The pre-emptive nature of the neoliberal state, such as anticipatory military action exemplified in the invasion of Iraq, is beneficial for an Orwellian governmental control over citizens through the perpetual threat of war and constant fear.³ These passively engaging modes of moving image utility open dialogue for an inverted

¹ Kapur & Wagner, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Capital, Culture and Marxist Critique*, (New York: London: Routledge) (2011) p.23.

² Väliaho, Pasi, *Biopolitical screens: image, power, and the neoliberal brain*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press) (2014) p.82.

³ Boal, Iain A; Retort (Organisation), *Afflicted powers: capital and spectacle in a new age of war*, (London: Verso) (2005) pp.101-102.

employment and critique of these technologies which is represented in the provocative works of the German artist filmmaker Harun Farocki, with specific focus on *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1988) and *Serious Games I–IV* (2009–10). Analysis of the formal arrangements of both *Images of War* and *Serious Games* will establish effective techniques of provoking spectator engagement with moving imaging works in direct remedial response to the encouraged passive consumption of contemporary image-based technologies. This will lead to investigation into methods of self-reflexive deconstruction of the moving image in the modern theatre of war in both *Images of War* and *Serious Games I: Watson is Down*.

***American Sniper* and Establishing the Enemy**

Following the recent military endeavours in the Middle East, there has been an increase in anti-Islamic sentiment and Arab vilification within recent Hollywood war productions. The Arab world has assumed the role of the terrorist ‘Other’, a position formerly held by communists during the years of the Cold War. This cultural establishment of the Arab enemy beneficially maintains public support for the continuing military involvement in the Middle East. This trend is exemplified in *American Sniper* (2013) and will be illustrated through an analysis of the film’s use of sound and visual form.

The film sonically opens with the Islamic call to prayer eventually obscured by the mechanical sound of a military tank; this is confirmed visually as a tank appears rolling through a burned-out Middle Eastern town. The very outset of the film provides the initial connotations of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ rhetoric, the call to prayer not just providing a locational signifier (as there are mosques all over the globe), but when coupled with militarised images establishes an emotive connection between Islam and war. This is thematically continued through the duration of the film with consistent visual references to the Iraqi fighters as Muslim and the American soldiers as Christian, establishing a wrongful context of a war of religion (e.g. the scene featuring a quick cut to a suicide bomber’s lifeless hand falling whilst clutching prayer beads). The call to prayer is again used as sonic accompaniment to a climactic moment of tension by which the audience is first introduced to the main antagonist, the Iraqi sniper ‘Mustafa’. This scene further commemorates Mustafa’s first on-screen killing of a U.S. soldier, continuing the demonising association of Islam through sonic suggestion. The character of Mustafa is a cartoonish depiction of a villainous Arab, complete with an ominous, deep and throbbing leitmotif that intensifies his caricaturised evil persona.

American Sniper is punctuated throughout with a series of point-of-view shots through Kyle’s rifle viewfinder, as he tracks potential enemies in the deadly crosshairs. These shots are effectively subjective, implicating the spectator in the position of Kyle, strengthening emotional identification with the protagonist whilst simultaneously alienating and vilifying the subjects in shot, nearly always Iraqis. In one instance, after

the audience is introduced to Kyle in the beginning of the film, he lines up a nefariously behaving hijab-clad female with her young child. Tracked through Kyle's rifle viewfinder the child runs forward carrying an RKG grenade, passed to him by his mother. Not only is this sequence subject to the criminalising effect of the viewfinder POV, but the shot then quickly cuts to a scene of Kyle as a young boy shooting his first deer. This rapid transition infers a moral relation between the shooting of a deer and that of an Arab, effectively animalising and dehumanising the 'Other'.

American Sniper and the Neoliberal Man

Eastwood's *American Sniper* successfully advocates contemporary neoliberal-influenced prescriptions of gender. The attributes of the idealised self-disciplined individualism of the neoliberal man easily fulfils the 'Hollywood hero' prototype that Kyle profitably conforms to—a design unchanged since the early days of Hollywood that reinforces the conservative notions of gender and masculinity. Corresponding to these traditionally masculine character criteria is valuable in maintaining multitudes of young men signing up for armed service with aspirations of achieving similar cinematically hyper-masculine heroics. Kyle's character is fundamentally a microcosm of the model conservative, neoliberal American state. He emphasises the desirable qualities of a neoliberal subject—exhibiting resilience, a constant pre-emptive anticipation, and an individualised self-reliance—that are admirable character traits necessary to thrive under neoliberal implications.

The film is an unadulterated celebration of masculine violence and individual merit within its very premise—a production solely dedicated to heralding the heroic sacrifices of 'America's deadliest sniper'. This congratulatory stance concerning 'honourable' violence is established early in the film through a sequence depicting an incident from Kyle's youth. As a young Kyle and his family sit around the family table, his authoritative father delivers an analogical lesson on good and evil through the categorisation of an individual into a sheep, a wolf or a sheepdog. He refers to sheepdogs as "those who have been blessed with the gift of aggression and the overwhelming need to protect the flock" whilst condemning his young sons to turn out as anything other than a noble and protective sheepdog, and ultimately congratulating young Kyle on finishing a fight. This in essence is the summation of *American Sniper's* attitude to violence, and eludes to the violence in Iraq as being a justifiable retaliation (a potentially dangerously misinforming connection of the invasion of Iraq to 9/11.)

Kyle embodies the impulsive and enterprising self-confidence rewarded under neoliberal individualism. On several occasions in the film, he instinctively recognises the correct course of action, even breaking rank in order to follow his intuition. The pinnacled climax, in which Kyle finally kills his nemesis Mustafa, is one such occasion. Kyle is repeatedly told to hold fire so as not to give away their position, under the commanding officer's assurance that the distance between Kyle and Mustafa would

render it an impossible shot. Kyle, however, is confident of his gifted marksmanship and takes the shot anyway, to great success. His character further displays the resilience desired in a prosperous neoliberal subject, an ability to speedily re-cooperate which negates any danger of dependence on anyone or establishment other than the self. This is illustrated in his ability to return immediately to the battlefield moments after his close friend 'Biggles' is shot, and his lackadaisical attitude to his girlfriend's infidelity and their consequential breakup early in the film.

Neoliberal Women and Feminism in *Zero Dark Thirty*

Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* was widely commended for its depiction of a dynamic female CIA agent accountable for arguably one of the greatest U.S. military victories in post-9/11 conflict. Some have even hailed the production a 'feminist epic'—a claim that typifies current assumptions of female representation being the centrally significant issue of the feminist struggle, over endeavours for redistribution of power.⁴ Aspirations for female representation over redistribution are commonly understood as a prerogative of post-feminism, arguably defined as a neoliberalised feminism.⁵ *Zero Dark Thirty* provides exemplification of the current trend of appropriating feminist rhetoric to provide credibility to the contemporary military agenda.

Zero Dark Thirty's gender representations within its central character, Maya, largely comply with the postfeminist ideal. She epitomises individualism, manifesting as a deeply driven 'lone wolf' character that is utterly devoted to her career. She is single-mindedly motivated to ensure the death of Bin Laden, which becomes an individually driven pursuit as her superiors move on to more imminently demanding issues of national security. This crusade eventually comes to fruition with Maya reaping the rewards of her dedicated individual labour, through the killing of Osama bin Laden at the hands of the navy SEALs under her direction. Early in the film, Maya is complimentarily referred to as a 'killer' in her field. As men primarily dominate this field of expertise, this statement resonates as an empowering accomplishment for her as a woman, but the violence of the term 'killer' provides potential insight to her success as a consequence of adopting traditionally masculine traits. Her aggressive ambition and quickly learned immunity to brutal violence align her with conventionally understood aspects of the 'alpha male'. This encouraged female adaption to a more masculinised archetype in order to succeed in the workplace is a negation of foundational aspects of the feminist struggle and is characteristic of post-feminism. Maya's character exhibits the self-surveillance and regimented self-discipline expected of an efficient post-

⁴ Fraser, Nancy, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, (London: Verso) (2013) Part II, 6.

⁵ Gill, Rosalind. 'Postfeminism Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10:2 (2007) pp.147 – 166.

feminist woman. Her slender and well-groomed appearance confirm that however engrossed she is in her vocation, she is still attentive to her physical presentation. Throughout the film she maintains an emotionally restrained persona, only exhibiting an aggressively emotive response when her superiors impose obstacles to the fervent pursuit of her goal. She appears to be constantly monitoring her own behaviour, contrastingly highlighted next to the relaxed and natural demeanour of her male co-agent. Maya's unswayable individualism and inherently capitalist temperament is confirmed through the competitive acquaintance between her and her fellow female CIA agent, Jessica. Their initial meeting is an icy exchange, which later develops into a guarded friendship. This lack of establishing a sense of sisterhood or even a natural friendship is testament to the postfeminist severance of the necessity for a socialised unification of women that was prevalent in second wave feminism.

Neutralising Violence and the Brutality of Torture in *Zero Dark Thirty*

The narrative of *Zero Dark Thirty* presents a confirmation of the constructive outcome of employing enhanced interrogation techniques ("EITs", commonly known as torture.) The director, Kathryn Bigelow, and the writer, Mark Boal, worked closely with the CIA to ensure a 'realistic' interpretation of the CIA manhunt for Osama bin Laden, leading many critics to decry it as pro-torture propaganda. Not only does the film provide justification for the military use of torture through the storyline, it further nullifies the brutality of the violence depicted through specific methods of camera work and structural form that increase viewer identification with the perpetrators of the violence and dampen the impact of its cruelty.

The entire film is shot with a minimum of four cameras for each scene, allowing the final product to provide a fully immersive exposure of the viewer to the characters, narrative, and location. Each scene cuts relatively quickly amongst the differing angles of the various cameras, with one camera delivering an active, seemingly handheld perspective. This shot appears almost as POV and forms an informal viewpoint that provides a subjective platform for the viewer. The resulting mode of experiential presentation strengthens viewer empathy with characters and gives the viewer a sense of their own personal presence within the narrative. This method acts as an effective vehicle to fortify the validation of state-sanctioned violence that is established in the plot through the spectator's enhanced feeling of camaraderie with the characters performing the violence.

The diluted effect of the violence depicted in the film's early displays of torture can further be contributed to discerningly utilised camera work. The scenes mostly deliver abstracted images of the imposed brutality—an example of another advantageous employment of the active, handheld camera perspective. The constant transition between the camera angles also provides a manipulating distraction from events unfolding within the narrative and ensures they don't always stay in shot. In the

opening scene, in which the detainee is water-boarded, there are frequent cuts to the shot of Maya as the passive witness. These interruptions in the representation of the torture mitigate the director's claim of a 'realistic' and 'unbiased' exploration of the use of EITs in the hunt for Osama bin Laden.

The Globalised Impact of American Cinema

The Act of Killing provides testimony to the globalised influence of the passively consumed American cinema, detailed in the previous section, and the impact of cultural imperialism both through its filmic structure and its narrative political content. The premise of the film encompasses a selection of perpetrators to re-enact their involvement in the killings, through performative conformation to the American movie genres that they adulated. This construct establishes a surreal reflective critique as the killers talk about learned killing techniques from these American films that they then feedback into re-enacted imitations adhering to those specific genre conventions. The idolised violent heroics portrayed in the Hollywood films they admire act as reconfirmation of their own heroism. This can be exemplified in the previous study of *American Sniper*, Kyle being celebrated for his abundance of valiant assassinations as they were all justifiable kills due to the victims' undeniable status of 'bad guys'. The Indonesian perpetrators are similarly convinced of the undoubtedly villainous nature of the 'communists' they killed, thus they are heroes worthy of filmic commemoration also.

The Act of Killing utilises a self-reflective employment of screens throughout the production which act as a visual exposition of the critical historical and current involvement of film within the events depicted.⁶ Throughout the production there are scenes of Anwar re-watching the re-enactments on a television set. This provides an opportunity for objective viewing of his actions, but yields little emotional response. The distancing and de-contextualising impact of screen-delivered images is highlighted in a scene that features the main character's participation on a National television talk-show. The sequence cuts between formats, altering the perception of the viewer. Some frames are from the talk-show production itself, implicating the spectator in the position of a member of the Indonesian public watching the show on their televisions. Other shots return to the cinematic format of the film, which depicts the interview taking place and the studio cameras capturing the action. The most interesting frames refer to the previously mentioned method of featuring the images on a television screen within the frame. One instance of this method that is particularly provocative features many different small screens depicting the image of Anwar as he talks on the show, as the footage is viewed by the programme operators. The shot zooms in a small screen showing a black and white image of Anwar as he speaks with the host, and a larger

⁶ Michalski, Milena & Gow, James, *War, Image and Legitimacy: Viewing contemporary conflict*, (London: Routledge) (2007) p.46.

coloured screen with the same image. The visual impact of the dual television screens provides a comparable image of Anwar, perceivably far more sinister in the small black and white screen than on the larger, coloured screen. This comparative framing of the differently formatted images is resonant of the previously shown extracts of the anti-Communist government propaganda film that was essential viewing for all school-aged children and portrays the evil deeds of the communists in the same effectively vilifying black and white. The shot illustrates the power of framing in altering content and further alludes to the thematic considerations of time central to both *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*. The viewer apprehends the same image of Anwar in the antiquated format of black and white and again in modernised full colour, thus referencing past and present and highlighting that although many decades have elapsed since the genocide, neither Anwar nor his rhetoric have altered.

Neoliberal associations with Psychopathy

The central characters in *The Act of Killing* illustrate not only the neoliberal ideological impact on personality development, but also, critically, the personality traits rewarded under such conditions. The gangsters and paramilitary personnel that perpetrated the genocidal killings in the mid-60s are shown to have risen to positions of political and economic power due to their active role in the massacres. As this was a western-backed coup d'état with neo-imperial motivations, those who helped facilitate the overthrow were rewarded capital power in the newly established highly corporate and international-business-friendly state. The characters in the film exhibit the psychopathic features that excel under neoliberal regimes—traits that are comparable to the desirable modern attributes of successful corporations and businesses.⁷ The cut-throat emphasised individualism that propels a successful neoliberal subject has habitual connotations to psychopathic behaviours that are exhibited strongly in nearly all the characters featured in *The Act of Killing*, although analysis will be streamlined to focus on the characters of Anwar Congo and Adi Zulkadry.

Anwar Congo provides the foundational character in the film and is responsible for directing the narrative production that re-enacts the differing methods of killing under various Hollywood genre conventions. The arc of the film follows his journey of altering moral awareness, from the unrepentant pride of his direct role in the killings to his seemingly empathetic epiphany. This is highlighted in a scene near the beginning of the film in which he dances the cha-cha on the rooftop where he used to kill 'communists'—a post re-enactment of his murderous actions. This location is then revisited at the very end of the film, where this time Anwar violently retches as he describes again his killing of 'humans'. It can be argued that Anwar Congo is representative of learned psychopathic behaviour, perpetrating violence and brutality

⁷ Boddy, Clive et al. 'Extreme managers, extreme workplaces: Capitalism, organisations and corporate psychopaths', *Organization* 22:4 (2015).

that was continuously rewarded with the implementation of the new regime and therefore never explicitly considering the implications of his actions. Throughout the film it is evident that Anwar is lacking in any form of self-awareness; his inability to grasp the situation is frustratingly highlighted formally, with punctuations in the film of Oppenheimer playing back the footage of the re-enactments for him. The viewer is able to watch Anwar's reaction to the footage—often frowningly studious—which alludes to a potential moment of realisation, only for it to conclude with a voiced disapproval of his clothing or inauthentic acting. In the film, he confesses to being plagued by nightmares, even dedicating a scene in the re-enacted production to his night terrors, but he doesn't seem to have the emotional depth to fully understand the cause. Anwar's unadulterated conviction in his behaviour during the genocide is arguably the result of his ability to deflect responsibility by imitating some of his favourite on-screen gangsters and military heroes, illustrated in his learning of some basic empathy through the same filmic language.⁸ In this line of reasoning it is feasible that Anwar learned these desensitised, psychopathic traits as a survival tool which he has continued to manifest through its beneficial recompense in the proceeding administration.

Adi Zulkadry appears a third of the way through the film and features in the narrative re-enactments of the killings. A character analysis of Adi beneficially provides comparative understanding of Anwar's potentially 'learned' psychopathy through establishing Adi's inherent and firm character correspondence to traits understood to be undeniably psychopathic. Adi exhibits a clear understanding of the immorality of the '65-'66 genocide. At one point during a re-enactment he attempts to coach his fellow perpetrators: "Listen, if we succeed in making this film it will disprove all the propaganda about the communists being cruel and show that we were the cruel ones...it's not about fear, it's about image. The whole society will say...they lied about the communists being cruel." His intellectual capacity seems to be greater than that of Anwar in his ability to perceive the moral injustice of his actions and understanding of how this film will be perceived. This awareness fortifies the fact that he possesses the psychopathic ability to feel no remorse or empathy; this is further highlighted in a scene in which Adi and Oppenheimer are talking in a car. Oppenheimer clarifies that under the Geneva Convention the Indonesian genocide is definitively classified as war crimes. Adi defensively replies that the definitions of right and wrong in war are susceptible to change, further arguing that war and mass killing is just part of the organic behaviour of people and always has been. This talent for intellectually manipulating concepts of justice to comply with his own individual agenda is a further example of psychopathic behaviour.

⁸ Nayman, Adam, 'Find Me Guilty: Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*'. *Cinema Scope Magazine*. <http://cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-magazine/24-find-me-guilty-joshua-oppenheimers-the-act-of-killing/>, date accessed 10 February 2016.

Active Spectator Participation in Artist Moving Image

Passive consumption of the moving image and the inactive spectator participation encouraged by mainstream cinema maintains film as the definition of a capitalist ‘product’. The emancipation of both film and the viewer from the capitalised process of production and mass consumption is arguably exemplified in artist moving-image works that endeavour to actively engage viewers, thus ensuring the film is realised through the mutual labour of both filmmaker and spectator-turned-producer.⁹ This collaborative intellectual provocation of active spectatorship counteracts the neoliberal influence within mainstream and Hollywood cinema, detailed previously. Instigating active engagement with moving-image works can be achieved through formal considerations in both the moving-image work and the environment in which a viewer is exposed to the work. These constructive modes of deliverance are demonstrated in the works of the German artist filmmaker Harun Farocki, illustrated through formal analysis of *Serious Games I–IV* and *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*.

Serious Games comprises four moving-image installations, each detailing varying facets of the interrelationship between video game technology and the military. The installation is intended to be spatially experienced, allowing an immersive and participatory active engagement with the work and space, in direct contention with the virtual and video game technology depicted in its content. This environmental encouragement of movement ensures the spectator maintains a level of corporeal awareness whilst engaging with the moving-image works, which arguably functions as a form of Brechtian distancing.¹⁰ The spectators’ autonomous engagement with both the form and content of the installation provides a platform for an individuated apprehension of the work. This self-determining perception of the work further develops the installation to be experientially comparable to an expanded model of ‘montage’ and undoubtedly exceeds the limitations of a singular work in ensuring the participatory role of the viewer. The coupling of images in this manner is a technique Farocki described as ‘soft montage’; it allows the spectator to develop and question ongoing associations, informing “a general relatedness, rather than a strict opposition or equation.”¹¹ The impact of the ‘soft montage’ requires the spectator to assimilate the images and engage in a process of spatial editing, implicating the viewer as collaborative producer.

The activating method of montage is evident in the majority of Farocki’s work, including his seminal film essay *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*. This single screen work utilises a more conventional linear mode of montage, reminiscent of early montage methods employed by filmmakers such as Eisenstein, using cut up and re-

⁹ Ranciere, Jacques, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London: Verso) (2009) p.66.

¹⁰ Elwes, Catherine, *Installation and the Moving Image*, (London & New York: Wallflower Press) (2015) p.146.

¹¹ Farocki, Harun & Silverman, Kaja, *Speaking About Godard*, (New York: New York University Press) (1998) p.142.

appropriated archival images delivered through a thematic and rhythmically repetitive image track. This technique provokes the viewer to infer significance from between the images and successfully nullifies the potential didacticism associated with political film or the documentary genre. The laboured viewing required of the spectator in *Images of the World* encourages a broader contextual consideration of the images.¹² Another process utilised to certify spectator engagement with *Images of the World* is in the soundtrack, featuring a neutral female voice over. The objectivity of the narration negates the possibility of emotive manipulation of the viewer when apprehending the images, instead behaving symbiotically with the images to inspire a greater degree of autonomously produced questioning in the viewer.

Using the Form of the Moving Image to Deconstruct the Relationship of War and Images

In ‘Towards a Third Cinema’, Getino and Solanas call for revolutionary filmmaking to harness the communicative power of the moving image in order to counteract the “culturally penetrative” neo-colonial and consumerist films generated by the ‘System’.¹³ This form of filmmaking would mobilise the spectators into being the reactionary, active citizens necessary to implement radical changes and a self-determining culture of the people, in contrast to the oppressive, neo-imperial culture of capitalism that caters solely to the ruling classes. This mode of revolutionary filmmaking is embodied in the works of Farocki. His moving image critiques on the increasingly dominating role of technology in contemporary society—importantly in the modern theatre of war—provide a vital self-reflexive filmic discourse. Through transitions in the formal deliverance and content of his work, Farocki’s development as a filmmaker and artist have reflected and symbiotically evolved with the technologies he scrutinised. His introspective and deconstructive examinations of image-making technology in contemporary warfare are centrally thematic to *Images of the World* and *Serious Games I: Watson is Down*. Analysis of these works will provide insights to the advancements of these technologies within the timeframe of each work and the effectiveness of artist moving image in intellectually disseminating the medium’s role in modern warfare.

Images of War utilises found photographs and documentary footage articulated into a film essay that references issues of aesthetics, visuality, and deception in the context of postmodern warfare. Farocki focuses on contemporary warfare’s fundamental endeavour to omnipotently see all, whilst simultaneously remaining hidden. It questions the problematic role of images in the theatre of war—centrally photography—and the implications of the techno-surrogate perception of the lens in terms of framing, perception, and context. Farocki utilises reoccurring motifs and

¹² Halle, Randall. ‘History Is Not a Matter of Generations: Interview with Harun Farocki’, *Camera Obscura* 16 (2001) p.55.

¹³ Getino, Octavio & Solanas, Fernando. ‘Towards a Third Cinema’, *Cineaste* 4:3 (1970-71) p.1.

sequences in the form of montage, frequently revisiting images and contextually rearranging them, thus highlighting the ease of altering the content of an image through reframing. A sequence that features repetitively in the film depicts photographs of Berber woman from Algeria, unveiled in order to photographically document their full appearance for the purpose of identity cards. When introduced to the full frame images of the women, the viewers are informed that only at home and with close family would they normally be without their veil. This implies the questionable veracity of an image portraying an already reframed facial identity of the photographed subject. As this sequence is revisited later in the film, the viewer is exposed to the same images of the women, albeit from the pages of a photography book as it's flipped through by an on-screen reader. This alteration of context converts the content of the images, reframed once more from an operational image purposed for surveillance to a commodified image of pleasure. When the photographs reappear later in the film they are reconstructed once again, this time reframed by the hands of the on-screen reader, who alternates between covering the eyes and the mouths. As he covers the mouths of the women, only their eyes are visible, therefore revealing a more accurate portrayal of the real-life appearance of the woman through replicating what would be visible when veiled. This layered study of image de-contextualisation and restructuring highlights the deceptive nature of photography and imaging technologies.

As the military interrelation with image-based technologies has intensified and rapidly advanced, the functional capacity of these technologies has broadened. The participatory virtual worlds now utilised by the military for both training and rehabilitation purposes are the subject of Farocki's multi-screen video installation *Serious Games I–IV*. In these works, Farocki explores how these immersive techniques potentially blur the spectator–participants' distinction between fiction and reality and further the relationship of their physical body with the computer-generated images. The participant is neurologically receptive to video game imagery in a far more penetrable manner than of images perceived in films and photographs.¹⁴ This ability to control the conscious level of comprehension of a soldier is beneficial in ensuring a highly effective desensitisation, dehumanisation of the enemy, and subconscious response in the field. This is highlighted in the first work of the series, *Serious Games I: Watson is Down*, a split screen installation showing an army unit involved with a video game purposed for training. Although the split screen images alternate and cut between images in conformation of the 'soft montage' method, they predominately subscribe to a format of one channel presenting the video game as it is played, while the other is fixed on the soldiers as they are playing. This assimilation of images—correlated with the language used by the soldiers—underscores the video game's deconstruction of bodily and conscious separation from the on-screen virtual world. The soldiers converse with one another and refer to their avatar characters on-screen as 'you' and 'I'. This hyper-subjective connection with the game is provocatively contrasted with the encouraged objective viewing of the spectator through Farocki's activating use of both soft and spatial montage. As a soldier states "Watson just got killed", we simultaneously see the

¹⁴ Väliäho, p.41.

computer-generated Watson fall from the tank and be left behind as the tank drives away and the real-life Watson lean back in his seat with a defeated sigh.

Conclusion

The research in this dissertation concludes that the most potent impact of neoliberalism on the role of the moving image in postmodern warfare is the augmentation of its societally manipulative function. Through promotive representation of ideals that perpetuate the neoliberal agenda, such as attaching false morality to military campaigns or valorising particular character traits and gender subscriptions, the moving image is a vital tool in maintaining a weak, fragmented and conformable society. This is reinforced with the encouraged consumerism of the neoliberal era, which manifests in an abundance of personal screen-based possessions that maximise exposure and alter engagement with the moving image. Oversaturation of information and images of war and violence ultimately normalise the suffering of others through establishing a desensitised society.¹⁵ Persistent exposure to these images preserves the perception of constant, unstoppable war, which leads to a dangerous apathy. The influence of the internet and the democratisation of image-making technology has led to a multitude of platforms to access informative content and beneficially communicative moving image, but this inundation of information exacerbates distractibility and obscures qualifiable veracity. The distancing effect of perceiving images of war and violence on screens has enhanced alienation and decreased empathy with the civilians on the receiving end of the military aggressions of the Western powers. The separating effect of the screen, combined with the effective ‘Otherising’ in largely circulated productions such as *American Sniper*, sustains indifference to the suffering of those fictionally perceived as enemies. This perpetuates the neo-imperial north–south divide that is maintained by the cyclical relation of neoliberal globalisation and the hugely funded technologically advanced weaponry of the wealthy Western nations.

As distinction between government, business, and industry has dissipated into a multi-corporate, neoliberal miasma, it has become increasingly difficult to discern the invested motivations of moving images in any given context. Artist moving image is not immune to prejudiced funding through gallery ownerships and private cultural funding bodies that boast corporate and political affiliations. With neoliberal privatisation, more and more aspects of society are becoming corporately sponsored, from the images and information consumed daily to educational establishments and hospitals. This fully penetrative impact of neoliberalism has arguably lead to a self-fulfilling, cyclical momentum of the applied ideology facilitated by the power of the image, comparable to the notions in Guy Debord’s ‘The Society of the Spectacle’: “for what the spectacle expresses is the total practice of one particular economic and social

¹⁵ Sontag, Susan, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (London: Penguin Books) (2003) p.84.

formation; it is, so to speak, the formations agenda...the spectacle is essentially tautological, for the simple reason that its means and its ends are identical. It is the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire globe, basking in the perpetual warmth of its own glory.”¹⁶

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¹⁶ Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle*, (New York: Zone Books) (1994) p.6.

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