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New American Patriotism in Games: WWII-Themed Military Shooters in the Shadow of Post-9/11 Politics

Abstract

In the 1980s, American popular culture started to restore its reputation as a dominant political power—weakened after the Vietnam War—by recalling the success of World War II and constructing its mythology. The following cinematic tendency, which Frank Wetta and Martin Novelli label as New Patriotism, disseminated triumphalist views on the U.S. presence during the earlier conflict. This study aims to examine the similar trend in the American gaming industry between 1999 and 2008, when a considerable number of first-person shooter games with a World War II setting were released. The author later argues that this wave responded to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, when the George Bush government started a crusade against the so-called “axis of evil”. This political background affected the American gaming industry, as shown with examples of several shooters constituting three important game series: Medal of Honor, Call of Duty, and Brothers in Arms. Those franchises used the specific setting and stylized antagonists, thus recalling the contemporary events in the Middle East. The main problems with New Patriotism are also raised, including the demonization of enemies and the simultaneous absence of civilians during in-game military actions. Further analysis discusses the hyperrealism of World War II-themed shooters produced in the United States. Products such as Call of Duty resembled cinematic narratives not only in terms of ideological message, but they also recreated scenes from films as such Saving Private Ryan and employed documentary-like cinematic techniques. Finally, the reasons for the natural atrophy of the movement are explained. This explanation includes increasing cathartic violence, the declining credibility of the ideological message provided by New Patriotism, and overutilization of episodes from World War II that are too well-known. The results of the research allow diagnosis of new possible reincarnations of New Patriotism.

Key words: 9/11, digital games, hyperreality, ludology, World War II

Introduction

The United States has one of the biggest entertainment industries in the world. From Hollywood motion pictures to television stations, this industry plays a vital role in shaping the global political discourse. One of the most important forms of U.S. cultural expansion to foreign countries has become digital games, which are not free of the “discursive, political and ideological meanings” associated with an American point of view on politics, the economy, and history.¹ As Nick Dyer-Whiteford and Greig De Peuter remind us, digital games as a form of media were created for the purposes of the “U.S. military-entertainment complex”, contributing to national imperialist politics.² Numerous publications describe digital games as media which support aggressive politics towards other countries (especially Middle Eastern) on the same footing as motion pictures; *America’s Army* (2003, U.S. Army) serves here as an important example of explicit military propaganda.³

However, digital games shape not only discourse about the present, they also influence current views of the past. This article examines a certain tendency in American digital games which coincided with the appearance of military shooters set in the Middle East while using another historical setting and serving similar militainment purposes. Between 1998 and 2008, the movement included an explosion of numerous American first-person shooters⁴ devoted to the main events of World War II. Although World War II had already been a theme for several digital games like *Panzer General* (1994, Strategic Simulations) and *Steel Panthers* (1995, Strategic Simulations), such productions paid attention to the strategic abilities of the player, therefore appealing to a limited number of board game enthusiasts. Hence, they were overtaken in popularity by action-oriented fantasy games such as *Duke Nukem 3D* (1996, 3D Realms) and *Quake* (1996, id Software).⁵ The appearance of *Medal of Honor* (1998, DreamWorks Interactive) changed many things, as this game succeeded at merging the reality of World War II with the conventions of the increasingly popular first-person shooter genre. The choice of this ludic genre was

¹ David A. Clearwater, *Full Spectrum Propaganda: The U.S. Military, Video Games, and the Genre of the Military-Themed Shooter* (McGill University) (2006), p. XIII.

² Nick Dyer-Whiteford, Greig De Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) (2009).

³ Nick Dyer-Whiteford, Greig De Peuter; see also Marcus Schulzke, “Serving in the Virtual Army: Military Games and the Civil-Military Divide”, *Journal of Applied Security Research*, 8.2 (2013), pp. 246–261.

⁴ First-person shooter (FPS) is a genre of digital games based on shooting at enemy objects and moving within three-dimensional game worlds where the player can manipulate the point of view by steering the mouse.

⁵ In the Readers’ Top 10 poll for an American gaming magazine *Computer Gaming World*, the debuting *Quake* was placed immediately higher than the *Steel Panthers* and *Panzer General* games, which were listed there for several months. See “Readers’ Top 10”, *Computer Gaming World* 150:1 (1997), p. 42.

no coincidence because the convention of first-person shooters had a greater potential to immerse players in the game world than strategy games. This article explores the causes of that further expansion of American WWII-themed shooters, their characteristics, and political background.

The aforementioned tendency can be termed “New American Patriotism”, with reference to the name suggested by Frank Wetta and Martin Novelli to describe a movement encompassing American motion pictures with “sentimental and ideological concepts that put the nation and cause ahead of individual survival”.⁶ The New American Patriotism, according to Wetta and Novelli, is a celebration of “loyalty to one’s comrades in battle, the ability to survive the horrific face of modern hyper-lethal weaponry and warfare, and the shared experience of battle”.⁷ Although both researchers count numerous films from different historical settings as examples of the movement,⁸ they claim that an important influence on the message of such motion pictures was remembrance of World War II, which will be further discussed below. Then, because of similarities in their depiction of combat and suffering between both American WWII-themed shooters and films, I will restrict the definition of the New Patriotism to include only the World War II setting.

The following analysis of game characteristics excluded the subversive, parodist reinterpretations of World War II such as *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992, 3D Realms) and *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (2001, Raven Software), as well as the games of non-American developers, merely published by American enterprises, like *Battlefield 1942* (2002, Digital Illusions CE). Instead, several installments in three gaming franchises (*Medal of Honor*, *Call of Duty*, and *Brothers in Arms*) were chosen because of their prestige among players and non-parodist approach to the war. Because of their highly cinematic form, this analysis intends to indicate the specific narrative form rather than the gameplay. The former ludology vs. narratology debate has lost its significance and some ludologists acknowledge that the narrative can also be the object of research.⁹ Espen Aarseth, for example, indicates that modern first-person shooters are linearly designed. The presence of fixed kernels, which Aarseth defines

⁶ Frank J. Wetta, Martin A. Novelli, “Now a Major Motion Picture: War Films and Hollywood’s New Patriotism”, *The Journal of Military History* 67:3 (2003), p. 861.

⁷ Frank J. Wetta, Martin A. Novelli, p. 861.

⁸ Their objects of analysis range from movies about World War II, like *Saving Private Ryan* (1998, Steven Spielberg), *The Thin Red Line* (1998, Terrence Malick) and *Pearl Harbor* (2001, Michael Bay), to modern warfare, like *Three Kings* (1999, David O. Russell) and *Black Hawk Down* (2001, Ridley Scott), to the American Revolution, like *The Patriot* (2003, Roland Emmerich).

⁹ Michalis Kokonis, “Intermediality between Games and Fiction: The ‘Ludology vs. Narratology’ Debate in Computer Game Studies: A Response to Gonzalo Frasca”, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 9.1 (2015), pp. 171–188; compare Gonzalo Frasca, “Ludologists Love Stories, Too: Notes from a Debate That Never Took Place”, in *Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference Proceedings*, ed. by Marinka Copier and Joost Raseesne, (presented at the Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference, Utrecht: DiGRA and University of Utrecht) (2003), pp. 92–99.

as “events that define a particular story”,¹⁰ makes linear games immune to the randomness of gameplay, as the kernels are repeatable and foreseeable during each play.¹¹ The American WWII-themed shooters are chained to fixed kernels, which makes them useful for the analysis of storytelling.

From “New Patriotism” to Digital Games

According to Wetta and Novelli, New American Patriotism was formed as an ideological response to national trauma after the failure of the Vietnam War.¹² During the 1970s and 1980s, American cinema encountered numerous films criticizing national involvement in the Vietnamese conflict and citing several war crimes committed by the U.S. Army. Motion pictures such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979, Francis Ford Coppola), *Platoon* (1986, Oliver Stone) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987, Stanley Kubrick) reflected an absence of faith in optimistic narration about modern conflict. In contrast to this traumatic imagination, the American government sought to replace the feeling of guilt with a revived militaristic discourse (identified with the term “Reaganomatography”) shaped by both the Ronald Reagan administration and the Republican Party.¹³ The flood of action heroes like Rambo helped to reinvent the heroism of individual soldiers and therefore allowed an anxious American society to be reassured that right was on their side.

A key role in redefining the official patriotic discourse was played by the remembrance of World War II. A new historical approach, comparing the conflict in Vietnam with more prestigious successes in World War II, reshaped the U.S. attitude to patriotism. World War II became the “Good War”,¹⁴ a conflict which did not shame the nation and could instead help re-establish the common view of soldiers as patriots. The main supporter of this new movement was Stephen Ambrose, a historian who often portrayed combatants from the 1940s as common heroes or “citizen soldiers”. Ambrose’s vision of World War II was embraced by the director Steven Spielberg, who suggested a redefined approach to the spectacle of war. The New Patriotism, combining suffering and explicit violence with moral

¹⁰ Espen Aarseth, “A Narrative Theory of Games”, in *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games* (Raleigh, North Carolina: ACM) (2012), https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Espen_Aarseth/publication/254006015_A_narrative_theory_of_games/links/57fb37a708ae280dd0bf9983.pdf, date accessed 14 February 2017.

¹¹ Espen Aarseth.

¹² Frank J. Wetta, Martin A. Novelli, pp. 865–867.

¹³ A term coined by Łukasz Kobylarz, “‘Rambo! Your Country Needs You!’ czyli kino w służbie państwa”, *Panoptikum*, 7 (2008), pp. 296–302.

¹⁴ A phrase popularized by Studs Terkel, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Ballantine Books) (1984).

characters having a deep faith in the legitimacy of war, could give more credibility to such a discourse.¹⁵

In 1998, Spielberg directed *Saving Private Ryan*, which would serve as inspiration for the subsequent digital games. The film suggested a new, hyperrealistic approach to the representation of the effects of war on soldiers. The opening sequence of the Omaha Beach assault during the invasion of Normandy staged with attention to violent details and the frequent point-of-view camera shots, condensed the day-long attack into several minutes. Therefore, it fell within Nicholas Mirzoeff's definition of a "visual event", which in this example became a prototype of subsequent reconstructions of combat assaults in popular culture.¹⁶ At the same time, it helped reconstruct the triumphalist vision of subsequent conflicts in which the United States took part; the Americans are depicted as the only liberators of Nazi-occupied France, and although "they commit atrocities in the fog of war [...], this is the exception rather than the rule".¹⁷ Albert Auster notes that World War II, thanks to films like *Saving Private Ryan*, "has become for Americans that mythic, Edenic moment when the entire nation bent itself to victory over evil and barbarism".¹⁸

In the same year, Spielberg produced a digital game called *Medal of Honor* (1998, DreamWorks Interactive), which served the same triumphalist purpose, but the adaptation of World War II reality to the first-person shooter genre was intended for younger recipients. Spielberg, fascinated with digital games, planned to popularize the "Good War" amongst a new generation raised with new forms of media. Knowing that *Private Ryan*'s violence would be potentially damaging to children, he commissioned a war game with a different plot, without blood and suffering.¹⁹ The result was an adventurous shooter with the player directing a serviceman at the Office of Strategic Services. Tasks involved diverse covert actions behind enemy lines, such as stealing important documents and sabotaging military objectives. In contrast to previous strategic games about World War II, *Medal of Honor* did not intend to realistically imitate the historical battles themselves, and it employed the point of view of an individual soldier only; its arcade-like gameplay seemed to imitate the spy shooting game *GoldenEye 007* (Rage, 1997).²⁰ However, there was no specific story which shaped the *Rage* game; intersections during the main game included briefings with tasks to complete, and nothing more.

¹⁵ Frank J. Wetta, Martin A. Novelli, p. 868.

¹⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Subject of Visual Culture", in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, (London and New York: Routledge) (2002), pp. 6–7.

¹⁷ Albert Auster, "Saving Private Ryan and American Triumphalism", *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 30:2 (2002), p. 102.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁹ Retro Gamer Team, "The Making of Medal of Honor", http://www.retrogamer.net/retro_games90/the-making-of-the-sims/, date accessed 4 February 2017.

²⁰ Gerald Voorhees, "Monsters, Nazis, and Tangos: The Normalization of the First-Person Shooter", in *Guns, Grenades, and Grunts: First-Person Shooter Games*, ed. Gerald Voorhees, Joshua Call, Katie Whitlock (New York – London: Continuum) (2012), p. 103.

Nevertheless, *Medal of Honor* received positive reviews and encouraged its publisher, Electronic Arts, to develop a series of games within a World War II setting. The sequel to *Medal of Honor*, subtitled *Underground* (2000, DreamWorks Interactive), maintained a similar tone while providing the fresh perspective of a French female underground activist.

The Influence of 9/11

Medal of Honor's adventurous tone changed after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. According to Jean Baudrillard, the psychological damage it caused to the American nation led to a globalized cultural expansion of the United States (resulting in such events as the First Gulf War, where the United States led military action against Saddam Hussein's Iraq), with such symbolic violence questioning the global domination of this North American military power.²¹ However, the terrorist attack did not lead to any reflections about the U.S. militarized national diplomacy. Instead, it became an excuse for President George W. Bush to order military intervention in Afghanistan in the same year, where the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda responsible for the attack was based. In 2003, the Bush government invaded Iraq for the second time, citing Iraqi development of weapons of mass destruction as a reason. Both invasions were legitimized by Bush's speech of 23 January 2002, during which the President branded Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan as sponsors of international terrorism, the so-called "axis of evil". A comparison to the political alliance between Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan (Axis Powers) during World War II was evident,²² and was not without reason, as further World War II games would allude at the same time to both "axes of evil", both historical and current.

In the post-9/11 period, the number of military first-person shooters alluding to the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq became much more visible. Popular culture, steered by the connection between military forces and various kinds of entertainment, was involved in the popularization of "justified" violence against other nations, as it had been during the previous events.²³ The role of military shooters cannot, therefore, be diminished, as this ludic genre reflected the enduring cult of guns and violence in the United States.²⁴ First-person shooters, as one of the

²¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays* (Verso) (2003), p. 6-8.

²² William Safire, *Safire's Political Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford Dictionary Press) (2008), pp. 30–32.

²³ See, for example, an examination of the *Captain America* comic book as influenced by up-to-date geopolitics: Jason Dittmer, "Captain America's Empire: Reflections on Identity, Popular Culture, and Post-9/11 Geopolitics", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 95:3 (2005), pp. 626–643.

²⁴ See a comprehensive study of the Americans' attitude to gun culture: Gary Kleck, *Point Blank: Guns And Violence In America* (Transaction Publishers) (2005).

most popular ludic genres, reflected this attitude to violence. On the one hand, there was a vast array of digital shooting games directly supported by the American government, such as *America's Army* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* (2004, Pandemic Studios). Their role as persuasive games with an explicit political message, whose intention was to convince players to support U.S. military interventions, became a topic of comprehensive research.²⁵ However, it is harder to explain the simultaneous wave of American WWII-themed shooters, which lasted until 2008.

Following *Medal of Honor's* success, Electronic Arts continued the series with such games as *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (2002, 2015 Inc.), *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* (2003, EA Los Angeles), *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* (2004, EA Los Angeles), and *Medal of Honor: Airborne* (2007, EA Los Angeles). Meanwhile, another publishing company, Activision, decided to jump on the bandwagon and launched another gaming franchise with *Call of Duty* (2003, Infinity Ward), *Call of Duty 2* (2005, Infinity Ward), *Call of Duty 3* (2007, Treyarch), and *Call of Duty: World at War* (2008, Treyarch). An independent gaming studio, Gearbox Software, also joined the trend, producing a trilogy named *Brothers in Arms*, consisting of three games: *Road to Hill 30* (2005), *Earned in Blood* (2005), and *Hell's Highway* (2008). Whereas the *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* series employed various perspectives of soldiers from different fronts, and featured run-and-gun mechanics restricted to shooting at enemies and destroying enemy installations, *Brothers in Arms* established a coherent narrative about a squad from the 101st Airborne Division during the Normandy invasion and the Operation Market Garden in 1944, with more monotonous and slow-paced gameplay involving the ability to command the whole infantry squad from a first-person perspective. Although the games were cloaked under a specific historical setting, scholars such as Marc Ouellette²⁶ and Trent Cruz²⁷ claim that the World War II-themed military shooters were used to account for military interventions both in Afghanistan and Iraq, assumptions we shall now consider.

Firstly, it is noteworthy that WWII-themed games, while not explicitly showing the influence of the war in Afghanistan and the Gulf War, tended to relocate to Middle East settings in time and space. For example, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, set in the Pacific Theatre, begins with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, which became a convenient excuse for the United States to engage in the world conflict. The Japanese invasion has been frequently compared to American public opinion concerning the devastation of the Twin Towers. Although there are claims

²⁵ Margot A. Susca, "Why We Still Fight: Adolescents, America's Army, and the Government-Gaming Nexus", *Global Media Journal*, 12 (2012), p. 1–16; compare David B. Nieborg, "America's Army: More Than a Game", ed. by Thomas Eberle and Willy Christian Kriz (presented at the *Transforming Knowledge into Action through Gaming and Simulation*, Munchen: SAGSAGA, 2004).

²⁶ Marc Ouellette, "I Hope You Never See Another Day Like This': Pedagogy & Allegory in 'Post 9/11' Video Games", *Game Studies* 8:1 (September 2008), http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/ouellette_m, date accessed 22 February 2017.

²⁷ Trent Cruz, "It's Almost Too Intense': Nostalgia and Authenticity in Call of Duty 2", <http://docplayer.net/30795749-It-s-almost-too-intense-nostalgia-and-authenticity-in-call-of-duty-2.html>, date accessed 28 February 2017.

that such a comparison has been lax and based on simplification,²⁸ the memory of Pearl Harbor within the context of the 9/11 crisis functioned as a persuasive emotional response to human misfortune and suffering.²⁹ This metaphorical outlook on recent events as a reiteration of the past permeated *Rising Sun* along with *Pacific Assault*. In both games, Pearl Harbor develops into a turning point of the main story. While playing *Rising Sun*, the player confronts *kamikaze* planes while defending the *USS Oklahoma* destroyer; in *Pacific Assault*, the Japanese bombers devastate the base while the defenseless player sees the other people suffering from below. Ouellette observes that the fumes of burning Pearl Harbor seen from the distance in a cut-screen resemble the smoke from the Twin Towers after the 9/11 attack.³⁰

Conversely, the references are sometimes subtler. For example, the beginning of *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* is a covert operation taking place in Arzew, Algeria, where a group of OSS servicemen prepare for Operation Torch, an invasion of the Allied military forces on Morocco and Algeria, where the Axis forces are stationed. One of the campaigns featured in *Call of Duty 2* also includes levels depicting the British offensive against German forces in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. Although both games feature protagonists of different nationalities (the reasons for establishing different national viewpoints will be discussed later), the allusion to current events in the Middle East is mediated via Arab urban landscapes. In such scenarios, the Germans—the like Japanese in *Rising Sun* and *Pacific Assault*—serve as the equivalent of Middle Eastern terrorists. If the Japanese soldiers attack the player with bayonets and sword by surprise, the German soldiers organize a violent resistance against Allied forces, performing ambushes with grenade launchers—just like the guerrilla forces in Iraq.³¹

The Germans and the Japanese in these games are both portrayed as fanatics: they repeat conventional cries like “Banzai” and “Amerikaner”, and their role is restricted to those of targets at a shooting range. They are cruel to their captives, and their brutality becomes highlighted in *Call of Duty: World at War*. Each campaign of the game opens with similar scenes: in the American campaign, the player observes an enemy officer burning a prisoner with a cigar, then cutting his throat; the Soviet campaign begins with the player witnessing a massacre of his comrades by German forces. The unfolding narrative suggests the following message: the enemy shows no mercy, so we cannot show it to them either.³²

²⁸ See Fred L. Borch, “Comparing Pearl Harbor and ‘9/11’: Intelligence Failure? American Unpreparedness? Military Responsibility?”, *The Journal of Military History*, 67:3 (2003), pp. 845–860.

²⁹ See Geoffrey M. White, “National Subjects: September 11 and Pearl Harbor”, *American Ethnologist*, 31:3 (2004), pp. 293–310.

³⁰ Marc Ouellette.

³¹ Ken Silverstein, “Soviet-Designed Weapon Is Still Guerrillas’ Choice”, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 July 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jul/06/world/fg-rpg6>, date accessed 24 June 2017.

³² See Robin Andersen, Marin Kurti, “From America’s Army to Call of Duty: Doing Battle with the Military Entertainment Complex”, *Democratic Communiqué* 23:1 (2009), p. 56.

Of course, the situation is different when it comes to portraying the Allies. Activision's *Call of Duty* series, marked initially with the slogan "No one fights alone", involves the diverse perspectives of nations fighting against the Axis. The *Call of Duty* game series, in contrast to homogenized American meta-narratives about their involvement in the war, features varying viewpoints of American, British, Soviet, and other Allied soldiers. All the gaming franchises also include naturalized Americans from ethnic minorities such as Italians and Mexicans (African Americans are not featured, though, due to racial segregation in the American military forces). What linked the meta-narration of the New American Patriotism in games was the accentuation of an international alliance against common enemies.³³ The national and ethnic diversity of fighting characters suggested that they united against a serious threat to their existence. The inclusion of selected Allied nations was affected by the contemporary balance of power, for example the Soviet presence in the *Call of Duty* series can be attributed rather to the intermittent collaboration between the United States and Russia during the invasion of Afghanistan than to the historical alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States during World War II.

By contrast, the perspectives of the defeated nations are not included. Tanine Allison notes that while in many strategy games the player can control German and Japanese forces, the narration of American WWII-themed shooters stays highly vectorized, and the Allies constitute the only playable side of the conflict.³⁴ The civilian perspective is also reduced from the main narration, as the New Patriotism in games would lose attractiveness if the player confronted the real suffering of defenseless people murdered during military action. According to Holger Pötzsch, such a tendency is typical for first-person shooters in general:

If civilian deaths are presented, their fates are disconnected from player involvement and usually presented as the consequence of the opponents' actions and decisions. The only violence that is enabled is strictly battle related and targeted at opposing soldiers or paramilitary forces this way excluding such documented war-related abuses as rape, the killing of children, or the unintended targeting of non-combatants with heavy weapons.³⁵

The only WWII-themed shooter which included civilians as refined characters is *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*. The game, set in The Netherlands during Operation Market Garden in 1944, features several Dutch people who interact with an American unit while residing in the city of Eindhoven; a shoemaker offers the main protagonist Matt Baker some information about the enemies' position, and a

³³ See Debra Ramsay, *American Media and the Memory of World War II* (Oxford: Routledge) (2015), p. 170.

³⁴ Tanine Allison, "The World War II Video Game, Adaptation, and Postmodern History", *Literature/Film Quarterly* 38:3 (2010), pp. 191.

³⁵ Holger Pötzsch, "Selective Realism: Filtering Experiences of War and Violence in First- and Third-Person Shooters", *Games and Culture* 12:2 (2007), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1555412015587802>, date accessed 9 February 2017.

secondary character falls in love with a local girl. However, two motives—resistance and love—are dramatically curtailed with the brutal deaths of the shoemaker’s son and the girl. Their sacrifice, however, is used pretextually to illustrate enemy atrocities, and the narration still defines the American servicemen as people determined to prevent the civilians from suffering.

Cinematic Imagery

These factors—relocation of the present into the past, demonization of enemies, and heroization of protagonists—correspond to period films constituting the cinematic New Patriotism. However, American WWII-themed shooters are defined not only by their common, ideological message, but also by their hyperrealism in staging scenes from the conflict. Although the games’ developers frequently used slogans that seemingly attest to the authenticity and realism of their products,³⁶ the notion of realism in digital games is actually very problematic. We can attribute this issue to the ontological status of digital games in general. The realism considered as being in the real-world environment does not apply to digital games because they can only simulate their worlds, and simulation always excludes some factors constituting real life. For example, virtual bodies disappear after the passage of time, and the player can easily heal herself even after being seriously injured. As Aarseth says, virtual bullets used in various shooters do not differ ontologically,³⁷ and simulation as part of gaming experience always combines the real and the fictional.³⁸

Furthermore, WWII-themed military shooters from 1998–2008 are more intertextual than extratextual, which means that they borrow from cinematic imagery rather than from real experiences on World War II battlefields. One can cite numerous inspirations of game developers by the cinematic New Patriotism. For example, the Omaha Beach sequence from *Saving Private Ryan* appeared in two Electronic Arts’ games about the Normandy invasion (*Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* and *Medal of Honor: Frontline*) where even details such as the subtitle “Omaha Beach, June 6th, 1944” with the Times New Roman font are copied from the film. Similarly, the *Call of Duty* and *Call of Duty: World at War*’s Soviet storylines that take place during the Battle of Stalingrad remediate the settings and events previously seen in *Enemy at the Gates* (2002, Jean-Jacques Annaud). The spectacularly staged sequence of the parachute landing in the French countryside, which introduces *Road to Hill 30*, as well as the serialized narrative of the whole series, recalls the HBO mini-series *Band of*

³⁶ See James Campbell, “Just Less than Total War: Simulating World War II as Ludic Nostalgia”, in *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games*, ed. by Laurie N. Taylor and Zach Whalen (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press) (2008), p. 186.

³⁷ Espen Aarseth, “Doors and Perception: Fiction vs. Simulation in Games”, *Intermedialités* 9 (2007), p. 38.

³⁸ Espen Aarseth, s. 43.

Brothers (2001, Steven Spielberg & Tom Hanks), whereas *Rising Sun* and *Pacific Assault* imitate *Pearl Harbor* in their depiction of the titular base attack.

Adapting Jay David Bolter and David Grusin's term of "remediation", defined as the "refashioned and improved versions of other media",³⁹ James Campbell sees such a tendency as an example of "remediated nostalgia". His research indicates that WWII-themed shooters were intended to simulate not World War II itself, but a World War II film. Hence, games such as *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty* attempt to provide ludic visual experiences similar to those from the 1990s American combat films.⁴⁰ This assumption, according to Eva Kingsepp, recalls the Baudrillardian notion of hyperreality which replaces historical events, currently impossible to revive, with their mediated representations.⁴¹ The games imitated reality, but their developers could not develop a real experience, only a feeling of authenticity.⁴²

Following James Campbell's suggestion that WWII-themed shooters simulate cinematic experience, we discover that their design is intended not to demonstrate real suffering during combat, but to just "look" real. Discussing this issue, Andrew Salvati and Jonathan Bullinger define American WWII-themed military shooters as using "selective authenticity", a term introduced to describe the creative interpretation of historical facts instead of strict historical reconstruction. This process, according to Salvati and Bullinger, applies to these shooters within the framework of three categories: technology fetishism (an accurate depiction of the weaponry used during the war), documentary authority (a selection of documentaries or quotations from known personalities), and cinematic convention.⁴³ The latter category is characterized by frequent use of slow-motion and cut-scenes (*Rising Sun*, *Pacific Assault*, *Earned in Blood*, *Hell's Highway*), as well as a stabilized virtual camera during significant events (*Road to Hill 30*, *Call of Duty 3*, *World at War*) and the inclusion of authentic documentaries that are already cinematic in their form. All these factors contributed to the meta-narrative of the New American Patriotism in games and made them a visually attractive collection of factual discourses, where complex military operations are rapidly achieved on screen.⁴⁴

³⁹ Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press) (1999), p. 15.

⁴⁰ James Campbell, pp. 187–188.

⁴¹ Eva Kingsepp, "Fighting Hyperreality With Hyperreality: History and Death in World War II Digital Games", *Games and Culture*, 2:4 (2007), pp. 367–368.

⁴² Eva Kingsepp, "Immersive Historicity in World War II Digital Games", *Human IT: Journal for Information Technology Studies as a Human Science*, 8:2 (2013), p. 64.

⁴³ Andrew J. Salvati, Jonathan M. Bullinger, "Selective Authenticity and the Playable Past", in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Wilhelm Kapell, Andrew B.R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury) (2013), pp. 153–167.

⁴⁴ For example, in the Soviet campaign of *Call of Duty*, there is a mission in which the player defends a strategic object known as Pavlov's House during the Battle of Stalingrad. Whereas the real defense lasted two months before the arrival of supporting Soviet forces, the in-game defense could be easily completed in 15–20 minutes. The historical events are condensed to fully immerse the player in the battle that could not be as intense as on screen.

The Decline and the Revival?

New American Patriotism in games, considered here as the presence of American WWII-themed shooters, rapidly disappeared after 2008—there were no further productions about the conflict. One can posit several causes of such a decline. Firstly, the virtual image of World War II became much darker during the existence of the movement. The first *Medal of Honor* games which attracted the attention of players featured no blood or gore. This situation changed after the appearance of the *Brothers in Arms* franchise, in which the player had to confront the dispiriting deaths of fallen comrades and scenes naturalistically picturing the physical fragmentation of soldiers. This increase of violence reflected the brutalization of the Second Gulf War, when a growing number of news reports indicated the tragic result of American aggression against civilians. The military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq were failures resulting in the appearance of so-called Islamic State in post-2010 Iraq. The last game of the *Brothers in Arms* series, *Hell's Highway*, is set during Operation Market Garden in 1944, which was regarded a similar failure because of equally poor intelligence and dire consequences for civilians. This game, featuring horrifying imagery of the consequences of war on soldiers and civilians, ends with the operation unaccomplished and the player-directed unit being demoralized, but nevertheless having faith in further phases of the war (retrospectively motivated, anyway). James W. Creel suggests that the closure of *Hell's Highway* was paradoxically uplifting in its allusion to the War on Terror and hope for a final victory since World War II had been won despite the operational failure.⁴⁵ Yet if we consider the demotivating tones of the whole game, the implicit ideological message of *Hell's Highway* seemed ineffective, the story being assessed by a British journalist Kristan Reed as “overblown, and, towards the end, really quite cringeworthy”.⁴⁶

Secondly, the constant ideological remembrance of such historical battles as the Normandy beaches, Stalingrad, and Pearl Harbor became counter-productive. The discourse, when repeated without refreshment, turned out to be unconvincing, and the depictions of historical conflicts lost their attraction, as the meta-narrative of the New American Patriotism was still the same.⁴⁷ When Activision realized that moving the World War II setting to fictionalized modern conflicts in *Call of Duty 4*:

⁴⁵ James W. Creel, “Failure Is Not An Option: WWII, Video Games, and the War on Terror”, in *The Game Culture Reader*, ed. by Jason Thompson and Marc Ouellette (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing) (2013), pp. 175–187.

⁴⁶ Kristan Reed, “Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway”, *Eurogamer*, 2008 <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/brothers-in-arms-hells-highway-review?page=2>, date accessed 24 June 2017.

⁴⁷ Brian Crecente, “Video Games Bid Adieu to World War II”, <http://kotaku.com/5555349/black-opsvideo-games-bid-adieu-to-world-war-ii>, date accessed 24 February 2017.

Modern Warfare (2007, Infinity Ward) “made the game more exciting to the players”,⁴⁸ the developers shifted to *political fiction* while maintaining the militaristic discourse to justify U.S. military aggression. Conversely, a new trend began to infect military shooters. The bonus horror episode of *Call of Duty: World at War*, in which the player could battle against zombified versions of the Nazis, became more popular than the game itself.⁴⁹ Thus, World War II in military shooters turned itself into a dead project, and the military–entertainment complex sought new methods of persuading the audiences to intervene in the Middle East.

However, the relocation of U.S. military forces to Iraq to counter an increasing regional threat from the so-called Islamic State gave the American government new arguments for maintaining the position of primary guardians of the global order. The military–entertainment complex seems to respond to such trends, with Activision and Gearbox Software recently announcing the development of new games set in World War II.⁵⁰ Thus, the question of American imperialism is being reintroduced. The living dead of WWII-themed games are rising from their graves, thus forcing us to indicate the renewed articulation of New American Patriotism.

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⁴⁸ Seth Schiesel, “In This Electronic War, Momentum Shifts to the Underdog”, *The New York Times*, 4 July 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/08/arts/television/08battle.html?nytmobile=0>, date accessed 24 June 2017.

⁴⁹ Adam Rosenberg, “Zombies Don’t Belong in Call of Duty — so How the Hell Did They Get There?”, *Digital Trends*, 2015, <https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/zombies-dont-belong-call-duty-hell-get/>, date accessed 24 June 2017.

⁵⁰ Cade Onder, “Randy Pitchford teases new Brothers in Arms game”, <http://www.gamezone.com/news/randy-pitchford-teases-new-brothers-in-arms-game-3453060>, date accessed 11 July 2017.

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