2014 2016

Lethal Appetites: Media, Connectivity and Consumption in the Age of Discreet War

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This project examined the inter-subjective relationship between war and media. The research lead to a deep understanding of the various political-economic practices, techniques and process that lead to the administration of Discreet War. I accomplished this by focusing on the various ways conflict is transformed into a mediated process which in turn, incites a contradictory process of greater opacity in power while a need to create higher degrees of transparency in private life. As such this research project addressed the increasing propensity of opacity in Western media coverage political violence that takes place Western nation states. This phenomenon, I discovered has led to an increasing erosion of the distinction/line between notions of public space and private space. Thus, my field research was in essence an exploration the porous institutional boundaries between social media, data mining and national security.

Media Studies

Consumption Connectivity Militarism Consumerism War

More than a decade after 9/11, a large disconnect remains between the continuity of a War on Terror and the absence of actual images and information from the battlefield to sustain its legitimacy. Instead what we are offered as substitute for this 'Discreet' iconography of actual violence is a war mediated in the same manner in which it is waged, as a virtual yet virtuously charged consumer spectacle.

From the *Patriot* app for *iPad* that 'deputizes' and 'networks' citizens, allowing them to report suspicious activities and persons directly to federal agencies, to the Volkswagen *Polo* TV ads claiming that their new car is 'small yet tough enough' to foil a suicide bomber attack, to the US campaign slogan 'General Motors/Alive and Osama Bin Laden/Dead' – the War on Terror has become a regulating and normalizing feature of our media ecology but also an integral part of everyday media practices and advertising strategies.

The research began with the underlying premise that Pentagon war hawks, advertising gurus and policy makers are building inter-subjective relationships around the terror battlefield in pursuit of corporate enterprise, national security, and the legitimization of Discreet War.

This project analyzes three aspects of Discreet War (covert operations, secret kill lists and drone warfare) and its place in contemporary media culture: (i) the ways commercial and political forces are coming together to shape our understanding of the War on Terror and the role Discreet War plays as a 'grey' but necessary solution; (ii) the ways media texts and practices advocating Discreet War are consequently woven into our daily media behavior and commercial culture; and (iii) the ways Discreet War has ultimately become a regulating and normalizing feature of our media ecology and an integral part of everyday media practices and advertising strategies.

The project explored the increasingly mediated nature of conflict. The purpose of this research is to fill the vacuum that exists between traditional International Relations theories on conflict and the ways in which their mediatization becomes an integral part of the ways in which these conflicts are enacted and not simply represented.

While there is a plethora of scholarship on the politics of consumption during World War I and World War II, the biopolitical relationship between contemporary media practices, commercial culture and the state is in fact a much overlooked aspect of the discourses on the War on Terror.

This research is extremely relevant today because increasingly the mediatized nature of modern day conflicts sublimates more honest and genuine political dimensions of this conflict.

In order to better understand the complex ways in which media interfaces with modern day conflict, especially in the age of Discreet War, my focus was to examine more the various phenomena that mediation creates rather than simply trying to read what various conflict media means. This required looking at the multiple ways in which corporate strategies and foreign policy initiatives are aligned through media exposure, connectivity and modern consumption practices.

In order to accomplish the various tasks at hand, my research adopted a cross-disciplinary, qualitative approach that brought together both (new) Media Studies, International Relations, popular culture artifacts (films, videogames, news broadcasts, online and traditional newspapers), as well as various Western military doctrines, a wealth of Jihadist media and peer to peer resources in order to critically analyze the social, political and interactive dynamics of wartime media texts and consumption practices.

I also borrowed extensively from various theoretical models of notable scholars such as Giorgio Agamben and his work on State of the Exception and Homo Sacer, Michel Foucault's Biopower and Biopolitics, Michael Dillon and Julian Reid's work on illiberal democracies, Judith Butler's work on 'grievable life' as well as Deleuze's work on 'assemblage theory' in order to map the rhizomatic growth and semiotic cycles of media texts, institutions, hardware, software, processes, practices and ways of thinking to

analyze how meaning is produced through the conditions of our engagement with that which is mediated. This research strategy was punctuated with field interviews with pundits, scholars, activists, entrepreneurs and members of fan culture relating to Discreet War.

FY2014

The objective of this research was to examine and analyze the increasing synergy between commercial and political forces in relation to war and the crisis of liberal democracy. This research used a combination of archival visits as well as interviews with scholars, military personnel, media professionals such as journalists, editors and photographers. The research at this point focused on the increasing tendency of liberal democracy to embrace illiberal practices and actions under the pretense of spreading liberal ideals to the 'non-integrated gap'.

I used as my case studies the increasing human rights violations, aggressive unilateralist actions, the permanent state of exception, mass surveillance, the creation of black sites similar to Guantanamo Bay, targeted assassination, and other coercive processes to achieve political aims. From a series of interviews with leading media practitioners, academics and pundits I was able to better understand the practices and processes through which discursive frameworks for liberal war are communicated. This included an extensive comparative examination between the

rhetoric used in the Cold War and the War on Terror. My trips to Cold War satellite states such as Slovakia and the Czech Republic were instrumental in helping me to better understand the ways in which notions of modernity and humanism were promulgated in these opposing ideological systems which in fact shared common interests.

The second aspect of my research for this year dealt with the role of photography in war and the impact of the image as a representational device that works to interpret the viewer rather than the opposite way around. My research in this section looked at the socio-historical and technical advancements in war photography, its prevalence during the rise of the internet and of course the advent of 24/7 TV cable news which began at the beginning of the first Gulf War. This was followed by an extensive examination of the use of Web 2.0 technologies during the Arab Spring otherwise known as the 'Twitter' or 'Facebook Revolutions'.

Throughout this period, I also conducted research in great depth on the history of liberal war. This historical examination allowed me to gain a better understanding of the current situation in contemporary society. In connection to this, I was able to also do research on the Cold War because I felt that much of the rhetoric used in the Cold War parallels that of the Global War on Terror.

FY2015

In 2015, the intention of my research was to focus on issues surrounding surveillance. This began with an examination of the biopolitical history of surveillance as a major pole of exercises in discipline or what Foucault calls 'governmentality'. Thus, I looked at surveillance as a mechanism of social control and progress by tracing a historical arc across various time periods (Ancient Times, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment, the Age of Empire, the Industrial Revolution, World War I and World War II, the Cold War and finally, the post-9/11 era). I was able to understand the ways in which surveillance, once simply a marker of authoritarian regimes, has become a crucial marker of modern liberal society, particularly in a biopolitical capacity of improving and maximizing life as an essential form of capital. I was able to understand how surveillance is a key pillar in the administration of life from health science and immigration to online marketing and law enforcement and national security through representation in other countries, notably the UK.

As well I was able to do some collaborative writing with Professor Ponton at University of Catania as well as attend a European International Studies Association conference in Taormina, Italy. The event lasted several days and it allowed me an opportunity to learn more about various aspects of conflict in violence. My field studies also took me to Canada: I visited Toronto University library to do archival research and a field interview with a media practitioner who is skilled in special effects. The reason for the interview was to ascertain the possibility of the terrorist group known as ISIS using special effects during their executions – specifically,

I investigated the use of cinematographic techniques used by modern day terrorists.

I then journeyed to Montreal where I had a chance to visit the Canadian Armed Forces recruiting center to investigate how recruiting practices are organized, regulated and finally legitimated; to do archival research at Concordia University and McGill University; and also to do some collaborative writing with Professor Elene Tremblay.

Moreover, I spent several months during 2015 with my research project to develop and design an interactive computer simulation game based on media and conflict. This effort resulted in a keynote invitation in which I presented the interactive simulation at Deutsche Welle's Global Media Forum, Foreign Policy in the Digital Age, in Germany in 2015. I also did some field interviews at Amsterdam University with two academics doing work on social networks and politics.

At the end of FY2015, my ongoing research was brought to fulfillment as an invited keynote speaker for a workshop entitled Tackling Transparency Beyond the Nation State, hosted by the Department of International Relations at Cardiff University, Wales, U.K.

My presentation examined the biopolitics of securitization when data led regimes empower sentient neo-security assemblages as surrogate forms of sovereign authority and decision.

FY2016

I spent much time analyzing the writings of Massumi, Agamben and Amoore. This examination led me to a clear understanding of the importance of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages and the ways in which assemblages seek legitimacy by offering the widely admired [if often unproven] predictability, impartiality and objectivity of techno-scientific solutions: their ultimate goal is merely to preempt immediate threats to the body politic by extending juridical reach and disciplinary sight. I also learned the longer term effects—and arguably intent—of sentient neo-security assemblages is to preserve the domains of their masters, who will control immense existential and predictive data that will allow them to shape public perceptions and quell possible opposition, thereby ensuring the exception incontrovertible and infinite life.

In the latter half of 2016, my investigation undertook an assessment of how social media and its connectivity shapes or at least influences the media practices and understanding of audiences in regards to their perceptions of terrorism. Specifically, I conducted research with journalists and media outlets in order to gauge how current post 9/11 discourse shapes how security threats are narrated through the media and the resulting disconnects that occur between what is happening in Western countries in terms of terror related attacks and the events that are going on in the Middle East.

2

1. <u>Mantello, Peter</u>. "Military Shooter Video Games and the Ontopolitics of Derivative Wars and Arms Culture." *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 76 (2017): 483–521. doi:10.1111/ajes.12184 (peer reviewed)

2. <u>Mantello, Peter</u>. "The machine that ate bad people: The ontopolitics of the precrime assemblage." *Big Data & Society* 3, no. 2 (2016): 1-11. doi: 10.1177/2053951716682538 (peer reviewed)

2

1. <u>Mantello, Peter A.</u> Keynote - "Conflict in Kulmeria." Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum 2015. June 23, 2015. Bonn, Germany.

2. <u>Mantello, Peter A.</u> Keynote - "Neo-Security Assemblages." Seminar: Tackling Transparency Beyond the Nation-State. March 31, 2016. Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom.

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