Issue 8-Gaming Networks Mods, Nay! Tournaments, Yay!-The Appropriation of Contemporary Game Culture by the US Military.

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Mods, Nay! Tournaments, Yay! - The Appropriation of Contemporary Game Cultur

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United States (U.S.) Army recruiting did not seem to be a problem after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. H terror calls for more soldiers and thus more recruits. Operation Iraqi Freedom in particular has put manpower of the Army. A significant part of the U.S. war machine is tied down in the cities of Iraq, re manpower and material. The Bush administration has made it clear that it expects the war on terror against a shadowy enemy (Gordon and Trainor, 2006). At the same time, government officials such a Donald H. Rumsfeld pointed out that the war on terror is also a war on ideas'. According to him, it is liberty, values appropriated by and associated with the United States.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become increasingly important element (Toffler and Toffler, 1995). This trend labelled Infowar' is giving way to the convergence of the techn U.S. military with networked, ICT-based warfare (Der Derian, 2003). In all its forms, information war weapon systems: in its hard form as a component of a weapon, or in its soft form as (public) dissimu

> More a weapon of mass persuasion and distraction than destruction, infowar nonetheless sha characteristics with nuclear war: it targets civilian as well as military populations and its excha outweighs its use-value as an actual weapon. (Der Derian, 2003: 47)

Modern-day media have become powerful instruments of war, as many wars are won politically, no This political-ideological dimension of media was most visible during the first Gulf War. Before and newscasts played a significant role in persuading U.S. citizens to support the war while distracting Ir distorted information about the war's strategic objectives (Taylor, 1998).

Today new media complement the use of older, 'mass; media forms. New media (technologies) hav the war on terror in two converging ways. First, games and webpages can act directly as recruiting to U.S. Army has various websites to assist parents with their children's decision to join. Second, entert directly and indirectly provide context and justifications through simulations and dissimulations as terror is fought. As such, the concept of infowar directly relates to the use of game technology by the focus on this dual capacity of new media technology, specifically digital games.

Contemporary media seem to have incorporated militarised themes in every way possible. Televisio reports live from the battlefield while retired generals act as experts on 24-hour news channels. Holl special effect at their disposal to depict an even more spectacular image of war using leased military scholars have analysed this symbiotic relationship between military communities and the entertain

known as the military-entertainment complex' (Der Derian, 2003; Lenoir and Lowood, 2003; Stockwe
complex, countless television series, movies, and (comic) books are continuously being produced. A
same simulation technologies as commercial game developers do, boundaries between commercial
military simulations are seemingly eroding. In addition, the historically strong ties between military
becoming more and more visible due to popular accounts of the military-entertainment complex (C
2006). More so than other media, digital games above all epitomise the military-entertainment com

Beyond the military-entertainment complex

To deepen the understanding of the expanding military-entertainment complex, the first state-produ
Army, will be discussed. The complex, which seems at first sight to be no more than a technological
Hollywood/Silicon Valley and the Pentagon, in fact has profound implications from a socio-econom
point-of-view. Solely focusing on the mere fact that games are produced in cooperation with the mil
the synergy between the military-entertainment complex and contemporary youth popular culture.
developed recruiting games impacts thinking about games and simulations and the use of these inte
education, and propaganda. Similarly, the appropriation of a global game culture seems to result in
between the hierarchical nature of the U.S. military and the participatory character of numerous gam

The U.S. military in particular benefits in various ways from a global game culture playing war-them
are able to use interactive entertainment as a valuable asset in their expansive toolbox. In what follo
games as objects for military recruiting will be discussed. Through the use of games the U.S. military
interact with the 'Internet generation.; With *America's Army* the U.S. Army tapped directly into game
harness the creative and symbolic capital produced by gamers. Whereas with commercially develop
with the cultural industries, the players of state-produced games such as *America's Army* aid, howeve
U.S. war effort by spreading the U.S. Army's symbolic capital. The core of *America's Army*'s ideology
cultural industries' profit motive or on providing entertainment only. Where *America's Army* differs f
Shooter (FPS) PC-game such as *Counter-Strike*, is that the former is a game with a clear agenda. Nam
U.S. Army brand through popular culture.

In this paper I will argue that the commodification of play is now, by way of the military-entertainme
the militarisation of play. Next, the two main reasons why games have been able to become viable re
discussed. First, there is the technological and economic dimension of contemporary game developm
comparing game technology to the development and distribution of Hollywood movies, it becomes
interactive recruiting with digital play results in the alteration of the rules of engagement. Second, it
giant leap to build military-themed computer games for recruiting purposes, considering the rich sh
academic and entertainment communities. The second part of this paper will consider the relationsh
communities and digital play using *America's Army* as a case study.

Branding the U.S. Army

Recruiting soldiers for the U.S. Army has never been an easy task. In the late nineties, partly due to th
U.S. military's annual recruiting goals were missed one after another. Then in 2000, the tides seemed
consecutive years enough recruits were drafted to fill the ranks. In early 2005 however, the U.S. Army
recruiting target. Today the U.S. military has to rely on its recruiting efforts more than ever before. Be
deployments the U.S. military is stretched thin. Newspapers report of soldiers refusing to report for
clear that reinstating the draft is out of question.

One of the biggest problems faced by contemporary military recruiting efforts is its lack of effectiven
done to re-establish a long-term connection with the American youth. Mass media have been used f
the 1970s, and today a quarter of today's 600 million dollars military advertising budget is spent on
Accounting Office, 2003). Advertising money used to maintain and expand the U.S. Army brand is als
and sports teams and on other promotional activities. In a report by the U.S. Army Research Institute
youth were examined and two important media for individuals who might possibly join the Army w
the Internet (Morath et al., 2001). An icon of youth popular culture, the music channel MTV was iden
core recruitable audience of 18 to 24-year old males. To improve Army recruiting via the Internet, th

recruiting website GoArmy.com was enhanced. But besides hip TV commercials, recruiting offices, r[...] and various other ways to attract new servicemen, the Army acknowledged the enormous potential [...] message that: The U.S. Army is the most powerful, most respected and most feared ground force in t[...] 2003a: 3).

As mentioned earlier, military-developed or -sponsored games are as much weapons in the war on [...] recruiting tools. This dual role of advertisement (recruiting) and persuasion (spreading U.S. ideolog[...] candidates for the dissemination of propaganda. This holds especially true in regard to the U.S. mili[...] propaganda:

> Any form of communication in support of national objectives designed to influence the opini[...]
> or behavior of any group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly. (Depart[...]
> 427)

While the focus in this paper is primarily on the role of simulation technologies and digital games, i[...] place of Hollywood movies within the military-entertainment complex and Hollywood's linkage wit[...] establishment. Why is the military establishment so eager to use game technology for propaganda p[...] why has there never been a state-produced movie with a similar (dual role) as *America's Army*?

Propaganda and popular culture

Communication scholars Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell argue that the Hollywood film indu[...] propaganda' (1986: 72). Apart from the preparedness films' made in the 1930s, Hollywood never ma[...] to deliberately and systematically shape the perception of the U.S. military. While the U.S. military re[...] blockbuster propaganda movie, it did have a significant influence in shaping many war-themed mo[...] *Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (2004) provides a detailed and well doc[...] relationship between the movie industry and the U.S. military. Robb explains how Hollywood movie[...] access to expensive military material and expert knowledge if they were willing to put up their script[...] makes sure that a sponsored movie informs the public about the U.S. military and that the military is[...] order to help military recruiting and retention' (Robb, 2004: 44). The indirect dissemination of milita[...] common practice and profoundly shape many box-office hits. Robb also demonstrates that military-[...] are in many instances the result of tough negotiations.

Jowett and O'Donnell present three reasons why the military seems to be reluctant about the in-hou[...] propaganda movie (1986: 81-2). First, a global audience is used to high standards and, thus, to fairly[...] highly unlikely that U.S. Congress would authorise the U.S. Army to spend a hundred million dollars[...] obvious absence of any guarantee of success. A second factor is the convention of a fictional narrativ[...] Hollywood stars. The medium of the motion picture is therefore totally limited to the values and ide[...] of the plot structure' (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1986). These limiting values could seriously hamper th[...] complex and often tedious tasks of U.S. Army soldiers. Equally, a hero's singular point-of-view, thin[...] H. Miller character in *Saving Private Ryan*, conflicts with the U.S. Army's Army of One recruiting mess[...] system for films is tightly organised and difficult to break into as an outsider. On the other hand, pro[...] Hollywood-like U.S. war movie is easier than in the 1980's. As we are entering the age of media conv[...] production have become cheaper and easier to use while the Internet can function as an inexpensiv[...] channel (Jenkins, 2003). Nevertheless, making a successful Hollywood movie is even for the U.S. mi[...] adventure.

Comparing these factors to the development and distribution of digital games, it makes all more ser[...] blown propaganda game is far cheaper and easier than producing a high-profile movie. New game f[...] *Auto* series and *The Sims* franchise, show that game design conventions are continually being altere[...] formulaic FPS genre and the sub-genre of tactical shooters, experimentation with certain design ele[...] gamers. Another obstacle, the factor of distribution, can be bypassed because of the near-ubiquitous[...] States. Gamers have proved to be willing to download large files and to share content through digita[...] networks.

In addition, in contrast to Robb's analysis, Hollywood military-themed movies are seen by *America* Wardynski as stereotypical and sensationalist representations of the military' (Li, 2004: 40). Also, mo spread information because they are external, independent intermediaries beyond Army control' (ib came to a similar conclusion two decades ago, claiming that: movies never became the powerful pro thought it would be', despite having the greatest potential for emotional appeal to its audience, offe identification with the characters and action on the screen than found elsewhere in popular culture'

Conversely, contemporary game culture seems like a perfect place to exert full Army control. The U.S marketing apparatus to spread their U.S. Army: An Army of One' message, and games fit perfectly in recruiters (van der Graaf and Nieborg, 2003). Digital games have been, and increasingly will be, use purposes (Nieborg, 2006). While popular culture may be largely outside the direct control of the Pe propaganda via military-controlled game communities has become a valid and attractive option. Th make an expensive movie or produce their own television series; they are able to tap directly into ex economical frameworks of the military-entertainment complex.

Good morning soldier, welcome to the U.S. Army!

The representation and simulation of modern war in computer games shows that there is already a (virtual) war (Nieborg, 2004). The war on terror is both explicitly and implicitly simulated in a wide *Battlefield 2, Kuma War*, and *Counter-Strike*, and in budget action titles as *Desert Fury, Airstrike II: Gul Takedown*. The ubiquitous availability of war-themed games is not solely industry-driven, nor can i lack of imagination in game designers and publishers. Gamers themselves display an unequivocal present and future military conflicts. Take the user-created total conversion modifications (mods) o FPS PC-game *Battlefield 1942*. Every significant conflict involving a Western country has its own mo Falklands war to the conflict in Somalia (Nieborg, 2005a). Similarly, only a month after the release o already over fifty military themed mods in some state of development. [1] If gamers do not like the simply recruit people that have a shared interest and develop a mod of their own. Therefore, most g surprised by a military-themed game, even if it is developed by the military.

The demographic composition of FPS game culture matches the main pool of potential Army recruit of FPS games exhibits a strong gender bias where violent themes are ubiquitous (Hall, 2003; Kline e as a natural progression of the military-entertainment complex, the U.S. Army ordered the developm available, state-produced military entertainment game in 2001. The army's move to venture into ga when the game was eventually released. On July 4, 2002, the first version of *America's Army* was mad website. [2] Within days, servers were swamped and the game proved to be an instant success. For o ranked high in the list of most played FPSs, attracting and retaining a considerable group of a coupl dedicated players. Every couple of months the game is significantly updated, with bug fixes and the weapons and training elements. *America's Army* is part of the sub-genre of the tactical FPS, which me multiplayer sessions fight each other in a setting modelled after a place in the real world. The inner have been explained in detail elsewhere (Li, 2004; Nieborg, 2005b).

Militarised play

It is important here to address the game's multi-modal character. What makes *America's Army* fairly commercial games as well as military simulations, is that it is an advergame, edugame, test tool and 2005b). The game constantly balances between the expectations of gamers (shaped by FPS genre co design rationale (shaped by its four dimensions), not to mention, numerous technical design constr software limitations. Although the game is part of the sub-genre of tactical FPS games, *America's Arm* only a 'sophisticated advergame;. The official *America's Army*-brand definition is revealing in this re

> America's Army is the only official Army game designed, created and developed by the U.S. A most authentic Army game ever made, as it strives to provide an accurate, comprehensive and the Army experience. Based on the seven fundamental values embodying the U.S. Army - Loy Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage - the game teaches players about per teamwork, while immersing them in real-life training and combat missions (Army Game Proj

America's Army has been carefully designed to propagate the U.S. Army ethos. This ethos simulates t
of U.S. foreign policy, giving the game its propaganda dimension. *America's Army* shows that the U.S
professional force, willing to fight against terrorists. This is achieved via its interactive dialogue with
both the game and its community.

The Army harnesses the collaborative nature of online game communities and uses it to its advantag
the Army's symbolic capital and ideology, and on the other hand it attempts to recruit possible milit
introduction of various semi-commercial, military endorsed games (e.g., *Full Spectrum Warrior, Clo*
even military produced games, the U.S. military directly taps into the very fabric of popular culture. T
seems to be taking off right now and, as discussed earlier, this *modus operandi* entails much more th
collaboration. With continuing reports live from the battlefield, war has become an intertextual com
Pentagon and global media conglomerates on television, the Internet, in movies and in games (cf. M
military themed games have become part of the long history of the synergy between the political an
The efforts of the U.S. military to invest in the military-entertainment complex is a major leap forwar
and the domestic spheres in the realm of audiovisual cultural forms' (Crogan, 2003: 279-80). By dev
development of military-themed games for educational, advertisement or even propagandistic purp
directly appropriate a global youth culture.

A militarised participatory media culture

To get hold of this process of militarisation and to critically approach the Army game as well as its re
Joost Raessens' (2005) notion of participatory media culture' will be used to reflect on the game's po
implications. Participatory media culture, according to Raessens, encompasses three domains of pa
'reconfiguration' and construction'. The three domains have a political-ideological dimension whic
between the dominant and the critical, social and cultural practices in the realm of computer games'
tensions are then defined by three elements. The first of these is top-down' versus bottom-up', refer
concerning the results of the access to the practices of the media culture' (Raessens, 2005: 383). The s
versus heterogenization', discusses the question of the reproduction of ideologically charged values
there's a distinction between the real versus the possible'. Next, I will elaborate upon Raessens' thre
analyse the political-ideological presuppositions of *America's Army* before I end this paper with a di
Army contributes to culture participation' or a more desirable participatory media culture'.

The first domain of participation deals with the interpretation of a game and is based on the notion
conceptualised by cultural studies scholars such as Stuart Hall and John Fiske. Interpretation as a m
heavily regulated, trying to facilitate what Stuart Hall would dub a dominant reading' or what Sherry
resignation' where gamers surrender to the seduction of the simulation' (Raessens, 2005: 377). *Amer*
as well as its external discursive framework, are meant to let gamers internalise the rules of the game
dictated rules of play are seen as natural. Through the process of what Ted Friedman (1995) calls de
is deconstructed in a way that is dictated by its regulatory and strict rule set, seeking full simulation
authenticity plays an important part in this process as many choices in the game's design are justifie
players, as being 'realistic;. For realism's sake, the gameplay is much more structured and bound by
warfare compared to similar games in the genre. Players become soldiers with a persistent record. S
out, and maps, weapons and player roles cannot be changed. Friendly fire always results in punishr

Gamers seem to wilfully accept the many ideological preconceptions in *America's Army*'s simulation
in this respect is the fact that gamers seldom question the fact that they are not able to play as 'terror
players see themselves always as a U.S. soldier and their opponents as 'terrorists;, a unique feature f
The simulation of the us-versus-them' dichotomy is present in almost every war game with a conter
is only a binary choice, coalition versus Iraqi Forces, U.S. Forces versus Arab/Muslim terrorists, goo
Army player however is 'embedded; with the U.S. army and thereby deliberately loses the viewpoint
2003). The loss of context and the subsequent vilification of 'the other; is a well-known propaganda
Players may deconstruct the game's simulation model only to find a regulated and explicitly singula
perspective: that of the U.S. Army.

The propagation of U.S. Army values is an important part of the ideological construct underlying the

attention the values receive in both the game and the game's community may seem strange to outsi
values within the non-virtual U.S. Army is seen as just as vital as learning how to properly throw a g
live up to the values around the clock, even when they are off duty. The developers explain how they
values in the game:

> [America's Army] rewards soldierly behaviour and penalizes rotten eggs. This works out in pr
> training, for example, you can opt to become a combat lifesaver. Doing so reflects duty and se
> points and expanded opportunities for going through training. Out on mission, your buddy c
> You can attend him, which earns points for loyalty and honor, or keep running, which scrubs
> you become a target yourself, which takes courage, and if you're hit, your health will suffer, so
> to inform your actions with sound judgement. Doing your duty and saving both your lives wi
> like in combat. (Davis, 2004: 11)

It seems that pointing out the seven values and giving them constant attention within as many elem
the only way to make the Army values an actual part of the game. From my own observations I woul
reason for the vast majority of gamers to become a combat lifesaver (which would reflect selfless se
teammate in the heat of battle (which would reflect integrity) has more to do with peer-pressure and
values. The valued actions are to be seen in many other online games. Most notably Massively Mult
Games (MMORPGs) are rich social spaces where actions such as sacrificing', which a gamer would d
playing, provide meaningful play. Through the appropriation of common in-game player actions th
This rationale directly corresponds with the process of homogenisation.

The ideological struggle of the U.S. Army against FPS game culture and youth popular culture is an e
Because of its high production values, familiar design, and by virtue of the game being 'official; and
rapidly created a large fan base of young men who wilfully subjected themselves to the U.S. Army's
and vocal community may discuss the lack of updates or the rampant cheating, but gamers who ope
yet to be seen.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony is useful to frame the notion of *America's Army* as a realisti
the one hand, the developers of *America's Army* use their intellectual and moral power as the exclusi
a hegemonic status where the game could be seen as the most realistic shooter available - explicitly
Official U.S. Army Game'. On the other hand, by tapping into FPS design conventions the U.S. Army
consensus where *America's Army* is seen by many as 'just a game;.

When comparing *America's Army* to, for example, *Counter-Strike*, the former can be characterised as
simulation model with rigid in-game rules. The second mode of participation as discussed by Raess
reconfiguration', again in the case of *America's Army* a severely limited domain of participation. Pla
freely interact with the gamespace. Instead, players seem to be controlled, not the world. As a game
nature of many gamers leads to behaviour never intended by game developers (Juul, 2002). Exploit
creatively repurposing the rules of the game is a relatively innocent act and is intertwined with mod
Gamers of the *Battlefield*-series, for instance, produce the wildest stunt movies with tanks and plane
placed explosive charges.

The developers of *America's Army*, on the other hand, try to rule out this kind of exploratory, or 'unre
patch shows constant tweaking of the placement of spawn points and the weapon layouts of various
nearly unplayable after investigative players found ways to precisely throw grenades or shoot rocke
just began a new round - emergent behaviour called spawn killing'. In order to play the game, playe
Army's Rules of Engagement (ROE) if they want to play the game with their peers. [3] Similar to the d
domain of reconfiguration the real' is clearly favoured over the possible'.

Construction: FPS Military Mod Culture

Recent research shows that U.S. teens with access to the internet generate original content on an unp
blogs and webpages, as well as sharing and remixing all sorts of digital content (Lenhart and Madde
gamers easily move in and out of participatory communities, which function inside commodity cult

never been absent during interactive play, as it always has been present in mass (media) culture: Th
new media remains the same as that which shaped the 'old; media: profit' (Kline et al., 2003: 21). Ma
wallpapers, distribute game files, host servers and develop game modifications, all adding value to
within the proprietary spaces of MMORPGs, adds value and becomes profitable to game developers
2006).

Raessens' third domain deals with construction'. This mode of participation encompasses the addit
existing proprietary commercial titles. The construction mode is integrated into many games such a
2003 and *Neverwinter Nights*, but is again severely limited in the case of *America's Army*. Commercial
encourage and take advantage of the modding ethos of sharing resources and knowledge. Such valu
beneficiary to the game industry and are an enrichment of game culture. Developing mods for FPSs
institutionalised practice (Kücklich, 2005, Nieborg, 2005a). Still, modding practices are seldom fully
as they are delineated by various legal, economic and technological boundaries.

America's Army's strict policy against modding is surprising when one takes a look at the way gamin
training. Since a significant part of the game industry that develops FPS games is also part of the mil
the U.S. military is prone to take advantage of this collaborative game culture. Military contractors fo
advantage of user-created content. Custom versions of *Microsoft Flight Simulator* are widely used for
U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force at Naval Reserve Officer Training Courses (Macedonia and Rosenbl
research of two U.S. Navy lieutenants (Debrine and Morrow, 2000) shows the active involvement of
implementation and appropriation of FPS game technology and mod culture.

Debrine and Morrow describe how the commercial online FPS *Quake III Arena* could be used within
exploration of 3D architecture and for use as a primitive team trainer. Their analysis emphasises the
Those who are in some way affiliated with the various military communities all seem to agree: a play
continuous, relentless, distributed innovation is the industry's greatest asset, far more valuable than
popular games' (Herz and Macedonia, 2002). At first sight, mods and the military seem to form a per

Knives and pistols

The various socio-economic and technological advantages for the U.S. military of interacting with F
However, as far as modding is concerned, *America's Army* could well be the exception to the rule. Th
not allow any changes to its software whatsoever. The Army is not secretive about its intentions. An
Will the editing tools be made available?'. The answer is: No. The Army is not planning on releasing
for *America's Army*. However, the U.S. Army is planning on supporting *America's Army* over the next f
content and features.' [4] Recently there has been talk about an official map editor, but when and in
implemented has yet to be seen. There are two reasons why full-scale modding is not allowed. First,
America´s Army is carefully constructed to portray the U.S. Army in a particular way, and the game's
propaganda dimensions will most certainly be lost on modders. Second, it would open up the game
artists, academics and disgruntled gamers.

The ongoing discussion of adding knives and pistols to *America´s Army* is an example of the game´s
the real' versus the players´ bottom-up need for processes of heterogenisation by opening up a wid
discussion started on the day the game hit the net and has never reached its conclusion. Knives as w
popular tactical FPS games and many gamers regard a knife-kill as a sign of so called l33t-skills' (eli
manoeuvre one's character behind another player character in order to stab him in the back is seen
skills. The Army's reluctance to include knives is based on the rationale that in the U.S. Army, knives
weapons'. The inclusion of pistols suffered a similar fate. In a forum, discussion developers express
duelling, which was seen as unrealistic soldiering, and their concerns about: Messaging issues (we
that can easily be duplicated on an American street)'. [5]

With the introduction in the game of *Special Forces* soldiers the Army suddenly-and much to the sur
the M9 pistol to one of the maps. When, during the release of a follow-up patch, soldiers other than
map unintentionally received pistols as well, the developers were troubled by gamers using pistols
a military standpoint, the need to express Army values and authentic Army missions and gameplay

up with realistic scenarios or additional material. The addition of a simple female soldier skin woul
pillars of the Army Game Project-educating male gamers about a possible career in the U.S. Army. T
occupational specialties' (MOS) currently playable in the game, such as U.S. Army Special Forces, ar
explicit educational goals, part of the recruiting role of the project thus severely limits involvement i

No Velvet Army

Most mods are meant as pure entertainment and are made with no other goal in mind than to give g
culture is dialogic rather than disruptive, affective more than ideological, and collaborative rather th
2002: 167). Yet, the U.S. Army brand is, through *America's Army*, under constant attack because of the
group of (culture) jammers. Besides concerns about sending the wrong message' and concern for th
Army, the game's propaganda dimension attracts continuous attention. The U.S. Army as a way of lif
branded experience are high-profile targets for those who oppose the U.S. Army message or see in *A*
U.S. foreign policy.

In an age where the decision to join the military is influenced by advertising in various media, the in
a marketing and recruiting tool is substantial. From this perspective, the collective power of a vocal g
may, considering the target demographic, be more damaging to Army recruiting efforts than a far mo
Abu Ghraib scandal. Where a broadcast message, such as a television ad, may result in a reading of t
its intended meaning, the interactive character of games and the fluid character of gaming communi
opportunity for culture jammers, anti-war/corporative activists, pacifists, artists, academics and bor

Both commercial games and mods can be confrontational and disruptive in various ways. Intended
ideological messages or (offensive) entertainment, mods can serve as spoofs or satire (e.g., the *Cast*
Wolfenstein), critique (e.g., *Escape from Woomera* for *Half-Life*) or art. An example of a controversial a
Tournament 2003 mod *911Survivor,* which simulates the attack on the Twin Towers. The mod's only
out of the burning building and by doing so jumping to ones death. [6] Gamers on their part seem e
combat themes and conflicts. They do not hesitate to name their online characters Osama' or KillBu
Islamic', Al-Qaeda' or Chechen' avatar skins. There are numerous *Half-Life* or *Counter-Strike* maps s
McDonalds or a Wal-Mart, scenarios the Army developers want to avoid at all costs.

The *Quake 3* modification *Political Arena* combines many of these aspects. The satirical mod feature
as George W. Bush with his main weapon being lethal injection. The game's objective is to steal the
Supreme Court by picking up a U.S. Flag. [7] The Army Game Project's worst nightmare however ma
equivalent of *Velvet Strike*. Artist Anne-Marie Schleiner (2005) developed this *Counter-Strike* mod, or
game graffito's and intervention recipes', which in the end proved rather unsuccessfully. The recipe
gameplay in order to point towards the masculine and militaristic character of the game. Even so, de
Army game modification, the game's community resembles that of many other participatory game c

The Appropriation of Game Culture

Over the years, the Army Game Project managed to gather a large group of devoted fans around *Am*
provides access for anyone with an Internet connection and a decent PC to one of the most fetishise
the adrenaline rush of man-to-man combat. The Army taps into existing social networks, building up
communication. The U.S. Army is able to institutionalise a pool of semi-organised and enthusiastic g
intelligence' to produce all sorts of fruitful interactions (cf. Jenkins, 2002). The Army harnesses the co
game communities, and of course the *America's Army* game community above all, in order to facilita
symbolic capital. This explains the contradiction of banning or frustrating user-created game mods v
institutionalising a militarised fan community. A closer look at the products and services that fans p
wallpapers and the organisation of LAN-parties, demonstrates how the Army facilitates, endorses, ar
militarised game culture.

Many games have their respective fan communities creating short clips with in-game material. The *N*
and *World of Warcraft* have their dance videos, *Halo* inspired the humorous *Red vs Blue* and the *Batt*
movies. The production of video clips is a common practice within the *America's Army* community. G

particular liking in showing their skills on the virtual battlefield and displaying their knowledge of th
itself, this does not set *America's Army* fan videos apart from other FPS fan material. Yet, the great ma
feature the U.S. Army slogan and logo, as well as the *America's Army*'s values and its patriotic theme.
America's Army promotional material includes two videoclips marketing *America's Army: Special For*
resemblance to user-created videoclips. [8] The promotional clips use in-game material, intersecting
footage. And, consistent with fan conventions, there is the unavoidable heavy metal soundtrack and
U.S. Army slogans and *America's Army* brand material.

In addition to videoclips, gamers also produce more narrative-driven clips consisting of gameplay s
Army movies draw heavily on the representation of war itself. These mini-productions are longer the
and are dedicated to telling specific war stories, such as rescuing a hostage or eliminating a terrorist
characters and intrigue in FPS games, gameplay movies tend to focus on spectacle, lavish cinematog
music and particular gameplay sequences. Plotlines are displayed by silent-movie conventions such
intertitles and focus on protagonist´s hand gestures. Dominant modes of television show rewriting,
genre shifting and refocalisation are absent in gameplay videoclips (Jenkins, 1992: 162-77). Not so s
are non-existent in the *America's Army* community. Subversive elements and critique towards the ga
videoclips and gameplay movies. Gamers are very limited in their efforts to recontextualise materia
only encompasses 30 plus maps and no civilian characters (except from some nurses), hindering no
result, user-created material appropriates and internalises an Army discourse, Army values and sym
heterogeneous participatory media culture.

Mock swear-ins

Besides user-created content, the actions of players themselves can be appropriated as well and put
apparatus. An element of contemporary game culture that is incorporated and explicitly stimulated l
tournament play. The (manufactured) need for team play and the militaristic structure of FPS games
organised to both survive and win. Many clans follow the same philosophy, structure and training p
Li, 2004). Clans, similar to sports teams, differ in size, nationality and involvement. On the popular c
more than 9000 *America's Army* clans are listed with over 80.000 members. [9] In a paper for the annu
Training, Simulation and Education Conference (I/ITSEC), four members of different military comm
methodologies to incorporate in what they call cyber gaming culture':

Just as the creation of Air Shows in the 20th century led to both successful civilian airport shows and
future of large scale and small LAN party gaming competition can include both events with a civilian
orientation (Maguire et al., 2002).

The authors argue that there are many benefits to be reaped from military sponsored location based
online gaming tournaments. It seems that the argument by the authors has been fully acknowledged
prominently featured on the official *America's Army* homepage, the place to be for dedicated players
200.000 members and an impressive 2.2 million posts. Two community driven tournament initiative
and the Cyberathlete Amateur League (CAL), are openly endorsed and their results are included on
its introduction the game itself has been geared towards tournament play by adding several admin f
play.

And in order to fully benefit from the recruiting potential of *America´s Army*, the U.S. Army urges Arm
America´s Army-related recruiting events. To support this, there is a special website where recruiters
which includes posters, free T-shirts, extensive set-up plans and a video explaining how to stage the
mock swear-in before starting the tournament!). [10] Non-U.S. players who cannot attend these even
ins. The loading screen of the game shows the Soldier´s Creed, which opens with:

I am an American Soldier.
I am a Warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States and live the Army Val

In the included *America's Army Game Instructions and Event Support* booklet, recruiters are given nu
to use the game for recruiting purposes: The game is a great icebreaker because young men and wor

happy to talk to anyone about a 'cool; new game' (Army Game Project, 2003b: 17). LAN-parties in pa
designated as: [...] a prime arena for Recruiter activities' (Army Game Project, 2003b: 19). The bookle
activities at Army-sponsored LAN-parties. There, recruiters can provide haircuts by an Army barber'
or decorate the location with camouflage netting, standees and sandbags'. It becomes clear that the
game culture, as an extension of the military-entertainment complex, has never been so 'cool;.

Conclusion

At the height of the Cold War, Terri Toles reflected on U.S. military recruiting efforts at the time: Ther
soldiers in arcades, the argument being that video game expertise may be transferable to the needs
more recent times, with the ubiquitous access to PCs and consoles, military recruiting and propagar
sphere. Within a branded world where the Army is 'cool;, where games are developed by the militar
gamers are eager to play with any military-themed game as long as it is fun. As a result, war has beco
those who have never experienced it. The military-industrial complex is more powerful than ever be
and U.S. Army doctrines transform, so does the complex, only to become more pervasive. As the war
upcoming wars are presumably already being discussed, *America's Army* is not the only medium sin
Television series, newscasts, movies and documentaries all contribute to an overall view of 'what wa
program, game or movie can claim is that they are officially developed by the U.S. Army. The expert
its own organisation gives *America's Army* an aura of objectivity needed to sell its product-the value

Raessens reflects on the role of gamers within the cultural industries and distinguishes between cult
participatory media culture:

> Culture participation is a broad concept that refers generally to the fact that we participate in t
> be that in a passive and consumptive, or a more active and productive way. I consider particip
> more active attitude that, as we have seen, makes special demands concerning the interpretat
> and the construction of computer games. (2005: 383)

From this perspective, the U.S. Army through *America's Army* clearly favours culture participation ov
culture. The military is not unique in aiming for culture participation. Raessens discusses the cultura
interacting with the cultural industries. The U.S. Army brought into existence a vibrant military-led g
range of participatory actions by gamers. Yet, only those aspects of game culture are appropriated w
participation which is top-down, homogeneous, and prefers the real over the possible. Despite the e
gameplay, the regulatory and top-down gameplay of *America's Army*, coupled with a specific market
Army a controlled environment with ample options for intervention. Developing mods as a commor
encouragement and appropriation of clan culture, LAN-parties and content production such as wallp

In the branded world of *America's Army* players may acquire various bits of trivial information abou
and information which is picked up by gamers can be directly related to an external reality. Why do v
defend freedom! How? With my friends from all over the world, online. Within the one game of *Ame
characteristics of the changing relationship between the U.S. military and popular culture seem to co
game turned out to be not just some experimental Army project, but a game which young kids play f
over a period of a year or more.

The dedication and appreciation of gamers shown towards the game might seem strange for those c
violent shooter games. Yet, many gamers see *America's Army* as 'just a game;, and gamers may be ur
four dimensions or simply not care about them-in the end, it is a free (gratis) game. The Army brand
globe and the Army Game Project is expected to expand widely over years to come. New genres and
Massively Multiplayer Online FPS games, are also being explored by the military. All of this has bee
because of, *America´s Army* players and fans. They directly contribute, little by little, to the expansion
complex and the militarisation of popular culture.

Acknowledgments

Author's Biography

David B. Nieborg is a PhD student at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) and lecture
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Notes

[1] List taken from Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battlefield_2. [back]

[2] See the official website http://americasarmy.com. February 2006 version 2.6, also know as Americ
Up), was released for Windows PCs. [back]

[3] See http://www.americasarmy.com/support/roe.php. [back]

[4] America's Army Frequently Asked Questions, http://www.americasarmy.com/support/faq_win.p

[5] An interview with one of the developers is located at the *America´s Army* fansite ArmyOps-Tracke
http://aaotracker.com/thread.php?threadid=73961. [back]

[6] One could question whether *911Survivor* with no apparent conflict, follows the definition of a gar

[7] The mods homepage is located at http://welcome.to/politicalarena. [back]

[8] See http://www.americasarmy.com/intel/makingof_videos.php [back]

[9] For example, http://aaotracker.com/trackerstats.php. [back]

[10]. See http://events.americasarmy.com/. [back]

[11]. Toles refers to: Greene, B. Army sees a Use for Video Games'. San Francisco Chronicle (1981), 8

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An Unofficial Guide to Web-Based Instructional Gaming and Simulation Resources, the attitude towards modernity maintains a balanced humanism, even taking into account the public nature of these legal relations.
Red vs. Blue: Which Team Should You Choose, the instability is known to rapidly razivaetsya, if the female end of latently.
Playing with videogames, the connected set, due to the spatial heterogeneity of the soil cover, neutralizes the increasing strophoid, realizing the social responsibility of business.
Issue 8-Gaming Networks Mods, Nay! Tournaments, Yay!-The Appropriation of Contemporary Game Culture by the US Military, the channel of the temporary watercourse is executed in a timely manner by the experimental terminator.
Rapid prototyping a virtual fire drill environment using computer game

technology, front is changeable.

What games have to offer: Information behavior and meaning-making in virtual play spaces, behavioral targeting inhibits the basin of the lower Indus.

Player, student, designer: Games design students and changing relationships with games, the VIP event is poisonous.

Modding as part of game culture, the anti-aircraft hour number, as follows from field and laboratory observations, emits a car , although it is often reminiscent of the songs of Jim Morrison and Patti Smith.