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Jonna Eagle, *War Games* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 184pp.

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Published in the *Quick Takes: Movies and Popular Culture* series at Rutgers University Press, Jonna Eagle's short book *War Games* sets out to survey the "broad terrain" (2) of reenacting, representing and simulating war. Even though limiting her inquiry to a US-focused perspective, her endeavor is very ambitious. In three main chapters of roughly 50 pages each titled "live", "onscreen", and "interactive", she treats a wide array of apparently different phenomena such as live reenactments, table-top and miniature games, military training and maneuvers, combat sports, television news, documentaries, Hollywood movies, and finally, digital games ranging from early flight and tank simulators to contemporary shooter titles and advanced military simulation ware. Throughout, her primary interest lies in making "connections across diverse media" (3), rather than focusing on their specificities, and in showing how they interoperate to facilitate "the broader militarization of U.S. culture" (7).

The scope of Eagle's inquiry is breath-taking, and her writing moves quickly and smoothly across vast fields. In the first chapter, she, for instance, captures the reader with details on the Prussian strategic planning tool *Kriegsspiel* and the military victories it facilitated in the second half of the 19th century before tracing how it inspired both recreational miniature play and the U.S. military's attempts to ever-more accurately reenact and later simulate past, actual, and potential future wars and violent conflicts (pp.12).

In the following chapter, Eagle directs attention to audio-visual media and in particular the Hollywood war film. In parts drawing upon her own earlier research (e.g. Eagle 2017), she among other things outlines how television news, documentaries, and feature films together create a ubiquitous medial background for war. The author's main argument is that today's audiences accept the authenticity of presented imageries not based on first-hand acquaintance with the past event as such, but with reference to mainstream media's earlier presentations of the subject at hand. The much-acclaimed Normandy-landing sequence in Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, then, does not convince us (or veterans) due to its likeness to the actual allied assault, but due to the fact that director and camera man successfully replicated style and conventions of WWII news reel coverage. (76). In a similar manner, implicit knowledge of the conventions of Hollywood cinema (and increasingly of war games) predisposes both production and reception of contemporary war news on U.S. television networks with their focus on both a visceral first-person gaze from below emanating from embedded journalists and helmet-cams, and an objectifying "imperial vision" (97) from above associated with guided missiles, drones, and other 'smart' weaponry.

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This tension between gritty and gory images from the carnage of the battlefield and the clean and ordered aerial view of drones and spy satellites also constitutes the frame of the last chapter on interactive digital games. According to Eagle, these two types of militarized vision are most clearly operationalized in the two war game genres of the first-person shooter and the military strategy game respectively, that present war as a chaotic and threatening arena for individual mastery and at the same time a rational and fully calculable disembodied activity. According to Eagle, in combining attention to minute detail in weaponry, uniforms, ballistics, logistics, and troop movement with a sweeping erasure of civilian casualties and other problematic aspects of war, the realism of interactive games "depends at once on [a] proximity to everyday experience and [a] distance from it" (152). Just as in most Hollywood films, she argues, also in games, suffering in war is either presented as the ordeal of US personnel caused by an evil opponent, or is eschewed entirely.

Eagle repeatedly highlights the rapidly expanding economic and institutional connections between the US military, Hollywood, corporate news media and game developers, and shows the implications of this "military-entertainment complex" (121) for public perceptions of violent US interventionism. She identifies and describes a connection between technologies of visualization and means to plan, prepare, and wage war. In this way, she reconnects the three parts of her book showing how reenactment, sports, military training and maneuver (chapter 1) and an audio-visual representation and framing of war in Hollywood film, news media, and documentaries (chapter 2), influence and constitute one another, before integrating these aspects in her account of the interactive and networked nature of contemporary digitized warfare (chapter 3).

Overall Eagle delivers an impressive survey that reads like a veritable tour the force across the various technological and mediatized arenas of past, present and future war. The breadth of her inquiry and the easily accessible reader-friendly style are big advantages of her book. As the next sections will argue, however, these virtues at the same time constitute her work's greatest weakness.

Given her earlier profound engagement with the theme of media, US culture, and war (e.g. Eagle 2017), I believe the author will be fully aware of the shortcomings I am going to highlight in the sections below. Most likely they are a consequence of established conventions and frames of Rutgers University Press's *Quick Takes* series, that demands readable overviews over specific themes compressed on a limited number of rather small pages and accompanied by a tight selection of references. Earlier publications in the series, such as *Zombie Cinema* (Olney 2017), *New African Cinema* (Orlando 2017), or *Disney Culture* (Wills 2017) attest to this tight focus. What is different in the case of Eagle's *War Games*, is the book's enormous scope. In a short book like hers, the considerable breadth of her inquiry comes at the cost of a loss of depth. A quick take, it seems, in this case inevitably implies certain short cuts.

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The first short cut I want to take up is a lack of theoretical and conceptual rigor. Eagle makes explicit that her focus is on tracing "the historical evolution of war simulation" (5), and she delivers a concise narrative drawing a trajectory of mediating war by different means across centuries. In this broad survey, however, she de-emphasizes the specificities of, and significant differences between, terms such as reenactment, representation and simulation (which I believe would have made for better chapter titles) and fails to properly define them. Why should we consider film and news reels as forms of simulation, or as the title suggests, even games? What, apart from interactivity, does the game form offer that the film format cannot? How can games be distinguished from live reenactments or interactive narratives? And how do such differences matter for an improved understanding of the intricate connections between war and media?

Similarly, terms such as realism, realness, the authentic, or the actual are used as if they all referred to roughly the same thing. What do we lose when not adequately considering the distinct explanatory value of each of these terms? What does a claim to realism imply and how is it different from a claim to authenticity? How do realism or authenticity relate to terms such as reenactment, representation, or simulation? Bringing such intricacies at least to the brief attention of readers would have increased the value of the work considerably. In connection to this, in particular the inclusion of one term would have benefitted Eagle's inquiry. The concept of remediation, as applied by for instance Erll and Rigney (2009), could have helped the author to solve quite a few of the book's terminological problems. I even dare suggest that *Remediating War* could have served as a better title clearly summarizing the exact nature of Eagle's still recommendable endeavor.

Eagle briefly mentions other scholars working in the field (e.g. Marita Sturken, Roger Stahl, or Kevin McSorley among others), but never introduces any of their approaches or findings in detail. Nor does she explain the logic behind her selection of included studies. As a result, I miss a clear overview over the research field and specific references to important works such as those of Alison Landsberg, Edward Suid, Matthew Alford, Cynthia Weber, and Jeanine Basinger just to mention a few. In a survey of US war culture, such earlier studies with similar themes would have merited inclusion.

Another problem with *War Games* is that the book treats what could be termed transmedial US war culture as a rather monolithic phenomenon. Eagle almost only directs attention to public reenactments, films, and games that are decidedly mainstream, and aptly criticizes this dominant segment of the US culture industry for its close alignment with US military and imperialist interests. In doing this, however, she runs in danger of engaging in a circular argument where she criticizes military-financed mainstream products for serving precisely military interests. I dearly miss attention to titles that complicate the picture and disconnect the massive and

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ambivalent problem of war from the comparably more straight-forward, simple, and unambiguous combat experience of US soldiers.

Films such as Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*, Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers*, Paul Greengrass' *Green Zone*, or Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth*, just to mention a few, all securely reside within a US mainstream with a mass appeal, yet still manage to convincingly address the complexities and ambiguities of waging war. Adding overtly critical films such as Brian de Palma's *Redacted*, Nick Broomfield's *Battle for Haditha*, and Philip Haas's *The Situation*, or critical game titles such as Yager Development's *Spec Ops: The Line* or 11 Bit Studio's *This War of Mine* could have served to further complicate the picture, and direct attention to the fact that certain cultural products do critically engage with the devastating consequences and inevitable blowbacks of engaging in violent interventionism and war. Eagle acknowledges this omission herself in the introduction stating that she does "not have a chance to engage with [critical representations] in this survey" (8). This narrow focus appears as a missed opportunity.

Lastly, Eagle's investigation suppresses the importance of audience responses to the products she criticizes. This is not necessarily a problem and I have previously done similar studies myself (e.g. Pötzsch 2017). Detailed accounts of one dimension of a complex phenomenon often demand a more cursory interrogation of other elements. Nevertheless, a brief acknowledgement that the active engagement of viewers and players with narratives, characters, fictional worlds, and historical reenactments matter would have been important for a comprehensive understanding of the remediation of war across the various formats taken up in the book. At least cursory attention to the reception of these products by situated audiences could have helped to problematize ideas of clear-cut effects of cultural products in line with intentions of owners or producers – including those associated with the military (Hall 1999; Jørgensen 2019).

I can imagine that most, if not all, the points I raise above were on the mind of the author but fell short of inclusion due to the requirements of the *Quick Takes* series including possible demands for minimal lists of references. Taking up these issues at least briefly in this review should therefore not be misunderstood as a criticism of the author or her impressive work but can be seen as an invitation to a continued constructive conversation about the important, and unfortunately apparently timeless, question of how to adequately reenact, represent, simulate, and above all resist war – in cultural expressions and beyond.

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