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M.A Thesis in International Studies

“Militainment”

In post 9/11 American war movies

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## PART I: Introduction

“War is cinema and cinema is war” wrote the French film director Abel Glance at the start of the 20th Century (Quoted in Virilio, 1989:12). Since the invention of cinema, a spectacle of moving pictures, initially popularized by the Lumière Brothers at the end of the 19th Century to the billion-dollar industry it has generated, cinema has inserted itself into the heart of Western societies. In 1915, it is here that through *Birth of Nation*, directed by D.W Griffith, the theme of war embraced the art of cinema in one of the first American war movies narrating the American Civil war. Consequently, in its role as an orator for historical events, from the very beginning cinema has been intrinsically linked to politics. Aware of its significant ideological power on the masses, the Department of Defense (DOD) commonly known as the Pentagon has actively built an intimate and dynamic relationship with the Hollywood movie industry. During the 20th Century, a period tainted with major conflicts involving the United States, Hollywood was used by the Pentagon as a platform for propaganda. As noted by journalists Nick Turse and Tom Dispatch, “the military has been deeply involved with the film industry since the Silent Era” (Turse, 2008:1. The start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked the beginning of interactive warfare and the birth of “Militainment” (Stahl,2009:6) which according to the Princeton Dictionary refers to “entertainment with military themes in which the Department of Defense is celebrated “(Wordnet,2018:1). The defusing of military discourses is articulated through the “military-industrial-media-entertainment complex” (Der Derian,2009:1). This special relationship between Hollywood and the Pentagon is enabled via the employment of a liaison officer whose responsibility is to “ensure that Hollywood makes movies the military way” (Turse, 2008:1). At the turn of the 21st Century, with the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and ensuing the “War on terror” (Bush, 2001), Hollywood again was used as an instrument of the Pentagon (Der Derian, 2009:158). This paper will not focus on the MIMEC (Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Complex) but rather on the infusing of military discourses into Hollywood cinema, eventually coalescing in a new era of ‘Militainment.’ This research posits the following question: to what extent does the “militainment” come to be reflected in a selection of post 9/11 American war movies? Through a thorough discourse and film analysis and interpretation of a selection of war movies, the purpose of this research is mainly to operationalize a theory developed by the writer Roger Stahl to demonstrate how some American war movies released in the era of Militainment, can be imbued with military discourses. Ultimately, the goal is to prove that the presence of these tropes distances the citizen from critically engaging with the motives of American intervention and foreign policy decisions.

The literature review mainly focuses on “Militainment Inc.: War, Media and Popular Culture” by Roger Stahl<sup>1</sup>, in which the scholar expounds a theory on the emergence of interactive warfare and the infusing of military discourses into the entertainment industry. To contextualize films analyzed, it is first essential to understand the historical evolution in the process of how images of war are being consumed by the American citizen and the various facets of interactive warfare.

### **A. The logic of spectacle in the consumption of movies**

Following the horrors of the Vietnam War, a discourse of introspection emerged in American society, incarnated both by the popularity of counter-culture and Vietnam Syndrome, leading to a distancing between the citizen and the military and political spheres. Indeed, in the post-Vietnam era, the draft was abolished, and congress was not willing to wage another war (Stahl, 2009:20). While images of war began to fade from news and broadcast media, the enormously popular Hollywood film industry continued to drive the logic of war-as-spectacle, enabling observation of war with a disconnection from the military, this resulted in what Stahl (2009) describes as a citizen “purged of political connection to the military” and who experienced war in a “choreographed privatized consumption” (22). This logic of spectacle had the effect of turning the citizen into a “submissive, politically disconnected, complacent and deactivated audience member” (*ibid*). In other words, this logic of spectacle distanced the citizen’s conception of war from its political reality.

Stahl argues that this logic of spectacle truly came to light during the 1991 Gulf War, demonstrating how “the civic relationship to the military changed dramatically between the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Storm.” (*ibid*)

The 1991 Persian Gulf boosted the public image of the American military, which “institutionalized the press pooling model on a grand scale during the 1991 Persian Gulf War” (*idem*;23). Learning the lessons of the Vietnam War and the impact of the media-entertainment network on the audience, the Pentagon revised its relationship with the entertainment industry. Indeed, at the wake of the Gulf Persian war, the Pentagon had its grip on the news “in both agenda and language” (*idem*; 24).

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<sup>1</sup> Stahl, R, 2010. *Militainment Inc.: War, Media and Popular Culture*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Routledge.

As a result, the Gulf war gave birth to a “new military media arrangement” between the Pentagon and the media industry, one which, unfortunately, compromised democracy (*idem*, 24).

Learning from Vietnam, during the Gulf War the Pentagon “delivered a war that both satisfied its public relations interests and remained television-friendly” (*ibid*). As a result, “the new symbiosis positioned war as a dramatic screen production increasingly at home amidst the usual menagerie of televised consumables and amusements” (*ibid*).

As American society became more and more consumer-focused, the “consumer war” turned the citizen into a mere consumer-of-content, who could sit back and “enjoy the show” (*idem*:25). With these structural changes, the audience’s perception of war on screens became as important as the waging of war itself (*ibid*). The logic of spectacle therefore became fully ingrained during the Gulf Persian war.

The notion of “spectacle” was first coined in 1967 by Guy Debord in *Society of Spectacle* in which (according to Stahl) Debord relates to a “social condition infused by images and representations that serve to distract and politically deactivate the masses” (*Idem*, 31). By “deactivating the masses”, the logic of spectacle does not seek to engage the citizen into a way of thinking but rather to efface the political power of popular debate (*idem*, 31).

As a result, “the spectacular war does not examine the legitimacy of military action so much as it inserts itself into the momentum of an inevitable conflict” (*idem*:32).

The idea of ‘war-as-spectacle’ became so important during this era that even prior to the Gulf War, the French philosopher Paul Virilio wrote that “a war of pictures and sounds is replacing the war of objects -projectiles and missiles” (Virilio, 1989:26). The place for the waging of war was no longer so much on the battlefield but more in visual communication.

In other words, the representation of war in cinema has become as important as the conduct of warfare itself:

“war can never break free from the magical spectacle because its very purpose is to produce spectacle” (Virilio, 1989:30)

However, the discourse of the citizen-spectator passively consuming war mutated at the start of the 21st century following the dramatic events of September 11, 2001. After 9/11, President Bush declared war not on a state, group or entity, but on a *noun*, the so-called “War on Terror” (Bush, 2001). Consequently, the act of declaring war on an abstract concept greatly facilitated the mass integration of the war in the media-entertainment network. That shift was so significant that “war flooded the social field” (Stahl, 2009).

## **B. The rise of “Militainment” and the birth of the virtual-citizen soldier.**

This new war invited the audience into a new mode of consuming war. The relationship between war entertainment and the citizen became interactive (*idem*:30).

As noted by Stahl, “the logics of spectacle thus gave way to those of interactivity” (*idem*:38). However, the notion of spectacle had not disappeared, as the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 were so spectacular that they “occupied virtually all eyeballs simultaneously, pushing the screen closer to the center of war.” (*idem*:38).

Whereas in the past, the logic of spectacle meant that the citizen was a passive subject in this interactive war, the citizen was now participatory subject of war. This new approach to war was so important that it “thrust the citizen through the safety glass of the television screen into the new war zone” (*idem*:40). This new “participatory war” invaded the social sphere, and “represented a military colonization of civic space” (*idem*, 40).

Another important aspect of Stahl’s theory on the glamorization and sensationalization of war is his impetus on the employment of Information Warfare, the use of information to win the advantage over an opponent. Thus, with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Pentagon intensified its use of information warfare (*idem*; 34). It is from that point that Stahl notes the birth of “Militainment” (Stahl, 2009:44) which designates the extensive infusing of military discourses in the entertainment industry at the start of 2003.

In this logic of Militainment, the interactive war reshaped the model of the consuming citizen: war is to be consumed with pleasure and participation from the citizen who is thrown into a “fantasy of a first-person, authorial kinetics of war” (*idem*:42).

Following this first-person participatory approach, the interactivity of war means that the citizen virtually occupies the soldier’s body (*idem*:43). This virtual occupation has the direct effect of positioning the citizen into the role of the soldier thus giving him/her a role to play in the war. Thus, the Militainment gave birth to a new status for the citizen, who becomes a “virtual” citizen-soldier, a third sphere which combines the dimension of the citizen and of the soldier (*idem*:126).

Not only does the interactive war reposition the citizen’s relationship with war, it mutates and reinforces military discourses already found in the logic of spectacle.

### C. The military tropes in the interactive warfare

Stahl identifies three tropes through which the military discourses are infused in popular culture: “clean-war”; “techno fetishism”; and “support-the-troops” (*idem*: 30).

Through the “clean-war discourse”, the Pentagon seeks to present a new image of war by avoiding the resurgence of the ‘dirty war’ mirrored in the Vietnam conflict and marked by ‘Vietnam Syndrome’. It aims to represent war in a way “that maximizes the war capacity to be consumed” (*idem*:25). Using high-tech weaponry and technological advances, ‘clean-war’ resembles traditional war, but detracts attention away from its immoral and barbaric aspects. Indeed, high-tech weaponry justifies the ‘cleanness’ of war waged against a “barbaric” and disorganized enemy (*idem*; 26). ‘Clean war’ also relies heavily on the idea of “ethical killing” (*idem*; 27), which as Stahl argues, relies heavily on the mass adoption of drones in modern warfare., Drones, which both distance the soldier from the act of killing and greatly decrease the potential for collateral damage, help support the idea of a ‘clean war.’

The ‘clean-war’ discourse is also propagated through a remodeling of war language. Terms such as “surgical strikes” or “targeted killing” (*idem*; 27) replace the former war vocabulary and seek to mask the reality of war. As Derian (2009) argues, phrases such as “get the job done” are regularly used by the U.S Army, as it omits direct reference to the enemy (102). These euphemisms serve to hide the reality and nature of war from the audience and pave the way for the idea of a “virtuous war” (*idem*:20). Stahl develops upon the Derian’s postulations, arguing that these euphemisms constitute the “flow of the clean war” meaning that they become embedded in the trope of the clean-war (Stahl 2009; 28).

In addition, war is no longer conducted on the battleground but from a sterile room, known as the “theatre of operation” (*idem*; 27).

In short Stahl defines ‘clean-war’ as “a manner of presenting war that maximizes viewer alienation from the fact of death to maximize the war’s capacity to be consumed” (*idem*:27).

The second trope, “technofetishism” is intrinsically linked to the clean-war discourse as it relates to glorification or “worship of high-tech weaponry” (*idem*; 28).

The precision and effectiveness of modern, high-tech weapons, Stahl contends, fetishize the ‘clean-war trope’ by emphasizing the technological advantage of one side over another, while emphasizing the idea that such weapons cause no collateral damage.

Since modern weapons mutate in constant technological development, this effectively reshapes the window through which war is perceived and acted: war in a sense becomes a theatre for showcasing the new technological advances of the military.

Consequently, high-tech weaponry also intensifies the dazzling of the citizen-soldier and succeeds in reducing or suppressing the debate regarding the legitimacy of war. Indeed, technofetishism succeeds in “displacing the process of democratic deliberation” (*ibid*). By glorifying the military and opposing it to “low-tech barbarism” (Stahl, 2009) the political motives of war are intelligently swept away by the Pentagon (29).

The third trope relating to the infusing of the military discourse is labelled the “support-the-troops” (Stahl, 2009). In a post-Vietnam war era and more specifically post-9/11 era, the Pentagon made it its mission to suppress the protesting citizen contesting the legitimacy of war. Through this third trope, soldiers are pictured as strong masculine heroes of the nation meaning that the citizen who fails to “support our troops” will be interpreted as being anti-patriotic. The Pentagon wishes to ensure that troops are to be considered as heroes, fighting the “good war against an evil enemy (*idem*; 30).

Not only does the interactive war reinforce the tropes of the logic of spectacle, under the model of the virtual-citizen soldier, the interactive war has had the effect of “weaponizing the civic-gaze” (*idem*; 42). Meaning that in this virtualization of war, the eye becomes a weapon.

In *War and cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, Virilio contends that the military shapes our way of seeing... Since seeing through the eye of the military first debuted with reconnaissance planes in World War I when the “the camera’s peep-hole served as an indirect sighting device” (Virilio, 1989:20), the military has always played a key role in providing visuals and offering a platform for the act of seeing:

“by 1914...aviation was becoming one way, or perhaps even the ultimate way, of seeing” (*idem*; 22).

As a result, by seeing through the war plane’s camera, the eye becomes weaponized and replaces the actual material weapon “Eyeshot will then finally get the better of gunshot” (*idem*:24). In other words, the eye replaces the weapon, as the function of the eye becomes the powerful tool in the perception of war (*idem*:24).

Nowadays, drone technology reflects this weaponizing of the civic-gaze, the virtualization of war and this shift to the logic of the citizen-soldier. Stahl argues that the drone camera acts as a “medium”



between the gaze of the citizen-soldier and the perceived image (Stahl 2013; 662). Once again, through consumption in this interactive war, “drone vision” (Stahl, 2013) paves the way for a “visual discourse” (663).

Virilio notes that “weapons are not just tools of destruction but also perception” (Virilio, 1989:35). Clearly, as the drone becomes this weapon of perception, it succeeds in weaponizing the civic gaze (Stahl, 2013:665). In short this gives birth to “a first-person relationship with the drone’s camera” as war becomes more real and palpable to the virtual citizen-soldier (*idem*; 665).

As a result, this relationship with the drone contributes to the domesticating of war as the virtualization of war and the emergence of drone technology creates “a remote, controller war” (*idem* :670).

#### **D. The birth of a virtual enemy.**

Along with the birth of the virtual citizen-soldier, this virtualization of war paves the way for the creation of a ‘virtual’ enemy (Derian, 2009:115) referring to a faceless and unidentifiable enemy. Indeed, this shadowing of the enemy’s faces suppresses the human character of the enemy and diverts from the image of the identifiable and distinguishable enemy as an individual. In 1989, Virilio wrote that “the disintegration of the warrior’s personality is at a very advanced stage” (Virilio, 1989:85) and constitutes “the conundrum of the virtuous war” (Derian, 2009:117). In other words, the disappearance of the enemy’s face opposes the human and real soldier to a dehumanized and anonymous enemy. This further distances the virtual citizen-soldier from the nature of the enemy and serves in suppressing his political deliberation.

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Stahl and al. offer a constructive and rich theory on how war is consumed by the American citizen in this new era of Militainment. From this literature review, it can be concluded that there is a possibility for American war movies to be imbued with these facets of the interactive warfare: the three main military tropes identified above, coupled with the birth of a virtual citizen soldier. The next step of this paper will be to outline the methodology and the theoretical framework appropriate for interpreting the selected data. By operationalizing Stahl’s theory, we will see how the selected war movies validate this theory on the facets of the interactive warfare. The main consequence of

which is the failure in critically addressing the motives of military interventions narrated in the movies.

## **PART III METHODOLOGY-THEORY-RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **A. Data selection**

#### **1. Criteria for movie selection**

As previously noted, interactive warfare is argued to have been sparked by the attacks of 9/11, which marked the beginning of the ‘War on Terror’. To limit the scope of research, the selection of data has been narrowed down to a limited number of movies in order to operationalize Stahl’s theory.

This explains the following criteria for the selection of the war movies:

- Although not necessarily pertaining to the ‘War on Terror’ as such, their storyline categorizes them as belonging to the war genre as they address American military interventions of various kinds.
- The selected movies were released after September 11, 2001 and are therefore inscribed in the timeframe of the interactive war.
- Their box office results in the United States reflect a wide reception amongst the American audience.
- Although the purpose of this paper is not to analyze the relationship between the Pentagon and Hollywood, it should be noted these movies were produced by Hollywood-based studios.

Movie Title	Director	Producer(s)	Country of origin	Duration	Release Date (US)	Box-office results (US)
<i>Black Hawk Down</i>	Ridley Scott	Jerry Bruckheimer, Revolution studios, Scott Free Productions	United States, United Kingdom	142 min	18th January 2002	108,638,745 US dollars <sup>2</sup>
<i>Act of Valor</i>	Scott Vaughn, Mike McCoy	Bandito Brothers	United States	110 min	24 <sup>th</sup> February 2012	70,012,847 US Dollars <sup>3</sup>
<i>Eye in the Sky</i>	Gavin Hood	Moonlight films, Rain dog films, Entertainment One	United States, United Kingdom	102 min	11th March 2016	18,704,595 US Dollars <sup>4</sup>
<i>13 hours</i>	Michael Bay	Paramount Pictures, 3 arts Entertainments, Latina pictures	United States	144 min	15 <sup>th</sup> January 2016	52,853,219 US Dollars <sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blackhawkdown.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=actofvalor.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=eyeinthesky.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=13hoursthesecretsoldiersofbenghazi.htm>

## 2. Short summary of the four selected movies

- **Black Hawk Down:**

*Black Hawk Down* was released in 2002 and immediately inscribed itself in the new era of interactive warfare. Although not directly relating to the ‘War on Terror’ in Afghanistan and Iraq, the movie addresses the American intervention in Somalia, from March 1993 to March 1995.

In 1993, Somalia is consumed by civil war, exacerbated by widespread famine. In response to an attack on UN forces conducted by rebel leader General Mohamed Farrah Aidid, the United States sends a convoy of 25 000 thousand men with the goal of ending the civil war. Unable to locate Aidid, the Americans launch an attack on one of the capital districts with the aim of capturing Aidid’s comrades in arms. During the intervention two Black Hawk helicopters are shot down by militiamen, hence the movie’s title.

- **13 hours:**

*13 hours* relates to the Libyan crisis and the use of private contractors to save American lives.

In 2011, Libya collapsed into political crisis and civil war between the Pro-Gaddafi forces against the Liberation Army, who were fighting against the regime. As the American ambassador Christopher Stevens was staying in the American consulate in Benghazi, pro-regime militia decided to attack the consulate and the remaining American civil servants who had not yet fled. *13 hours* narrates the story of the Global Response Staff (GRS), a special force section of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) of highly trained men, who were sent to exfiltrate the Ambassador from the consulate. Although primarily relating to the role of the CIA in the evacuation of the Ambassador, the Pentagon has a substantial and importance presence in the movie.

- **Act of Valor:**

When a CIA agent is captured by drug traffickers in South America, a team of Navy SEALs, the elite force of the U.S military, is sent to rescue the prisoner in the forests of Costa Rica. After successfully saving the agent and retrieving her phone, the Special Forces make an unexpected and alarming discovery: the drug trafficker has close ties with a Chechen terrorist by the name of Abu Shabal, whose intention is to commit terrorist attacks on American soil. The movie was made in cooperation with the US Navy (Thompson, 2012:1).

- **Eye in the Sky:**

The movie questions the legitimacy and ethics of drone strikes in the fight against terrorism. Based on the 2013 attacks at the Westgate Shopping mall in Nairobi, *Eye in the Sky* narrates a joint-led mission of the British and American intelligence with Kenyan Special Forces, to locate and eliminate locals as well as American and British citizens suspected of preparing an imminent attack in Nairobi. The film narrates the critical role played by drone operators in the new form of modern warfare waged against terrorism. Although questioning the ethics of drone warfare, by using the literature review and the methodological tools, the interpretation put forward in this thesis will challenge the value and scope of this questioning

## **B. The methodological approach**

### **1. Discourse analysis**

#### A. The concept of discourse

Since military discourses can be infused in these American war movies, it seems only relevant to refer to a discourse analysis for this paper. According to Rose, discourse refers to a group of statements which constitute the foundation of a thought and influences the way we think, and it effectively bears a mental impact on our understanding of the exposed concept and how we act on the basis of that understanding (Rose 2016; 219).

The French philosopher Michel Foucault represents one of the most critical thinkers and references in understanding the concepts of discourse.

In *L'ordre du Discours: leçon inaugurale au Collège de France*, Foucault argues that in every society the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized and redistributed through a set of processes which produce power (Foucault, 1971:10).

Foucault also analyses systems of education, arguing that any system with an educational value is *political* as it seeks to maintain or alter a certain discourse (Foucault, 1971:46). Undoubtedly the ability for cinema to transmit ideas and ideologies demonstrates its value as a tool of education, no matter the demographic background of the audience, and thus instilling in its audience both positive and negative messages through certain discourses.

#### b. The relationship between power and knowledge:

Foucault founded his theory on the idea that knowledge is constructed on regimes of truths and therefore that discourse is “a function of regimes of truth, constituting forms of resistance” (Foucault, 1971) which mainly reflects the structure of the institution at the origin of this regime of truth (25). In other words, the formation of discourse is rooted in a structure which aims to make a certain type of truth prevail, therefore explaining the term “regime of truth”.

It is by identifying, analyzing and deconstructing this regime of truth that we can extract the discourse which is being produced. As outlined by Rose, one needs to look at “the grounds on which truth is claimed” (Rose, 2016:190).

In this regard, in *Surveiller et Punir*, based on a historical and sociological analysis of prisons and punishment in France, Foucault famously argued around the concept of power and knowledge contending that power produces knowledge. Therefore, when there is a source of power there is a source of knowledge which is directly influenced, nurtured and controlled by that power (Foucault, 1975:30). As power is incarnated by the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment network and produces knowledge through the representation of war in movies, discourse analysis does indeed serve as one of the appropriate methodological tools for this research paper.

### **B. How to analyze discourse**

After having analyzed the concept of discourse developed by Foucault and having shown that it is relevant to this research question, it is essential to look at the methodology of discourse analysis.

Rose notes that scholars agree that Foucault’s methodology of analysis for discourse is rather unclear and blurry which is why the methodological approach developed by Gillian Rose seems to be appropriate (Rose, 2016:192).

Although discourse analysis is primarily intended for the analysis of written texts it can be used for analyzing visual texts (referring to any image designed to communicate a message) and thus will be applied to films in this thesis (Rose, 2016:188). In other words, discourse analysis serves to analyze the political content of visual texts (Schneider, 2013:1).

Based on the definition of discourse previously developed, the analysis will be looking at the ways through which this discourse is deployed, at “how those specific views or accounts are constructed as real or truthful or natural through particular regimes of truth” (Rose, 2016:193).

## 2. Visual methodology-film analysis

Florian Schneider provides a useful methodological approach to discourse analysis narrowed down to visual communication which encompasses films. “Politics is about communicating” (Schneider, 2013) which is why films one of the most powerful and seductive communication and political platform (1).

Schneider lists 8 steps for the analysis of visual texts.

<b>VISUAL COMMUNICATION ANALYSIS</b>	
<b>STEPS</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
<b>STEP 1: CONTEXT</b>	The site of production for the movie and “how it fits into the big picture” (Schneider, 2013:2)
<b>STEP 2: PRODUCTION PROCESS</b>	Identifying the director, the producer (see IIa)
<b>STEP 3: CODING THE MATERIAL</b>	Establishing categories, tropes through which the discourse is enabled

<b>STEP 4: STRUCTURAL FEATURES</b>	Looking at how the movie is structured and what stands throughout the visual text.
<b>STEP 5: VISUAL PROPERTIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angle</li> <li>• Color scheme</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Mise-en-scène</li> <li>• Actions/Demeanor of characters</li> <li>• Recurring visual tropes</li> <li>• Visual metaphors</li> </ul>
<b>6: DISCOURSE FRAGMENTS</b>	Identifying individual statements in the text
<b>7: CULTURAL REFERENCES</b>	How the context acts as medium for discourse
<b>8: THE LINGUISTICS</b>	Analyzing the level of language, the wording of statements (relevant to what movie characters will be saying).
(Schneider, 2013)	

The analysis of the selected films will be based on the theory established in the literature review as it will help to “unveil the structure” (Pezzotta, 2010) of the discourse therein (9).

According to Pezzotta, “Analysis is informed and guided by theory” (Pezzotta, 2010:9). By citing Augusto Sainati and Massimiliano Gaudiosi who differentiate the spectator from the analyst, Pezzotta notes that the spectator situates himself in a “passive, absent minded behavior” whose “viewing attitude is naïve” (Pezzotta, 2010:9)

On the contrary, the role of the analyst is “to try and understand the relationships among the elements which constitute the film and the logic which organizes them in a coherent whole” (Pezzotta, 2010:9). Citing Sainati and Gaudiosi (2007:9), Pezzotta notes that “the rigorous analysis of an analyst can be compared to a detective investigation and is always accompanied by a subjective interpretation”



(Pezzotta, 2010:3). In that respect, the interpretation of the selected movies will, as well being mainly based on Stahl's theory established in the literature review, reflect a subjective view.

### **3. The role of objects and sound**

To enrich the methodological analysis of the movies, it is necessary to look at the role of objects in films and how they can serve as a tool to fuel the virtualization of war- the extensive involvement of technology- and the infusing of military discourses.

#### **A. The role of objects**

Scholar Renita Randazzo Gambarato provides a useful approach to analyzing the role of objects in movies

Randazzo Gambarato defines the object as encompassing "reason, ideology, content, emotion, and sensation" (Gambarato, 2010:106). In addition, she contends that "Objects are signs that represent ideas, ideals and translate intended meaning in a film" (Gambarato, 2010:107). Consequently, objects should be interpreted as having a polysemous value.

"The role of objects as being metaphorical and indexical" (Gambarato, 2010) is recognized by Gambarato who bases this argument on Roland Barthes's semiological accounts of objects (108). This means that objects should not be merely seen as bearing a materialistic value. On the contrary, they can allude to certain images and can construct "metaphors" (Gambarato, 2010) or "codes" (Gambarato, 2010) which are embedded in the object (108). Therefore, it seems only correct that "objects are auxiliaries that make the narrative and symbolism work" (Gambarato, 2010:108).

For instance, "vehicles can represent the power, the virility and the status of a character" (Gambarato, 2010:113). This idea of the symbolic behind a vehicle will be particularly relevant to this research in understanding why certain characters are seen driving an automobile and what effect this could potentially produce on the audience.

Not only are the nature and the role of the object powerful in their effect, but also the way it is projected and perceived in a sequence. Indeed "the close-up point of view" (Gambarato, 2010) or in

other words, the *mise-en-scène*, are “extremely relevant in characterizing the expressiveness of an object in a film” (Gambarato, 2010:114).

The recurrence of an object in a movie should be interpreted as a desire to communicate a certain message. The repetitive use of an object will have been “consciously used by the filmmaker to communicate certain intentions” (Gambarato, 2010:108). It is these “intentions” (Gambarato, 2010) that are to be extracted in the analysis of the object as they will be useful in revealing the military discourses and the underlying effect of the movies (108).

Gambarato also looks at the criterion of the functionality of objects, also known as the stenographic function of “creation and adaptation of the scenario in relation to an environment” (Gambarato, 2010:109). Similarly, to Florian Schneider’s approach, the setting in which the object is placed is crucial to its meaning and to the information an object can carry (Gambarato, 2010:110).

## **B. The role of sound**

To end this methodological analysis, it is crucial to look at the role of sound in a movie. In the cinematographic context, sound encompasses all the elements heard in a movie meaning “words, sound effects, and music” (Poyntz, 2012:1).

In a movie, sound can have the effect of “heightening a mood” and can “provide us with information about the location of a scene, advance the plot, and tell us about the characters in the story” (Poyntz, 2012:1). To some extent sound can add emotions to a scene.

There are two categories of sounds in film: non-diegetic and diegetic sound.

On the one hand, non-diegetic sound refers to “all those audio elements that come from outside of the fictional world we see on screen, including the musical score and sound effects” (Poyntz, 2012:1).

On the other hand, diegetic sound relates to “audio elements that come from sources inside the world we see on the screen, including dialogue, doors slamming etc...” (Poyntz, 2012:1).

Moreover “Sound effects can be used to add mood or atmosphere to a film by creating a soundscape that accents or adds another layer of meaning to the images on the screen” (Poyntz, 2012:1).

It is argued that “the most interesting use of sound in a movie is the very absence of it: silence”. If the image can speak for itself and be so powerful that sound would alter its desired effect on the audience, silence is often employed by film makers to emphasize this phenomenon. Moreover, the

use of music referring to the cultural context of the movie can serve to situate the movie and entrench it in its geographical location.

To conclude, “The most obvious way music scores are used is to guide the emotional response to the audience” (Poyntz, 2012) as “they provide huge signposts that tell audiences how the filmmaker wants to react to a given scene.” (Poyntz, 2012:1).

## **PART IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Firstly, the paper will offer an analysis and discussion on the facets of the interactive warfare which can be found in the selected data.

Secondly, a critical comparison will be drawn between the selected data with Vietnam War movies. Thirdly and as corollary, a demonstration will be made on how the selected data shifts the debate on the motives for these military interventions from a political to a moral one.

### **A. The infusing of military discourses in the virtual citizen-soldier experience**

- ***Black Hawk Down***

Euphemisms in the war language represent a prominent feature of the clean-war discourse which serves in eroding the gruesome reality of war. In *Black Hawk Down*, these euphemisms are recurrent and thus mirror the clean-war discourse. Indeed, one of the commanding generals uses a nickname for the capital of Somalia, Mogadishu by referring to it as “Mog”. When speaking about their location, he insists that the soldiers must call it “Mog, only Mog”. By using this nickname, the general deprives the capital of its full name and identity which has the effect of distancing the audience from the reality as “Mog” is used as a code name in the military. This creates a distortion in the cognizance of the geographical location and erodes the concept of reality. To that extent, the nature of the mission also seems to be covered up as the general commander says, “Let’s get things done” reducing the critical and sensitive aspect of the mission to a “task” which needs to be achieved (24 min 04 sec). In other words, the use of this language minimizes the nature of the intervention to a “thing” and thereby avoids direct labelling.

Furthermore, the glorification of high-tech weaponry – which participates in the experience of the virtual-citizen soldier-, is clearly apparent in *Black Hawk Down*. For instance, in one scene early in the film, a long-shot is employed to depict (7 min) a Black Hawk helicopter flying across a blue sky, panning out to a three-minute theatrical sequence of a theatrical parade of Black Hawks, backed up with the sound of the radio of the helicopter (37 min). This heavily cinematic scene glorifies the military apparatus depicted within, while the camera's close-up on the soldiers' weapons also has the effect of imprinting the image of high-tech weaponry into the minds of the audience.

By providing an insight into the commanding center of the military (34 min) composed of three TVs with live visual transmission of the helicopter's camera showing the informant in his car where the General and Commander are giving orders, the director succeeds in bringing out the high-tech surveillance and top notch visual technologies mirroring the virtualization of war and the fetishizing of technology.

Finally, the weaponizing of the civic-gaze through the Black Hawk's camera (34 min 18 sec) demonstrates how the helicopter's camera acts as a medium for the eyes of the virtual citizen soldier.

## • 13 hours

One scene of the film depicts, (44 min 20 sec) automatic rifles filmed close-up, being reloaded by soldiers. Intensity is added to the scene by a high- pitch screeching noise of the reloading gun, providing a first-sensory experience and embarking the spectator in the virtual-citizen soldier experience. Under that model of the virtual-citizen soldier, the citizen's gaze is captured through the viewpoint of the drone's camera (64 min) and the zooming of the camera on the geographical zone contributes in weaponizing the civic gaze – a feature of interactive war.

Once again, clean-war is conspicuous through the use of euphemisms, when one of the soldiers full of hope, calls for an F-16 saying “Put the fear of God and the United States in them” (64 min). This strong, radical language used by the soldier along with the slow-motion camera focus on the soldier's gun, emphasizes the use of sensational violence and heightens the techno-fetishism implied therein.

The audience becomes visually immersed into the United States' intelligence commanding center in Stuttgart, Germany, as the sequence shows TVs displaying various aerial maps (50 min), fueling the fetishizing of advanced technology.

The weaponization of the civic gaze is also reflected in one scene at 55min 23: the audience is given the perspective of a soldier looking down the scope of a gun, allowing them to share the gaze of the

soldier and experience war from a personal, yet distant position. Moreover, the use of the green laser (employed by the military for accurate aiming) reflects the use of technofetishism in this scene, further embarking the citizen-audience on a virtual soldier experience via the camera.

The scenes depicting the Pentagon's commanding center plunge the audience into near darkness, only to be lit by the dim blue glow of the screens showing maps of Libya, evoking a soft and almost balmy atmosphere within the setting and evincing admiration from the audience of the precise and highly advanced technology being used by the military to locate and track the enemy. Finally, the dialogue also serves to distance the enemy from their humanity, as the soldiers use euphemisms such as "hostiles" (69 min) or military codes "tangos on the left" (73 min) which ultimately contributes to the clean-war discourse.

- ***Act of Valor***

Drones epitomize the technological advantage of the American military. Using impressively advanced technology, these highly precise instruments of surveillance and assault that minimize both risk to the pilot (compared to a traditional assault vehicle) and the risk of collateral damage, fulfilling aspects of both technofetishism and 'clean war' discourse. In *Act of Valor*, the fetishizing of drones is particularly notable in a sequence (7 min) during which one navy SEAL stands on a speeding zodiac boat and launches a mini drone by manually throwing it up the air. This mini-drone - about 1 meter long called a "raven" - personifies the weapon compared to a bird and attaches to it a gadget-like feature which more easily attracts the civic-gaze in this fetishism of high-tech weaponry. This toy-like feature distills the true nature of this surveillance weapon and facilitates the infusing of the technofetishism trope.

The subsequent sequence with a Predator drone flying in the blue sky at 17 min 16 seconds over the shed where a CIA agent is held captive, mirrors the technofetishism and the intensive use of drones by the US military and their omnipotent capacity to control visuals, to be everywhere and to see everything, an illustration of the Foucauldian Panopticon.

By allowing the audience to share the first-person perspective of the soldier at 31 min, the director embarks the audience in the virtual citizen-soldier experience. Indeed, this experience is rendered more sensational via the use of the first-person viewpoint through an on-board shaky camera (from the soldier's shoulder), which intensifies the experience delivered in the scene. Also, the use of

specific language such as “the package” to designate the prisoner and “the birds”-referring to Black Hawk helicopters, and military codes such as ORP – Objective Rally Point- - not only reflect the idea that euphemistic language underpins the clean-war discourse, but this also emphasizes the participation of the virtual citizen-soldier in the conduct of the mission. These military codes bring more realism to the scene which has the effect of reinforcing the participation of the audience in the mission.

In an early scene, a sequence depicting fast-moving Navy boats in slow-motion gives the scene an extremely sensational quality, as the camera focuses on the soldiers’ reloading machine guns. This fetishism of weaponry is brought to a climax not only by the slow-motion feature but also with the deafening sound of the machine guns. The diegetic sound occupies most of the scene’s soundscape which thereby succeeds in adding intensity and reality to the scene.

The grandeur of the American military, in other words, the power of its military apparatus, is communicated particularly strikingly with the sequence (48 min 31 seconds) of a full-camera shot of the US Navy USS Bonhomme Richard aircraft carrier stationed on the Central American Coast. The mise-en-scène fuels the technofetishism as the warm sunrays of the beautiful sunset shine on a Black Hawk helicopter taking off from the aircraft carrier. The high-angle camera shot of the fighter jets stationed on the naval-aircraft carrier contrasts with the two Navy SEALs walking on the carrier’s immense platform, using comparison of scale to strike the audience with a visual metaphor for the power of the military apparatus.

Another symbol of America’s high-tech weaponry stands out when the Navy Seals make a quick move from their zodiac boats sailing on the sea to a submarine emerging out of the water. The inside of the submarine’s controlling center, glowing with hypnotic blue and red lights, is occupied by TVs showing aerial maps contributing to the dazzling of the audience through the virtualization of war that underpins the film’s techno-fetishism.

## • *Eye in the Sky*

The large role given to drone technology in *Eye in the Sky* strongly reflects the fetishism of technology. Remarkably, the sequence of the Predator drone flying in the sky at 12 min 13 second is particularly striking and powerful. At first, the entire gigantic drone appears to the eyes of the audience and then suddenly the camera focuses on the drone’s camera, in other words, on the drone’s

eye. The drone captures two fundamental pillars of the visual citizen-soldier experience: firstly, drones appeal to technofetishism by being an instrument of war that, via cutting-edge technology, has replaced the genuine soldier that observes not with eyes, but with a dispassionate camera. Secondly, these highly precise instruments supposedly minimize the possibility for collateral damage, an ethical consideration that runs thematically through the film, and thus contribute toward fueling the clean-war discourse.

The latter being reflected by euphemisms used by Colonel Powell, the chief of the mission who orders Steve the drone pilot to “prosecute the target”. The same kind of euphemism is used towards the end of the movie: when the drone pilot has successfully destroyed the terrorists’ safe house, Colonel Powell asks Steve to perform a “damage assessment”. Once again, the language used seems to cover up the reality of what the drone strike has just produced. Instead of referring directly to the “dead bodies” produced by the drone, this is referred to as “damage”.

The interpretation of the *mise-en-scène* in the sequence shot inside the drone operator’s compartmentalized space reveals the game-like feature of the scene and the weaponizing of the civic gaze. Indeed, at 18 mins, the camera focuses on Steve’s joystick and fingers and therefore invites the civic-gaze to participate in the mission. The invitation to participate in this mission involving high-tech weaponry compares to a war game being played by the drone operators and at the same time by the virtual citizen-soldier.

Another feature of this techno-fetishism and virtualization of war appears, in a sequence with a camera focus on a special agent from the Kenyan forces, who through the use of his phone, pilots a robotized beetle with an integrated camera. As he flies the beetle discreetly into the house, the sequence offers an overhead view of the house where the terrorists are gathered. The striking fact is how the civic-gaze is entirely captured through the viewpoint of the beetle’s camera. Indeed, when the beetle is flying, the audience watches the scene from a first-person perspective, in other-words from the eyes of the beetle. This filming technique undoubtedly serves in fetishizing technology while at the same time weaponizing the civic gaze by inviting the virtual citizen-soldier in the action.

Again, what makes it particularly interesting in the movie is the fact that when the Hellfire missile is launched from the drone, the virtual citizen-soldier’s civic-gaze is captured through the lens of the drone as the shot is taken through the drone’s point of view. In other words, the citizen-soldier is participating in this strike which, according to Colonel Powell and British General Frank Benson, is proportionate to the threat to civilian life. Therefore, the virtual citizen-soldier participates in this supposed ethical form of killing.

As technology breaches the distances between the battlefield and the drone operation, the movie reflects this new form of technological war, being operated away from the warzone, as the drone operators are physically and psychologically separated from the reality of the battlefield. Indeed, the atmosphere in the container is very sterile and silent, ruptured only by the voices of the crew. As their work appears to be “bureaucratized” (Stahl, 2013), the drone operators appear like regular office workers when their job involves the surveillance of the enemy and killing (217). This bureaucratizing of the drone operators distracts the audience from the reality of their mission.

The glorification of high-tech weaponry is conspicuous in *Eye in the Sky*, as there are various sequences that seem to glorify and highlight the technological prowess of the Predator drone. Moreover, the space in which the drone operators appear resembles the cockpit of a fighter jet, creating a video-game-like simulation that reinforces the techno-fetishism of the scene. Indeed, the dimmed lights inside the compartmentalized space where the drone operators are sitting brings forward the bright TV screens showing the drone’s vision and aerial maps of where the drone is flying. In addition, the drone operators’ joysticks and the multiple red and shining buttons of the container, in a sense, dazzle the audience and fuel the techno-fetishism trope.

## **B. The virtual citizen-soldier occupying the glorified heroic soldier.**

The “virtual-citizen soldier” is the prime feature in the era of Militainment and the interactive consumption of warfare it entails: a dimension in which the citizen occupies the body of the soldier through the medium of entertainment. In this case, we will look at how the citizen virtually occupies the body of a masculine, glorified and heroic soldier.

### **• *Black Hawk Down***

At 92 mins, the U.S soldiers still trapped in the dangerous areas of town are being attacked by a crowd of uncontrollable and enraged Somalis who start throwing stones at them, are. This display of resilience and bravery coalesces in a scene that effectively valorizes the actions of US soldiers, elevating their perception from citizen-soldier to glorified heroic soldier. This is further reinforced in a slow-motion sequence (120 min) of a soldier running through crossfire.

At 59 min and 8 seconds, the “heroic” soldier - who had previously survived a helicopter crash - defends himself in the crushed cockpit of the helicopter against a horde of about 15 enemy militias;



he appears like a fearless warrior fighting till his last breath. This contributes to drawing the portrait of the glorious heroic soldier.

As the soldiers are leaving the military base and as they are about to go back to town, the camera pauses on the U.S flag with sun rays shining on it. This sequence (79 min) illustrates how the troops are fighting for their country and that they should be supported by their fellow citizens. This sequence clearly embodies the “support-the troops” narrative which is one of the three major discourses in interactive warfare.

### ● *13 hours*

By showing soldiers not only on deployment, but also in the comfort of their domestic home life, *13 hours* evokes an image of certain national citizens giving up such luxuries for the sake of protecting the same lives of others. When soldier Jack Silva mentions how he misses home, “I just wish I was home” (40 min), the audience is compelled to feel empathy for him and others like him, forcing them to appreciate the sacrifices being made. The same idea comes back at 46 min 30 sec, when Rone says “None of you have to go, but we are the only help they have,” communicating the bravery of the soldiers as they decide to fight and risk their lives for the sake of other people’s lives.

The heroic feature of the soldier stands out during a slow-motion sequence (119 min 45 sec) of an American GRS running on a roof and crying out to his injured comrade “Rone”. This is a true sign of brotherhood which again appears at 118 min when Jack Silva says: “Never leave a brother behind.” In that line, the theme of brotherhood reinforces the empathy from the audience towards the soldiers.

Another feature which feeds “support-the-troops” rhetoric is the gendering of heroism with a distinct masculine flavor. Indeed, the support becomes stronger as the characters appear as strong and vigorous heroes fighting for their country. For instance, at 53 min and 57 seconds, the CIA chief appears fearful and weak in the critical context of the situation compared to the confident GRS soldier who takes care of the crisis. The trope of masculinity is also apparent at 98 min when the GRS arrive at the safe house: “anyone comes in tonight, we’re kicking some ass”.

At 96 min, the GRS soldiers, although outnumbered by the enemy, are pictured defending the fort bravely from the attackers. The heroic feature of a strong solid man is further reinforced at 109 min when GRS soldier Jack says that he is fearless: “I never get scared” or when the chief says: “warriors are trained like warriors” The heroic and vigorous virtues are spread out to the end of the

movie when, at 131 min, the GRS soldier limping on the tarmac goes “I walked into this country, I’m walking out”.

Indeed, the CIA agent stresses the heroic acts of the GRS soldiers when at 122 min she says, “I don’t know how you survived this tonight, but I know how we did” and at 123 min when the CIA director in Benghazi expresses his gratitude towards the soldiers “I’m proud to know Americans like you”.

In one of the final scenes taking place on an airfield in Libya, the GRS soldiers - who are not directly affiliated with the military but use their experience as former US military agents on a contracted basis-(Miller) compare the honors the rangers will receive : “What do we get?” asks one soldier to which soldier GRS soldier Jack responds “We get to go home” ( 2012:1). As a major trope of the idea of heroes is to act altruistically and not in the pursuit of recognition, the mere fact that Jack brushes away the need for recognition of their accomplishment signifies to the audience that these men are true heroes. An emotional climax is reached at 132 min when Jack calls up his wife to tell her that he is “coming home for good” but that unfortunately “Rone is not coming home, I love you so much”. To some extent the whole mission in Benghazi ends with the heroes on the tarmac and it is nurtured by the emotional moments which are fueled by the non-diegetic sound of strings music.

## • *Act of Valor*

*Act of Valor* engages with the idea that the allied victory of World War II was putatively accepted as a moral victory, and that the allied soldiers involved therefore were inherently heroic. This idea is illustrated at 9 min when the narrator’s graves voice says, “your grandfather was a liberator who died in World War II” reflecting and praising the heroism of the marines who fought during that war while simultaneously connecting this heroism with the heroism of the Navy SEALs. Also, when the narrating voice at the beginning talks about “brotherhood” to the father’s son, it is decisive in the support-our-troops rhetoric because, running concurrently to the scene mirroring the solid bond and solidarity between the soldiers, it invites the empathy and identification of the audience.

Rendered even more poignant using melancholy string music in the background, the narrator’s manly and hoarse voice comments “First thing my father said, the worst thing about getting old it’s that it’s harder to protect the things that matter: honor, freedom, justice an

d family.” These codes that “matter” reflect the image of the model American soldier who is pictured as a just and dignified man fighting for two core American values: the nation and the family.

The film appeals to the idea of altruism and self-sacrifice to an almost platitudinous degree: at 91 min, when a live grenade threatens a group of soldiers, a Navy Seal jumps on it, covering it with his stomach. He dies with a slow-motion depiction of the grenade exploding and his comrades being saved. This can be interpreted as a true heroic act of bravery embracing the idea of brotherhood since the SEAL died saving his brothers.

At 94 min, after being shot at with 15 bullets by the Chechen terrorist, the Navy SEAL falls to the ground, draws out his gun and as a slow-motion sequence shows him reloading, his SEAL comrade storms into the room and shoots the Chechen terrorist Abu Shabal before he has time to shoot the wounded NAVY seal. Therefore, the SEAL saves his friend’s life following a tense scene full of suspense.

Finally, the caption at the end of the movie indicates that *Act of Valor* is dedicated to the Navy SEALs who “have dedicated their souls since 9/11”. In that respect, the movie is dedicated to those who fought for the United States ever since the beginning of the War on Terror and clearly embodies the glorification of the soldier.

## • *Eye in the Sky*

The “support-the-troops” rhetoric is not too obvious in *Eye in the Sky*. To some extent, as the clean-war discourse through the virtualization of war elevates the war as supposedly being more ethical, the audience is invited to support the work of the drone operators who are supposedly waging a more ethical war.

### **C. The humanization of the soldier opposed to the barbaric virtual enemy**

In this virtualization of war, the humanization of the soldier fuels identification from the audience who sees the confrontation between the soldier and a seemingly barbaric virtual enemy.

#### **1. The humanization of the soldier**

Not only do the selected movies invite the audience into the interactive consumption of war, they also tend to humanize the character of the soldier.

- ***Black Hawk Down***

Showcasing fun distracts from the reality of war. Therefore, by showing a scene (25 min) in which the soldiers are playing a game of basketball before heading off to their mission, the director narrows the relationship between the audience and the characters by showing them to be doing a ‘normal’ activity in comparison to their actions on the battlefield. Through this humanization of the soldiers, the drama from the reality of the events is reduced. Then a few minutes later when the soldiers are about to depart on their mission, a rock-song is played in the army base to stimulate and encourage the soldiers. To some extent, this joyful and upbeat musicality adds fervor and excitement to the scene.

Also, a true reflection of the invitation to participate into a “playful” war is seen at 29 min and 42 secs when Sergeant 2 asks Soldier 1 how he is feeling, to which soldier 1 responds “I’m excited”. This makes the mission sound like an adventure and paints the image of a somewhat entertaining or fun war.

Humanization of the soldiers is also illustrated by scenes which remind the audience that the soldiers are also family men and are not immune to feelings, such as missing their loved ones. Indeed, this feature of humanity for instance appears when one of the American soldiers is alone and defending himself against the militia and takes a quick look at the picture of his wife and his son which is stored in his wallet. This sequence achieves its goal in breaking with the tense atmosphere the audience is witnessing.

- ***13 hours***

Some unrealistic scenes appear in *13 hours*: for instance, at 11 min and 22sec, the soldiers are playing video games, entertaining themselves as if they were isolated from the war zone. They are also seen watching a movie at 34 min which in a way fuels identification from the audience who is also watching the movie starring these characters. By showing the soldiers playing a war game on the console connected to the TV (at 42 min), this not only shows the moment of entertainment and relaxation that they are enjoying, it also invites the virtual citizen-soldier into playing the war game and in consuming combat.

There are also various scenes where the family life of the protagonists is brought to light. Once again, these sequences of emotions and daily life fuel empathy from the audience and draw a point of identification with the soldier.

While in Benghazi, at 37 min, after having made a Skype call to his family, combined with the sound of emotional piano chords, Rone says the following “My girl’s drinking, she’s 15, and girls don’t drink”. This mirrors the fact that these soldiers are also family men, fathers who worry about their family even though they are in a combat zone.

The same kind of scene which creates a distortion from reality happens at 42 min when the soldier Jack is fighting over the phone with his wife over the payment of bills at home. This typical scene of family life takes place on the phone whilst Jack is also in a war zone which serves in humanizing Jack and de-dramatizing the reality of the conflict

### • *Act of Valor*

Although not yet on their mission and still in America, a scene is shown depicting the Navy SEALs enjoying a barbecue with their families. At the same time, there is a digital portrait appearing next to each of the SEAL’s face detailing his profile thus contributing to a virtualization of a war whilst at the same time showing a normal scene of friendship.

There are many scenes where Navy SEALs are seen with their wives and children. As previously mentioned, the barbecue scene is already a sign of this painting of a family man. Also, at 14 min when at the airport seeing off the Navy SEALs, the family is there and waving goodbye at them. This gives an emotional touch to the sequence as the audience can feel sad for the separation between the SEALs and their family.

### • *Eye in the Sky*

The case of drone pilot Steve mirrors the idea of a “bureaucratized” form of killing envisaged by Peter Asaro. By showing the drone pilot lying in his bed and getting up to go the controlling base, *Eye in the Sky* paints the truthful image of drone operators who have regular office hours. At the end of the mission, Steve has permission to go back home to get some rest but “I want you

back in 12 hours” says the Captain at the end of the movie. Thus, Steve and the fellow drone operators must deal with the mental stress due to the distance from the battlefield and the fact that their work is not geographically separate from where they live. For the soldiers, the act of killing is no longer conducted on the battlefield but in their own country, thousands of miles away from the enemy. The drone pilot, Steve, undergoes intense pressure from Colonel Powell and it becomes clear that the entire success of the mission relies on him: “you are now our best option to take those HIV out” says Colonel Powell to Steve at 40 min followed by an immediate lethal request “Now prepare to launch a single AGM-114 Hellfire on the target house “

At 54 min, the camera focuses on Steve’s hands shaking whilst gripping the joystick and piloting the drone. When tears start pouring out of his eyes, the scene becomes emotional and that way the audience feels empathy for the psychologically troubled soldier. The humanization of the drone pilot through this emotional scene is accompanied by the non-diegetic sound of airy pads.

As the drone operators are waiting for confirmation, and Steve is so stressed he is biting his fingernails in hope that the girl will leave the scene. At 84 min, with tears at his eyes, Steve shoots again on Colonel Powell’s order. The dramatic feeling of the scene is fueled by emotional music playing. Although at the end of the movie, the drone pilot is responsible for the death of a little girl, the weight and necessity of the mission reflected in the words of the general “what these men would have done would have been ever more terrible” and “never tell a soldier that he does not know the cost of war” prevails over the civilian casualty. In the end, the mission is accomplished and the necessity of the strike over the political consequences and death of the girl, prevail.

## **2. The “good” man confronted to a barbaric “virtual” enemy**

In these movies, the American soldier is often pictured as the good man fighting a barbaric enemy whose face is rarely apparent. The disappearance of the enemy’s face nurtures the trope of a virtuous war (Der Derian; 2009:10).

### **• *Black Hawk Down***

The mise-en-scène is crucial in provoking the disappearance of the enemy’s face. This is apparent when a sandstorm hits the soldiers who are engaging in crossfire with the enemy. The scene

(44 min 24 sec) becomes murky and blurry as it becomes hard to identify the enemy, thus reflecting the disappearance of the enemy's face. The sandstorm is followed by 15 minutes of intense crossfire during which the enemy is rarely seen as most of the time his head is covered by a turban. This is not the case of the American soldiers, whose faces and whole body are clearly visible to the audience most of the time.

Also, it should be noted that during the crossfire, the emptiness created by the absence of speech, is filled in by the sound of emotional string music, which succeeds in adding a touch of intensity and tension to the scene. The covering of the enemy's face is also reflected in one of the scenes in which one of the militiamen is shooting with a machine-gun but is covered with a black hoodie, or when the enemy is seen covered with a red turban, but his face can barely be seen (83 min).

To create this dichotomy between the barbaric enemy and the American soldier pictured as the "good guy", the director shows a favorable image of the American soldier. This appears in a sequence during which an American soldier finds himself alone in an alley, and to escape shooting from the enemy, he storms into an abandoned school and finds one woman kneeling and protecting six children. This scene of humanity and the innocence of these civilians - even more of the children due to their age - and peacefulness of the moment, contrast with the brutality from the outside and serves in releasing the tension. As the soldier exits the room through another door, he waves at one of the little girls who waves back. Somehow, this scene of humanity disconnected from the brutality occurring outside, underlies the idea that the Americans are fighting to protect civilians and that they are the good guys. This is not the case of the rebel soldiers who are indeed depicted as barbarian militiamen are chanting and singing "Allahu Akbar" ("God is great" in Arabic) in a sequence using slow-motion, the latter elevating the tension in the scene and inviting the eyes of the audience to take their time in focusing on this enemy.

### • **13 hours**

In *13 hours*, the disappearance of the enemy's face is illustrated with the failure to distinguish the enemy from the appearing characters. Indeed, when Rone expresses his doubts that "you can't tell the good guys from the bad guys" it mirrors the fact that the enemy could be anyone and therefore that he is not clearly identifiable.

When at 27 min 42 seconds, the former Libyan Leader Gaddafi is referred to by the Americans as an “evil asshole” this picture becomes a caricature and clearly opposes the “good”, the Americans from the “evil” enemy, the Libyan leader and his supporters. The spirituality behind the term “evil” reinforces the enemy’s image as being cruel and barbaric. The tension in the scene is captured at 93 min when the sound of classical music and drums accompanies the scene of American soldiers running on the rooftop of the safe house.

The surrealism of these two scenes plunges the audience into this distortion of reality. Indeed, there is a scene of two American soldiers on the safe house’s roof who see two of the house’s neighbors sitting on their garden terrace and watching a football game on their TV. “Surreal” says Jack Silvia as they are watching out for the imminent approach of the enemy, the neighbor says hi to them as if nothing was happening.

As well as barbarizing the enemy and stripping him of an identity, the sequence of Muslims praying with AK-47s at their side directly associates Islam with the Libyan enemy. This is also reflected at 40 min when rebel soldiers are fiercely chanting “Allahu Akbar” in slow motion adding intensity to the scene.

### • *Eye in the Sky*

For all its high-tech capabilities, from its aerial position, a drone is incapable of capturing the image of an enemy’s face, who is instead represented as a formless dot on a screen. Sometimes it is true that the drone’s camera offers a neat image of an individual, however, in most cases, the enemy’s face is either covered by a veil or a turban and in some others the enemy appears as if he was a dot on the screen. This lack of recognition and clear identification of the enemy is reflected in Colonel Powell’s words when she asks a surveillance officer operating in Pearl Harbor and monitoring the mission, to give a “positive ID” on one of the bodies.

*This feature in Act of Valor doesn’t particularly stand out but this lack does not deprive it value from the research project.*



#### D. **The failure to address the political motives of war**

A comparison can be drawn between the analyzed data and Vietnam War movies. We will see that these movies contain similar codes and adapt filming techniques mostly used in what we can consider as anti-war movies on the Vietnam conflict. The desire to make these movies realistic however arguably fuels even more the spectacle of the war and its glorification, with all the military discourses infused, the four movies studied in the paper fail to critically address the motives of war.

##### **1. The narrow parallel with Vietnam War movies.**

It is first necessary to introduce the different trends of Vietnam War movies to understand how they can be linked to the analyzed data. One should be reminded that the Vietnam War contaminated Hollywood with the Vietnam Syndrome, referring to the disgust of the American citizen due to the intensive broadcasting of the atrocious and disastrous Vietnam War.

Looking at the chronology of Vietnam War movies, although a few were released during the conflict (notably *the Green Berets*), most of them came out in theatres after the conflict had ended in 1975 (Carvalho,2006: 955). The extraordinary flux of Vietnam War movies in Hollywood, served in fueling the Vietnam Syndrome.

The focus on the codes and the content of these movies is relevant to this critical comparison. Looking at Vietnam War movies, a distinction can be made between the anti-war movies which were more numerous than those seemingly uncritical of war.

Responding to the tarnished image of the American military in the conflict, a “romanticized-emotional” (Pollard, 2002) genre sought to vivify the image of the American soldier fighting in Vietnam, by portraying him as a brave man and hero fighting for his country (126). The most exemplary model is the *Green Berets (1968)* which was released during the conflict. Undoubtedly the desired effect of such a movie was to convince the audience that these soldiers needed support as they were fighting for their country. However, as Pollard notes, this type of movie did not receive much audience which therefore indicates that the American audience had been growing extensive distrust on the reasons of the Vietnam intervention (Pollard, 2002:126).

Following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the destruction of America's image in the horrific conflict, additional movies sought to clean and refurbish the image of the military still by focusing on this heroic soldier: *Uncommon Valor* (1983), *Missing in Action* (1984) are illustrations with *Rambo* (1982) marking one of the most powerful examples of this revival of the American soldier, a "symbol of patriotic, betrayed manhood" (Pollard, 2002:128). According to Gates, these types of movies are part of what she calls the "revenge film" (Gates, 2005:197). In that line, Gates identifies three types of war films relating to the Vietnam War: the one of the returning veteran from 1975 to 1980, the revenge film from 1980 to 1985 (*Rambo*, *Missing in Action*) and the realist combat film from 1985-onwards (Gates, 2005:197).

In the revenge films such as *Rambo* and *Uncommon Valor*, war is glorified through a super heroic soldier, and the morality of the war is brushed away, paving the way for the underlying effect of the movie to show that he is fighting a "good war". Therefore, these movies sacrifice an authentic representation of war in favor of a glorified and idealized soldier. Arguably, the presence of these same codes – heroic soldier, brave and masculine- in the analyzed movies, can have the effect of labelling American interventions after 9/11 as justifiable especially considering the debacle of the Iraq War and the tainted image of the American military. As we have seen in the first part of this analysis, this portrait of the romanticized and glorified heroic soldier is found in *Black Hawk Down*, *13 hours*, *Act of Valor* and *Eye in the Sky*. In that line, these four movies can be seen as having the effect of improving the image of the soldier.

Interestingly, although Westell (Quoted in Mc Sweeney, 2016) agrees that *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse Now* criticized the Vietnam War, he contends that "their primary ideological function of these films was to address and alleviate this trauma to restore American self-belief and credibility" which is why a parallel can be made with *Black Hawk Down*, *Act of Valor*, *13 hours* and *Eye in the Sky* (59). This paper argues that they cannot be considered as anti-war movies since they are fueled with the various tropes of Militainment. In line with previous argumentation, they can be interpreted as an attempt to restore a sense of pride in American minds and heal a similar trauma and disbelief caused by the failed interventions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Iraq and Afghanistan).

Furthermore, while Carvalho argues that movies focusing on the return of the veteran, such as *the Deer Hunter* (1978) – fail to address the morality of the war and rather focuses on the emotional aspect and mental distress suffered by the veteran, thus "reducing the war to an individual experience" (Carvalho,2006), others argue that it depicted a realistic portrait of the war. Both arguments are indeed debatable, but it can be true that by picturing the mental distress and trauma suffered by the returning veteran, the audience can be led to a personal identification and therefore understand the

disastrous psychological consequences of the Vietnam War (958). The focus on the insanity of war embodied in characters such as in *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) serves in shocking the audience. These types of movies treating Vietnam “expose and reflect the American crisis of conscience about Vietnam” (Rasmussen, 1991:175). However, there we do not see this feature of insanity in the analyzed data, meaning that it can be argued that they are not directed towards shocking the audience and producing the same effects as these anti-war Vietnam movies.

This style mirrored in these types of Vietnam War movies should be contrasted from the one reflected in *Black Hawk Down*, *13 hours*, *Act of Valor* and *Eye in the Sky*. Indeed, as we have seen and most particularly in *Black Hawk Down*, *13 hours* and *Act of Valor*, they rather focus on a revitalized masculinity through the concept of brotherhood and the idea that a soldier shall *leave no man behind*. Belonging to what Gates calls the “New Hollywood war film”, the value ascribed to brotherhood embedded in the war movies serves in demonstrating a sacred bond between the soldiers but also invites the audience into sharing support for these men who embody the nation, part of an “army of one” (Gates,2005:298). Just like in Rambo, where the hero is idealized, films of this new era borrow success as we have seen, in valuing heroism. Under this narrative, the idea of morality comes into play as the heroes are pictured “Moral men who think for themselves and, no matter what their orders, act humanely and heroically” (Gates, 2005:298).

Another interesting comparison, though not general, can be made with the disappearance of the enemy’s face in *Platoon* (1987) which is argued to address the audience into questioning war “The defacing of the enemy has the brilliant effect of making the audience question the righteousness and effectiveness of the war” (Pollard, 129). However, the interpretation of the analyzed data demonstrates that this feature is one facet of this interactive warfare. The disappearance of the enemy’s face rather blurs the image of *who we are fighting* and acts in dehumanizing the other side. That way, the depiction of war arguable becomes more acceptable as it opposes a humanized soldier to a virtual and unidentifiable enemy.

Finally, if we look at movies like *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), they are arguably painting a gloomy and realistic picture of war thanks to their content but also thanks to their filming techniques. Indeed, these movies mark the style of the “documentary-drama” (Gates, 2005) insofar as their depiction of the war is so realistic that one could believe that they portray an authentic picture of war (299).

For instance, according to Gates they used “tight-framing and camera-shaky movements” (Gates, 2005) which offered an extreme level of realism (300). The post 9/11 movies appear to be combining the degree of realism from the Vietnam docu-drama while at the same time using the codes of the

revenge film by enabling a glorification of the soldier (see I.C). Indeed, the use of shaky-camera filming and first-person viewpoint has been demonstrated to appear in the *Black Hawk Down*, *13 hours*, *Act of Valor* and *Eye in the Sky*.

When the realism of some of these Vietnam War movies can be argued to have acted in favor of anti-war spirit, in the case of the *Black Hawk Down*, *13 hours*, *Act of Valor* and *Eye in the Sky*, it serves an antithetical purpose, of celebrating the image of the military. In short, although, the realism of some Vietnam War movies served an anti-war purpose, showing the crudity and horror of the Vietnam War through the cinematographic techniques, *Black Hawk Down*, *13 hours*, *Act of Valor* and *Eye in the Sky* arguably produce a realistic depiction of combat, which does not bear the same effects.

## 2. The avoidance of political debate: a war of morals rather than politics.

We will see that *Black Hawk Down*, *13 hours*, *Act of Valor* and *Eye in the Sky* are so imbued with the military discourses on interactive warfare that they generally fail to offer a criticism on the military interventions.

### • *Black Hawk Down*

The first few minutes of the movie start with a gloomy and morbid scene of a Somali village showing starving and agonizing women, men and children. The scene is particularly shocking and is intensified by an emotional African song that invites pathos from the audience. Also, at the start of the movie, a caption stating that the U.S has sent “20 000 U.S marines”, indicates that the deployment is linked to the sufferings of Somalis. Nothing is said about the political interests of the United States regarding their intervention. For instance, at 9min, this scene showing a captive Somali official interrogated by an American General is particularly interesting.

The Somali prisoner says, “This is our war, not yours” to which the General responds “This is not war, it’s genocide”. If there is genocide, the General deviates from the political motives of war by using a term which should be carefully used and seems to be thrown too easily without any justification and debate.

The opportunities to criticize the role of the American military in the intervention and the legitimacy of it are eroded. A conversation between soldiers illustrates this argument, when of the soldiers briefly

starts to question the reality of war and their role in the crisis "people are poor, no education, no future....", to which another soldier responds saying "He's an idealist". After this reaction and friendly mockery from the other soldiers, this political discussion is rapidly ended. Therefore, the political motives of the intervention and the questioning which could have been brought to light, is put aside.

This lack of clarity and questioning on the political motives of the war is mirrored when a Sergeant talking to a Ranger asks, "You don't think we should be there?" to which the Sergeant responds: "You know what I think? Don't really matter what I think. Once that first bullet goes past your head, politics and all that shit just goes right out the window" (55 min). In other words, politics do not matter in that situation. Sadly, the movie fails to address the politics of the intervention and shows a gloomy and cynical picture of the political situation in Somalia which clearly seems debatable: "Killing will never stop in our country" as one Somali sergeant says to a captured American soldier (98 min).

### • **13 hours**

At 44mins, GRS soldier Jack Silva comments: "if I'm doing the right thing, I have nothing to worry about. God will protect me", illustrating the fact that although he is arguably doing the "right thing" since he is on a mission to protect and exfiltrate American citizens, the deeper reasons for his presence and the Libyan crisis have been withdrawn from the forefront. For instance, nothing is said about the reasons for the uprising in Libya and the potential role and interests of the United States in the crisis.

At 129 min, at the end of the movie, when the GRS soldiers have managed to kill the enemy and a horde of rebels from the "17<sup>th</sup> of February" army arrive which signals the end of the attack, some Libyan civilian waves at the American soldiers. This simple gesture of a "wave" is a sign of friendliness and somehow shows that the American soldiers were there for a good reason because they are pictured as accepted by the locals.

Another interesting moment of the movie is when at 132 min, one of the GRS soldier's bids farewell to Amal, their Libyan interpreter and says: "Your country has got to figure this shit out Amal". Again, the use of the term "shit" reflecting a lack of appropriate language to clearly define the context of the Libyan crisis shows how the political debate is nullified. Also, this way of speaking from the American soldier is condescending towards the interpreter and towards the Libyan in general.

Ironically, the attack takes place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September and the GRS staff watch the broadcasting of the footage of the attacks 10 years ago while they are sitting on a couch in Benghazi.

- ***Act of Valor***

For instance, in *Act of Valor*, when the soldiers mention the name of the Chechen terrorist “Mohammed Abu Shabal” at 49 min and refer to him as an old Jihadi who wants to kill Americans, there is no mentioning of the motives for which he wants to kill them and therefore there is only a vilification of the enemy to the eyes of the audience. The motives for the various military operations are always justified by a protection of American interests. This lack of critical debate is not surprising since *Act of Valor* serves as an homage to the Navy SEALs. Any counter-argument to their missions would act as a direct threat to the image of the SEALs and therefore of the military.

- ***Eye in the Sky***

Although on some aspects, *Eye in the Sky* arguably pulls the spectator into questioning the legitimacy of drone strikes, the debate is effectively reduced to a narrow-minded conception framed by the common military rhetoric of necessity of a strike over the potential civilian casualties. This idea of a ‘necessary’ drone strike is reflected in the words of Colonel Powell who says that “Many children’s lives are at stake, this is just one girl” (60 min). This scene is central in understanding the morality put forward by the movie. In fact, the 2 hours of the movie’s duration revolves around one central question that bears a legal and moral implication. First, the legality of the drone strike which does not go “beyond the legitimate risk” of killing the young innocent child (as spoken by the US legal advisor at 63 min) needs to be assessed. However, the morality of the drone strike also comes into play as the military commanders argue that they must do “the right thing” (UK colonel), “it is our task to make the right military action”. Although there is some opposition from Angela, the Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for Africa, after a reassessment of the Collateral Damage Assessment (CDE), the strike is ordered and the authorization to “prosecute” is given.

With the chilling effect of ambient music with dark and deep sounds, the climax intervenes at 73 min when Colonel Powell expresses the fact that “there are many lives at risk” and by going off the record, the Collateral Damage Assessment limit fixed below 45% is revised upwards to proceed with the strike. This indicates that to satisfy the necessity of the strike and therefore the morality of it judged necessary by Colonel Powell and most of the British officials present in the movie, the legality of the

strike is curtailed. In other words, the morality of the situation takes precedence over the legality of the strike: the CDE is illegally modified to meet the standards for the strike. What is considered as representing the appropriate military action “it is our task to make the right military action” seems to equate the right moral action. Indeed, as Colonel Powell says: “We have now done everything in our power to save this girl’s life”.

In that line, although the ending of the movie is dramatic since prior to the strike, the camera focuses on the drone pilot’s shaky hands who has tears in his eyes as he shoots and is clearly emotional as the strike is a success but ends with the death of the little girl, the war of morals wins over the legality. Therefore, what *Eye in the Sky* reveals is how drone strikes permit a more ethical way of waging war against terrorism and preventing the mass killing of civilians, even though some lives might be lost to protect a more substantial amount of lives. From this line of reasoning, *Eye in the Sky* fails to critically address the legality of the strike and blurs the audience on the concept of the morality regarding the strike. Although it could be argued that one of the ending sequences showing the unconscious little girl at the hospital, surrounded by her devastated parents, could alert the audience on the morality of drone strikes, it appears that the last word is given to the British general (played by Alan Rickman). Indeed, when exiting the crisis room, the General responds to an outraged Angela, saying that one should “Never tell a soldier that he does not know the cost of war”. In other words, the cost of war was known but had to be paid to protect numerous civilians from potential death. Finally, it appears that the final sequence of a full camera-shot of the flying Predator drone acts as a symbolic, demonstrating the need for this ethical form of killing necessary in the fight against terrorism and the protection of civilian lives.

## V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, *Black Hawk Down*, *13 hours*, *Act of Valor* and *Eye in the Sky* reflect the features of interactive warfare and more specifically the tropes of Militainment theorized by Stalh: ‘clean-war’, ‘technofetishism’ and ‘support-the-troops’ through a glorification of the soldier. All these discourses are effectively infused through the dimension of the virtual citizen-soldier. By mirroring the facets of Militainment, these movies tend to value the image of the American military. As the ideological power of cinema on the spectator cannot be denied, it raises the issue of the lack of address on the political motives of war. Indeed, these movies tend to avoid constructive criticisms on the military interventions by favoring moral pretenses. By failing to engage in a debate on the motives of war, they offer a spectacle to the audience and a source of pleasure, which arguably does not involve necessary questioning on the reasons justifying American military interventions and their consequences.



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