

It's Called 'War Porn'

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"And so, to the end of history, murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honour and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can understand." George Bernard Shaw, Caesar's Monologue, "Caesar and Cleopatra," 1898

War has always been a turn-on, its thrill as old as mankind itself. It is intense; it is raw; it is primal. It reaches into every nerve, so carnal it borders on the sexually erotic. And many who cannot participate want to watch.

It's called war porn.[1]



As a way to bypass blockages placed against credit card purchases placed from Iraq and Afghanistan, soldiers swap their own footage of enemy kills with sexual pornography sites, in exchange for X-rated videos. Military personnel regularly submit thousands of these 'snuff videos' enhanced with heavy metal rock music; the more graphic the footage the higher the rating attributed by website viewers.

When the pictures from Abu Ghraib were published, the Pentagon worked overtime to claim the abuse of prisoners as isolated incidents carried out by a handful of aberrant military personnel. Whilst clearly apparent that the majority of military personnel do not find pleasure in killing, it is nevertheless indisputable that the demand for war porn photographs and videos prove an endemic euphoria from the humiliation, degradation, and death of the enemy.

With Abu Ghraib came an onslaught of personal videos to YouTube and war porn websites such as www.gotwarporn.com. Millions of hits by viewers anxious for more merely reinforce their popularity. In 2004, 30,000 soldiers had registered with one website alone.[2] The US

military has done nothing to close the sites, brushing the videos aside as impossible to trace, despite specific GPS co-ordinates, times, and tracking data clearly visible on the tapes. Only one website, www.nowthatsfuckedup.com, was shut down by the local Sheriff of Polk County, Florida, who prosecuted the site's owner for obscenity.[3] The Pentagon has otherwise seen fit to let the sites stand, evidence of 'boys will be boys.' Centcom spokesman Matt McLaughlin said that although the Geneva Conventions prohibit photographs of detainees or mutilated bodies, the military "has no specific policy on taking pictures of the deceased as long as those pictures do not violate the aforementioned prohibitions." [4] The Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Congress nor White House has stepped in to put a stop to these explicit videos, and not a single troop has been disciplined for disseminating the materials.

The phenomenon serves a valuable dual purpose. Trading war footage for sexual footage contains desire. On the ground far from home, computer sex means that troops are less compelled to seduce – or worse attack – young village girls for relief, historically a norm in battle. Now it is all available online, straight to their personal computers in the desert.

It is also useful propaganda, support of US troops essential to the ongoing occupation. Whereas in wars past it remained the role of government ministries and media platforms, propaganda is now conveniently dispensed by those directly involved in the fight. War porn enables voyeurs to not only sense the gratification should they enlist to the cause, but enforces a hoped for success in a war against terror. War sells, war porn really sells, and peace is not good for the defence industry business.

If not to guarantee perpetual retaliation upon American targets, either at home or abroad, why else are the videos permitted to remain in the public domain?

Just as the slaughter of civilians can be viewed in the comfort of an armchair in America, the videos are just as readily accessible by the very enemy the US military seeks to eradicate. It is a world wide web, after all. The Iraqi who has witnessed his entire family blown to pieces by an American bomb, the Afghan who has experienced nothing but war since his birth, the Pakistani who suffers US drones dropping missiles on his land: they are each able to watch the same scenes in their own homes. They too hear the thrilling cries of a soldier as he relishes dropping explosives upon families' homes, on a mother and child walking along a road, or on a group of men returning from a day's work. They too can see the macabre mauling and mutilation by dogs as they tear into the remains of an Iraqi soldier, or view compilation videos of 'identify the internal body parts' lay strewn across the ground, audible cheers in the background by soldiers as they engage. Watching war porn, the enemy also feels a burning rush. Not of the electric bolt of adrenalin surging through his body when a trigger is pulled, but from the passion for revenge.

Twenty-first century warfare is more complex than the argument of an inherent desensitisation of the computer-game generation, of soldiers who view targets merely as pinpricks on a screen – the higher the number hit the higher their score. It is well known that those who learn aggression from video games are likelier to engage in aggressive behaviour.[5] Once upon a time, a creaking door in the night, a bloody knife lifted in a 60s horror film, a window suddenly thrashing open in a storm were enough to terrify a man to nightmares. Today's soldiers laugh when seeing heads explode and limbs torn off, having been raised on a steady diet of the same on celluloid, television, and digitalised death games such as Mortal Kombat and God of War.

If kindness begets kindness, if healthy eating begets good health, if reading improves academic achievement, how can violence not beget violence?

Tactical fighting methodology has drastically changed in modern warfare, systems operators in America carrying out much of the killing. Driving to work with coffee and doughnut in hand, military technicians they can read their emails, enter their command centre stations, drop a few missiles thousands of miles from the zone of conflict, have lunch, fire a more weapons killing a few more Afghans and Iraqis, call their husbands or wives to check on what they ought to pick up at the supermarket on the way home before their children's baseball game, only to calmly do it all again the following day after a good night's sleep. Innocent men, women and children of a different religion and culture are irrelevant. There is no emotion to the result; they are numb to the consequences.

War gives authority and control, another's life entirely dependent upon whether a trigger or switch is pulled. Nevertheless, we do not label it as terrorism or violence when mandated by divine righteousness in the name of God and country; violence and terrorism is reserved only for an enemy defending his land from foreign occupation. Only martyrdom in a uniform is honourable.

War porn cannot be equated to news war footage, as reported by al-Jazeera or other regional television channels, the carnage caused by foreign troops aired nightly. Neither can it be likened to the horrific videos of foreign captives who were beheaded: those incidents were not for sport, pleasure and enjoyment. They were clear messages of retaliation for the torture witnessed at Abu Ghraib, and warnings to the West to stay out of Muslim lands. By contrast, war porn brags about the hunt and the kill, the body count, and the slaughter.

Because it is a computer driven war, the adrenalin rush is short-lived. When a soldier is far from his target, thousands of feet in the air or thousands of miles away in a control room, it is only a quick fix. It needs feeding repeatedly to secure the same rush.

It used to be that a soldier engaged in battle face-to-face with his enemy, the whites of his opponent's eyes clearly visible. The adrenalin from a kill lasted long, the final moments of the enemy relived eternally. As life left one, the other returned home with the image burnt on his brain, never to discuss, never to forget.

The despicable atrocities committed during the Crusades or the Middle Ages were not revealed until hundreds of years later, Latin documents dusted off and analysed. Veterans of World War I & II came home from the frontlines, their privacy and experiences respected. When newsreels played, the Germans and whether or not Allied troops rejoiced in fresh bodies. Vietnam permanently altered the perception of war, Michael Herr's 1977 *Dispatches* revealing the visceral conflicts within the souls of men who fought. His book brought the unspoken hell of war to the fore of television and prompting a new genre of shocking movies.

War porn is generally defined as a fascination with super-sized weapons and glinting uniforms, hi-tech tanks and guided missiles, "a panoply of images as the aseptic substitute of sexual pornography." [6] Or as Linda Williams, professor of film studies and rhetoric at UC Berkley explained, "It's narcissistic; boys getting together admiring their toys. It is about us

proudly displaying our weapons and there is something sexual about that.”[7]

It is more than a metaphor.

War intensifies appetites. It stops time, and amplifies the senses to a terrible ecstasy. The love of war is “so intense...that it had no limits, not even death.”[8]

Thus was the brutal honesty as to the excitement men could feel from killing when sanctioned by governments, according to William Broyles, Jr. in 1984, in one of the most candid essays on war ever written. In Vietnam, Marines called it ‘eye fucking’. Broyles wrote that most men who have been to war remember how, “never in their lives did they have so heightened a sexuality.” The “soft, seductive touch of the trigger,” the “intense beauty” of white phosphorous billowing its white smoke whilst wiping out a population: these were the rushes that war junkies lived for, who “couldn’t get an erection unless they were cutting in the afterburners on their F-4s.” And because most men who had been to war had to admit that somewhere deep down they loved it as much as anything that has happened to them before or since, “how do you explain that to your wife, your children, your parents, or your friends?”[9]

The depravity of death for a sexual rush is not unique to troops. There are those who have an “obsessive voyeurism that draws us to 9/11 videos.”[10] Even the destruction of the World Trade Centres have some watching the footage over and over again, not because of the ghastliness of the attacks but because they experience a sick pleasure from watching so many jump to their deaths, burnt alive, or crushed in the collapses. “I doubt that I’m the only person in the world who derived sexual gratification from watching two of America’s tallest buildings being destroyed,” said Chris Korda, leader of the ‘Church of Euthanasia’.[11] “The endless replays of the plane penetrating the tower were unmistakably pornographic, complete with flames and debris spurting out in slow motion...The towers were blatantly phallic, and their collapses resembled post-ejaculatory loss of erection.”

Korda’s video, “I Like to Watch” not only represents the basest form of society, but morphs war and sexual pornography with images of 9/11 in pursuit of a grotesque delight from death. It is hard to argue a valid case for any daylight between voyeurs of these videos and those viewing war porn. Both sadistically experience the same ecstatic charge from watching them, with only the victims remaining far apart.

War porn videos feed the enemy. They virtually guarantee that Americans will be under continual attacks from aggrieved Muslims long after any planned countdown or withdrawal of troops in the Middle East and Asia. As long as any singular Iraqi, Afghan or Pakistani is afforded the opportunity of watching grotesque footage of his family and neighbours being chewed up and spit out to amuse others a continent away, there is little breathing space for a peaceful conclusion. At best, there can only be a lull. The availability of war porn presents no traditional pause for a ceasefire, no acceptable negotiation, and no effective diplomacy. The war of terrorism goes on, a cat and mouse of who shot first and last ensuring the Long War so often publicly denied.

“The power of war, like the power of life, springs from man’s heart. The one yields death, the other life,” Broyles believed.” It is no accident that men love war, as love and war are at the core of man.” To turn that love into peace, the love of life must be greater than possibly imagined.

If the enemy is well aware of the extent to which Americans love and embrace death...what possible motive does he have to remain silently passive, and not attack them?

Notes

- 1 [Jean Baudrillard](#), "The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Texts, Interviews," (MIT Press: Boston) 2005, p.205
- 2 "Carnage.com," Jessica Ramirez, *Newsweek*, May 10th, 2010; online at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/237182>
- 3 Polk County Sheriff's Office, *News Room*, Notice of URL maintenance under Chapter 847: Florida State Statutes, Bartow, Florida
- 4 "The Porn of War," [George Zornick](#), *The Nation*, September 22nd, 2005; online at <http://www.thenation.com/article/porn-war>
- 5 Craig Anderson, PhD, *Violent Video Games: Myths, Facts, and Unanswered Questions*, Psychological Science Agenda, American Psychological Association, [October 2003](#); online at <http://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2003/10/anderson.aspx>
- 6Mattei Pasquinelli,"Warporn Warpunk! Autonomous Videopoesis in Wartime," (Saria Reader: Delhi) 2005 p.496; online at http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/05-bare-acts/03_matteo.pdf
- 7 "War porn," Emma Brockes, *The Guardian*, March 26th 2003; online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/mar/26/military.iraqandthemedial>
- 8 William Broyles Jr., "Why Men Love War," *Esquire*, November 1984; online at http://www.wsu.edu/~hughesc/why_men_love_war.htm
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Mattei Pasquinelli,"Warporn Warpunk! Autonomous Videopoesis in Wartime," (Saria Reader: Delhi) 2005 p.492; online at http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/05-bare-acts/03_matteo.pdf
- 11 "Rev. Korda on "I Like to Watch"," Marshall Dury, *The Maine Campus*, University of Maine; accessed online at http://www.churchofeuthanasia.org/catalog/iltow_int1.html

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