

‘The rush to the intimate’

Counterinsurgency and the cultural turn in late modern war[†]

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‘Cultural awareness is a force multiplier’: Lieutenant General David Petraeus¹

Savage Minds

In Hanns Johst’s *Schlageter*, first performed at the State Playhouse in Berlin in April 1933 to celebrate Hitler’s birthday, Friedrich Thiemann proclaims that whenever he hears the word ‘Culture’, he reaches for his Browning. The line is symptomatic of the play. A review in the *New York Times* warned theatre-goers that ‘If you don’t believe that everything worthwhile in history has been won by slaughter..., you won’t go home happy.’² In recent years the US military has been contemplating the reverse of these positions: inverting the modern American way of war, substituting cultural awareness, cultural intelligence and culture-centric warfare for the post-Vietnam Weinberger-Powell doctrine of overwhelming force, and promoting ‘non-kinetic’ over ‘kinetic’ modes of engagement across the occupation zone. Yet these possibilities have been criticised not only by those who do not wish American military violence to be reined in but also, more interestingly, by those who do, and in what follows I seek to explore the ground of this controversy.

In the years following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, the *New Yorker* published a series of critical reports by its investigative

[†] I am indebted to audiences in Berkeley, Cambridge, Durham, Heidelberg, Sheffield, Irvine, Seattle and Vancouver for their comments on presentations of these arguments.

¹ ‘Learning counterinsurgency: Observations from soldiering in Iraq’, *Military Review*, January-February 2006, 2-12: 2.

² C. Hooper Trask, ‘The Nazis enter the play production field’, *New York Times*, 28 May 1933; the remark is often attributed to Goering and on occasion to other Nazi leaders. The Browning is, of course, the machine gun rather than the poet.

journalists, notably Seymour Hersh and Jane Meyer, on the conduct of the ‘war on terror’, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and the treatment of detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghraib and elsewhere in the global war prison. But during 2006 the magazine began to outline an alternative scenario. Staff writer George Packer was a veteran of four tours in Iraq and the author of an acclaimed book on the war whose title, *Assassin’s Gate*, served as a metaphor for America in Iraq. The gate was the main entrance to the Green Zone in Baghdad, but its name in Arabic was *Bab al-Qasr*, Palace Gate; ‘Assassins’ Gate,’ Packer explained, was an ‘American invention’, ‘a misnomer for a mirage’. ‘Iraqis complained about the way the US military renamed their highways and buildings and redrew their district lines,’ he continued. ‘It reminded them that something alien and powerful had been imposed on them without their consent, and that this thing did not fit easily with the lives they’d always known.’ Mistranslation, misunderstanding and misappropriation formed the book’s leitmotiv. Travelling back and forth between the Green Zone and the Red Zone that was the rest of Iraq, Packer became ‘almost dizzy at the transition, two separate realities existing on opposite sides of concrete and wire.’ In a tortured, twilight landscape that was ‘neither at war nor at peace’ firepower was ‘less important than learning to read the signs’, but an aggressive series of counter-insurgency sweeps showed that ‘the Americans were moving half-blind in an alien landscape, missing their quarry and leaving behind frightened women and boys with memories.’³

It is scarcely surprising that Packer’s first-hand disillusionment with the war (which he had originally supported) should have made him receptive to a new, culturally informed strategy of what he called, after Sun Tzu’s *Art of war*, ‘knowing the enemy’.⁴ In January he had visited the city of Tel Afar in northern Iraq, where he found troops implementing an improvised counterinsurgency strategy that emphasized the cultural

³ George Packer, *The Assassins’ Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005) pp. 6, 202, 224, 233; see also Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq’s Green Zone* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006). Ironically Packer’s account was framed by his friendship with Kanan Makiya, an implacable opponent of Edward Said whose critique of Orientalism did so much to disclose the entanglements of culture and power under the sign of political and military adventurism.

⁴ Sun Tzu: ‘If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.’

dimensions of warfare. ‘You can’t come in and start talking,’ their commanding officer told him, ‘You have to really *listen* to people.’ Next month Packer attended a workshop at Fort Leavenworth on the draft of a new Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency where he heard much the same. Interviewing several of its key architects, Packer subsequently suggested that social science could help redefine the ‘war on terror’ as a global counterinsurgency and thus direct attention away from the diffuse, shape-shifting spectre of pervasive Terror – which the Bush administration had found so rhetorically convenient – towards a more practical engagement with the norms and forms of specific adversaries with their own ‘structure, meaning, agency’. He noted that such a strategy would require ‘deep knowledge of diverse enemies and civilian populations’, but gloomily concluded that these ‘revolutionary’ ideas had ‘yet to penetrate the fortress that is the Bush White House’.⁵

That same month, however, the US Army and Marine Corps released the final version of the new Field Manual (FM 3-24), which showed that these ideas had breached at least the outer wall of the Pentagon. The civilian was placed at the centre of gravity of counterinsurgency (COIN); the first priority could no longer be force protection, with the military sequestered in Forward Operating Bases – Packer described America in Iraq as ‘one of the most isolated occupations in history’ – but protecting the civilian population.⁶

⁵ George Packer, ‘The lessons of Tel Afar’, *The New Yorker* 10 April 2006; ‘Knowing the enemy’, *The New Yorker*, 18 December 2006. The Bush administration was notoriously – and risibly – reluctant to describe resistance in Iraq as an insurgency.

⁶ In fact the Defense Science Board had already proposed that the two – force protection and population protection – were two sides of the same COIN. Criticizing a ‘garrison mentality’ that made effective counterinsurgency operations impossible, since these ‘must involve operating in close contact with the civilian population,’ the report concluded thus:

‘[F]orce protection must involve issues that are far wider than concertina wire and bunkers. Force protection needs to become a way of thinking far beyond direct, passive measures. Force protection must involve the recognition that the achievement of political goals will inevitably require military forces that possess the cultural, linguistic and historical understanding to work successfully with the population. It also demands intelligence capabilities in which technology is only an enabler to support those who are culturally attuned to the world in which the insurgent and

To that end, the Manual insisted that ‘cultural knowledge is essential to waging a successful counterinsurgency’, and in a single paragraph established the basis, however limited, for a hermeneutics of counterinsurgency:

‘American ideas of what is “normal” or “rational” are not universal. To the contrary, members of other societies often have different notions of rationality, appropriate behavior, level of religious devotion, and norms concerning gender. Thus, what may appear abnormal or strange to an external observer may appear as self-evidently normal to a group member.’

For this reason, it was vitally important ‘to avoid imposing’ American ideas of the normal and the rational on other people (‘a foreign cultural problem’). This was and remains an extraordinary injunction, given the conduct of American foreign policy, the pursuit of accumulation by dispossession, and the violence of military occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq. Not surprisingly, the Manual drew a different conclusion. In most American-led COIN operations, it warned, ‘insurgents hold a distinctive advantage in their level of local knowledge. They speak the language, move easily within the society, and are more likely to understand the population’s interests.’ Cultural knowledge was therefore essential both to combat the insurgency and to redress some of the basic social and political concerns of the population at large. That twin focus should not be overlooked. A key objective was to generate actionable intelligence about the insurgency that could inform lethal targeting, so that cultural knowledge was not a substitute for killing but rather, in certain circumstances, a prerequisite for its refinement. The presentation of the new doctrine focused public attention on non-kinetic operations and non-lethal targeting, however, and successfully re-presented counterinsurgency as ‘armed

the guerilla live; it is only that knowledge that can effectively turn the information gained by technology into intelligence.’

Defense Science Board Task Force on Force Protection in Urban and Unconventional Environments, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Technology and Logistics, March 2006: pp. 4, 44.

social work' ('attempts to redress basic social and political problems while being shot at') whose legal and ethical entailments were front and centre. The Manual reaffirmed the obligations imposed by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and firmly rejected the cruel and inhumane treatment of prisoners. And seeing military operations from the point of view of those subject to them, the new doctrine also drew attention to the counterproductive potential of overwhelming force and collateral damage. 'Sometimes the more force is used, the less effective it is.' Humiliating, injuring or killing civilians and destroying their property is a gift to the insurgency, the Manual cautioned, whereas 'using force precisely and discriminately strengthens the rule of law that needs to be established.'⁷

The revised doctrine drew on the experience of highly educated and responsive commanders in the field – 'a small band of warrior intellectuals' – and the very first chapter opened by describing counterinsurgency as 'the graduate level of war'. The Manual also made much of its incorporation of the work of anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists and the involvement of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard. These intellectual credentials signalled – and were, I think, intended to signal – a significant departure from previous protocols: as *The Economist* had it, 'After smart weapons, smart soldiers.'⁸ Given the prevailing public culture in the United States, there was something audacious, frankly astonishing, about this appeal to the humanities and the social sciences, and some critics feared its seductive power. Tom Hayden warned that 'the Pentagon occupation of the academic mind may last much longer than its occupation of Iraq, and may require an intellectual insurgency in response.'⁹ By December 2007 he

⁷ US Army Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency (December 2006) § 1-80, 1-125, 1-149, 3-38, 5-103, 7-22, 7-42, A-45, D-14. *Assassin's Gate* is included in the annotated bibliography, and one of the vignettes describes 'Clear-Hold-Build' operations in Tel Afar (pp. 182-4).

⁸ Thomas Ricks, 'Officers with PhDs advising war effort', *Washington Post*, 5 February 2007; 'After smart weapons, smart soldiers', *The Economist*, 25 October 2007.

⁹ Tom Hayden, 'Harvard's humanitarian hawks', *The Nation*, 14 July 2007. Cf. Evan Goldstein, 'Professors on the battlefield', *Wall Street Journal*, 17 August 2007, who claimed there was 'reason to believe that the Vietnam-era legacy of mistrust – even hostility – between the academy and the military may be ending.' Ironically both commentators foreshorten the connections between the humanities and social sciences

had his wish. Many anthropologists were up in arms at the Pentagon's attempt to enlist them in its Human Terrain Systems (HTS) project, which was part of a wider plan to incorporate knowledge of adversary culture into military operations. The Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association expressed grave concern at the HTS project, and the ad hoc Network of Concerned Anthropologists pledged 'not to undertake research or other activities in support of counterinsurgency work in Iraq or in related theatres in the "war on terror".'¹⁰

While these scholars were right to expose the historical roots of what they saw as a reactivated 'mercenary anthropology' and to sound the alarm at its ethical implications, it is far from clear that they have persuaded the public at large of the significance of their concerns. Although the dispute has been widely reported, principled arguments about the selective appropriation of anthropology and the proper citation of sources (in the Manual) and informed consent and 'enabling the kill-chain' (in relation to the HTS) have been drowned out by a chorus of enthusiastic commentaries on the effectiveness of the new doctrine on the ground. Thus Noah Shachtman at Danger Room: 'Army social scientists calm Afghanistan, make enemies at home'.¹¹ So much so, in fact, that political scientist

and (late) modern war. In the United States many Area Studies programmes were closely aligned with strategic interests before and after Vietnam, most obviously Soviet Studies, and since 9/11 the Office of Homeland Security has vigorously promoted its security agenda within the academy. It was the contrary position of many scholars in Middle Eastern Studies, who provided cogent criticisms of US foreign policy in the region, that prompted neo-conservatives to seek to restrict their independence: for a summary of the affair, see Zachary Lockman, 'Behind the battles over US Middle East Studies', Middle East Report Online, at http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/lockman_interv.html, January 2004.

¹⁰ See <http://concerned.anthropologists.googlepages.com>.

¹¹ Noah Shachtman, 'Army social scientists calm Afghanistan, make enemies at home', Danger Room, 29 November 2007 at <http://blog.wired.com/defense>; see also David Rohde, 'Army enlists anthropology in war zones', *New York Times*, 5 October 2007; Ken Stier, 'Anthropologists on the front lines', *Time*, 11 December 2007. This is not to discount the significance of the anthropological critique: see in particular David Price, 'Pilfered scholarship devastates General Petraeus's Counterinsurgency Manual', *Counterpunch* 30 October 2007; David Price, 'Enabling the kill-chain', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 30 November 2007; Roberto Gonzalez, 'Towards mercenary anthropology? US Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 and the military-anthropology complex', *Anthropology Today* 23 (3) (2007) (and subsequent debate).

Colin Kahl claims that counterinsurgency has become ‘part of the zeitgeist’ – a flight of fancy, but a revealing one – and media reports have started to trumpet the success of the ‘surge’ in Baghdad, which they attribute in large measure to the new, culturally sensitive strategy pursued under the command of General David Petraeus (who, to the fury of Fox News and the astonishment of the *Daily Telegraph*, narrowly missed being *Time*’s ‘Person of the Year’ for 2007).¹²

As these other reactions show, the importance of these developments extends far beyond their ethical implications for anthropology and other academic disciplines. They also have *political implications for war* that need to be subjected to the closest public scrutiny. In order to bring these into view I want to plot the contours of the ‘cultural turn’ in late modern war in more detail.¹³ I begin with the way in which, from the end of the twentieth century, the US military imaginary focused on what the RAND Corporation called the ‘urbanization of insurgency’ and enframed cities of the global South as target and as terrain. I then describe the genealogy of the cultural turn, tracing its intellectual trajectory and its widening arc through the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment complex (MIME). This gyre raises questions about the radical nature of the cultural transformation, however, because I argue that it reveals a series of continuities between the new counterinsurgency doctrine and the dispositions of late modern war in general and the ‘war on terror’ in particular. No matter how those questions are answered, I finally suggest that the advertisement of the transformation as a counter-revolution in military affairs has therapeutic effects for the American public and the American military – though not necessarily for the people of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Late modern war and the city as visual field

In the closing decades of the twentieth century American and allied military theorists argued that most wars of the near future would be fought in cities. Within the

¹² Colin Kahl, ‘COIN of the realm’, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2007.

¹³ Cf. Patrick Porter, ‘Good Anthropology, Bad History: the cultural turn in studying war’, *Parameters* 37 (2) (2007) 45-58.

US military imaginary, cities of the global South emerged as what Stephen Graham calls ‘paradigmatic conflict zones’.¹⁴ In this optic, the city was visualized as target and as terrain, hollowed out and emptied of human life. Air operations reduced enemy cities to strings of co-ordinates and constellations of pixels on visual displays, while ground operations reduced cities to three-dimensional object-spaces of buildings and physical networks.

The city as target

The Revolution in Military Affairs and its successor projects promised complete clarity and coordination through technical mastery of the battle-space. Although the interoperability of sensing and surveillance technologies holds out the prospect of total battle-space awareness and ‘bombing at the speed of thought’, the performance of this martial God-trick commingles what Chad Harris calls ‘the mundane and the monstrously violent’. Harris reconstructed the three-day targeting cycle used by the US during the first Gulf War in 1991, involving a cascading series of translations from images through data to targets and back again, and concluded that the system worked to obscure the violence that occurred on the ground in Kuwait and Iraq from those organizing it at the US command and control centre in Saudi Arabia.¹⁵ This optical detachment is reinforced by the very syntax of deliberative targeting, which implies the careful, almost surgical isolation of an object – the reduction of battle-space to an array of *points* – whereas in fact targets are given a logistical value by virtue of their calibrated position

¹⁴ Jennifer Taw, Bruce Hoffman, *The urbanization of insurgency: the potential challenge to US Army operations* (Santa Monica CA: RAND Corporation, 1994); ‘Deconstructing the city’, Stephen Graham, ‘War and the city’, *New Left Review* 44 (2007) 121-132: 121. Cf. Ashley Dawson, ‘Combat in hell’, *Social text* 25 (2) (2007) 169-80, who notes that Pentagon representations of the ‘urbanization of warfare’ as a ‘calculated strategic ploy’ by insurgents and others ignore the political, economic and cultural formations that propel urbanization in the global South. So they do; but the more recent ‘cultural turn’ does incorporate those structural templates – though its analysis of them remains instrumental – and this makes a critique all the more urgent.

¹⁵ Nick Cullaher, ‘Bombing at the speed of thought: intelligence in the coming age of cyberwar’, *Intelligence and National Security* 18 (2003) 141-154: 141; Chad Harris, ‘The omniscient eye: satellite imagery, “battlespace awareness” and the structures of the imperial gaze’, *Surveillance and society* 4 (2006) 101-122: 114.

within the infrastructural *networks* that are the very fibres of modern society. The complex geometries of these networks displace the punctiform co-ordinates of ‘precision’ weapons, ‘smart’ bombs and ‘surgical’ strikes so that their effects surge far beyond any immediate or localised destruction. Hence British and American attacks on Iraqi power stations in 2003 were designed to disrupt not only the supply of electricity but also the pumping of water and the treatment of sewage that depended on the grid. By then the targeting cycle had accelerated, and the ‘kill-chain’ has since been further compressed by the introduction of adaptive targeting, which depends on the local identification of emergent ‘targets of opportunity’ by ground forces who call in close air support from fighters already in the air.¹⁶ At the same time, it has been possible to increase dramatically the distance between target and command centre, a process that has reached its temporary limit in the deployment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in Iraq. Take-offs and landings of Predator drones, armed with heat-seeking cameras and Hellfire missiles, are controlled by US pilots from Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadrons stationed at Balad Air Force Base north of Baghdad. Once airborne, however, the missions are flown by pilots from Indian Springs Air Force Auxiliary Field, part of the Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, some 7,000 miles away. ‘Inside that trailer is Iraq,’ one journalist was told, ‘inside the other, Afghanistan.’ It is hard to overstate the degree of optical detachment implied by such casual reduction.¹⁷ But it is symptomatic for, as these examples show, the logic of late modern targeting depends on an electronic disjuncture between the eye and the target, between what, in the more prosaic terms of

¹⁶ Adam Herbert, ‘Compressing the kill chain’, *Air Force Magazine* 86 (2003); Samuel Weber, *Targets of opportunity: on the militarization of thinking* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). In 1991 it normally took around three days to assign aircraft to targets; by 2003 that had on occasion contracted to less than 10 minutes.

¹⁷ Robert Kaplan, ‘Hunting the Taliban in Las Vegas’, *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 2006. Similar, but less extreme abstractions underwrite more conventional air strikes in late modern war:

‘Remote as they are from their “targets”, scurrying over those they hit too fast to witness the devastation they cause and the blood they spill, the pilots-turned-computer-operators hardly ever have the chance of looking their victims in the face and to survey the human misery they have sowed.’

Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Wars of the globalization era’, *European journal of social theory* 4 (2001) 11-28:27; see also Derek Gregory, *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Oxford: Blackwell) 53-5.

Edward Said's imaginative geographies, becomes 'our space' and 'their space'. The techno-cultural form of this disjuncture makes the experience of war (for those in 'our space') less corporeal than calculative because it produces the space of the enemy as an abstract space on a display screen composed of co-ordinates and pixels and emptied of all bodies.¹⁸

The city as terrain

Ground operations initially transposed the visual logics of targeting to render the city as a three-dimensional object-space. The Handbook for Joint Urban Operations, prepared for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in September 2002, treated the city as a space of envelopes, hard structures and networks whose solid geometry confounded surveillance, reconnaissance and manoeuvres. The same emphasis reappeared in the transition from the printed page to pre-deployment training. Since November 2003 thousands of soldiers have been trained for convoy duty by driving through a virtual Baghdad, and from February 2005 an enhanced three-dimensional data base of the city has been used by the Combat Studies Institute to conduct virtual staff rides to study the 'Thunder Runs' made by armoured brigades during the invasion. The simulations focus on terrain visualization, and render buildings, bridges and streets with extraordinary fidelity: yet the inhabitants are nowhere to be seen. 'The important thing for us is the terrain,' explains Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Kennedy, who oversees the staff ride team. People are 'conspicuously absent' from the presentations by design. The scenes offer 'just the basics of the terrain', Kennedy continues, because 'the purpose of the staff ride is officer education': for which, so it seems, the presence of civilians is irrelevant.¹⁹ The latest US Army Field Manual

¹⁸ Rey Chow, 'The age of the world target: atomic bombs, alterity, area studies', in *The age of the world target: self-referentiality in war, theory and comparative work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 25-43. Chow's reference to 'the age of the world target' repeats and extends Heidegger's claims about 'the age of the world-picture'. See also Derek Gregory, "'In another time zone, the bombs fall unsafely": Targets, civilians and late modern war', *Arab World Geographer* 9 (2) 2006 pp. 88-111.

¹⁹ Paul McLeary, 'Digital Recon,' *Defense technology international* (December 2007) 20. The simulations were developed for the Army by MetaVR, whose later versions –

on Urban Operations (FM 3-06), released in October 2006, opens by emphasizing the sheer complexity of the ‘multidimensional urban battlefield’ and diagrams the city as ‘an extraordinary blend of horizontal, vertical, interior, exterior and subterranean forms.’²⁰ These visualizations are closely connected to enframing the city-as-target. In fact, they are often part of the same process, and assume the same highly sophisticated, technically mediated form as detailed images from satellites, aircraft and drones are relayed to display screens in command centres and combat zones. They enact the same optical detachment; according to one observer, staring at the brightly lit screens of the Command Post of the Future (CPOF) outside Fallujah, with their charts, overlays and animations, was ‘like seeing Iraq from another planet.’²¹ The same object-effect, a rush from the intimate to the inanimate, can be produced by more mundane apprehensions of the city. In November 2004, for example, immediately before the second US assault on Fallujah, US Marines constructed a large model of the city at their Forward Operating Base, in which roads were represented by gravel, structures under 40’ by poker chips and structures over 40’ by Lego bricks. Infantry officers made their own physical model of the city using bricks to represent buildings and spent shells to represent mosques.²²

These reductions of the city to physical morphology have three powerful effects. First, they render the city as an uninhabited space, shot through with violence yet without a body in sight. Under what Henri Lefebvre called the sovereignty of the eye, space is radically de-corporealized.²³ In Iraq, as elsewhere, this repeats the colonial gesture of *terra nullius*, so that the city becomes a vacant space awaiting its possession; its

consistent with the cultural turn –incorporate ‘cultural features’, crowds and ‘characters’: see <http://www.metavr.com/casestudies/baghdadviews.html>.

²⁰ US Army Field Manual 3-06: Urban Operations (October 2006), Figure 2-2.

²¹ Noah Shachtman, ‘How technology almost lost the war’, *Wired Magazine* 15.12 (2007); Caroline Croser, ‘Networking security in the space of the city: event-ful battlespaces and the contingency of the encounter’, *Theory and event* 10:2 (2007). The CPOF is a command and control software system developed by General Dynamics to provide a comprehensive, real-time visualization of the battle-space for collaborative monitoring, analyzing and planning military operations.

²² Fadel al-Badrani, ‘US bombards Fallujah bastion’, *The Age*, 7 November 2004; Ann Barnard, ‘Inside Fallujah’s war’, *Boston Globe*, 28 November 2004.

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) pp. 382, 404-5.

emptiness works to convey a right to be there on those who have the power to represent it thus. Secondly, these representations are performative. As John Pickles reminds us, ‘mapping, even as it claims to be representing the world, produces it.’²⁴ Before the final assault on Fallujah, one infantry captain instructed his platoon commanders: “‘The first time you get shot at from a building, it’s rubble. No questions asked.’” Afterwards journalists described ‘a picture of utter destruction, with concrete houses flattened, mosques in ruins, telegraph poles down, power and phone lines hanging slack and rubble and human remains littering the empty streets.’ One year later a returning reporter was still ‘shocked by the devastation. Huge areas of what were once homes have been flattened. On countless street corners, mountains of rubbish spew plumes of black smoke into the air. Fields of rubble stretch as far as the eye can see.’ And yet in an important sense the city was rubble before the attack began, for the violence wrought by the US military in Fallujah cannot be separated from the violence of its visualizations of it.²⁵ Thirdly, these representations possess a legitimating force. They enter directly into national and transnational public spheres, where they prepare audiences for war and desensitize them to its outcomes. The reduction of the city to a visual field is naturalized not only through the barrage of satellite images and bomb-sight views (city as target) but through media reports that hollow out the city on the ground. In a striking graphic from the *Los Angeles Times*, ‘Taking it to the streets’, for example, Abrams tanks rumble in a double column down a wide street in Baghdad, soldiers scramble across roofs and hug walls: but there is no other sign of life. Similar graphics were published by other media: Bradleys blasting their way along rubble-strewn streets, troops racing from building to building, and helicopter gunships buzzing over mosques – but the cities are otherwise utterly empty. The hideous intimacy of killing is deliberately effaced.²⁶ Videogames

²⁴ John Pickles, *A history of spaces* (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 93.

²⁵ Barnard, ‘Fallujah’s war’; Michael Georgy and Kim Sengupta, ‘A city lies in ruins’, *Independent*, 15 November 2004; Hala Jabber, ‘Terror reborn in Falluja ruins’, *Sunday Times*, 18 December 2005. See also Stephen Graham, ‘Remember Fallujah: demonising place, constructing atrocity’, *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space* 23 (2005) 1-10; Michael Schwartz, ‘Neo-liberalism on crack: cities under siege in Iraq’, *City* 11 (2007) 21-69.

²⁶ Cf. Joanna Bourke, *An intimate history of killing: face-to-face killing in twentieth-century warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999).

based on the Iraq war substitute immersion for intimacy, exultation for effacement. Although they cannot be staged in empty cities, off-the-shelf and online videogames typically register only the spectral figures of terrorists and insurgents. Kuma\War combines faux news reports, satellite imagery and mission briefings with first-person shooter simulations, for example, and in its 'Battle in Sadr City' players are told that 'guerillas emerge throughout the city', while in 'Fallujah: Operation al-Fajr' the cyber-city is said to be 'swarming with Sunni insurgents'.²⁷ Yet Fallujah was neither empty nor the exclusive preserve of insurgents; the US military threw a cordon round the city and refused to allow men and teenaged boys to leave before the attack.

I have made so much of Fallujah because many military commentators regarded the second US assault as 'a model of how to take down a medium-sized city.' Air strikes had pulverized the city for weeks before the ground attack, but it was the use of persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance from air and space platforms that was widely seen as the decisive innovation. This 'God's eye view,' as several commanders called it, made it possible to map the city and pre-assign targets to 'shorten the kill-chain' – 800 buildings were in the joint data-base – and during the attack Predator drones and tactical UAVs provided visual feeds to command centres and combat troops. Through 'Predator TV' airborne sensors 'opened up a full-motion video perspective on the street battle' so that, as one ground controller put it, 'We knew their alleyways better than they did.'²⁸ But other military commentators saw this as a problem rather than a solution. Pentagon orthodoxy may have regarded the enemy 'as less important than his labyrinth', as Mike Davis notes, but some field commanders insisted that 'knowing' the skeletal geometry of a city was no substitute for understanding its human geography. These abstracted renderings of the city have been criticized from outside the military, but it is

²⁷ For details and screenshots see <http://www.kumawar.com>.

²⁸ Rebecca Grant, 'The Fallujah model', *Air Force Magazine*, February 2005: 48-53; 'Operation Dawn: al Fajr; Brief comments on air power in urban warfare', Talking Proud, 28 April 2005 at <http://www.talkingproud.us/Military042805D.html>; Ralph Peters interviewed by Jamie Glazov, *Front Page Magazine*, 7 September 2005.

this contrary response from inside the machine that needs interrogation.²⁹ With its new recognition of counterinsurgency and cultural awareness, Thomas Ricks declared that ‘the Army is turning the war over to its dissidents.’³⁰

Genealogies of the cultural turn

In the months following President Bush’s triumphant announcement of the end of major combat operations in May 2003, it rapidly became clear that, for all the spin from the White House and the Pentagon, the war in Iraq was going badly. There were many reasons for this, but not the least of them was the complacent conviction that occupation would be mistaken for liberation and the consequent inability to comprehend the basis of insurgency. The cultural turn was a response to these failings, which traversed the military from the Pentagon down to the platoon. But it was those on the frontlines who had the clearest sense of what was missing.

The wrong enemy

The US military relied on thousands of young men and women who had been abruptly transferred from small town America to a cultural landscape for which they literally had no terms. They were provided with two expedients. One was a fold-out *Iraq Visual Language Survival Guide*, which included a list of instructions (‘Hands up’, ‘Do not move’, ‘Lie on stomach’) combined with point-at-the-picture graphics that covered ambushes, booby traps, vehicle stops and strip searches. ‘What usually happened,’ one soldier recalled, was that when an Iraqi was shown the card ‘his eyes would wander’ and he would start to laugh at ‘the cartoon of a soldier getting stabbed and the one where he’s

²⁹ Gregory, *Colonial Present*, pp. 200-208; Stephen Graham, ‘Cities and the “war on terror”’, *International journal of urban and regional research* 30 (2006) 155-7; Graham, ‘War and the city’; Nick Turse, ‘Baghdad 2025: the Pentagon solution to a Planet of Slums’, *Tomdispatch*, 7 January 2007; Turse, ‘Slum Fights: the Pentagon plans for a new Hundred Years War’, *Tomdispatch*, 11 October 2007, at <http://www.tomdispatch.com>.

³⁰ Ricks, ‘Officers with PhDs’.

being burned to death.’³¹ The other was an *Iraq Culture Smart Card* whose twenty panels provided a basic Arabic vocabulary, a bullet-point summary of Islam, and terse tabulations of Iraq’s cultural and ethnic groups, cultural customs and cultural history. This may have been more effective – it’s hard to imagine it being less – but it had limitations of its own that derived as much from how culture was conceived as how it had to be abbreviated. The panel on ‘Cultural Groups’ in the 2006 version, for example, was concerned exclusively with ethno-sectarian divisions: ‘Arabs view Kurds as separatists [and] look down upon the Turkoman’; ‘Sunnis blame Shia for undermining the mythical unity of Islam’; ‘Shia blame Sunnis for marginalizing the Shia majority’; and ‘Kurds are openly hostile towards Iraqi Arabs [and] are distrustful of the Turkoman’. Culture was reduced to a force-field of hostilities with no space for mutuality or transculturation.³² Commanders were often at a loss too, confronting an adversary ‘that was not exactly the enemy we war-gamed against,’ as one general famously complained, and undertaking non-combat tasks for which most of them were equally ill prepared: all of this in a shadow world where war bled into occupation and back again.

As the resistance to the American presence intensified, so US troops retreated into their Forward Operating Bases, so many Green Zones across a spreading sea of Red Zones, and issued out only to conduct ever more aggressive midnight raids, arrests and interrogations. The Pentagon was so invested in high technology and network-centric warfare against the conventional forces of nation-states that it was radically unprepared for the resurgence and reinvention of asymmetric warfare in so-called ‘new wars’ waged by transnational, non-state and non-hierarchical adversaries in the margins and breaches of former empires.³³ In short, the military was in a high state of readiness for precisely the wrong enemy. It had not revised its doctrine on counterinsurgency for twenty years,

³¹ Colby Buzzell, *My war: killing time in Iraq* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 2005) p. 160; see <http://www.boingboing.net/images/iraqchart1.jpg>. More comprehensive electronic versions have since been developed, including one produced by Vcommunicator Mobile during summer 2007 that can be loaded on to an iPod and allows words and animations to be displayed: see <http://www.vcom3d.com/VcomMobile/nate/>

³² An online copy is available at <http://www.slate.com/id/2145533/entry/2145534>.

³³ Herfried Münkler, *The new wars* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); Mary Kaldor, *New and old wars: organized violence in a global era* (Cambridge: Polity, second edition, 2006).

and in an attempt to shore up the rapidly deteriorating situation an interim Field Manual on Counterinsurgency (FM 3.07-22) was hastily released in October 2004; but it remained rigidly ‘tactical-technical’.³⁴ That same month retired Major-General Robert Scales repeated arguments he had made before the House Armed Services Committee over the summer in an influential essay on culture-centric warfare, in which he called for cultural awareness to be given a higher priority than the technical fix of ‘smart bombs, unmanned aircraft and expansive bandwidth.’ He based his case on conversations with commanders returning from Iraq, who said they had found themselves ‘immersed in an alien culture’, ‘an army of strangers in the midst of strangers’, and forced to improvise.³⁵ Many officers turned to e-mail to share their experiences, and the interim Manual was soon eclipsed by developments in the field. One year later the US Army’s Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) responded by identifying cultural awareness as one of its key priorities. By December 2005 a COIN Academy had been established at Camp Taji in Baghdad, emphasizing the importance of the civilian population and the cultural. ‘On the surface,’ officers were taught, ‘a raid that captures a known insurgent or terrorist may seem like a sure victory for the coalition. The potential second- and third-order effects, however, can turn it into a long-term defeat if our actions humiliate the family, needlessly destroy property, or alienate the local population from our goals.’³⁶ Twelve months later the capstone was put in place with the publication of the revised counterinsurgency doctrine.

³⁴ James Corum, ‘Rethinking US Army counterinsurgency doctrine’, *Contemporary security policy* 28 (2007) 127-42: 128-9; Beatrice Heuser, ‘The cultural revolution in counter-insurgency’, *Journal of strategic studies* 30 (2007) 153-71: 156.

³⁵ Statement of Major General Robert Scales, testifying before the House Armed Services Committee, 15 July 2004, at <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/04-07-15scales.pdf>; MG Robert Scales, ‘Culture-centric warfare’, *Proceedings of the Naval Institute*, October 2004.

³⁶ Thomas Ricks, ‘US Counterinsurgency academy giving officers a new mindset: Course in Iraq stresses the cultural, challenges the conventional’, *Washington Post*, 21 February 2006. In February 2006 TRADOC opened its own Culture Center at the US Army Intelligence Center at Fort Huachuca, AZ, and in April 2007 a COIN Academy was established in Kabul: Nathaniel Fick, ‘Fight less, win more’, *Washington Post*, 12 August 2007.

This spare chronology does not provide a conceptual trace of the cultural turn, and so I need to make a series of deeper cuts into its construction. I concentrate on just four of its architects (there were others), but I do not mean to imply that the cultural turn can be reduced to the forceful projection of individual wills. It is, rather, a heterogeneous assemblage of discourses and objects, practices and powers distributed across different but networked sites: a military *dispositif*, if you prefer. As such, it is a contradictory machine. For war, occupation and counterinsurgency are not coherent projects; they are fissured by competing demands and conflicting decisions, and they are worked out in different ways in different places. So it is with the cultural turn.

From cultural morphology to the cultural sciences

Some of the groundwork had been prepared in a paper on ‘Military operations and the Middle Eastern city’ by Lieutenant Colonel Louis DiMarco.³⁷ He had been the lead writer of Field Manual 3-06 on Urban Operations, and by the fall of 2003 he was involved in planning the invasion of Iraq. This was widely expected to centre on urban warfare, and Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister had threatened the United States with a new, urban Vietnam: ‘Let our streets be our jungles, let our buildings be our swamps.’³⁸ But DiMarco had already realized there was a considerable gulf between the generalities of FM 3-06 and the situational exigencies of Iraq’s cities (the epiphany apparently came in an upper division Urban Geography class). His new analysis did not provide geo-specific studies of Baghdad, Fallujah, Karbala or Najaf, however, but was instead a geo-typical survey (whose examples included, disconcertingly, Cairo and Istanbul) in which the object shifted between ‘the’ Middle Eastern city, ‘the’ Islamic city and ‘the’ Arab city. These are all problematic constructs, but the nuances of contemporary cultural theory or cultural geography were beside the immediate point. DiMarco’s first concern was kinetic

³⁷ LTC Louis DiMarco, *Traditions, changes and challenges: Military operations and the Middle Eastern City*, Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper (1) (2004), Combat Studies Institute, US Army Combined Arms Center. The paper was completed in February 2003; 4,500 copies had been distributed throughout the Army by mid-2007, when a new print run of 2,500 was authorized: Louis DiMarco, pers. comm., 31 August 2007.

³⁸ Gregory, *Colonial Present*, p. 201.

operations and his language resolutely one of ‘attackers’ and ‘defenders’. The need to move beyond the abstract geometries of FM 3-06 convinced him that an analysis of built form and topography would be insufficient. What he had in mind was a revolutionary emphasis on *cultural* morphology. ‘The idea of analyzing urban populations and culture was not recognized,’ he told me, ‘much less accepted.’ Yet his remained a morphological approach, modelled on Stefano Bianca’s *Urban Form in the Arab World*, and its sense of the spatialities of culture captured in urban models, plans and diagrams was neither fluid nor transactional.³⁹ Consistent with the essentialist diagnostics of Orientalism, little attention was paid to the modern Arab city, which was seen as axiomatically normal and so non-threatening. The focus was on the ‘traditional’ city, which was viewed – perhaps ‘diagnosed’ captures the pathological sense better – as the epicenter of radical Islam.⁴⁰ As such it was invested with cultural meanings that required translation but, following the morphological imperative, these were inscribed in physical places and structures: the sacred geometry of the mosque and its network of welfare services; the market and its webs of trade and social interaction; the neighbourhood and the architectural codes through which privacy is maintained; and the home as a place which ‘no person [should] enter uninvited.’ But these cultural affordances turned out to be mere preliminaries to their tactical reversal. Throughout the text ordinary meanings were retrieved, interpreted and then subjected to a violent *détournement* in which military meanings took absolute priority. Mosques had to be monitored and as a last resort ‘isolated’ from the community by ‘shaping operations’. Neighbourhoods were mazes of alleys and culs-de-sac, difficult to navigate and even harder to enter by surprise, but these same characteristics made ‘isolating specific objectives from reinforcement and preventing the escape of targeted enemy forces easier’; similarly, ‘effective population-

³⁹ Stefano Bianca, *Urban form in the Arab world* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

⁴⁰ Although there is close co-operation between the US and Israeli militaries, these characterizations are not those of the IDF. Theirs is a geo-specific analysis, focused on the cities and refugee camps of occupied Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank), which acknowledges the importance of ‘Arab modern’ (not least in its determined attempts to destroy it) and revels in its sophisticated command of cultural theory and philosophy to produce a concept of space that is always much more than morphological: see Eyal Weizman, ‘Lethal theory’ at <http://roundtable.kein.org/node/415>, May 2006, and *Hollow Land: Israel’s architecture of occupation* (London: Verso, 2007) 185-218.

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control techniques' could be implemented through 'well-placed checkpoints', and armoured bulldozers could 'maximize mounted movement' through these close quarters. Inward-facing courtyard homes were 'more secure from rapid seizure and search', but this simply changed the tactics, techniques and procedures 'for those charged with attacking, defending, seizing or searching these types of residences.' The city was to be choreographed by the interventions of the US Army.⁴¹

These were textbook recommendations, however, and in practice such reversals threatened to capsize the American mission. By the summer of 2004 Major-General Peter Chiarelli, commanding the 1st Cavalry Division in Baghdad, was convinced that the standard doctrinal progression from combat to 'stability operations' was mistaken. Attempting to see military actions 'through the eyes of the population', he concluded that a purely kinetic approach to insurgency risked alienating local people not only through its spiralling circles of violence – those second- and third-order effects – but also through its indifference to their own predicament. 'The cultural reality is that no matter what the outcome of a combat operation, for every insurgent put down, the potential exists to grow many more if cultural mitigation is not practiced.' The image of 'growing' an insurgency – Chiarelli also writes of 'breeding' insurgents – derives from an organic model of what he called 'full-spectrum operations'. 'We went after the insurgents,' Chiarelli explained, 'while at the same time – really simultaneously – we maximized non-lethal effects' that targeted the provision of basic services, local government and economic regeneration.⁴² DiMarco had sutured poverty to political radicalism in similar terms. 'Insurgents use the grievances of the urban poor to garner recruits, support and sanctuary,' he warned, so 'commanders must become engaged in these neighbourhoods because it is here that discontent turns into radical action. Poor neighbourhoods become the breeding ground for terrorists and insurgents.'⁴³

⁴¹ Here there is a parallel with the IDF and its method of reversing 'enemy interpretations of space' – 'walking through walls' – that produces an 'inverse urban geometry': Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 201.

⁴² This is a stark contrast to the way in Kuma\War stages the 1st Cavalry Division's battle for Sadr City, above p. 00.

⁴³ DiMarco, *Traditions*, pp. 53, 60.

But Chiarelli's Baghdad was not the 'traditional' city of classical Orientalism. Before deploying to Iraq, he and his officers consulted city administrators, engineers and planners in Austin, Texas, and while he said he 'knew we weren't going to create Austin in Baghdad,' he also knew they would be confronting a modern city whose infrastructure had been degraded by years of air strikes, sanctions and war. Chiarelli also recognized the significance of cultural knowledge, and he laid his model of modern urban infrastructure over what he described as 'a fully functional model of the norms of the Arab people [and] the current status of Baghdad services and government.' It is not clear to me what the first of these entailed, although Chiarelli made much of the importance of cultural awareness, but the second was more straightforward. A major focus was Sadr City, which had been designed by Constantinos Doxiadis, funded in part by the Ford Foundation, as part of the 1958 master plan for Baghdad. It was no Orientalist labyrinth but a modernist, hyper-rationalist grid that had become a vast, sprawling slum, home to almost three million people. Chiarelli used a prototype of the Command Post of the Future to implement a spatial monitoring system – what Caroline Croser calls an 'eventful' visualization of a city in motion rather than a static morphology – that revealed that '[Sadr] cell congregations, red zones and anti-coalition, anti-government religious rhetoric originated from those areas of Baghdad characterized by low electrical distribution, sewage running raw through the streets, little or no potable water distribution, and no solid waste pickup. Concurrently, unemployment rates rocketed in these extremely impoverished areas and health care was almost nonexistent.' In short, 'areas where local infrastructure was in a shambles became prime recruiting areas for insurgent forces' and, in turn, danger zones for US troops. This is not as reductive as it sounds. Sadr's Mahdi Army 'target[ed] disenfranchised neighbourhoods', providing its own services and shadow government, and Chiarelli's response was to target the same districts and to focus on producing visible improvements in people's daily lives.⁴⁴ But

⁴⁴ MG Peter Chiarelli, Major Patrick Michaelis, 'Winning the Peace: the requirement for full-spectrum operations', *Military Review*, July-August 2005: 4-17; Patrecia Hollis, 'The 1st Cav in Baghdad: counterinsurgency EBO in dense urban terrain', *Field Artillery*, September-October 2005: 3-8; Dennis Steele, 'Helping Iraq: a block-by-block battle', *Army* 54 (2004) 43-4; Caroline Croser, 'Commanding the future: command and control in

the logic of occupation was clear: poverty, ignorance and manipulation by malcontents provoked insurgency, and military occupation could not see itself as a legitimate cause for resistance and rebellion.

Chiarelli's approach was to all intents and purposes to treat counterinsurgency as 'armed social work'. The phrase is David Kilcullen's, an ex-Australian Army officer who was seconded to the US Department of State as Chief Strategist in the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism; he was a key contributor to FM 3-24 and, until July 2007, served as Senior Counterinsurgency Adviser to General Petraeus.⁴⁵ 'Your role is to provide protection, identify needs, facilitate civil affairs,' Kilcullen wrote in a widely circulated memorandum aimed at company commanders, 'and use improvements in social conditions as leverage to build networks and mobilize the population.'⁴⁶ Insurgent violence was part of 'an integrated politico-military strategy' that could only be met by an integrated politico-military counter-strategy. Precisely because counterinsurgency was 'population-centric', it depended on cultural awareness and what Kilcullen called 'conflict ethnography'; otherwise it would be impossible to understand the connections between the insurgency and the population at large. 'Culture imbues otherwise random or apparently senseless acts with meaning and subjective rationality,' he argued, so that it was actively unhelpful to locate insurgents outside the space of Reason. He also argued that the spaces through which contemporary insurgencies are conducted are compound and plural, a complex reticulation of the local, the regional and the transnational. The insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq involve swirling engagements across the frontiers with Pakistan and with Iran, and while Bush used a fictitious connection between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein as one of his several pretexts for invading Iraq, al Qaeda

a networked environment', *Defense and Security Analysis* 22 (2006) 197-202; Croser, 'Networking security'.

⁴⁵ Kilcullen has a PhD in political science from the University of New South Wales/Australian Defence Force Academy (2000); his dissertation was entitled 'The political consequences of military operations in Indonesia 1945-99'.

⁴⁶ David Kilcullen, 'Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of company-level counterinsurgency', *Military Review*, May-June 2006: 103-8; this was drafted in March 2006 and first circulated as an e-mail among US officers; it was republished in modified form as Appendix A to FM 3-24.

subsequently established a significant presence in Iraq as well as Afghanistan. The fluid, multi-scalar and evolving situation prompted Kilcullen to conceptualize insurgencies as dissipative structures and self-synchronizing swarms, and he often turned to the language of complex systems theory to characterize their emergent properties. But he also used a more familiar model to describe al Qaeda as ‘an intricate, ramified web of dependency’, bound together by networks of friendship and marriage, mutual obligation and financial transaction. Seen thus, he claimed, al Qaeda is ‘a variant on a traditional Middle Eastern patronage network’ that functions ‘more like a tribal group [than] a military organization.’⁴⁷

This characterization has had extraordinary influence, and what was originally an analogical model of ‘the global jihad’ has seeped in to general models of insurgency and assumed a starkly concrete form. Although the urbanization of insurgency is supposed to be one of the cardinal distinctions between classical and contemporary insurgency – ‘the cover is in the cities’, Kilcullen wrote, and so are the targets – his commentaries on counterinsurgency in Iraq have consistently privileged tribalism and, on occasion, reduced Iraq to a tribal society. When critics complained that FM 3-24 paid insufficient attention to religion, for example, Kilcullen’s response was dismissive: ‘When all involved are Muslim, kinship trumps religion’; the ‘key identity drivers’ are tribal. During the summer of 2007 he reported spreading Sunni resistance to al Qaeda in the province of Anbar (the ‘Awakening’), and explained its tribal origin and operation. He then propounded ‘the Baghdad variant’. Although he conceded that the capital ‘is not tribal as such,’ Kilcullen argued that there are such close connections between city and countryside that ‘clan connections, kinship links and the alliances they foster still play a key underlying role.’⁴⁸ I have no doubt that they do; but while some military authors

⁴⁷ David Kilcullen, ‘Countering global insurgency’, *Journal of strategic studies* 28 (2005) 597-617; ‘Counterinsurgency Redux’, *Survival: Global politics and strategy* 48 (2006) 111-30; ‘Counterinsurgency in Iraq: theory and practice, 2007’, Seminar at the US Marine Corps Base, Quantico VA, September 2007, at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/10/coin-seminar-summary-report>.

⁴⁸ David Kilcullen, ‘Religion and insurgency’ and ‘Anatomy of a tribal revolt’, at <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/blog>, 12 May 2007 and 29 August 2007; cf. William McAlistair, *COIN and irregular warfare in tribal society* (AKI, 2007), at <http://www>.

have written about ‘tribal cities’ as a category apart from the ‘hierarchical cities’ that ‘we Americans know’ – which is not, I think, Kilcullen’s intention – it is misleading to treat Baghdad in such one-dimensional terms. Indeed, in what is probably the most thoughtful discussion of ‘tribal engagement’ from the US military, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Eisenstadt cautioned that ‘it would be a mistake to overemphasize the role of the tribes or to regard the tribe as the central organizing principle of Iraqi society today.’⁴⁹

Perhaps this simply indicates Kilcullen’s distance from anthropology: but a close connection between counterinsurgency and the cultural sciences raises its own red flags and is no guarantee of a more nuanced understanding. In a combative series of essays Montgomery McFate, a cultural anthropologist and a former AAAS Defense Fellow at the Office of Naval Research, called on anthropology to set aside its ‘self-flagellation’ – its colonial guilt and its modish ‘postmodernism’ – and to reclaim rather than repudiate its historical role ‘to consolidate imperial power at the margins of empire’. In her view, ‘cultural knowledge and warfare are inextricably bound,’ and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq demanded nothing less than ‘an immediate transformation in the military conceptual paradigm’ infused by the discipline that she said was ‘invented to support warfighting in the tribal zone’: anthropology. It is not difficult to see why so many scholars were riled, but McFate was adamant that ‘cultural intelligence’ was not a scholastic exercise. It was important strategically, but it also made a crucial difference operationally and tactically. ‘Soldiers and Marines on the ground thoroughly understand that,’ she declared, so that the future thrust had to be on the systematic production, dissemination and utilisation of ‘adversary cultural knowledge’ on the frontlines. In November 2004 McFate organised a conference on Adversary Cultural Knowledge and National Security, sponsored by the Office of Naval Research and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). ‘The more unconventional the adversary,’ she told

smallwarsjournal.com/documents/coinandiwinatribalsociety.pdf. McAlister is a former military officer employed as a senior cultural adviser for a consulting company ‘specializing in human factors and cultural terrain modeling’ in Iraq.

⁴⁹ Ralph Peters, ‘The human terrain of urban operations’, *Parameters* 30 (2000) 4-12; cf. David Allen, ‘The trembling balance: peacekeeping in the tribal city’, *Defence studies* 3 (2003) 83-101; LTC Michael Eisenstadt, ‘Tribal engagement: lessons learned’, *Military Review*, September-October 2007: 16-31.

the 250 delegates, ‘the more we need to understand their society and underlying cultural dynamics.’ Six months later she formalized a proposal for an Office for Operational Cultural Knowledge.⁵⁰ Over the next twelve months McFate’s ideas were transformed into the Human Terrain System, for which she is currently Senior Social Science Adviser. The HTS aims to provide field commanders with a ‘comprehensive cultural information research system’ – filling the ‘cultural knowledge void’ – through a visual display of ‘the economic, ethnic and tribal landscapes, just like the Command Post of the Future maps the physical terrain.’⁵¹

It is striking that all of these contributions rely on visualizations of one sort or another or another, and most of them make extensive use of visual technologies. But Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, one of the leading contributors to FM 3-24, was more interested in what such visualizations could not show: ‘The police captain playing both sides, the sheikh skimming money from a construction project,’ Nagl asks: ‘What color are they?’⁵² Nagl’s two examples are telling; the cultural turn is never very far from a hermeneutics of suspicion. But Nagl’s question also speaks directly to the presumptive

⁵⁰ Montgomery McFate, ‘Anthropology and counterinsurgency: the strange story of their curious relationship’, *Military Review*, March-April 2005: 24-38; ‘The military utility of understanding adversary culture’, *Joint Force Quarterly* 38 (2005) 42-48; Montgomery McFate and Andrea Jackson, ‘An organizational solution for DOD’s cultural knowledge needs’, *Military Review*, July-August 2005: 18-21. McFate has a PhD in anthropology from Yale (1994); her dissertation focused on British counterinsurgency operations in Northern Ireland.

⁵¹ Jacob Kipp, Lester Grau, Karl Prinslow, Don Smith, ‘The Human Terrain System: a CORDS for the 21st century’, *Military Review*, September-October 2006: 8-15; Shachtman, ‘Technology’. CORDS refers to the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support programme developed during the Vietnam war ‘to gather human and cultural intelligence and to develop economic and social programs.’ It was coupled to the Phoenix Program that gathered data to target tens of thousands of people for ‘neutralization’. See Roberto Gonzalez, ‘Human terrain: past, present and future applications’, *Anthropology Today* 24 (2008) 21-26. Human Terrain teams consist of five people: three from the military (a team leader, a research manager and an analyst) and two civilians (a cultural analyst and a regional studies analyst), and are to be embedded in each forward-deployed brigade. The initial budget was \$20 million, and the first teams were sent to Afghanistan and Iraq in the fall of 2006 ‘to provide proof-of-concept’; one year later \$40 million was authorized to expand the project.

⁵² Shachtman, ‘Technology’.

intimacy of cultural intelligence. In one sense, the continued reliance on visual displays to capture ‘adversary culture’ combines optical detachment with the intrusive intimacy of the biometric systems used by the US military to anatomize the Iraqi population.⁵³ But the cultural turn implies another sort of intimacy that extends beyond the compilation of databases to claim familiarity, understanding and even empathy. Some writers root this sensibility in tribal engagement – Eisenstadt suggests that individuals are more trusted than institutions, so that sustained, face-to-face contact is indispensable in tribal societies – but it has a more general provenance. A primer for US forces deploying to the Middle East emphasizes that cultural awareness involves more than ‘intelligence from three-letter agencies and satellite photographs’; Scales’s vision of culture-centric warfare required an ‘intimate knowledge’ of adversary culture; and Kilcullen defined ‘conflict ethnography’ as a ‘close reading’ of local cultures.⁵⁴ While this ‘rush to the intimate’, as Ann Laura Stoler called it, is conditional, forcefully imposed, and unlikely to produce or be much interested in ‘thick description’, it is clear that, as she said, ‘the ethnographic has become strategic military terrain.’⁵⁵ And just like military knowledge of any other terrain, it has to be taught. ‘The military spends millions to create urban combat sites designed to train soldiers how to kill an enemy in cities,’ Scales told Congress. ‘But perhaps equally useful might [be] urban sites optimized to teach soldiers how to coexist simulated Middle Eastern city.’⁵⁶

Re-scripting Iraq

⁵³ Noah Shachtman, ‘Iraq’s biometric database could become “hit list”’: Army’, Danger Room, 15 August 2007; ‘Fallujah’s biometric gates’, Danger Room, 31 August 2007. Three systems are used in Iraq: the Automated Fingerprint Identification System, the Biometrics Automated Toolset System (used to identify residents of particular cities), and the Biometric Identification System for Access (which is used for access to the Green Zone and US bases). All three are linked to the Biometrics Fusion Center in West Virginia.

⁵⁴ Eisenstadt, ‘Tribal engagement’, p. 25; LTC William Wunderle, *Through the lens of cultural awareness: a Primer for US Armed Forces deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries* (Fort Leavenworth KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2007) p. 3; Scales, Statement, p. 8; Kilcullen, Religion and insurgency.

⁵⁵ Ann Laura Stoler with David Bond, ‘Refractions off Empire: untimely comparisons in harsh times’, *Radical History Review* 95 (2006) 93-107: 98.

⁵⁶ Scales, Statement, p. 8.

US troops prepare for deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq by rotating through major Combat Training Centers. The arc of these ‘theatres of war’ runs from the United States through Europe to Jordan and Kuwait, but the main Mission Rehearsal Exercises are conducted at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana; the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California; and the US Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Training Center at Twentynine Palms, California. Each includes prefabricated villages and small towns to train troops in urban operations. In contrast to Di Marco’s concern with cultural morphology, however, there is little attempt at morphological similitude. In fact, the same physical structures serve for Afghanistan and Iraq, as though the two are indistinguishable and interchangeable, and the buildings are rudimentary approximations. One journalist described the crude architecture of ‘Wadi al Sahara’ at Twentynine Palms as being ‘like an impressionist painting’. From the surrounding hills it could be mistaken for part of Basra or Fallujah, but ‘a walk through its dusty streets shows it to be only a vast collection of shipping containers.’⁵⁷ This too is not without its performative consequences. Shipping containers are an improvement on poker chips and Lego bricks, but reducing living spaces to metal boxes and studio flats conveys a silent message about the sort of people who live in them.

The focus at all the training centres is on interactive realism, and the cultural turn has transformed the terms of engagement. In the early stages of the ‘war on terror’, the emphasis was on kinetic operations and on state-of-the-art special effects that drew on the visual and pyrotechnic skills of Hollywood and theme-park designers. When one reporter visited Fort Polk in January 2003, she described troops calling in air strikes, securing roads and bridges on the perimeter of a town, and dealing with ambushes staged by insurgents played by soldiers from the base. Her story repeated the physical imagery of the Handbook for Joint Urban Operations issued the previous fall with precision: ‘From sewers to rooftops, cities are multi-layered, like three-dimensional chess boards.’ Civilians appeared only as casualties, and then only in the very last paragraph, where one

⁵⁷ Jesse Hamilton, ‘Battle-hardened in California’, *Hartford Courant*, 12 March 2006.

soldier admitted that he had ‘no clear answer’: ““What can you do?””⁵⁸ The cultural turn is supposed to provide the answer to that question, and from 2006 a flurry of media reports described a new emphasis on military-civilian interaction. Exercises still include kinetic operations, though these are now more likely to focus on combating IEDs and suicide bombings, but the main objective is no longer scoring kills but ‘gaining the trust of the locals.’ The deployment of Civilian (sometimes called Cultural) Role Players has expanded dramatically. More than 1,000 are on call at Fort Polk alone, including 250 Arabic speakers, many of them recruited from the Iraqi diaspora in Atlanta, Houston, Memphis and as far away as Michigan. Their very presence has changed the imaginative geography. One corporal noted that his previous training had never incorporated civilians ‘wondering what’s going on, and looking around, and doing everyday things. So when we got there and there were other people besides the enemy, it kind of threw us on our heels. You know, all we trained for was that the enemy are the only ones on the streets.’ But these Civilian Role Players are not extras, figures to be bypassed, and their roles are carefully scripted. They play community leaders, police chiefs, clerics, shopkeepers, aid workers, and journalists, and new scenarios require troops to understand the meaning of cultural transactions and to conduct negotiations with local people. Careful tallies are kept of promises made by US commanders, and the immediate consequences of civilian casualties are dramatized in depth. Mock newscasts by teams representing CNN and al Jazeera remind troops that local actions can have far-reaching consequences. Even the special effects have become more intimate; in one Gothic gesture, amputees are used to simulate the effects of suicide bombs (though not, I suspect, US air strikes). ‘It is no longer close in and destroy the enemy,’ one Marine officer explained: ‘We have to build relationships with Iraqis in the street.’⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ann Scott Tyson, ‘Block to block combat’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 2003.

⁵⁹ Dexter Filkins and John Burns, ‘Mock Iraqi villages in Mojave prepare troops for battle’, *New York Times*, 1 May 2006; Wells Tower, ‘Letter from Talatha: Under the God Gun’, *Harper’s Magazine*, January 2006; Vince Beiser, ‘Baghdad, USA’, *Wired Magazine* 14.06 (June 2006); Tony Perry, ““Mojave Viper” sessions reflect situations in Iraq’, *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 2006; Guy Rez, ‘Simulated city preps Marines for reality of Iraq’, National Public Radio, 13 April 2007.

These Mission Rehearsal Exercises have become increasingly expensive – the cost of a single month’s rotation for a brigade at the JNTC has risen from \$2 million to \$9 million – and they pose formidable logistical problems. And yet, for all their size and complexity, they are inherently limited because they cannot convey the scale of operations in a city like Baghdad; and, precisely because they are conceived on the grand scale, it is difficult to standardise training, still less to inculcate the face-to-face sensibility on which the cultural turn relies. For these reasons, the military has become increasingly invested in computer simulations and videogames.

Re-modelling Iraq

This strategy also allows the military to play to the skills and enthusiasms of its digital-generation troops. The former Chief of Staff of the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory described them as ‘the new Spartans’, brought up on first-person shooter games and ever ready for war.⁶⁰ Although videogames are used to train for kinetic operations, however, there has been a determined effort to devise ‘first-person thinker’ games and to model non-kinetic operations: the new military simulations do not invariably encourage soldiers to ‘shoot at anything that moves’.⁶¹ In parallel with the incorporation of Civilian Role Players into Mission Rehearsal Exercises, therefore, the Pentagon’s cyber-cities have had to be peopled too.

The first attempts to incorporate civilians into military simulations treated them as aggregations. Computer-generated crowd federates brought the city to limited life as a series of physical trajectories and collective behaviours (‘flocking’, ‘path following’), but this was a *danse macabre* that conveyed little sense of the city as a space of meaning, value and transaction. MetaVR introduced highly realistic 3-D crowd animations into its Virtual Reality Scene Generator, but these are typically part *of* the scene and provide few opportunities for interaction. The same is true of the most ambitious simulation to date,

⁶⁰ Jose Antonio Vargas, ‘Virtual reality prepares soldiers for war,’ *Washington Post*, 14 February 2006.

⁶¹ Cf. Marcus Power, ‘Digitised virtuosity: video war games and post 9/11 cyber-deterrence’, *Security dialogue* 38 (2007) 271-88: 281.

Urban Resolve, which was held in 2006. This distributed exercise simulated Baghdad in 2015, and modelled the population going to work, answering the call to prayer, and going home. But this was all so much background noise. Military operations had to be planned around the population, and the Synthetic Environment for Analysis and Simulation was used to predict population-level responses to military operations: but the exercise did not directly model military-civilian interactions.⁶²

Other simulations have attempted to incorporate the transactional intimacy of the cultural turn by using Civilian Role Players in Massively MultiPlayer online games or by using Artificial Intelligence to model cultural interactions. Forterra Systems produced the first closed virtual world for the US military in 2004, using the On-Line Interactive Virtual Environment software platform developed by its commercial predecessor, *There*, to simulate checkpoint operations in one square kilometre of a geo-typical Baghdad. Avatars represent American troops, insurgents, Iraqi police and Iraqi civilians, all played by role-players who can log on from remote stations, including Arabic-speaking Civilian Role Players from Fort Irwin. Interactions are unscripted, and players communicate through speech (via VOIP, voice over internet protocol), onscreen text, facial expressions and gestures. A principal investigator explained: ‘They will learn, if a woman comes up to a checkpoint and she has a baby and a bag, here’s how you handle it.’ Forterra has developed an enhanced suite of scenarios as part of its Asymmetric Warfare-Virtual Training Technology. These require troops to negotiate with a community leader to improve the delivery of essential food and medical supplies, and ‘to establish rapport with shoppers in a Baghdad market, only to confront angry civilians as well as insurgents

⁶² Mikel Petty, Frederic McKenzie, Ryland Gaskins, Eric Weisel, ‘Developing a crowd federate for military simulation’, *Proceedings of the Simulation Interoperability Workshop*, Arlington VA, Spring 2004: 483-93; Frederic McKenzie, Mikel Petty, Paul Kruszewski, Ryland Gaskins, Quynh-Anh Nguyen, Jennifer Seevinck, Eric Weisel, ‘Integrating crowd-behavior modelling into military simulation using game technology’, *Simulation and Gaming* 39 (2008) 10-38; Yuna Huh Wong, *Ignoring the innocent: non-combatants in urban operations and in military models as simulations* (Santa Monica CA: RAND, 2006). MetaVR subsequently introduced the First Person Simulator, which works with its character library to provide individual points-of-view: see <http://www.metavr.com/products/vrsg/vrsgdemo-CrowdSimulation.html> and <http://www.metavr.com/products/vrsg/firstpersonsim.html>.

who chose to launch an attack with an IED and small arms.’ Although these scenarios include ‘a little bit of the kinetics’, reports consistently emphasize the non-kinetic priorities of the simulation: ‘AW-VTT is more about social interactions than fire-fights,’ for example, or ‘Forterra creates sandboxes where people learn to interact.’⁶³

The University of Southern California, and in particular its Institute for Creative Technologies, has spearheaded the application of Artificial Intelligence to replicate military-civilian interactions. ‘What sets ICT apart,’ its website declares, ‘is our emphasis on human relationships, culture and emotions.’ These simulations seek to mimic the closeness and intimacy that is the fulcrum of the cultural turn in three ways. First, they are highly immersive: ICT claims to transport (even to tele-port) participants ‘experientially’ to its virtual worlds. Videogames are far from being passive, but the power to draw players into these scenarios has been dramatically enhanced by advances in Virtual Reality. When ICT first released *Every Soldier a Sensor Simulation* (ES3), for example, it was a conventional web-delivered patrol-training game based on *Full Spectrum Warrior*. The player navigates a three-dimensional neighbourhood modelled on Sadr City, and has to read the signs and react appropriately to people on the street, including civilians, security personnel, NGOs and insurgents. The objective is to develop situational awareness and to collect actionable intelligence, measured by the player’s Information Operations score. Soon after its release, however, ES3 was integrated with the Quantum3D Expedition platform, which uses a helmet-mounted display with a motion tracker system ‘to provide a high performance, immersive environment that enables soldiers to move naturally in a 360-degree environment with spatial 3D audio and the ability to interact with their environment in a manner that is much closer to reality

⁶³ Michelle Mayo, Michael Singer and Laura Kusumoto, ‘Massively MultiPlayer (MMP) environments for asymmetric warfare’, *Journal of defense modelling and simulation* 3 (2006) 155-166; Clive Thompson, ‘The making of an X-Box warrior’, *New York Times Magazine*, 22 August 2004; Luke O’Brien, ‘Asymmetric warfare: The game’, *SF Weekly*, 13 April 2005; Ann Laurent, ‘Virtually there’, *Government Executive.com*, 17 October 2007; Michael Peck, ‘Gaming hearts and minds’, *Defense technology international* (November 2007) 14. For videoclips and screenshots, see <http://www.forterrainc.com/screens.php>.

than a desktop system.’⁶⁴ The immersive possibilities have been taken still further with experiments in ‘mixed’ reality. ICT’s *FlatWorld* integrates digital flats – large rear-projection screens that use digital graphics to produce the interior of a building, a view to the outside, or an exterior – with physical objects like tables, doors and windows, and immersive audio, lighting and smell. Players can walk or run through these simulated rooms, buildings and streets, without any helmet-mounted display, and move ‘seamlessly’ between physical and virtual worlds. It is also possible to project ICT’s 3-D Virtual Humans onto the flats and have them engage players in dialogue. These simulations mount a renewed assault on optical detachment; as Dan Leopard argues, *FlatWorld* and its Virtual Humans (who even seem to breathe) interpellate players, entreating them to respond in particular, engaged ways to the situations in which they are immersed.⁶⁵

Secondly, these virtual worlds are often local, even domestic. Military operations are staged in the places of everyday life, not in an abstracted battle-space but in homes, neighbourhoods and clinics, and they require close, personal interaction with individuals, ‘face work’ that that involves learning to read gestures and expressions. *Tactical Iraqi*, for example, was developed at USC’s Information Sciences Institute to provide troops with the language skills and cultural knowledge necessary to accomplish specific tasks. Although the game was built on the extraordinarily violent *Unreal Tournament* engine, it involves no shooting. The player is a US Army sergeant who must interact with Iraqis in the fictional city of Waddihiya to find their community leader and help the platoon locate a source of bricks so that they can rebuild a girls’ school that had been damaged in a fire-fight with *Fedayeen*. The player engages with adults and children and, if successful,

⁶⁴ Roger Stahl, ‘Have you played the war on terror?’ *Critical studies in media communication* 23 (2006) 112-130: 115, 126; Dan Ray, ‘Using game technology for ES2 simulation training’, *Simulation Operations Quarterly* (Winter 2005); Robert Ackerman, ‘Army teaches soldiers new intelligence gathering role’, *Signal*, April 2005; Michael Peck, ‘Army game strives to turn soldiers into sensors’, *National defense magazine*, July 2005; Quantum3D press release, 3 October 2005; video clip at http://www.quantum3D.com/videos/wmv/Q3D_ExpDI_AAEEF_1000k.htm.

⁶⁵ <http://ict.usc.edu/projects/flatworld>; Dan Leopard, ‘Micro-ethnographies of the screen: FlatyWorld’, *FlowTV: a critical forum on television and media culture* (3), December 2005, at <http://flowtv.org>.

negotiates his way from public to private space.⁶⁶ Or again, in an ICT simulation, the player is a US Army captain who must negotiate with a Spanish doctor who works for a medical relief organization and with an Iraqi village elder to persuade them to move the clinic to a safer location. The two men are full body avatars, ‘virtual humans with rich cognitive, emotional and conversational skills that are fully capable of a wide range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours.’⁶⁷

Thirdly, *Tactical Iraqi’s* Social Puppets and ICT’s Virtual Humans invoke the inter-personal by making trust central to cross-cultural interaction. In *Tactical Iraqi*, as Elizabeth Losh puts it, ‘trust is both the precondition of play and the currency of the game.’ If the sergeant succeeds in winning the trust of the local people, measured by an onscreen ‘trust-meter’, they will cooperate and give him the answers he needs to advance in the game. A crucial part of doing so is observing the social formularies and protocols that establish the sergeant’s knowledge of and respect for Iraqi culture.⁶⁸ In ICT’s clinic scenario trust is a function of shared goals, believable claims and, again, ritual politeness. In a model dialogue, the clash between combat operations and the work of the NGO is made clear from the beginning. The doctor tells the captain: ‘This conflict is madness, it is killing people!’ When the captain suggests that ‘it will be a problem to stay here’, the doctor responds: ‘You are the problem, your bombs are killing these people.’ As the dialogue develops, non-verbal behaviour also changes to mirror the progress of negotiations. As in the Mission Rehearsal Exercises, promises made must be ones that can reasonably be kept: ‘The doctor is unlikely to be swayed by an offer of aid if he does

⁶⁶ Tactical Language and Culture at <http://www.tacticallanguage.com>; Tactical Pashto is also available for troops deploying to Afghanistan.

⁶⁷ Patrick Kenny, Arno Hartholt, Jonathan Gratch, William Swartout, David Traum, Stacy Marsella, Diane Piepol, ‘Building interactive virtual humans for training environments’, *Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation and Education Conference*, Orlando FL, 2007; Patrick Kenny, Arno Hartholt, Jonathan Gratch, David Traum, Stacy Marsella, Bill Swartout, ‘The more the merrier: multi-party negotiation with Virtual Humans’, *Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence Conference*, Vancouver 2007; http://ict.usc.edu/projects/integrated_virtual_humans/C40.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Losh, ‘In country with *Tactical Iraqi*: trust, identity and language learning in a military video game’, *Digital experience: Proceedings of the Digital Arts and Culture Conference*, Copenhagen, 2005: 69-78.

not believe the captain can and will fulfil his commitments.’⁶⁹

The cultural (re)turn

These developments represent significant departures from reductions of the city to target and terrain, and the cultural turn has been widely heralded (and attacked) as a ‘counter-revolution’ in military affairs. But there are three crucial continuities with its predecessors.

The cultural turn is consistent with the neo-liberal armature of late modern war in opening up new opportunities for private contractors. Revising pre-deployment training has involved extensive outsourcing. Cubic Applications Inc., for example, has been the contractor for support services for Mission Rehearsal Exercises at Fort Polk since October 2001, involving 1,500 full and part-time employees for instrumentation, special effects, and role players. Its contract, valued at \$375 million, expired in 2007 and was renewed for the next ten years for \$468 million. Another company, Strategic Operations, provides support services at Twentynine Palms, but it has also trained over 55,000 Marines at its own facility in San Diego that ‘combines new technologies, including modern-day pyrotechnics, computer simulations and digital recording systems, with real buildings, vehicles and rubble-strewn alleys and the human element of hired actors who portray a mix of enemy fighters, friendly villagers and other civilians, depending on the scenario and training goals.’⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Mark Core, David Traum, H. Chad Lane, William Swartout, Jonathan Gratch, Michael van Lent, Stacy Marsella, ‘Teaching negotiation skills through practice and reflection with virtual humans’, *Simulation* 82 (2006) 685-701: 688, 691. Researchers are apparently working on tracking the player’s body language and facial expressions too.

⁷⁰ Gidget Fuentes, ‘War’s reality show’, *Training and Simulation Journal*, 27 August 2007. There is a vast shadow army of 180,000 private military contractors in Iraq too, and some of them are making a cultural turn (of sorts). Blackwater offers a Language School ‘intended to arm the student with the language and cultural knowledge essential to survival in the Middle East.’ Its forty-hour, five-day course is ‘a survival course in the target language’ (either Iraqi Arabic or Pashto/Dari). The language of ‘targets’ and ‘survival’ is indicative. Day 1 includes ‘Important expressions; Greetings; Numbers’, but by Day 4 the priorities have become clear: ‘Parts of the body; the Hospital and Doctor’s Clinic; Field Emergencies’; and by Day 5: ‘Weapons and munitions; Instructions for handling weapons...’ See <http://www.blackwaterusa.com/training/bwl.asp>. In October

The development of military simulations has also involved extensive outsourcing. The Pentagon has preferred to leverage Commercial Off-The-Shelf videogames and to develop simulations in close collaboration with engineering and software companies, videogames companies and the academy. The Institute of Creative Technologies was established in 1999 to develop advanced military simulations with a multi-year, \$45 million US Army contract, which was renewed in 2004 for another five years for \$100 million. In 2003 DARPA funded the development of *Tactical Iraqi* at the Information Sciences Institute, and in 2005 the project was spun off into a new private-sector company, Tactical Language Training LLC. Forterra also had its origins in DARPA sponsorship, in a panel to investigate Massively Multiplayer Online games in 2003, and it too was spun off from its parent in 2005. In 2007 Forterra recruited Michael Macedonia, former Chief Technology Officer of the US Army Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation to head its new National Security Division. These examples could be multiplied many times over, and the connections within the Military-Industry-Media-Entertainment complex have become ever more intricate: but it is surely clear that the continued martialization of culture marches in lockstep with its commodification.⁷¹

The cultural turn is also consistent with the Orientalism that has underwritten the ‘war on terror’ since its inception. In its classical form, Orientalism constructs the Orient as a space of the exotic and the bizarre, the monstrous and the pathological – what Said called ‘a living tableau of queerness’ – and then summons it as a space to be disciplined through the forceful imposition of the order that it is presumed to lack: ‘framed by the classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual.’ American interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq are paradigmatic cases of a martial Orientalism; in fact, Davis describes the Pentagon’s vision of urban warfare as ‘the highest stage of Orientalism’.⁷²

2007, one month after a major incident in Baghdad in which Blackwater employees were involved in the deaths of 17 Iraqi civilians, US Secretary of State Condeleeza Rice ordered private military contractors to undergo ‘improved cultural awareness training’.

⁷¹ Timothy Lenoir, ‘All but war is simulation: the military-entertainment complex’, *Configurations* 8 (2000) 238-35; Stahl, ‘War on terror’.

⁷² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978); Mike Davis, *Planet of slums* (London: Verso, 2007) p. 205.

Although the cultural turn is supposed to soften these dispositions – part of its purpose is to displace the monstrous if not the pathological – it remains an inherently disciplinary programme (and, in my view, is part of a more general bio-political project).⁷³

The Orientalist cast of the cultural turn is strengthened by its constant citation of T.E. Lawrence ('Lawrence of Arabia'). The title of Nagl's book on counterinsurgency, *Learning to eat soup with a knife*, is taken from Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and I doubt that it is a coincidence that the Human Terrain System is based on 'seven pillars'. Its lead authors describe Lawrence's writings as 'standard reading for those searching for answers to the current insurgencies', and the pre-deployment Primer dutifully reprints Lawrence's '27 Articles' as an appendix. Kilcullen's seminal memorandum was self-consciously entitled '28 Articles', and his admiration for, even identification with Lawrence could not be plainer. No army will ever have 'more than a small number of individuals' with a gift for 'cultural leverage', he declared, mavericks 'in the mould of Lawrence'.⁷⁴ Lawrence is a totemic figure, a powerful representation of a close encounter with an other who remains obdurately Other. But his talismanic invocation also repeats the classical Orientalist gesture of rendering 'the Orient' timeless: calling on Lawrence to make sense of modern Iraq is little different from expecting Mark Twain to be a reliable guide to twenty-first century America. And yet the cultural turn places America outside history too, because there is little recognition of the part that its previous interventions in the Middle East play in provoking opposition and resistance. In *Tactical Iraqi*, for example, Elizabeth Losh emphasizes that the avatars are 'incapable of speech acts that are not scripted by the US military', and so they cannot ask awkward questions about US foreign policy or military operations. Similarly, the model dialogues in ICT's

⁷³ Cf. Elizabeth Dauphinee and Cristinas Masters (eds), *The logics of biopower and the war on terror: living, dying, surviving* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Julian Reid, *The biopolitics of the war on terror* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁷⁴ John Nagl, *Learning to eat soup with a knife: counterinsurgency lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) (Lawrence wrote that making 'war upon rebellion was messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife'); Kipp, 'Human Terrain System'; Wunderle, Cultural awareness, Appendix B p. 115; T.E. Lawrence, 'The 27 Articles of T.E. Lawrence', *The Arab Bulletin* vol. 60, 20 August 1917; Killcullen, 'Twenty Eight Articles'; Kilcullen, 'Countering global insurgency', p. 614.

clinic scenario acknowledge US violence in the present ('Your bombs are killing these people') but not the long shadows cast over cultural memory by its violence in the past.⁷⁵ Those antecedents, that spiral through the constitution of the colonial present, are obliquely present in a second citational figure haunting the intellectual landscape of contemporary counterinsurgency. For Galula's *Counterinsurgency warfare: theory and practice* was based on his experience as French officer during the 'pacification' of Algeria.⁷⁶

Finally, the cultural turn continues the exorbitation of cultural difference that is at the heart of the 'war on terror'. There is little room for Arab modern in many of its versions – hence the 'traditional city' and 'tribal society' – because Muslims or Arabs opposed to US foreign policy and its military adventurism are supposed to be outside and opposed to the modern. Where that leaves the rest of us who are also opposed to these things remains a mystery, but in fact the prospect of any sort of common ground between 'us' and 'them' is marginalized. The cultural turn acknowledges that there are cultural practices and values to be understood, but locates them in a completely separate space. It is far from clear that the HTS will (or is designed to) change this mind-set: at least one team leader is convinced that 'Arab society doesn't have any of the common foundations we have.'⁷⁷ Perhaps not surprisingly, the sense of alien estrangement is most vividly conveyed in Virtual Reality. Here is the project director of *FlatWorld*, Diane Piepol, explaining the versatility of its immersive display system:

“In the morning you could be training in Baghdad, and in the afternoon you could be in Korea,” she says. Or on Mars. One moment, the windows of FlatWorld look over a simulacrum of the Iraqi desert; when Piepol dials in stereoscopic images from Pathfinder, the flood plain of Ares Vallis extends to the red horizon.... Suddenly a translucent 3-D

⁷⁵ Losh, 'In country with *Tactical Iraqi*', p. 3.

⁷⁶ When the Pentagon screened Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1966), the first feature film shot in independent Algeria, in August 2003, the flyer advertised it as 'How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas...'

⁷⁷ Mike Pryor, 'Culture experts', *First Team News*, 7 December 2007.

rendering of a robot walks into the room, pauses in front of me, and walks back out. When a more sophisticated version of this 3-D projection is fortified with artificial intelligence and bathed in Debevec's virtual lighting, the mechanical invader will become a *Fedayeen* soldier...'⁷⁸

The emphasis on cultural difference – the attempt to hold the Other at a distance while claiming to cross the interpretative divide – produces a diagram in which violence has its origins in 'their' space, which the cultural turn endlessly partitions through its obsessive preoccupation with ethno-sectarian division, while the impulse to understand is confined to 'our' space, which is constructed as open, unitary and generous: the locus of a hermeneutic invitation that can never be reciprocated. 'That a twenty-first century colonization can be reduced to a matter of cross-cultural communication,' Vivienne Jabri argues, 'is itself testimony to the de-politicization of war, invasion and resistance to occupation.'⁷⁹ But this, as I must now show, depends on the production of a public and is, of course, profoundly political.

Therapeutic discourse and the production of a public

The cultural turn has been remarkably, radically public. Countless feature articles and reports have described the new Mission Rehearsal Exercises, videogames and simulations; clips are available on the websites of news media and companies like MetaVR and Forterra, and even on YouTube. When FM 3-24 was posted on the web it was downloaded two million times in the first two months, and the paperback edition published by Chicago University Press became an Amazon bestseller. Some of its lead authors made a round of TV appearances: Nagl on John Stewart, Kilcullen and then McFate on Charlie Rose. This publicness is, in part, a response to the mediatization of late modern war, and armies of democratic states should certainly explain themselves to the public to whom they are accountable. But this carefully staged space of constructed

⁷⁸ Steve Silberman, 'The war room', *Wired* 12:09 (2004); Paul Debevec leads the Graphics Laboratory at ICT and has a special interest in lighting systems.

⁷⁹ Vivienne Jabri, *War and the transformation of global politics* (London: Palgrave, 2007) p. 140.

visibility is also always a space of constructed invisibility. And what has been made to disappear, strangely, is the conduct of the war.

The cultural turn has *not* replaced enframings of the city as target and terrain, but it has deflected attention from the continuation of kinetic operations. Senior Air Force officers have been highly critical of the relegation of air power in the new doctrine on counterinsurgency. The commander of the USAF Doctrine Center complained that FM 3-24 reflected ‘a very two-dimensional view’ of late modern war and involved ‘too much hand wringing over the potential for collateral damage.’⁸⁰ While the opportunities for cultural nuance are limited at 60,000 feet and a range of 7,000 miles, the objection is misleading. For, as I have emphasized, the cultural turn is designed to yield actionable intelligence – hence the Human Terrain System and *Every Soldier a Sensor Simulation* – and Petraeus himself acknowledges that late modern war is a hybrid that includes air strikes. In fact, the air war has intensified since the end of major combat operations, and although this has been under-reported in the mainstream media, air strikes increased significantly between 2006 and 2007 in both Afghanistan and Iraq.⁸¹ Even the spare summary shown in Table 1 is a considerable understatement of the firepower deployed, because ‘major munitions dropped’ exclude 20/30mm cannon and rockets. The 30mm family of ammunition, for example, was developed for Apache helicopter air-to-ground missions, and the USAF A-10 Thunderbolt fighter was developed expressly for close air support and designed around the Avenger gun system, which fires an alternating mix of high explosive and armour-piercing incendiary rounds with a high-density penetrator of

⁸⁰ John Tirpak, ‘The new counterinsurgency: Airpower to the rear’, *Air Force Magazine* 90 (2007); Charles Dunlap, ‘We have a COIN shortage’, US Naval Institute, *Proceedings Magazine* 133 (May 2007); idem, ‘Air minded considerations for joint counterinsurgency doctrine’, *Air & Space Power Journal* (Winter 2007).

⁸¹ Nick Turse, ‘Bombs over Baghdad: the Pentagon’s secret air war in Iraq’, TomDispatch, 7 February 2007, at <http://www.tomdispatch.com>; Nick Turse, ‘The shape of a shadowy air war’, TomDispatch, 24 May 2007; Josh White, US boosts its use of airstrikes in Iraq’, *Washington Post*, 17 January 2008; Tom Engelhardt, ‘Normalizing air war from Guernica to Arab Jabour’, TomDispatch, 29 January 2008.

Depleted Uranium. These are not rubber bullets.⁸² Indeed, Kilcullen concedes that ‘there is always a lot of killing, one way or another’ in counterinsurgency, and on the most conservative estimate – body counts are a battlespace of their own – non-combatant deaths caused directly by US military action in Afghanistan and Iraq increased by 70 per cent between 2006 and 2007.⁸³ FM 3-24 ‘doesn’t say that the best weapons *don’t* shoot,’ Petraeus reminded a bemused reporter, ‘it says *sometimes* the best weapons don’t shoot.’ And, as he went on to insist, ‘sometimes the best weapons *do* shoot....’⁸⁴ Evidently more often than one might think.

		2004	2005	2006	2007
Afghanistan	Total sorties	6 495	7 421	10 519	12 775
	Major munitions dropped	86	176	1 770	2 926
Iraq	Total sorties	14 292	16 924	15 676	17 893
	Major munitions dropped	285	404	229	1 119

Table 1: Close Air Support/Precision Strikes

⁸² Table 1 is from Anthony Cordesman, ‘US Airpower in Iraq and Afghanistan’, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, 13 December 2007; <http://tech.military.com/equipment/view/88746/an-gau-8-30mm-cannon.html>.

⁸³ David Kilcullen, ‘Three pillars of counterinsurgency’, Remarks at US Government Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington DC, 28 September 2006; Neta Crawford, Robert Lifton, Judith Herman, Catherine Lutz, Howard Zinn, ‘The real “surge” of 2007: non-combatant death in Iraq and Afghanistan’, Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 22 January 2008 at http://www.cceia.org/resources/articles_papers_reports/0003.html.

⁸⁴ Shachtman, ‘Technology’.

The cultural turn also deflects attention from the role of military occupation in provoking violence. The new doctrine consistently refers to the military acting in support of the ‘Host Nation’ (HN), as though war, occupation and counterinsurgency were events in some deadly Olympic Games. The circumstances in which the United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq hardly correspond to Derrida’s unconditional hospitality and yet, far from acknowledging the conditional sovereignty of these states, the new doctrine advertises itself as intrinsically therapeutic. Counterinsurgency’s image as ‘armed social work’ is driven home – literally so – by simulated missions like rebuilding a girl’s school or moving a medical clinic. FM 3-24 describes the three stages of counterinsurgency in medicalized terms that are congruent with the bio-political project of which it is a part:

- **‘Stop the bleeding’**: ‘similar to emergency first aid for the patient. The goal is to protect the population, break the insurgents’ initiative and set the conditions for further engagement.’
- **‘Inpatient care – recovery’**: ‘Efforts aimed at assisting the patient through long-term recovery or restoration of health – which in this case means achieving stability ... through providing security, expanding effective governance, providing essential services and achieving incremental success in meeting public expectations’
- **‘Outpatient care – movement to self-sufficiency’**: ‘expansion of stability operations across contexts regions, ideally using HN forces.’⁸⁵

⁸⁵ FM 3-24 § 5.3-5.6. One military simulation is literally therapeutic. ICT has collaborated with several medical schools and hospitals to develop an immersive treatment for troops returning from Iraq suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. ‘By repeatedly encountering sights, sounds, smells and rumblings that evoke painful memories,’ researchers explain, ‘veterans can begin to reprocess them and become desensitized to them.’ As one veteran from the battles for Fallujah reported, ‘Every time I told the story, the less it bothered me.’ But some researchers argue that these stresses should be incorporated into pre-deployment training to provide a sort of inoculation – an aspiration that seems at odds with the stated cultural and ethical sensitivities of the cultural turn. See A. Rizzo, J. F. Morie, J. Williams, J. Pair and J. G. Buckwalter, ‘Human emotional state and its relevance for military VR training’, *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction*, Las Vegas NV, 2005; J. Pair, B. Allen, M. Dautricourt, A. Treskunov, M. Liewer, K. Graap, G. Reger, A. Rizzo, ‘A virtual reality exposure therapy application for Iraq Post Traumatic Stress Disorder’,

But the cultural turn is therapeutic in an altogether different sense, through the weight its public presentation has placed on doctrine and training. The US Army defines military doctrine as ‘a common language and a common understanding of how Army forces conduct operations’, and public discussion of FM 3-24 has directed attention to the normative construction of military operations in ways that have foreclosed questions about their practice. This has been compounded by media coverage of the new Mission Rehearsal Exercises, videogames and simulations in which the distinction between the virtual and the real has been consistently blurred. Report after report begins with a vivid description of military operations that is interrupted by variations on the same cut-line: ‘Only this isn’t Iraq; it’s Fort Polk/Fort Irwin/Virtual Iraq.’ The implication is that the hyper-realism of the simulation mimics the conduct of the war: we are in another *FlatWorld*, moving seamlessly from the virtual to the real, and encouraged to mistake the one for the other. The joint focus on doctrine and training, the normative and the virtual, is an invitation to step through the back of the wardrobe into a martial Narnia where the American military consistently follows the rules and intervenes for the greater good. Whatever the practical efficacy – or otherwise ⁸⁶ – of the new measures, there can be little doubt that the rhetoric that underwrites their public presentation is therapeutic *for the American public*. It sends the strong message that the military has learned from Abu Ghraib and the running battles over the cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment and torture of detainees. It enables the public to participate in what Losh calls ‘the “rhetoric of walking” in these virtual Iraqs’ in order to witness putative solutions ‘to persistent and perhaps intransigent problems in the theatre of battle.’ ⁸⁷ And, as the back cover of the

in M. Rey (ed), *NATO Advanced Research Workshop on novel approaches to the diagnosis and treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* (Washington DC: IOS Press, 2006) 233-50; Eileen Zimmerman, ‘Getting blown up again and again’, Salon, 16 May 2007 at http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/05/16/virtual_reality.print.html.

⁸⁶ For a preliminary assessment, see Colin Kahl, ‘In the crossfire or the crosshairs?

Norms, civilian casualties and US conduct in Iraq’, *International security* 32 (2007) 7-46.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Losh, ‘The Palace of Memory: virtual tourism and tours of duty in Tactical Iraqi and Virtual Iraq’, *Proceedings of the Joint International Conference on Cyber-Games and Interactive Entertainment*, Perth, Australia, 2006, 77-86: 83; idem, ‘Making things public: democracy and government-funded video-games and Virtual Reality

Chicago edition of FM 3-24 notes, it represents ‘an attempt by our military to redefine itself.’

The American military is not only redefined, however, but also rehabilitated and repositioned as an innocent and virtuous bystander. Sarah Sewall from the Carr Center, who was instrumental in the review of the draft of FM 3-24 and wrote an introduction to the Chicago edition burnishing its ‘radical’ credentials, indicts the Iraqi government (amongst whose failings she lists sectarianism, fecklessness, and corruption) and the Bush administration (about which one might say the same), while absolving the culturally aware and ethically driven military. ‘While the administration gambles away civil liberties at home and abandons human rights abroad,’ she declares, ‘the US military has recommitted itself to protecting the rights of foreign citizens of all nationalities and faiths.’⁸⁸ It is true that the long-term solution to insurgency must be political rather than military, as the new doctrine emphasizes, but the cultural turn places so much emphasis on cultural difference and division that the multi-dimensional violence in Iraq is reduced to an ethno-sectarian conflict from which the United States is causally absent. Many commentators have concluded that the American military’s new reserves of cultural tact and ethical sensitivity mean that the responsibility for continuing violence lies with the Iraqis alone, a logic measured by the distance from *Newsweek*’s cover of 15 October 2001 – ‘Why they hate us’ – to *Time*’s cover of 5 March 2007: ‘Why they hate each other’. The locus of the problem remains the same (‘them’), but *Time* removes ‘us’ (US?) from the frame altogether.

This is thoroughly fraudulent. The very presence of American troops and private military contractors is a provocation to violence, although the focus on ethno-sectarian killings distracts attention from deaths directly attributable to American military and paramilitary action, but more significantly the American political and military apparatus

simulations’, *Proceedings of the Association for Computing Machinery SIGGRAPH Symposium on Videogames*, Boston MA, 2006, 123-132.

⁸⁸ Sarah Sewall, ‘He wrote the book, can he follow it?’ *Washington Post*, 25 February 2007; ‘Crafting a new counterinsurgency doctrine’, *Foreign Service Journal*, September 2007: pp. 33-40.

has been directly implicated in a process of sectarian involution. In a typically colonialist gesture, the Bush administration reactivated and institutionalized sectarian divisions in the political constitution of its ‘new Iraq’, and American military commanders have cut deals with local militias to buy a precarious peace that entrenches those divisions. The diminution in ethno-sectarian violence that was set in train in the closing months of 2007 is inseparable from the ethnic cleansing that preceded it and which is memorialized with visceral clarity in the blast-walled fiefdoms of Baghdad.⁸⁹ In his original essay on the ‘human terrain’ of urban operations, Peters argued that the ‘most promising environment’ for stability operations is ‘a formerly multicultural city that has been ethnically cleansed’: ‘The deprivation of the object of hatred is a powerful force for peace.’ The language is Orwellian, but put more bluntly: if less people are being killed that is because there are less people to kill.⁹⁰ There are additional reasons for the diminution in ethno-sectarian violence, of course, including a fragile cease-fire with the Mahdi Army, but for all its newfound cultural awareness the military is markedly reluctant to acknowledge the impact of the violent recomposition of Baghdad on its body counts.⁹¹ Instead, the public version of events focuses on the new counterinsurgency policy, ‘a belated emergency triage’ according to reporter Jon Lee Anderson, which informs the deployment of troops in Baghdad and the tactics of tribal engagement: and all of which artfully reinforces the therapeutic effects of the cultural turn.⁹²

⁸⁹ See my ‘The biopolitics of Baghdad’, forthcoming.

⁹⁰ Peters, Human terrain. In keeping with the medicalized discourse of COIN, Kilcullen compares the recourse to ‘gated communities’ (an extraordinary euphemism for blast-walls and checkpoints) to ‘tourniquets in surgery’: ‘It’s something you do only when the patient is bleeding to death’. See Kilcullen, ‘The urban tourniquet: gated communities in Baghdad’, at <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/blog>, 20 April 2007.

⁹¹ When Petraeus reported to Congress in September 2007, he presented a series of maps in which plots of ethno-sectarian violence were superimposed over a base-map of ethnic segregation in Baghdad. The base-map remained unchanged throughout the sequence and yet, just days earlier, the equivalent maps used in the Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq showed Baghdad turning into an overwhelmingly Shi’ite city. Cf. Report of the Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq, 6 September 2007, p. 3; General David Petraeus, Report to Congress on the situation in Iraq, 10-11 September 2007; Ilan Goldenberg, ‘Putting your best foot forward’, at <http://www.democracypartisan.org>, 13 September 2007.

⁹² Jon Lee Anderson, ‘Inside the surge’, *New Yorker*, 19 November 2007.

Late modern war and the colonial present

In one of his less delphic observations as Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld is supposed to have said that ‘death tends to encourage a depressing view of war’. So it does, which is why representations of war as waged by America and its allies have become aestheticised and sanitised. This is a general diagnostic of modernity, where death is no longer seen as part of life, as it is in other cultural and social formations, but is sequestered in screened and medicalized spaces. This reaches its apotheosis in late modern war, where an enterprise expressly devoted to killing magically proceeds without death. The cultural turn is another modality of this contemporary re-enchantment of war.⁹³ It reintroduces corporeality to war – cyber-cities are re-peopled, Virtual Humans made to breathe – even as it snuffs out mortality. If the ‘virtual citizen-soldier’ is produced within the grid of the Military-Industry-Media-Entertainment complex, as Roger Stahl suggests, the enlistment of the ‘Arts’ Academy through the cultural turn provides this spectral figure with a dress uniform decked out in the colours of the humanities and humanitarianism. Just as the global North justifies its interventions in the global South by appealing to ‘military humanism’, so the cultural turn provides legitimation for its now refined conduct of these new wars.⁹⁴

This should surprise nobody. It is thirty years since Said’s critique of Orientalism drew attention to the close connections between culture and power and, as Eyal Weizman has reminded us more recently, ‘cases of colonial powers seeking to justify themselves with the rhetoric of improvement, civility and reform are almost the constant of colonial history.’⁹⁵ Those claims were self-serving, to be sure, and behind its genteel façade colonialism routinely resorted to exemplary violence as an assertion of sovereign power. So too the cultural turn not only re-centres counterinsurgency on the population at large;

⁹³ James Der Derian, *Virtuous war: mapping the military-industrial-media-entertainment network* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2001); Christopher Coker, *The future of war: the re-enchantment of war in the twenty-first century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

⁹⁴ Stahl, *War on terror*, p. 125; Costas Douzinas, ‘Humanity, military humanism and the new moral order’, *Economy and society* 32 (2003) 159-183.

⁹⁵ Weizman, *Hollow land*, p. 152. Gonzalez, ‘Mercenary anthropology’, pp. 16-17, is still more direct: to him, FM 3-24 ‘reads like a manual for indirect colonial rule.’

it also refines the kill-chain. It does more than this, however, and is more than an alibi. Refusing the reduction of enemy space to empty space, rejecting the de-humanization of adversaries, rehabilitating the concept of the civilian: these are all crucial ways to limit the horrors of war. But it is a measure of how far we have fallen that they count as major advances.

Stahl's virtual citizen-soldier is a hybrid that blurs the distinction between 'the political role of the citizen and the apolitical role of the soldier', the one asking questions, the other following orders, to foreclose the space of public deliberation. Stahl argues that its production is part of the de-politicization of the public sphere, or more accurately, 'a reprogramming of the citizen subject' in accordance with the logics of late modern war. This is a compelling thesis but, as Stahl knows very well, 'reprogramming' is mercifully not axiomatic and can be interrupted, even subverted by asking awkward questions.⁹⁶ The cultural turn is not confined to cyberspace, but the public projection of its hybrid humanism is directed at the same dismal vanishing point of politics. In a depressing little hurrah for the martialization of culture, anthropologist Sheila Jager demands that scholars choose between 'doing nothing' (and 'leaving the fighting to the military') and censuring those who 'do something'. But this is a false choice that evades the critical responsibility to question what that 'something' is and what that 'something' does.⁹⁷ Even on Jager's own diminished terms, however, a partisan appropriation of the cultural sciences that refuses the reflexivity of the return gaze, treats culture as inert and ignores the relations of power involved in all cultural forms and practices is unlikely to provide much insight into the conduct of war. Neither, more importantly, will it be of any help in the search for peace. President Bush may not know the difference between the two – 'When we talk about war,' he once pronounced, 'we're really taking about peace'⁹⁸ – but for this very reason cultural awareness cannot be confined to the academy or the military. It needs to spiral through the public sphere and inform public debate and public policy. For only

⁹⁶ Stahl, *War on terror*, pp. 125-6.

⁹⁷ Sheila Miyoshi Jager, 'On the uses of cultural knowledge', Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, November 2007, pp.17-18.

⁹⁸ Really: Remarks by the President at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington DC, 18 June 2002.

then can those awkward questions can be asked of our masters of war. As Stoler suggests, 'While government sights are set on "the enemy", ours might be set on them and how this rush to the intimate structures new sites of imperial governance.'⁹⁹ I hope this essay might be read as a modest contribution to that project.

⁹⁹ Stoler, *Refractions*, p. 98.