

Let us Become Children!

Training, Simulations and Kids

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There are lots of theories and analyses around the current 'War against Terrorism', and discussions about war against sovereign countries, reduction of human rights, insecurity and many other different questions. During warfare, it's 'normal' that State Securities practice censorship, and that media and press freedom is more or less reduced. Also, public media receives information from army press conferences and spokesmen, completely non-objective and tendentious. War propaganda is nothing new. From ancient wars till now, propaganda served the need to strengthen combat lines, to encourage warriors and the people, and to demoralize enemy forces. And with the rise of nation states, the ideological element becomes most important in the times of big national mobilizations.

It's interesting to see how certain war propaganda materializes itself today, and through which medium targets whom. In today's globalized networked capitalism, when tautology – 'everything is connected with everything' – tries to relativize any kind of deep research and traceability, it is important to focus more and to read between the lines.

Story

Hari Kunzru has written in an essay, "Beyond Good and Evil",¹ about the connection between the boom of fantasy literature and the 'War against Terrorism' (referring to JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Tolkien's revival of *Lord of the Rings* and the lesser-known *Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman). For instance, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* revival is coming thirty years after it was popular in counterculture in the sixties, with its simple

ethico-political categories. Sauron's nihilism, Saruman's polluting heavy industry, feverish productivity, and alienated Asiatic hordes are an analogy for evil dehumanized industry; on the other side, it is quite easy to recognize the Shire as an organic pastoral community under threat. Kunzru emphasizes "full-scale breakout from speculative fantasies, home in the airbrush/metal-head underground". He explains that the boom of fantasy literature, alternate worlds, and visionary romance draws its energy from a contemporary desire for moral clarity in situations of clearly drawn conflict.

Bush's phrase 'Axis of evil' is similar to slogans during WWII, or young, campus readings of Tolkien. Blair claims that there is no moral ambiguity in today's 'War against Terrorism', that is to say we can't dwell on whether or not our decision is righteous if we are resolutely determined to defeat the enemy. Terrorist, Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, Orcs, Voldemort, Azkaban...it's all the same. In *Harry Potter*, the evil magician Voldemort, obsessed by the purity of blood, wants to destroy 'mixed' ones. On the side of the Good is Dumbledore, a wizard who is for democratic principles, for intercultural dialogue, against death as punishment and against repressive methods. Consequently, the fanaticism that characterizes Voldemort and his followers corresponds with common prejudices about Islam as a religion of exclusions and of radical religious fanaticism.

The movie industry has been, for a century now, a strong psycho-ideological weapon of the state, often using sophisticated methods to shape certain ideological frameworks. *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* are breaking sales records with hundreds of millions of dollars only from cinema distribution; there are also the DVD distribution and brand-image marketing sections. Extremely long (for example *Lord of the Rings*, part three is of 3h 40 min duration), in a way these are contemporary Great stories, sagas like Wagner's operas whose durations too were sometimes more than several hours.

Content wise, it is interesting that in these movies Evil is presented with great energy and obsession extremely powerful and brutal.

Connected with post 9/11 trauma, a fantasy literature and movies avalanche brought about deep existential worries in their audiences: us or them? In the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the Evil enemy is purified; and one can say that evil in these visualizations is so described, and total in such a deep sense, that we cannot even communicate with it. The logic of narration doesn't allow us to approach the forces of Evil. Evil is without doubt, and in this way, transcendent; it is beyond our experience and reasonable perception and understanding. This evil is so powerful and omnipresent that is impossible to stop it and destroy it. It is impossible to perceive it with rational logic.

Similar things happened in the beginning of the war in Yugoslavia in the nineties. When official Yugoslav socialist ideology started to decline in the eighties, there were more and more publications that sought to explain the evil past and future destiny of the Balkan peoples. Suddenly, people realized that Serbs have been victims from the longest time, from the famous Kosovo defeat in 1389 by evil Turks, until genocide committed by Croats and others during WWII. The year 1389 was like 9/11 in USA, a shifting point in history when the linearity of space-time continuum was broken. After that, everything was different, and as everything had been allowed as revenge for those horrors and sufferings. When Slobodan Milosevic came to power, an increasing range of occult, pseudo-religious groups

and individuals started to show up on state TV to explain the universal position of Serbian people in the past, present and future without clearly differentiating between all these times. This was a mixture between real global and local socio-political facts and persons, military traditions, saints, heroes and kings from national history, and mythical creatures like dragons and vampires. There was the astrologist Milja Vujanovic who explained that the Pentagon is a symbol for the pentagram, G7 is the seven-headed dragon from Saint John's Gospel, and so on. The painter Milic od Macve proclaimed himself the Baron Lepenski, leader of world vampires. He accused America of wanting to destroy the Serbs, and threatened that if America would not help Serbia, Serbia would make a deal with Japan to build the New Byzantium. He also sent a squad of vampires to destroy America.

Milja Vujanovic had a weekly evening prime-time slot on national TV. Milic od Macve was the first living artist to have a solo exhibition in the history of the National Museum in Belgrade. His exhibition was opened by the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Serbia and travelled all over Serbia; the estimated number of visitors was more than 350,000 (Serbia has around 10 million inhabitants), so it was approximately 3.5% of the population. Never has one art exhibition in Serbia, before or after, had so many visitors.

Slobodan Milosevic held his first big, successful meeting on Kosovo Field in 1989, where the legendary and symbolic Battle of Kosovo had been fought 600 years ago. This meeting was a gathering of Serbs from every corner of Yugoslavia and the world, bringing almost two million people in one place.

Fantasy literature has always existed in Western civilization, from early medieval King Arthur's and Holy Grail fantasies till the Tolkien worlds. But, from the end of the nineties, suddenly this literature starts to take on an immediate presence. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* was known, but not in the way that it is presented now. In the recent few years, the situation is such that an army of readers intensely awaits every new issue of JK Rowling's *Harry Potter*; the whole planet awaits the new episode of *Lord of the Rings* (it seems that this is the first truly globalized movie).

What is so special in this literature, these movies, and other things that connect with stories about a great battle with Evil? These kinds of scenarios where Good and Evil are fighting, in a way, have always been present.

(What connects all these movies together, at least, as well as the *Matrix* and the *Terminator*, is that the producer of all of these films is Warner Brothers, a company that is now a subsidiary of the huge merger of AOL Time Warner.)

Training

We are witnessing the fact that ICT (Information and Communication Technology) is rapidly growing and that tech products are changing very fast. People who are using computers have difficulty in gaining additional technological knowledge required for everyday activities; their skill upgradation is reduced, especially if they have learned different/obsolete applications that are not operable in the new operating environments. The system needs people who will learn faster and act resolutely.

Today's kids (significantly in North America and Europe) are growing up in front of their computers. Most have parents who are just computer-users, if barely that. These children

are a population that naturally acquires knowledge fastest; the creativity of kids is a category that is omnipresent and universal. In the realm of cyberspace, kids are in their 'natural' environment, often exploring and challenging the potential of technologies and tools. Hackers and crackers have very often been children or young people.

Today's oft-repeated 'Revolution in warfare' becomes a mantra for contemporary warriors and leads to 'cyberwar', a war with advanced technological devices and tools. Fragile security in the networked world becomes the weak point of national security, when complex systems are connected and when strikes could be fast and almost invisible. For this, kids could be useful in collecting information, deciphering, breaking into the enemy's security systems or the interception of terrorists' communications. For all this information, missions and objectives, there is a special web site, the CIA KIDS Homepage, where you can find lots of useful information about the Agency, its goals, future activities and directions. There are also the nice movies *SpyKids I, II and III* (Twentieth Century Fox), now playing in your cinema, where children are agents working for the Agency, solving problems and saving the planet from fantasy creatures. In *Master and Commander* (Twentieth Century Fox) there is a young officer on a ship (a kid), who in a moment of crisis in a sea battle takes on responsibility, fires a cannon and shoots the enemy's sail.

Kids, like dolphins, can be useful in protecting national security. Dolphins are used to carry bombs and with free will, like *kamikaze*, destroy enemy ships. Dolphins are smart, innocent and loyal. Like children.

Like with Frodo Baggins or Harry Potter, the time will come when the child will decide to be more active and take more concrete steps in defeating world evil. Then he/she (mostly he) will choose different training simulation applications. The training of children is highly advanced, with complex theory and practice involving numerous different disciplines such as psychology, fight experts, flight experts, strategic combat advisers, geopolitics, geography, history, weapon science, logic, religion, military strength and the constitution of different world armies, position and trade routes of oil, and other energetic resources.

So-called computer games like *Mortal Combat* or *Ultimate Fight* teach kids how to fight hand to hand; *Wolfenstein*, *Quake*, *Doom* and *Perfect Assassin* teach how to combat as an individual in real war combat experiences. For more organizational types and potential future managers or soldiers there are games like *Command and Conquer: Generals*, *Tiberian Sun*, *Generals*, *Age of Empires*, *Civilization*, *Caesar*. In these games, children gain the skills of organizing and building citizens, troops, cities. You must defeat all your enemies, capturing their structures, facilities, cities, workers... Before each mission you receive your mission objective. This is, for example, one mission objective: "Hassan communicates to the Brotherhood through a nearby TV station. With the Brotherhood in chaos, the opportunity to divide Hassan from his followers presents itself. Capture the TV station and those ones loyal to Kane. The technology of peace will return to the fold. And as for Hassan's pathetic guards – crush them" (*Tiberian Sun*, © Westwood, Electronic Arts).

A special aspect is navigational training. There are different tutorials and training programs like: *FA-18 Korea*, *F-22 Air Dominance Fighter*, *F-16 Fighting Falcon*, *Euro Fighter 2000*, *Back To Baghdad* and *Flashpoint Kosovo* for flight combat simulations; *Armored Fist 2*, *M1A2 Abrams* for tanks; *688 (I) Hunter/Killer* for nuclear submarines. All

these useful things can be found in every corner-shop selling games.

Long before movies and literature, in the realm of computer games, fictions and fantasies were in their natural environment. From the first games like *Warcraft*, *Heroes of Might and Magic*, till now, there have been hundreds of fantasy and mythological games produced. Some of them are: *Lands of Lore: Guardians of destiny*, *Realms of Arkania*, *Diablo*, *Legacy of Kain*, *Warlords*, *Lords of Magic*, *Blood & Magic*, *Lords of Realm*, *Warhammer: Dark Omen*, *Arthur's Knight's – Secrets of Merlin*. Also, we can't forget sport as a substitute for war where companies like Electronic Arts are dominant: *FIFA Soccer Series*, *NBA*, *NHL*, *Formula 1*...

As Isabel Smadja in her text "*Harry Potter and the Forces of Evil*"² points out, there have been numerous of examples of the economy of salvation in Judæo-Christian history. But what is different now is that tasks, commands and missions in these novels and movies are undertaken by kids. In *Lord of the Rings*, there is a young Hobbit who has the task to save the World and defeat the enemy. In *Harry Potter* its the same, so in Philip Pullman's *Dark Materials*. And in lots of interesting new movies like *Terminator 3*, *Master and Commander*, *Spy Kids I, II & III*. Why suddenly so much focus on kids, and in such brutal environments?

After 9/11, the US apparently changed a lot. It was the first time after Pearl Harbour that the US was jeopardized to this extent. Today's generation doesn't remember WWII, and many of them not even Vietnam, so they don't have a real experience of war (for American citizens, the theatre wars around the globe in the 1980s and 1990s were legitimate police actions). The real results on the ground of US foreign policy during the nineties were mostly unknown to US citizens. Suddenly, 9/11 happened. People were living ordinary, usual ways, working and shopping, and that horrible thing happened. Evil people attacked a peaceful people, a peaceful and decent people who would never kill an ant. Why? Can this be rationally explained? You behave all your life as good and charitable, and somebody attacks you? All the time you are proclaiming democracy and peaceful solutions all over the planet, and it returns to you in this way. This must to be punished; it needs revenge. In order to revenge, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, you must abandon your democratic reasonable heritage, you must behave as a child, with heart, with honesty and without scruples. You need to become a child. A child that has the right to revenge, that has the privilege to react with anger. But a child that is able to take responsibility – a responsibility that in the right moment can execute its task in order to protect the community.

NOTES

1. Kunzru, Hari. "Beyond Good and Evil", *Mute Magazine* (May, 2002).
2. Smadja, Isabelle. "Harry Potter and the forces of Evil", *Le Monde Diplomatique* (December, 2002).
<<http://mondediplo.com/2002/12/>>

