

WAR MACHINE: MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY DURING OPERATION ALLIED FORCE

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ABSTRACT

One significant aspect of military interventions is that violence in binary geographies, which have an implied colonial discourse (such as Serbia), often involve the dialectics of construction and erasure, meaning that absence and presence of destruction and violence run side by side.¹ This paper investigates the ways that technology and media were instrumentalised in miniaturising evidence and reducing the visibility of destruction during NATO's Operation Allied Force in Serbia and Kosovo. While the dominant NATO rhetoric behind the intervention was "humanitarian" with the Operation being deployed in the name of Western values and civilisation, this text puts forward an alternative argument. The 1999 intervention was a war machine where the military-industrial-media-entertainment network restricted the public gaze and the control of information as well as made it nearly impossible to distinguish information from disinformation, and fact from fiction. Its value was predicated on expressing and showing less of the violence in order to set up a clear representation of a perpetrator and a victim. Thus, the reconceptualisation of borders in relation to 1999 was contingent on the deployment of the infrastructure of satellites and unmanned drones in an attempt to, firstly, miniaturise the weapon and, secondly, de-familiarise the military frame with spectacular speed.

INTRODUCTION

NATO's foremost reasoning for the implementation of Operation Allied Force in 1999 – a high-intensity air campaign that lasted for 78 days (24 March – 10 June) – was the termination of violence and ethnic cleansing by the Slobodan Milosevic regime in Kosovo and Metohija.² On 31 March 1999, former US President Bill Clinton stated that the objective of the Operation was to "raise the price of aggression

to an unacceptably high level so that we can get back to talking peace and security, to substantially undermine the capacity of the Serbian government to wage war.”³ The notion of security was underpinned by a discourse of morality. The former UK President Tony Blair openly spoke about the Operation being a means to protect European values whereby NATO’s targeting was a “battle for the values of civilisation itself and democracy everywhere.”⁴ Furthermore, according to the Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solana, the military operation was described as a necessary humanitarian intervention with Kosovo being “a defining moment not only for Nato [sic. NATO], but for the kind of Europe we wish to live in at the beginning of the 21st century.”⁵

While this paper acknowledges that violence took place prior and during the intervention in 1999, the focus of the text is on the deployment of violence that occurred during the Kosovo War from a more coercive and less visible frame. It proposes an understanding of borders in relation to media and technology, whereby representations of the same event (NATO’s Operation Allied Force) from different sides was contingent on the construction and erasure of particular modes of violence. Such an approach is marginal when compared with the usual foci of architectural analyses since physical artefacts are mediated by media representations and manipulations. They cannot be apprehended or examined directly. Consequently, as evident in this paper, to understand the coercive geographies of violence one needs to traverse literature from communications and media studies, as well as historical texts on the conflict in the former-Yugoslav context and mainstream news media. Thus, this paper begins with a discussion of the military-industrial-media-entertainment network as presented by scholars of the conflict in this Balkan zone, followed by an examination of how media and technology can be used to construct or erase violence, its representations of public and private space and resultant notions of speed and time.

According to Stephen Graham, violence in its making and purging benefits the military.⁶ The process is reliant on framing violence by miniaturisation of borders whereby infrastructure of media and technology becomes a flexible agent to advance the effort of the global emergency as part of the fight against alleged terror in supposed rogue territories where security must be pursued through military means.⁷ The stated aim of this paper is to examine Western and Serbian rhetoric on the

Kosovo conflict during the NATO intervention in order to draw connections and implications of the military-industrial-media-entertainment network. The network, as theorised by Paul Virilio and James Der Derian, is a type of a war machine that not only assists in manipulating the line between fact and fiction so that the complexity of war and violence is reduced, but through the conflation of media and technology can help disguise possible acts of crime.⁸ It is operationalised, as already suggested, in the name of “security and peace”, “civil values” and “humanitarianism”.

In contrast to the wars of the ancients, which were sporadic and where possession of forts and citadels was contested in the fairly transparent language of war-fighting techniques through face-to-face confrontations, or with modern wars, which were more systematic and centralised, current methods of warfare are more dispersed and flexible. They are fought in living rooms rather than in trenches.⁹ In other words, media in living rooms play a significant role in perpetuating the language to construct the other, and, in turn, construct the necessity for wars on terror. The other in relation to Kosovo, according to Philip Hammond, was history invoked to suggest that the Balkans, and Serbia in particular, was outside the scope of modernity and civilisation.¹⁰ For Paul Virilio, media and technology have been used to accelerate and extend the limits of conventional war strategies, where the modern world of militarisation is one in motion.¹¹ For James Der Derian, it is a virtual war machine where war fought from a distance eliminates guilt and responsibility.¹²

Unlike the 1991 Gulf War where the military deployed information technology and media as part of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), 1999 Operation Allied Force has been extended in that it has been called “a humanitarian intervention, coercive diplomacy, the first information war, and the first war won by airpower alone”¹³ with no casualties on NATO’s side. The intervention was aimed at gaining legitimised access and control of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia’s (FRY) air space. It was an attempt at realising the aerial panopticon by morphing media, entertainment, technology and the military in order to discipline. For Virilio, speed is a key aspect in war and he compares the morphing – which Der Derian terms the military-industrial-media-entertainment network – with Alzheimer’s disease as it affects memory, disorients and limits perception.¹⁴ The ideas of Graham, Virilio and Der Derian find application in the concrete situation of the NATO bombing where

military strategies were seamlessly transferred into urban architecture. Despite the intervention being framed through a “humanitarian” lens the means of pursuing these motives was through the built environment; following Andrew Hersher’s thinking, war was conducted through architecture.¹⁵ The significance of architecture is precisely because NATO’s operation particularly targeted the built environment in its pursuit of the objectives of the Operation Allied Force. Architecture and urban contexts were enfolded into the military-industrial-media-entertainment network. The rhetoric and the war on terror could in this way be seen as a coercive attempt at full spectrum dominance,¹⁶ made possible by military strategies and surveillance deployed through urban infrastructure.

[Fig 1 about here: Panopticon. Photographs: Nikolina Bobic.]

MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY: CONSTRUCTING AND ERASING VIOLENCE

If NATO’s intervention was geared towards defying moral values and signposting what a civilised culture may be through the rhetoric of humanitarianism, peace and security, there has been a peculiar way of showcasing these qualities. War and bombs now also extend to information manipulation, which according to Virilio is an integral part of the military-industrial-media-entertainment network.¹⁷ The contemporary system of values seems to be geared towards morphing entertainment media with war and technology as a type of spectacular entertainment. Even more spectacularly, NATO’s targeting of civilian dwellings is concealed by a “humanitarian” pretext where destruction is inflicted for “humanity”.¹⁸ While destruction of buildings can be justified as legitimate military targets, the fact that all destruction – military and civilian, inert and alive – was described as “collateral damage” is, according to Herscher, “destruction without humanity”.¹⁹

Hersher’s destruction without humanity is evident in NATO’s “humanitarian” intervention beginning with the pretext of saving Albanian lives and ending up adding to the overall death tally. While the examples are (unfortunately) extensive, these particular cases of civilian deaths (Albanian and Serb) were the result of NATO strikes on transport routes, for example, on 14 April, NATO bombed a convoy of

Albanian refugees on a Prizren-Djakovica road killing 75 civilians, and wounding over 60.²⁰ While some Western media criticised supposed accidents such as this one, the general rhetoric was not that the intervention enhanced the refugee crisis but rather that of support as the intervention was acted upon moral reasons.²¹ Through “humanitarian” induced rhetoric orchestrated with carefully constructed images, the viewers of news stories are habitually moulded to perceive the violence taking place through the gaze of a military-industrial-media-entertainment network. The disciplining is never overt. On one hand, the viewers are disciplined by passively consuming the images presented on a screen. On the other hand, disciplining is a result of the instilled fear that, if the war is not waged, security in the supposedly civilised world will likely be breached. This rhetoric is indicated in Virilio’s writings where “the conquest of **panoptical** unicity would lead to the conquest of **passivity**, with populations not so much succumbing to military defeat, as in the past, but succumbing to mental confusion.”²² Thus, the very notion of borders projected in this discourse is fluid, and adaptable; deployed to suit the agenda of the war machine. There is a dual motive of collapsing memory and disciplining viewers.

The military-industrial-media-entertainment network, according to Der Derian, hollows out the possibility of alternatives; the virtual screen is used “for the display of dazzling virtual effects, from digital war games to national party conventions to video-camera bombing.”²³ The network facilitates the treatment of memory and history as a space in limbo, where all points of reference become unreliable, whilst managing a hegemonic and panoptic understanding of memory and history. In describing the panopticon, Michel Foucault uses the example of a state prison where guards watch the prisoners from a concealed central guard post, their omnipresence instigating self-discipline in prisoners. This relationship, Foucault argues, mirrors larger social disciplining practices experimented with in the modern institutions of the nation state. A new interpretation of the panopticon as a mechanism for surveillance is captured in Virilio’s writings on the Kosovo War, where he states it is no longer

a question so much of observing what is happening on those *countries’ frontiers*, as what is happening *above* them, towards the firmament, and this would be no small matter, since this ‘lofty, extraterrestrial vantage point’ would cancel out any geopolitical perspective, the *vertical* dimension

winning out by a very long way – or, more exactly, from a very great height – over the *horizontal*.²⁴

The contemporary panopticon disciplines on the ground, from a vantage point in the sky. NATO's targeting of cities and urban infrastructure in the FRY executes a form of violence facilitated by ocular hegemony morphed with marketing and the media. It is conveyed through the militarisation of information presented on media/television screens. The dominant rhetoric and the premise for NATO's intervention was that Serbia refused to sign the Rambouillet Agreement,²⁵ with little critical information directed to the complexity of violence and the background of conflict in Kosovo.²⁶ These ideas are demonstrated in CNN's well-rehearsed style of reporting, evident since the Gulf War, where a clear us vs them moral binary is constructed.²⁷ Needless to say that the media network did not address questions to do with NATO's intervention, undermining the role of the UN and thus altering the international procedures to instate this military intervention.²⁸ Where attempts were made to unpack the conflict, according to Hammond, they were explained in terms of "ancient ethnic hatreds"²⁹ or "quasi-colonial Serbian aggression, despite the fact that [...] the KLA was known to be the main instigator of violence in the period immediately before Nato [sic. NATO] intervened."³⁰

In respect to the Yugoslav media and the Milosevic regime, disciplining occurred in a very specific way; through law. Up until 1998, apart from the pro-Milosevic Radio Television Serbia (RTS), existence of privately owned media such as B92 radio station and newspapers such as *Dnevni telegraf* meant that pro-Western views including an open critique of the situation in Kosovo were heard.³¹ However, in October 1998 – 5 months prior to NATO's intervention – media legislation was passed at the federal level where excessive fines were to be issued to any media that was openly against Milosevic.³² The law was implemented several times towards *Dnevni telegraf*, which resulted in other newspapers toning down their anti-Milosevic stance or suspending their publication altogether.³³ The rhetoric of privately owned media was in complete contrast to the RTS which failed to show that Serbian military operations did involve attacks on Albanian civilians, sometimes targeting whole villages regardless whether civilians were real or imagined supporters of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).³⁴

The RTS building was targeted by NATO on the nights between 22-23 April 1999, an action justified on the basis that RTS was identifying with Milosevic's propaganda-driven government. However, and according to Virilio, the destruction of the RTS building illustrates the importance of gaining control of information and can be interpreted as an attempt to establish a single market of data and images.³⁵ This reduces the possibility of verifying information, news reports and stories, and helps establish the hegemony of a single market of surveillance. The unlikelihood of eliminating all pro-Milosevic media networks was known and acknowledged. According to NATO's supreme commander General Wesley Clark, NATO "knew when we struck that there would be alternate means of getting the Serb Television. There's no single switch to turn off everything but we thought that it was a good move to strike it and the political leadership agreed with us."³⁶ The attack on a building, with its workforce of 120 technical and production staff, disrupted Serbian TV broadcasts for three hours at the cost of sixteen lives and eighteen wounded. Reportedly, NATO also announced that "it would shut down Yugoslavia's Internet links, the first threat of the kind, although to have actually done so would have been practically impossible."³⁷ The dominant agenda in the military-industrial-media-entertainment network described here was the rhetoric of simplistic reduction by blurring the ability to verify information, and halting alternative sources of media.

[Fig 2 about here: NATO targeted and still unreconstructed RTS building.

Photographs: Nikolina Bobic.]

PUBLIC/PRIVATE SPACE: REPRESENTATION THROUGH BLURRING

Ways of representing and understanding violence is contingent on blurring the ability to verify the very extent of violence. This blurring, according to Franke Wilmer, can be found in "the lines distinguishing the territory of one nation from another, police officer from soldier, and soldier from civilian, the stereotyping that underlies hate speech and war mongering and makes prejudices into an ideology."³⁸ This blurring of boundaries was exemplified in the manner in which Belgrade's population became a NATO target despite their divided loyalties. A considerable portion of that population

did not support the Milosevic government, and made their position evident in several mass gatherings throughout the 1990s. In 1996-97, during the three-month-long mass protests which averaged 100,000 people per day, humour was used to make political comments on Milosevic's rigging of votes and as a general sign of disapproval of the Milosevic regime.³⁹ People also voiced disagreement against the regime by banging on pots and pans during the Milosevic-induced propaganda evening news.⁴⁰ Additionally, on 13 December 1996, there was a gathering of 250,000 people to pay respect to Ferizu Balakariju, an Albanian from Kosovo, who was another victim of Yugoslav police brutality.⁴¹ These mass gatherings were also prevalent in the early 1990s, where Belgrade's public space was used as an urban demonstration space against the Yugoslav disintegration and the Milosevic regime.⁴² The protests were brutally suppressed, even in some cases through the deployment of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) tanks. The population was dehumanised both by the Milosevic regime in the 1990s and the Western economic and travel sanctions imposed on Belgrade and FRY beginning in 1993. These conditions remained operative into the 2000s.

In 1999, Belgrade's populace became legitimate NATO targets because of the assumption that alternative positions and perspectives were not possible in one political system and society. The populace responded, once again, through mass gatherings in what became known as the Songs Sustained Us (*Pesma nas je održala*). During NATO's Operation Allied Force, at any given time approximately 15,000 people utilised Republic Square for rock, hip-hop, R'n'B and turbo-folk⁴³ music concerts.⁴⁴ Christine Lavrence observes that the Songs Sustained Us events had "an almost carnivalesque character, in the Bakhtinian sense of subversion through reversal and parody."⁴⁵ At night, the Songs Sustained Us gatherings spilled onto Belgrade's bridges, hosting gatherings of the greatest intensity where concerts continued and human bodies became shields for the bridge. NATO strikes coincided with the Milosevic regime's intensification of its own disciplining of the citizenry of Belgrade and Serbia. This practice is illustrated in articles in newspapers such as the Serbian state-run *Politika*, which provided instruction on how to recognise and respond to different emergency sounds, as well as patriotic texts on the vitality and nutritional value of national dishes, affirming that food was plentiful. In May 1999, spurred by sporadic disruption of electricity and water supplies, *Politika's* articles

proffered serious advice on how to preserve foods and conserve water. The loyalties of citizens fluctuated during the conflict period, evidencing a complete reversal towards the war's end. Some Milosevic owned media stations interpreted the Songs Sustained Us gatherings as signs of support for the regime (despite the history of 1990s gatherings when the population in Belgrade was significantly against the Milosevic government and violence directed towards the Albanians in Kosovo). During the 1999 incursion, however, the population of Belgrade was possibly more supportive of Milosevic than it was at any point during the 1990s. This support predominantly occurred because the population agreed with Milosevic's refusal to sign the Rambouillet Agreement, and the associated non-negotiability of legal, territorial and free-market conditions stipulated in the Agreement. At that point in time, Milosevic was seen as a lesser evil compared to NATO. Whereas the contemptuous RTS acquired heroic status due to its refusal to side with the West, the once pro-Western *Dnevni telegraf* was shut on the very first day of the intervention while B92 kept running only to be overthrown midway into the Operation.⁴⁶ However, the fact that Slobodan Milosevic was removed from his position in the autumn of 2000 as a result of mass protest would attest to Western belief of the Serbian populace being in support of the regime.⁴⁷

Since the Songs Sustained Us events were played out on Western television in an edited form might resonate with Foucault's idea of justice as shifting from the public to the private sphere.⁴⁸ By utilising the television screen, NATO strikes on Belgrade were presented as a "humanitarian" intervention, whilst obscuring the destruction caused by the bombings on the ground. This rhetorical morality was facilitated by the possibility of editing out any form of revolt or resistance that takes place in that outside public space. The interpretation of these events in the Western media was therefore not that of a public will to resist control, but public gatherings as evidence of Milosevic's nationalism. As already mentioned, Milosevic's nationalist-driven media stations applied a similar technique. NATO strikes and the Songs Sustained Us events were used coercively as signs of support in an attempt to extend the legitimacy of Milosevic's rule as well as hide the violence perpetrated by the FRY military/police. During the 1999 operation, and according to one of many opponents of the Milosevic regime, a Belgrade student was noted as saying that it is "impossible to be correctly informed, either by listening to the Serb media, picking up the Western

media or surfing the Internet. Wherever you turn, there's just propaganda.”⁴⁹ The public and private gaze was (almost) eliminated, as the control of information made it (almost) impossible to distinguish information from disinformation. This coercive control of the media was used to blur the line between fact and fiction, and in turn help manage a particular understanding of events, memory and history. NATO's operation used the media and information operations to generate support for its military campaign. The justification for the intervention was framed by invoking moral values, making comparisons to the Holocaust and extending the rhetoric of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵⁰ In this media spectacle there is a different conception of borders; serving a multifaceted war machine where the territory of a country is firstly fragmented, movement paralysed and information blurred, so its violence can be entrenched in space and time to affect the urban and architectural spaces of everyday life.

The war machine supported by technology and the spectacle of the media screen minimises the possibility of verifying the situation that is taking place on the ground. Complex on-ground scenarios are constructed and presented in reductive images and language, and limited to the time and grid of the frame. The immediate and unquestioned acceptance of a unidimensional story presented on a screen (which is ironically presented as a transparent window into the world of events), is the last wall.⁵¹ It is reminiscent of the photography of Andreas Gursky, which is suggestive of a frictionless landscape of loosely connected parts bolstered by tenuous virtual transparency.⁵² In other words, Gursky's work exemplifies the uncomfortable construct of clarity and formality set against the ambiguity these scenes might resonate with. This flattening of complexity, and side-by-side construction and elimination of violence, intensifies the colonial discourse of violence in binary geographies such as Serbia. NATO's targeting of Belgrade, underpinned by the rhetoric of historic barbarism, becomes justifiable and swiftly accepted as evidence and confirmation that certain nations are allegedly naturally prone to acts of violence.

Violence encountered in sport is used as one such example. Virilio writes that “football simulates primordial territorial clan warfare, and the supporters of Red Star Belgrade are quickly recast [by the West] as the shock troops of Serbia sweeping through Bosnia.”⁵³ The tendency to regard certain spaces and histories, such as that of

the Balkans and Serbia, as prone to violence treats identity as fixed and aids in discursively positioning such supposed zones of violence as areas that can only be dealt with by using “humanitarian” force. The “humanitarian” crisis was validated by drawing reference to the recognised view on the war in Bosnia, and the refugee crisis facilitated by the Kosovo war.⁵⁴ Here, the perception and the appearance of a particular zone is through a limited window/vision. Considering that “speed, time and visibility are framed in the limit of the minimal slit perception”⁵⁵ further implies that the perception of citizens of NATO countries watching NATO’s execution of violence share this shallow interpretation since in both instances – sport and war – the citizens were part of a media spectacle. More so, the fact that the NATO strikes on Belgrade were presented to the world via the television screen further facilitated the demonisation of one person, Slobodan Milosevic, who was compared to Hitler.⁵⁶ For NATO, there was an overlapping of *like* and *likely*, where in this instance the whole of Belgrade’s population became *like* the war criminal Milosevic and therefore instantaneously became a *likely* ally of the regime. This reductive assumption allowed individuals to become legitimate targets. Both the Serbian and Western media invoked attributes of Fascism to discipline the populace. In the West, this was done through the rhetoric of Milosevic as the “new Hitler.”⁵⁷ The RTS also deployed the WWII rhetoric; by replaying WWII patriotic films, such as *The Battle of Neretva* or *Sutjeska*, when the Yugoslav anti-Nazi resistance (the Partisans) successfully fought against the Germans (in this instance (in)directly compared with NATO).⁵⁸ Other visible instances of violence through forms of mimicry were also noted during the Songs Sustained Us gatherings where there were instances of an American flag being redesigned so that the stars were turned into Nazi swastikas. Not only were acts of violence easily manipulated, but history became a key tool in doing so.

[Fig 3 about here: Virtual War as distance in sight/site. Photographs: Nikolina Bobic.]

PANOPTICON: SPEED-IN-VARIATION

The narrative of “absence” and “presence” of violence is implemented through wires, satellites and unmanned drones.⁵⁹ This proposition is complemented in Virilio’s *Strategy of Deception*, where he suggests that the war in Kosovo was a war of the

airwaves as it took place in the electromagnetic ether, utilising the global positioning system (GPS) and global information dominance (GID).⁶⁰ NATO's 1999 targeting included monitoring and framing of images presented to the world via the infrastructure of electric wires and satellites, where a missile that is equipped with a camera is used to both destroy, survey and record the targeted infrastructure on the ground. Technology, as demonstrated in the use of a missile to frame and destroy a target and then record it, is also an attempt to firstly miniaturise the weapon as well as de-familiarise the military frame, which is presented through a camera lens. The lens eliminates the human (subjective) gaze and replaces it with a technological (objective) gaze. Thus the cruise missiles become both weapons and machines of spectacle and legal evidence, where any gaps in erasing and constructing evidence can be seamlessly altered. The current disciplining practice is thus a form of permanent coercion, where the military is the new state prison and police. The speed at which these processes occur is significant.

The focused framing of violence is demonstrated in NATO's allegedly accidental targeting of a civilian occupied train crossing the Grdelica bridge, located 250 kilometres south-east of Belgrade, a transport route that according to NATO "was a vital supply line for Serbian troops in Kosovo."⁶¹ This event occurred on 12 April, 1999. NATO's spokesman Jamie Shea conferred that "a very extensive analysis [...] was done [...] which shows the pilot was totally unable to realize, to know before releasing his weapon that a train would appear on the bridge."⁶² The narrative of General Wesley Clark is even more detailed in that the pilot was focused on the bridge,

when all of a sudden, at the very last instant, with less than a second to go, he caught a flash of movement that came into a screen and it was the train coming in. Unfortunately, he couldn't dump the bomb at that point. It was locked, it was going into the target and it was an unfortunate incident which he and the crew and all of us very much regret.⁶³

The narrative was that the train was travelling too fast for the trajectory of the missiles to have been changed in time to avoid killing fourteen civilian passengers and wounding sixty more.⁶⁴ The video was replayed on Western television screens

incessantly in order to demonstrate that the speed of missiles means that “accidents” such as these are often unavoidable.⁶⁵ The targeting was only seen as violent when a train emerged and became visible on the bridge. If this information remained undisclosed and unseen, its violence would have passed unnoticed.

In January 2000, the unavoidability of the incident was called into question. The footage shown at the initial NATO press conference was revealed to have been altered so as to triple the actual speed recorded by a camera installed in the warhead of one of the missiles targeting the bridge.⁶⁶ The variation of speed was attributed to technology as Shea was noted as saying that the speeded-up video was caused by a “technical phenomenon” rather than human manipulation.⁶⁷ Using technology to deny responsibility for atrocities was also seen after WWII. According to Virilio, Albert Speer used the efficiency of technology in his defence during the Nuremberg Trial in order “to prove that he was only an instrument, certainly guilty, but that technological advances, in particular in the field of communications, had issued in the catastrophe.”⁶⁸ The argument is not that NATO’s killing of fourteen civilians is comparable to the large-scale genocide of Jews during WWII. Instead, the comparison is meant to suggest that technology is now both an instrument that can erase evidence of (possibly deliberate) crime through a process of speed-in-variation, as well as for a sole instrument to be called on as the perpetrator of crime. Similarly, through manipulation of what is visible on a screen, achieved through processes of editing, cutting and commentary, the violent effects of NATO’s bombing of Belgrade was suppressed. When viewed in this way, NATO’s strikes do not appear as acts of violence. The manipulation is also suggested in the alteration of figures. Despite NATO’s tally of destruction, inclusive of and not limited to bridges, power plants and the countryside, NATO’s reports only note destruction of military armaments.⁶⁹ Thus, the elimination of the horizon of perception and vision is also the elimination of information despite claims of an open information network in many post-industrial societies. NATO’s strategy in the 1999 Operation Allied Force thus exemplifies Virilio’s writings on the military-information-media-entertainment complex. Through the digital screen and edited constructions of news stories presented on screen, situations taking place in the rest of the world are taken for granted.⁷⁰ The presented image on a screen becomes the world in a glimpse. The acceleration and manipulation of speed has not only affected the perspective, but has eliminated the foreground and

background by eradicating volume and depth; the outcome being “the progressive desertification of various surfaces (territories, bodies, objects).”⁷¹ The frame of the military-industrial-media-entertainment network acts as a limit and form of confinement.⁷² The resultant reconceptualisation of borders is, thus, directed towards elimination of duration in the attempt for absolute conquest of speed,⁷³ and the “gradual dematerialization of the earth’s horizon” described by Virilio.⁷⁴ It is the surge towards eliminating the horizon line.

[Fig 4 about here: Constructions: evidence in motion. Artwork (mixed media):
Nikolina Bobic.]

Delimitation is contingent on mental confusion, a tactic deployed in the NATO Operation. NATO’s evidence of the Operation – the images of destruction – often needed to be interpreted due to their illegibility. During the 14 May 1999 briefing, NATO’s spokesman Jamie Shea had to interpret evidence of how the Serb forces destroyed buildings in Kosovo and Metohija.⁷⁵ According to Andrew Herscher,

[t]he subjects of these images, pictured in a bitmapped haze of pixels, had to be enmeshed in a complex apparatus of written, graphic, and verbal signs in order to become legible. The image of a building in flames, or damaged or even destroyed, was incomprehensible without an identifying text signifying flames, damage, or destruction. The rhetorical distance of irony in Shea’s presentation thus mapped onto the spectatorial distance of his satellite imagery. Was it possible to get up close and personal to a satellite image in 1999? Was it possible to lead spectators from a network of pixels to a vale of tears?⁷⁶

Shea’s commentary may well be an example of what Eyal Weizman terms “only a criminal being able to interpret a crime.”⁷⁷ The images are endowed with meanings and made to speak a particular rhetoric. The nature of these illegible images is peculiar considering that throughout the operation, NATO used videos mounted onto missiles to film the destruction of a particular target from the moment the weapon was discharged to the moment the missile struck the target.⁷⁸ The military, media and the law (as seen in Shea’s interpretation of pixels as evidence of destruction by Serb

forces) form a trinity where the value of language and images is to *show less* through de-familiarisation of a military frame.

The manifestation of speed on the Serbian side was exemplified differently. When the Serbian Armed Forces shot down NATO's Lockheed F-117A Nighthawk stealth aircraft on 27 March 1999 – only three days into NATO's campaign – the outcome was significant in several ways. It is not necessarily only for the reasons that the aircraft was detected, shot down and that it touched the ground at low speed, but more so for the symbolism that it invoked. The dominant Serbian rhetoric was that “although a small and impoverished country like Yugoslavia could not challenge US power, it could *de facto* question America's *absolute power*.”⁷⁹ This event was also marked during the Songs Sustained Us gatherings. The prominent message on banners in the early days of the gatherings was *Sorry, we didn't know it was invisible*. The catch-phrase was also printed on badges, stickers and T-shirts. With time, the messages on banners diversified, ranging from humour to nationalism: *Sorry we are singing, With bombs for a better tomorrow? Clinton, you are sick to America – pumpkin without a root, NATO – New America Terrorist Organisation, Kosovo is Serbia*, and *In alliance with the people and motherland until we reach victory*. There is a risk involved in interpreting the complexity of the situation at face value, and also summing it up inadequately through these single catch-phrase slogans; indicative of the Serbian populace subjection to the military-industrial-media-entertainment complex. The relation of speed to discipline is that the line that differentiates war from peace is ever less transparent. More so, there is a general cautionary aspect to the speed at which media narrates, interprets and sides with particular events. Whilst the task of a journalist is to immediately analyse and report, the very fact that these articles are a first attempt at writing this history indicates the power these words may have within the political context in which they are used.⁸⁰ The implication is that a different value system needs to be given to language and images in order to show *more*, rather than *less* of the currently de-familiarised military frame.

CONCLUSION

The Operation Allied Force is an example of wars fought from labs and media hubs where violence is becoming more opaque.⁸¹ The visibility of fighting has been miniaturised, no longer occurring on the ground but fought remotely from the air and through the infrastructure of satellites and wires. With the alleged need to protect against terror, the necessity for external and internal, and general and particular security also grows in partnership with rising insecurity and fear. People are willing to submit to the power of the military because they fear having their urban surroundings, their buildings and homes targeted. The submission exists in the militarisation of information presented on media screens, where violence becomes normalised and approval attained in a highly orchestrated and seamless way. Citizens become passive recipients of this violence that penetrates their living rooms through television screens mediating and interpreting the terms of destruction. The analogy of the panopticon interpreted for this scenario implies that power exists and stands ready to be used, but it is not there to be seen in a tangible physical way like a gun or a warship. Suggestively, the narrative of “absence” and “presence” of violence was also deployed in NATO’s 1999 campaign in the form of wires, satellites and unmanned drones.⁸² Thus, borders reconceptualised in this manner manifest as a synthesised military-industrial-media-entertainment network – a war machine – directed towards not only manufacturing, but blurring the realms of myth/history, rhetoric and spectacle. This machine is contingent on speed being mobilised to veil the extreme and continuous, yet not overt, presence of violence and war. Peculiarly, these qualities are the folly of Western civil values.

[Fig 5 about here: Borders as War Machine. Artwork (mixed media): Nikolina Bobic.]

FIGURES:

Figure 1: Panopticon. Photographs: Nikolina Bobic.

Figure 2: NATO targeted and still unreconstructed RTS building. Photographs: Nikolina Bobic.

Figure 3: Virtual War as distance in sight/site. Photographs: Nikolina Bobic.

Figure 4: Constructions: evidence in motion. Artwork (mixed media): Nikolina Bobic.

Figure 5: Borders as War Machine. Artwork (mixed media): Nikolina Bobic.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Stephen Graham, *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (London: Verso, 2010), 234-237.
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- ¹⁰ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 4.
- ¹¹ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 7.
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- ¹³ Julian H. Tolbert, “Crony Attack. Strategic Attack’s Silver Bullet?” Masters Dissertation, Faculty of the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies: Maxwell Air Force Base, Air University (Alabama: Air University Press, 2006), 27. Accessed September 12, 2009, http://aupress.au.af.mil/digital/pdf/paper/t_0032_tolbert_crony_attack.pdf
- ¹⁴ Paul Virilio, *A Landscape of Events*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000), 12.
- ¹⁵ Andrew Herscher, *Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 83.
- ¹⁶ The term refers to a military attempt to gain control of all elements of the battlespace: air, surface, sub-surface, electromagnetic and information space. See: William F. Engdahl, *Full Spectrum Dominance: Totalitarian Democracy in the New World Order* (Boxborough, MA: Third Millennium Press, 2009). Also see, Der Derian, *Virtuous War*, 191.
- ¹⁷ Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), 142 – 143.
- ¹⁸ Andrew Herscher, *Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 108.
- ¹⁹ Herscher, *Violence Taking Place*, 108.
- ²⁰ Vivian Martin, “Chapter 25. Civilian Casualties of NATO’s War on Yugoslavia,” *International Action Center*. Accessed June 12, 2014. http://www.iacenter.org/warcrime/25_civil.htm
- ²¹ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 147.

- ²² Paul Virilio, *Strategy of Deception*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), 55. Note: original text is in bold.
- ²³ Der Derian, *Virtuous War*, 200.
- ²⁴ Virilio, *Strategy of Deception*, 14. Note: original text is in italics.
- ²⁵ The Rambouillet Agreement was drafted by NATO in what was represented as a peace agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Albanian majority population in Kosovo and Metohija. Yugoslavia's refusal to sign the agreement – on the basis that it contained provisions for the autonomy of Kosovo and Metohija – became a justification for NATO's air strikes.
- ²⁶ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 147.
- ²⁷ Daya Kishan Thussu, "Legitimizing 'Humanitarian Intervention'?" CNN, NATO and the Kosovo Crisis," *European Journal of Communication*, 15:3 (2000): 353.
- ²⁸ Kishan Thussu, "Legitimizing 'Humanitarian Intervention'?" CNN, NATO and the Kosovo Crisis," 353.
- ²⁹ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 147.
- ³⁰ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 147.
- ³¹ Goran Gocic, "Symbolic Warfare: Nato versus the Serbian Media," in *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis*, eds. Philip Hammond and Edward S. Herman (London: Pluto Press), 88.
- ³² Gocic, "Symbolic Warfare," 88.
- ³³ Gocic, "Symbolic Warfare," 88.
- ³⁴ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 122.
- ³⁵ Virilio, *Strategy of Deception*, 22.
- ³⁶ Michael Mandel, "Illegal Wars, Collateral Damage, and international Criminal Law," in *Yugoslavia Unraveled: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, Intervention*, ed. Raju G. S. Thomas (USA: Lexington Books, 2003), 308.
- ³⁷ Gocic, "Symbolic Warfare: Nato versus the Serbian Media," 90.
- ³⁸ Franke Wilmer, *The Social Construction of Man, the State and War* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 273.
- ³⁹ Christine Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille': Memory, Agency, and Monumental Public Space in Belgrade," *Space and Culture* 8, no.1 (2005): 41.
- ⁴⁰ Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille'," 40.
- ⁴¹ Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille'," 41.
- ⁴² Milena Dragicevic-Sesic, "The Street as Political Space: Walking as Protest, Graffiti and the Student Carnivalization of Belgrade," *New Theatre Quarterly* 17, no.1 (2001): 81-82.
- ⁴³ Turbo folk is a music genre synthesised of Western pop, Oriental beats and Serbian folk.
- ⁴⁴ Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille'," 32.
- ⁴⁵ Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille'," 32. With reference to M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
- ⁴⁶ Gocic, "Symbolic Warfare: Nato versus the Serbian Media," 89.
- ⁴⁷ Dragicevic-Sesic, "The Street as Political Space," 74.
- ⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 3-32.
- ⁴⁹ Virilio, *Strategy of Deception*, 49.
- ⁵⁰ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 219.
- ⁵¹ Paul Virilio, "Architecture in the Age of Its Virtual Disappearance: An Interview

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⁵² Benjamin H. Bratton, “Logistics of Habitable Circulation,” in *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (Paul Virilio, author), trans. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 13.

⁵³ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 21-22.

⁵⁴ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 122.

⁵⁵ Virilio, *Landscape of Events*, 38.

⁵⁶ David N. Gibbs, *First Do No Harm Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 4-5. Dianna Johnstone, *Fools Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 250.

⁵⁷ Gocic, “Symbolic Warfare: Nato versus the Serbian Media,” 89 – 90.

⁵⁸ Gocic, “Symbolic Warfare: Nato versus the Serbian Media,” 89-90.

⁵⁹ Vojin Joksimovic, “Militarism and Ecology: NATO Ecocide in Serbia,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11, no.4 (2000): 144-146.

⁶⁰ Virilio, *Strategy of Deception*, 28-29

⁶¹ *BBC News*, “NATO’s missile video ‘no distortion’,” January 7, 2000. Accessed January 15, 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/594800.stm>

⁶² *BBC News*, “NATO’s missile video ‘no distortion’.”

⁶³ Cited in James Bovard, “Kosovo Déjà vu,” *The Future of Freedom Foundation*, July 1 2003. Accessed April 2, 2011. <http://fff.org/explore-freedom/article/kosovo-dj-vu/>

⁶⁴ Vivian Martin, “Chapter 25: Civilian Casualties of NATO’s War on Yugoslavia.”

⁶⁵ Bovard, “Kosovo Déjà vu”.

⁶⁶ Shea notes that the video was shown at double the speed, while other sources indicate that it was speed was tripled. See: Bovard, “Kosovo Déjà vu”.

⁶⁷ *BBC News*, “NATO’s missile video ‘no distortion’”.

⁶⁸ Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archaeology*, trans. George Collins (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 60.

⁶⁹ Paul Virilio and Lotringer Sylvère, *Crepuscular Dawn*, trans. Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2002), 138.

⁷⁰ Paul Virilio, *The Lost Dimension*, trans. Daniel Moshenberg (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 79, 90 and 112.

⁷¹ Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizon: An Essay on Dromoscopy*, trans. Michael Degener (London: Continuum, 2005), 136.

⁷² Paul Virilio. *Open Sky*, trans Julie Rose (London: Verso, 1997), 26. Note: original text is in italics.

⁷³ Virilio, *Negative Horizon*, 136.

⁷⁴ Virilio, *Open Sky*, 43.

⁷⁵ Herscher, *Violence Taking Place*, 77.

⁷⁶ Herscher, *Violence Taking Place*, 77.

⁷⁷ Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence From Arendt to Gaza* (London: Verso, 2011), 99 and 136.

⁷⁸ Herscher, *Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict*, 111.

⁷⁹ Gocic, “Symbolic Warfare: Nato versus the Serbian Media,” 89.

⁸⁰ Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts*, 2.

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