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Post Structuralism
Final Research Paper

Baudrillard and the Simulation of War

In Baudrillard's *Procession of Simulacra*, he outlines several of his key philosophical concepts. His primary notion is that the human perception of reality consists of a repeated circulation of models of simulacra, and that what people perceive as the actual reality of their world is in fact just a series of simulations building upon other simulations, perpetuated by media, far removed from any truth that may or may not exist. This theory can be applied to explain how simulations and forms entertainment based on modern warfare illustrates themselves the way they do and how it is or is not connected with any real war reality, experience, or perception.

In Baudrillard's theories, simulacra and reality have a similar relationship as does the sign and the signifier in semiotics. Though, while the sign is supposed to have a direct relationship with its signifier in reality, the simulacrum references something that is missing in reality - something that doesn't exist, or an absence. This relationship can be illustrated with an example such as a religious effigy. Religious icons take on the persona and embody the meaning of an abstract concept such as a deity, so much so that people worship the effigies as if they are the Gods themselves that they were originally forged to only reference - a reference to something that doesn't exist in the real world.

Baudrillard states that we live in a hyperreality. People perceive simulacra before they experience, if ever, the instances or lack of instances in the real world that caused them to be generated and take these simulations as the real and create more simulations from these simulations. This most often is perpetuated through mass media and is a condition of contemporary living that has destroyed anything truly real. This "death of the real" where people

feel a deeper connection to simulations such as video games and television shows than to the instances in reality that they reference. “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (Baudrillard 254)

Baudrillard wrote a book on the 1991 Gulf War called *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. The claim that Baudrillard makes in the title was more a jocular than literal, but it fairly accurately summed up the content of the point he makes in the book: the Gulf War was not a real war in the traditional sense of the word and the way the proof of its happening was conveyed to the American public caused it to perfectly fall into his category of a simulacrum (Clarke, Doel and Merrin).

Baudrillard called the Gulf War a “non-war” and a “war that never began.” He backed up this claim with the fact that it wasn’t a war in the traditional sense because there wasn’t a political outcome, such as a change in borders, that was going to be determined by the outcome of the war. The odds were so stacked against the Iraqi forces from the beginning, that the outcome of the war, or perhaps more accurately in Baudrillard’s sense, the *military engagement*, was predetermined. Baudrillard argued that “To be for or against the war is idiotic” because supporting or opposing the military imitative couldn’t be tied to a grand narrative of some tangible result such as libration (Clarke, Doel and Merrin 119). The odds were so in favor of the allied coalition, that while 35,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed during the Gulf War, only 250 coalition soldiers were killed by enemy action. In fact, the allied battle lines were so secure, the odds of being killed fighting the war in Iraq in the first weeks of the fighting were far lower than the odds of dying in car crash as a civilian motorist in the United States at the same time (Clarke, Doel and Merrin 121).

The way it was shown to the American public through the media also heightened its disconnection with reality. Much of the footage from the front consisted of first person views from aircraft flying high over targets or bombs speeding down quickly to their destruction. These videos were in black and white and often inverted infrared imagery with military overlays of target reticles and streams of informational numerals. It presented the engagements that were occurring in a format that felt like the public was watching a video game being played, not actual death and destruction occurring on actual land half a world away. This strange viewpoint caused the Gulf War to be nicknamed “The Video Game War” because of these daily broadcasts of bomber footage. Even this footage, which has an actual recording of the event, conveyed an unreal impression of the war since the public often saw a view from a bomb streaking down that ended right as it got there. Sometimes a brief view of the explosion was shown, viewed from the plane high above, removed from the actual shock and horror of the event on the ground. This disconnect is amplified in today's methods of warfare by unmanned drones where pilots that are raining down destruction of people and facilities and whose pilots don't even have to be located in the same country but can be sitting in “cockpits” that resemble a flight simulator or very advanced home entertainment computer game system far from the battlefield. This method of fighting wars perfectly illustrates Baudrillard's reference to the Jorge Luis Borges' fable, “On Exactitude in Science,” in *Procession of Simulacra* where an empire's territory is completely covered by a 1:1 ratio map that completely covers the land upon which the people live, so exact that the people take it for the land itself, only once it begins to erode away in certain areas is some of the original reality of their home is revealed and it turns out that realm they thought they knew had descended into wasteland, no longer recognizable as the world in which they thought they lived, but was now so mixed with this partially eroded simulated map so that they couldn't truly tell what was real and what was simulation.

This future advancement of this warfare of simulacra was predicted well before the notion of unmanned drones was a reality. In the sixties an episode of Star Trek was aired called *A Taste of Armageddon* which involved a situation that perfectly emphasizes Baudrillard's fourth level of simulation. In this episode, the crew of the Enterprise encounters a world that is at war with a neighboring planet. They do not engage in warfare in the traditional sense, instead they have found actual exchanges of high yield destructive weaponry too costly. So, while they feared for an escalation of technological warfare that would eventually destroy each other, they agreed to fight their wars through simulation. Instead of launching ships and missiles at each other, they engaged in a computerized war. Paralleling the allusion of the Jorge Luis Borges' fable, they created a digital world that exactly copied their planets and their mighty arsenals and regularly engaged in simulated attacks. The simulations were taken so much for the reality that it had begun to produce its own symptoms and have real world consequences. Computerized strikes on cities had projected casualties. Citizens that lived in the real world areas that correlated to the simulated locations that were struck were instructed by the government to make an orderly queue to vaporizing death chambers to provide a real world enforcement of the simulated conflict.

Captain Kirk destroys their computers so that they will have to use real weaponry and re-sensitize them to the horrors of war in hope it will convince them to stop, attempting to remove some of the layers of simulacra that the people of those worlds had been mistaking for reality for so long. In a later series, Star Trek Voyager, the starship encounters two warring cultures of robots which turn out to be all that remains of two different worlds of humanoids that were at war and created the robots to fight for them. Then the robots' humanoid masters attempted to call an end to the war and so the robots killed their so their war and their meaning for existence could continue. Literally, the simulation of their war took on a life of its own, creating very real and deadly symptoms. All science fiction - but fiction that has alarming bases in today's conflicts.

Baudrillard stated that the Gulf War was “Unlike earlier wars, in which there were political aims either of conquest or domination, what is at stake in this one is war itself: its status, its meaning, its future. It is beholden not to have an objective but to prove its very existence [...] In effect, it has lost much of its credibility.” Baudrillard was arguing in his book that modern wars, fought by an overpoweringly advanced western coalition, against an inferior non western entity were not to enact an important political agenda, but were a way of defining what modern warfare was and figuring out the identity of the west based on what it was in opposition to: identity based on simulacra. Baudrillard's claims are backed up by the fact that the western governments, through media, had to, and still do in today's conflicts, have to spend a lot of time justifying the conflicts they engage in. Modern wars aren't as clear cuts as wars of the past such as World War II where going to war could be boiled down to very simple reasons: it was the right thing to do, and if America didn't go to war its freedom was in grave peril. With the Gulf War, the government had to convince the people of the war's legitimacy by amplifying the perceived threat of Saddam Hussein and the threats that the Iraqi military presented. Baudrillard referred to him as a “fake enemy” and the media had to make him out as bad as possible to provide a sense of purpose. The media repeatedly emphasized that Iraq had the fourth largest army in the world, that they were massing their forces on the Saudi Arabian border and could attack at any time, even though while they had a large army they're technology was woefully inferior to that of the western coalition and it turned out when the western forces invaded that they hadn't been massing on the border preparing for an attack. The media was propagating a simulacrum of a powerful, malevolent, evil, and threatening Saddam force - a force or persona that allowed the U.S. to help define itself as what it wasn't: it wasn't the bad qualities Saddam represented. Since the U.S. was the opposite of Saddam and the U.S. was, good they were justified in attacking Iraq. Baudrillard suggested that the Gulf War was less a battle with Saddam

than a struggle to make sense of the West's role in the post-Cold War world. The Gulf war had fallen into Baudrillard's fourth level of simulation: where signs become simulacra and no longer have relation to reality and simulate a simulation and simulacra. The reality of the threat of Saddam was a construct separate from reality and the Gulf War was constructed based on that simulation.

The West is still defining itself through opposition and war. An excellent example of this is the proliferation of imagery, often found proudly displayed in the back window of large trucks, in the United States that involves aggressive and powerful bald eagles before a dynamically billowing American flag. The main concept that it is meant to produce is that of freedom as a powerful and predominant theme of what it is to be American. It is meant to reference that Americans are forcefully free and are somehow charged and justified to enforce this idyllic concept on other cultures. This image and its meaning was generated as a result of Americans defining themselves as in not what they believe the non west to be: dictatorships that don't allow their people to be free to do what they want and be who they are and are actively pursuing to take away the freedom of other cultures including those of the United States. Those that advertise their nation's ideals proudly most likely have no inclination that it is an image and ideal that came from without, to justify imperialist actions, not a reflection of the heart and soul of America.

Advertisements based on the hyperreality of warfare progresses even further away from reality and take on a new life of their own. This notion is expressed poignantly in the marketing strategies of war based first person shooter video games, resounding most in a recently released game that makes a point of advertising how accurate to real life warfare it is while promoting itself with hyperreal, over-glorified promotional imagery: Medal of Honor: Warfighter (MOHW). MOHW is a first person video game created by Electron Arts and Danger Close

where the player fights as a special operations soldier from various large nations. At their website, under the about tab, they give the game's mission statement: "Nearly 13 years ago, the Medal of Honor brand was born with authenticity and respect for the soldier at its core - and that commitment remains to this day. It's our goal to put you directly in the boots of the soldier whether it be in World War II or today's war. Every detail from the sound of the weapons to the landscapes of actual locations inspire the complete Medal of Honor experience. For the first time in Medal of Honor, we're consulting closely with not only Tier 1 Operators from the U.S. but also Tier 1 Operators from around the globe including the Polish GROM, the Australian SASR, the German KSK and more. No other gaming brand brings authenticity to life like Medal of Honor." They make heavy use of this consultation with real Tier 1 Operators (special forces) in their promotional material. On their website, there is an entire video section devoted to videos that are a hyperreal blend of the simulacra of the perceived glorious aura of a member of the special forces and how their game parallels it.

In these videos, a Tier 1 consultant narrates on a specific aspect of special operations: how they train, what gear they use for it, what happens during the operation, ect. The operator's voice is digitally distorted and there is a disclaimer at the beginning that informs the viewer that this is an interview with an actual Tier 1 operative and his identify must remain a secret, implying that this interview is only a brief pause from actively living the type of situations found in the game that viewers want to step into. As the operative narrates, clips of real special operatives training are being played: jumping out of high altitude planes, breaching rooms, and doing other generally bad ass things. This part of the video hooks in the younger male target audience viewing it. They can begin to imagine themselves in these types of exciting, dangerous situations. Then after awhile scenes of similar activities from the game itself are spliced in, alternating back and forth. The transitions are quick, and the lighting and coloration of the clips

is similar, conveying that playing the game itself is identical to performing that actual activities in real life. They even go so far as to include missions based on a movie that is based on an actual military operation: the raid that killed Osama Bin Laden. MOHW teamed up with the movie Zero Dark Thirty which is about the special forces raid on Bin Laden's fortified mansion, and the locations in the movie have been made into playable levels for MOHW. If anyone feels that some of this may seem a bit too far, they would be in agreement with the U.S. government. Apparently these active duty special forces operatives that consulted on Tier 1 tactics that are anonymously voicing over videos were under contract not to divulge such information and have been financially punished and their military careers virtually ended. Similar occurrences happened with members of the Seal Team Six unit that took down Bin Laden. One of them published a book about the event without having it proofed by the government to make sure no military secrets were revealed.

Electronic Arts accidentally disproves their link to reality in their game that they so hardly pursue. There videos are hosted through YouTube in their website. So when a viewer goes to the video section and finishes watching one of these promotional videos YouTube brings up a list of recommended related videos to watch. One of those videos is video footage from a camera mounted on the helmet of a U.S. soldier being ambushed by the Taliban in Afghanistan. The contrast between a video of subject matter so much closer to the reality of warfare and the game play videos of a game advertising itself as remarkably accurate is comical. In the footage, a patrol of soldiers is caught in an ambush in a field between eroded buildings. The composure of the men, the drama of the explosive battlefield, the perfection of the equipment, and the amazing fashion statement of the most expensive accoutrements of war are not in evidence. Instead, the soldier can't even seem to see his enemy which is hiding far off behind cover. He throws himself to the ground immediately as soon as the light popping of isolated gun fire begins, a sound so

dissonant to the massive explosions in the game. He crawls through the sand and dust towards his fellows, his gun becomes even more covered in dust than it was at the beginning of the video. No aesthetic care was taken in equipping his weapon as in the promotional photos of MOHW. He has a black gun with tan infrared laser and light PEQ box attached on the front with various covers on the gun's rails to block heat that don't even match visually and that are secured with a vigorous application of duct tape. He has a strange and ludicrously large rectangular object taped to his arm which look ridiculous but surely has some function vital to his role and survival. He does not worry about looking manly, coordinating his gear aesthetically, or being composed, instead he crawls and runs panting heavily and swearing profusely.

Perusing the cover art for the game and the downloadable wall papers one will find another showcase of war hyperreality. MOHW appears to promote customization and individuality as another core value in their game. They make a point of showing off every type of special operative unit in their game and how they all have their own persona that is forged from a combination of their camouflage uniform, gear, and weapon (collectively forming their military kit) in a dichotomous high definition gritty perfection. Each wall paper illustrates a member of a different special forces group. The warriors are seen in calm composure, showing off their kit, most prominently their weapon, while being engulfed by roiling dirt clouds from intense explosions and action behind him. Every shot shows a photograph of an actual person, shot in a studio, with smoke, embers, and debris added in digitally. The lighting on the figure is perfect. Most are lit from the side to provide dramatic rim lighting, but the rest of the figure has enough fill light that you can still easily distinguish what kind of gear they are using. MOHW's website also has a section describing how they consulted and made contracts with the manufacturers that produce the gear that the actual Tier 1 operators are equipped with. This way they can show company logos and add an additional layer to the aura of role play realism to the game's players.

Curiously, the game almost has a feel of grown up male version of Barbie. Players get to choose what nationality they are, pick what guns their characters will hold, choose what type of camouflage clothing they wear, and their gear, then pretend to be him and vicariously participate in an epic journey that in some form actually occurs somewhere in reality. This customizability individuality found in these games reflects a contemporary culture where everyone is now supposed to be a intricate and unique person and advertise it through online social media. This is why these shooter games become more and more focused on special forces which are the most individualist branch of the military. They are very small units where liberties can be more easily taken in dress and displays of personalities while larger branches of military are about stripping away the individual and replacing them with uniformity. Gamers used to be able to take pride in being part of something greater than themselves. In most of the beginning installments of the Medal of honor series, as well as other big realistic first person shooter series like Call of Duty, the player took the role of one of these uniform soldiers, one of many fighting together against forces of evil, mostly World War II settings.

Each image in the new MOHW is captured in a pose of collected and casual indifference to the dangerous chaos around them, either blatantly ignoring their surrounding and just posing with masculine control in front of the camera (like on the games cover art) or calmly taking aim, in control of themselves and about to exert control over their situation by killing the enemy. More than likely, in reality, someone in the same situation would be at the very least taking cover if not out rightly wetting themselves in fear as explosions buffet the air and ground around them. If the helmet camera video is any indication they would be hitting the deck and crawling to the safety of their comrades. Yet, these images convey a simulacrum of the reality of warfare, one that is glorious and adventurous, with the outcome certainly in the western persons favor because of his general superiority in all categories and his preparedness of mind, body, and

equipment. This definition harkens back to the notion of the West defining itself through a simulacrum of what it thinks it is not: weak willed, undetermined, unprepared, not advanced.

This game claims to be directly simulating reality, but what it is really doing is simply participating in the simulacra of war, many steps removed from the actual fact. One can trace backwards this progression. In the real world, there are westerners and non-westerners fighting it out in Afghanistan, then the media portrays what it can capture as the real of it, then people create their own impressions of that reality based on what media they see, then movie makers take these impressions and make them more visually and narratively more interesting and make movies, then the video game developers create an interactive entertainment that allows players to role play being the fantasized characters that they see in movies. Following this progression, these images have lost all viable illustrative validity. Instead they have become a hyperreal version of something that in some form does actually happen. So sensationalized, they are more war porn than war. With every detail perfect, every need of the viewer for fanciful *real life* adventure satisfied, they operate more like pornography which records an activity which happens all the time but in a fashion that showcases the most desirable and reaction producing aspect of everything within the frame while downplaying or hiding every undesirable characteristic.

This *war porn* ascetic is a fairly recent development in computer gaming. The version of Medal of Honor that came out just two years before MOHW was far more closely related to a more realistic illustration of reality than the super-reality of MOHW. Simply called Medal of Honor, the promotional art had a similar war torn, debris flying, background, and the figure had the same calm reaction, but he was presented far less perfected. The colors were much more muted, matching more what someone would look like inside an explosion cloud, and the fill lighting on the figure wasn't nearly as strong, allowing for much of his clothing to fall in shadow. There wasn't such a focus on the material aspects, there are no logos, he isn't wearing much

tactical gear, and the viewer can't even see what gun he is using. The man on the cover is actually modeled on a real life special operations soldier that was featured in a LIFE documentary on Afghanistan in 2002 known as *Cowboy*. While promoting this Medal of Honor, they only briefly mentioned that they “worked closely with Tier 1 Operators from the U.S. Special Operations Community.” This image is all about a more gritty realism and the countenance in the face of it. Which apparently wasn't enough to sate the gamer public appetite that has been fueled by the hyperreality of war.

This progression of disconnection from the reality of war is taken one step further when the people that play the games that step into the supposed shoes of someone living real life adventure decides to make the simulation even more real and enact it in real life. Airsoft, similar to paintball, is a sport where people shoot others with plastic pellet firing guns, nearly identical to real life weapons. This connection to *real life* war fighters is found in this sport as well. The guns are so identical to real weapons that they are mimicking that laws have been passed, forcing them to have bright orange tips at the end of their barrels so people aren't alarmingly confused. They are often used as props in movies because of their realism. The players are mimicking the video games, buying guns that “are the same as my favorite gun in such and such a game.” The online stores that sell them know this and market accordingly, advertising guns and gear as the same type as found in specific popular shooter games or movies.

War simulation continues in other avenues. Simulation of war has become so widespread and important that soldiers use them to experience what war is like before they ever leave the safety of training facilities. Soldiers train by aiming real assault rifles that shoot blank cartridges and lasers that use a computer to tell them what they hit as they aim at computer projections of life like military situations in simulation training rooms. Pilots log numerous hours in flight simulators with real controls and projected landscapes in the windows before they are allowed to

enter a real cockpit. The simulation is so real that it generates their own symptoms in users. These manifest as flash backs, visual distortions, and physical disorientation. Collectively known as Cue Conflict, where the mind's expectations based on experience run up against contrary sensory information (Der Derian, *The Simulation Syndrome: From War Games to Game Wars* 190). Soldiers prepare for war so intensely and accurately it produces similar symptoms. Similar simulators are used to treat veterans that suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Doctors re-expose them virtually to situations they would have experienced in war, such as riding in a humvee in a convoy escort mission. They slowly introduce more traumatic encounters along the way, forcing the subject to revisit the stresses and develop an immunity to them (Mackey).

In conclusion, the progression development of the modern war game's promotional material's aesthetic, misleading direct link to realism, and allusions to real soldier life, and that of other forms of war simulation, are a prime example of Baudrillard's theory of the precession of simulacra detailed in his *Simulacra and Simulation*. The perpetuation of this false impression of what it is like to be a soldier in a *war* perfectly illustrates Baudrillard's statement from that text, "Thus perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity" (Baudrillard 256).

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Baudrillard and the Simulation of War

Review: Precession of Simulacra

Review: Precession of Simulacra

- Reality = repeating circulation of simulacra

Review: Precession of Simulacra

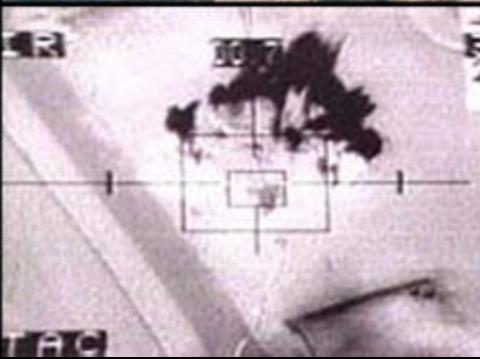
- Reality = repeating circulation of simulacra
- Simulacrum = references absence

Review: Precession of Simulacra

- Reality = repeating circulation of simulacra
- Simulacrum = references absence
- Hyperreal = substituting signs of the real for the real

Successive Phases of the Image

1. it is a reflection of a basic reality
2. it masks and perverts a basic reality
3. it masks the absence of a basic reality
4. it bears no relation to any reality whatever



Baudrillard – The Gulf War Did Not Take Place

DEFENSE DEPT. TAPE 120° R RTOL
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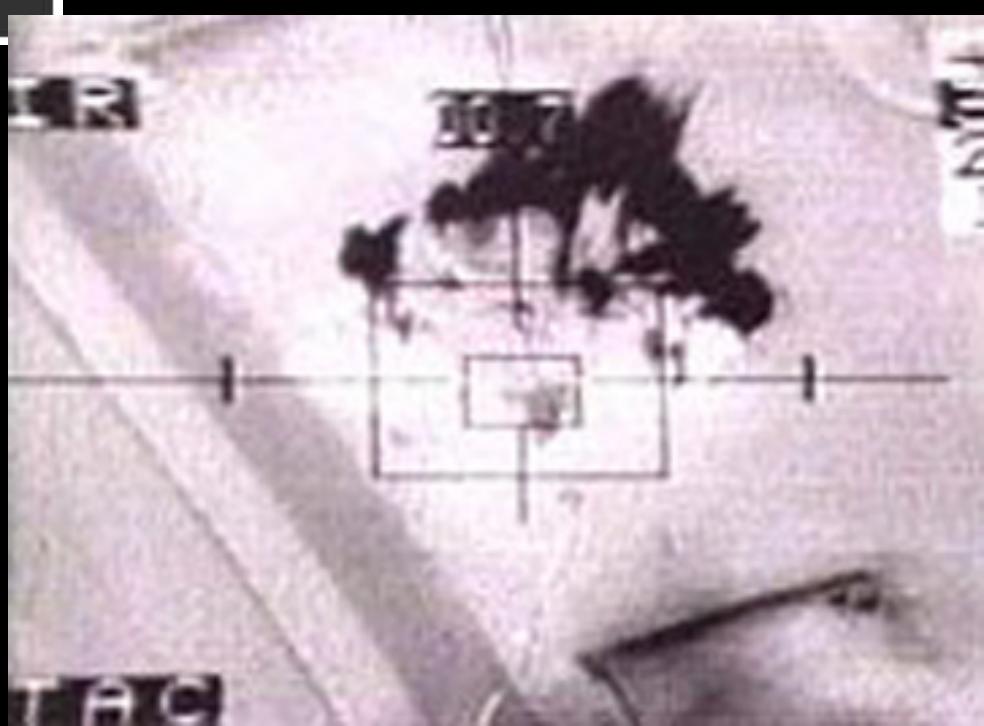
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Full Simulation



TYPE 4B ALPHA

TYPE 4A ALPHA

TYPE 4A GAMMA

TYPE 4A BETA



Video Games Marketing Imagery

Medal of Honor: Warfighter



MEDAL OF
HONOR
WARFIGHTER

WALLPAPER



MEDAL OF HONOR WARFIGHTER



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GERMAN

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Mr. DaDBoy





SEAL



[US] SEAL

[US] SFOD-D

[UK] OGA

[CANADIAN] JTF2

[BRITISH] SAS

[NORWEGIAN] FSK/HJK

[SWEDISH] SOG

[GERMAN] KSK

[SOUTH KOREAN] UDT/SEAL

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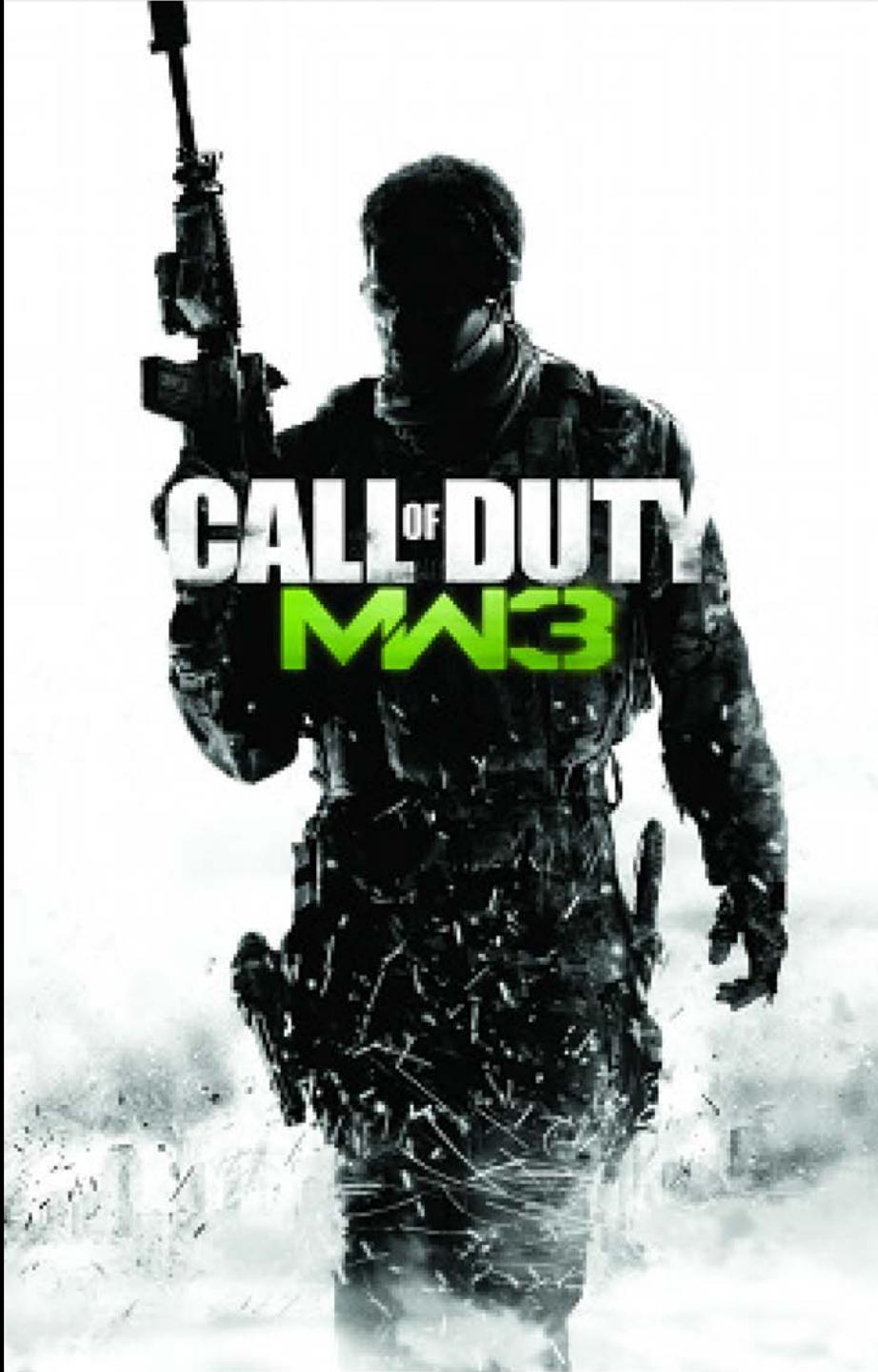
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- <http://www.medalofhonor.com/video/assaulter-seal-team-6-combat-training-series-episode-4>

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Xby2OgO1zsQ

REAL HEROES. REAL TACTICS. REAL ACTION.

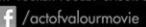
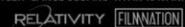
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CASTING BY NANCY NAYOR, C.S.A. MUSIC BY PETER AFTERMAN ALISON LITTON MUSCLES BY NATHAN FURST POST PRODUCTION BY SCOTT WAUGH MICHAEL TRONICK, A.C.E. PRODUCTION DESIGNER JOHN ZACHARY DIRECTOR OF SHANE HURLBUT, A.S.C.
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MICHAEL MAILIS BERT ELLIS BENJAMIN STATLER LANCE SLOANE RYAN KAVANAUGH TUCKER TOOLEY JASON COBLECK JASON CLARK JAY POLLAK MAX LEITMAN PRODUCED BY MOUSE MCCOY SCOTT WAUGH WRITTEN BY KURT JOHNSTAD DIRECTED BY SCOTT WAUGH MOUSE MCCOY



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SEALs Squeal



Simulator sickness / simulator syndrome

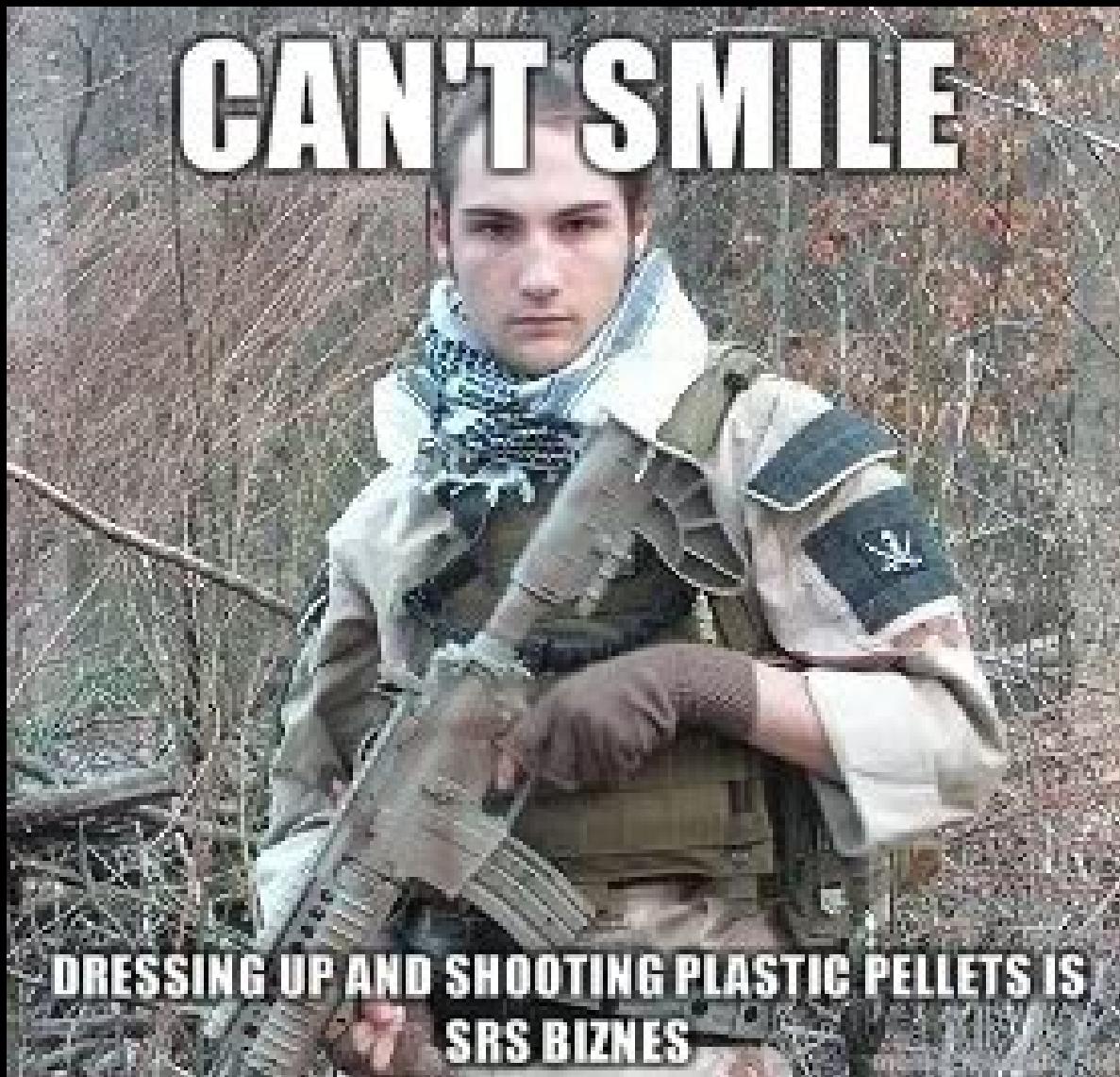


PTSD Treatment



Airsoft

CAN'T SMILE



**DRESSING UP AND SHOOTING PLASTIC PELLETS IS
SRS BIZNES**