

Editorial Necsus

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Perhaps no war has stirred the human imagination more deeply than the so-called ‘Great War’. From William Wellman’s *Wings* (1927) to Stanley Kubrick’s *Paths of Glory* (1957), Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (2004), and Steven Spielberg’s *War Horse* (2011), filmmakers have been reimagining the Great War in distinctly different yet captivating ways, profoundly stirring the audiences of the last decade as well as those of the previous century. The Great War itself has often been claimed to represent the birth of modern warfare. In retrospect one may wonder whether these developments were related to the concurrent rise of new forms of mass media in the early 20th century. Consequently, one of the pressing questions for our fields of study is how military and entertainment technologies are entangled in what Paul Virilio has called a ‘logistics of perception’.

War has been a central topic for media of all kinds on a global scale, and not only in this symbolic year of the centennial of the First World War. Can we re-evaluate the aesthetics and ethics of war films and television series? The birth of modern warfare also witnessed the birth of modern methods of documenting war; the question is whether a rapidly-changing documentary impulse affected depictions and the reception of war; also, whether new media influenced the execution of war plans and manoeuvres, as specialists in the field of war studies such as Peter Busch suggested and filmmakers such as Harun Farocki researched in their work. Given that civil and military strategies and tactics can be planned and put in place using computers and a variety of hand-held devices, what does the contemporary face of war look like in the 21st century? Have conflicts become cyber-wars overnight? In an age when wars between countries have been replaced by wars within countries, violent confrontations appear to be multiplying in many different guises: asymmetrical war, guerrilla fighting,

terrorism, low-intensity conflicts, unmanned drone strikes, and low-cost terrorist provocations aggressively seek media coverage. How does the thinking about ‘new wars’ (Mary Kaldor, Martin van Crefeld, Herfried Münkler) provide media and media studies with useful notions and speculation? How can media avoid becoming a mere tool in these ‘new wars’? Could they be instruments in the hands of peacekeepers? As Prime Minister David Lloyd George said to the editor of *The Guardian* during the First World War, ‘[i]f people really knew [the truth], the war would be stopped tomorrow.’

The entertainment and gaming industries have been interested in war from early on. Modern video games allow the player to enter conflict environments and act as a soldier or commander. How do we chart the (partly gendered) fascination with reliving and reinventing war narratives? War, in all of its mass-mediate qualities, is the subject for exploration in the current NECSUS special section. The overall concept of this special section and the individual contributions try to reconsider an old topic in light of some of these newer issues or to look at it with a fresh perspective. The special section opens with a homage to the work of a theoretician and image-maker we are very fond of: Harun Farocki. Farocki generously permitted us to publish his text ‘Serious games’, written in conjunction with a recent installation. Sadly, he did not have a chance to see it published in NECSUS, as he passed away last summer. We will miss his clear and dense research on the role of images in society, carried out with a perpetual reflection through the images themselves.

A long established trend of contemplation on war and media addresses epistemological issues and requires the scope of media archaeology, as Pasi Väliaho’s contribution ‘The light of God: Notes on the visual economy of drones’ very aptly proves. Such a perspective hints at the intermingling of scientific research, applied technology, sight, and vision. The connection between science, nuclear energy, and image is also investigated in Thomas Pringle’s ‘Photographed by the Earth: War and media in light of nuclear events’. As the transition from silent to sound cinema highlighted, the connections between warfare and media are not exclusively limited to the visual, also implying an acoustic dimension – it suffices to look at *Westfront 1918* (G. W. Pabst, 1930) to get an idea of modern war and aural chaos. Masha Shpolberg’s ‘The din of gunfire: Rethinking the role of sound in WWII newsreels’ explores this often neglected dimension in media studies.

Conflicts affect social experience and media production and consumption in terms of censorship, commercial agreements and exchanges, and

media product circulation. By interrogating the relationship between local topical filmmaking, national identity, and commercial exploitation, David Archibald and Maria Velez-Serna discuss textual strategies, local economies, and social experience during warfare in their article 'Kilt, tanks, and aeroplanes: Scotland, cinema, and the First World War'. In terms of social experience war is also remembered or removed: war memory and trauma play a pivotal role in building individuals, communities, identities, and the images of their past and future. In his book *Shell Shock Cinema*, Anton Kaes utilised his impressive knowledge of Weimar culture and film history to question silent German film masterpieces as hints of a complex work of removal of the trauma of the First World War. In the anniversary of the outburst of the Great War we thought that talking with Kaes about this work and its theoretical implications could be very productive in terms of memory and future perspectives for our field of studies.

The features section that opens the issue includes four contributions offering varied theoretical frameworks in examining significant topics. Adrian Martin chooses an alluring focus in his 'The documentary temptation: Fiction filmmakers and non-fiction forms' – on filmmakers usually devoted to fictional production turning to documentary. James Harvey-Davitt in 'Disputing Rossellini: Three French perspectives' reflects on a film director, Roberto Rossellini, who is always on the verge between documentary and fiction and functions as a pivotal theoretical figure in Jacques Rancière's highly influential work. Julian Hanich in 'Laughter and collective awareness: The cinema auditorium as public space' discusses the unique properties of the cinema hall through the experience of comedy. Finally, Marina Hassapopoulou in 'Reconfiguring film studies through software cinema and procedural spectatorship' explores new modes of viewing and experience as fostered in computer-based cinema.

We are very excited to introduce a new section on audiovisual essays in this issue, edited by Cristina Álvarez López & Adrian Martin, two accomplished figures in this growing field. They will explore the status and prospects of the audiovisual essay as practice-based research as well as artistic expression through both their written introductions to each section and also the works they choose to present. This inaugural section highlights the work of Dirk de Bruyn, a veteran of experimental film and video in Australia, and Laura Lammer, a graduate student in Germany taking her first steps in audiovisual expression. This issue also includes the debut of a new section on exhibition reviews, edited by Miriam De Rosa and Malin Wahlberg of the NECS Publication Committee. They will continue to chart the exciting developments and intersections of moving image and media con-

tent with gallery settings and modes of presentation. Finally, this new issue is complemented with our long-standing film festival review and book review sections.

We would now like to take a moment to discuss open access publishing. NECSUS was born due to a vivid public space developed within NECS. The journal's very existence depended on the financial support of the Netherlands Scientific Organization (NWO), which distributed funds to academic institutions for implementing open access academic publishing, as well as the support of several Dutch and Flemish university departments. During this thrilling and challenging three-year period we believe NECSUS found an authoritative place within screen and media studies peer-reviewed publications; it established a network of scholars bridging generational, theoretical, and national gaps, and it aims at further ambitious goals and continued growth. Unfortunately, our start-up financing has recently reached its limit. We want to keep NECSUS a gold open access journal. However, open access does not come free of production costs. We will continue to provide the high quality that you expect from the journal. Since subscriptions or sales are not viable ways to financially support this initiative and article processing charges (APC) are not yet supported by most of our current and future writers' research institutions, we are looking for alternative ways of financing NECSUS.

If your home institution or you as an individual are willing to support NECSUS and share our mission of providing outstanding academic research and writing under a gold open access model that is truly open in terms of both publishing opportunities, reading, and circulating ideas among an ever-increasing international community, please help us safeguard it by visiting our crowdsourcing page and becoming a partner. We thank you very much for reading NECSUS and hope you enjoy the new issue.