

Patrick Crogan, **Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture**, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 222 pp., \$22.50 (paperback).

Review by

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Today, we often read about U.S. military use of drones for international bombing or seemingly countless articles about the negative effects of first-person shooters on teenage players. In his book **Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture**, Patrick Crogan instead looks at the more interesting history of the intersection of the military and technoculture and its effect on how we conceptualize the future. Moving beyond questions of morality or issues of media effects, the book offers a rich history of the U.S. military technoscientific legacy, from Wiener's invention of cybernetics, to the U.S. Air Force's SAGE defense project, to DARPA's development of SIMNET in order to make substantial theoretical contributions to the interchanges among war, simulation, and technoculture. This legacy is built upon a significant—and the book's keystone—idea regarding simulation: “the impulse to model phenomena by hypothetically extending and extrapolating its future to see how that future may be predicted, modified, and controlled” (Crogan, p. xiii).



Crogan rigorously discusses the legacy of this impulse in both the introduction and in chapter 2. Some undergraduate readers may need an instructor to provide a thorough context for these theories so the student-learner can benefit from this book's contributions. In the introduction Crogan rightly looks to significant entries in the field of game studies and militarized culture in the form of Dyer-Witthoff and de Peuter's (2009) *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* and Stahl's *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (2010). The former acknowledges video games as originating from the military-industrial complex that itself served as a core for capitalism's global domination, while the latter makes salient observations of interactive war arising from Western televisual media's packaging of war as spectacle. While acknowledging Halter's and other authors' observations on the growing intersection of military and commercial development in regard to simulation on page 16, the author somewhat surprisingly omits Halter's (2006) *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* since it would provide context regarding the historical intersection of play/games and war within societies. Without a doubt, Crogan's insight is a new and significant development—the technological ability of systems to envelop and lock us into an anticipatory mindset based on prediction and control. However, if there is anything missing from Crogan's solid investigation into the technoscientific legacy, it would be the even older correlation of anticipatory military strategies and games as a cultural staple.

In chapter 2, Crogan compensates for this small criticism by discussing simulation as a dialogue with 1980s' postmodern thought to answer the chapter's question of “why [computer games] are important factors in our shifting sense of space and time in the contemporary digital age” (Crogan, 2013,

p. 20). Viewing work such as Taylor's (2006) *Play Between Worlds* and the ludic contributions of Aarseth (2004) and Frasca (2004) as important though ultimately somewhat positivist, Crogan emphasizes a desire to include the critical reflexive questioning from the best of this postmodern work into his own contemporary understanding of simulation. This is demonstrated by his engagement with the question "What is meant here by *reality*?" (Crogan, 2013, p. 23) and takes us through Baudrillard's (1983) ontological undecidability between theoretical projections and empirical phenomena. Ultimately this leads us to Poster's (2001) call for a new materialism that Crogan supports but is quick to remind us not to forget the significance of the postmodern critical theoretical project—to question modernist interpretative models of reality's nature. Crogan's high standing as a prominent scholar on the work of media technology philosopher Bernard Steigler also contributes greatly to this current volume.

The book's other strength beyond this comprehensive theoretical survey is the specifics of the technoscientific legacy "forged in the face of total war" (Crogan, 2013, p. xii) outlined in chapter 1. Organizing the chapter around three significant moments (cybernetics, SAGE, and SIMNET), Crogan smartly draws on Virilio and Lotringer's (1997) concept of "pure war" to support his notion of a computer-based system of anticipatory thinking in order to control the future. If logistics (as defined by Virilio and Lotringer) refers to transferring a nation's potential from other societal endeavors into its armed forces during times of peace and war, then logistics have ascended "over strategic and political prerogatives in the organization of life" (Crogan, 2013, p. xvii). This allows for an active, or "hot," war's processes and technics of mobilization to extend continuously into a cold war. Virilio and Lotringers work provides a strong context for Crogan's three case studies that show the evolution of the relationships among technoculture, war, and simulation.

This book's seven chapters serve multiple purposes. Chapter 2 (and the introduction) performs the theoretical heavy lifting in regard to simulation as understood from both modernist and postmodernist perspectives and the intersections of technology, war, and simulation. Chapter 2 also covers the history of our technoscientific legacy, beginning roughly during World War II through today. Chapters 3 through 6 each take a specific simulation medium or medium element (respectively, flight simulators, narrative cinematic context and games, first-person shooters, and war and online games) to show simulation's unique contribution to our understanding of contemporary technoculture and war. Chapter 7 observes alternative or critical game projects as well as critiques of existing scholarship on critical simulation.

While chapters 3 and 4 have different goals, both use the flight simulator as the medium through which to achieve them. Chapter 3 is convincing, with its mixture of the history of simulator development, which began in 1934 with the purchase of six Blue Box flight trainers, and the theoretical exploration of flight simulators as logistical spaces by again drawing on Virilio's (1997) work. In this instance, the chapter takes Virilio's (1997) understanding of logistics to its logical conclusion, or "the transformation of a nation into logistical potential" (Crogan, 2011 p. 48). In this context, Crogan defines the flight simulator space as a descendant of both the map and the diagram that allows the simulator to act as a mechanism for transforming the "politicostrategic real into a logistical diagram" (Ibid., p. 49). Ultimately, the flight simulator does not represent a real space but, instead, shows the world in a new way. While the postmodern discussion from chapter 2 is satisfying, it would be interesting in a future edition to see a short discussion in this chapter that includes Korzybski's (1958) principle of general semantics (e.g., "a

map is not a territory") from the perspective of sense-making, more Baudrillard (1994) (e.g., "the map *precedes* the territory"), and contemporary postmodern interpretations of cartographic representations of space in theory and literature (see Mitchell [(2013)] as context.

Usually the publisher's responsibility more than the author's, future editions of this book would benefit from greater use of illustrations, some in color. Currently, chapter 1's SAGE images from pages 9 and 11 are the most helpful, followed by the screenshot from chapter 6 of DeLappe's "dead_in_iraq," a media interventionist piece by the artist inside the game *America's Army*. Overall, there are nine black and white images, three of which come from chapter 7's discussion of the future of alternative and critical game practices. This is a "sexy" chapter, sure to catch students' eyes, thus justifying the relatively high number of images. If only it weren't the penultimate chapter, a piece of real estate students unfortunately rarely visit. Assuming the author's love for flight simulation and its significance as a case study for the transformation of "real" to logistical space, this chapter screams for more visual support.

Overall, *Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture* is an important and necessary volume. Have you ever sat staring at the television, wondering why groups of celebrities are running through war-torn, battlefield-dressed studio back lots, smiling as if experiencing *The Hangover*-type weekend of fun and debauchery and brandishing weapons? Have you ever wondered "How did we, culturally, arrive at this moment of militarization of mindset via simulated leisure?" Well, if you have, you just might want to pick up this book. After reading its conclusions, you might want to ask another question: "How do I join the battle for criticality against the Western trend of duplicating the real by means of technology for the purposes of better controlling it?" Or more simply: "How can I break out of this anticipatory program that always assumes a threat and locks us into a perpetual state of logistical data and mobilization for war?" We can begin by reading Crogan's thoughts and agree to be more vigilant about our play.

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