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Jennifer Terry's **Governmentality, Sentimentality, and Imperial Erotics in 'Extreme Cinéma Vérité'**

Lecture Notes by Candace Moore

AS NEW DETAILS of torture, beheadings, car bombings, point-blank assassinations, and other evidences of fragmented lives and body parts in the Middle East stream in as numerical info-bytes across CNN's ever-moving digital tape, Women's Studies scholar Jennifer Terry takes a sober account of how the values of militarism are instilled in and eroticized by our everyday entertainments.

Terry's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Studies-sponsored talk delivered on May 22nd at UCLA's Royce Hall, exhibited a steady bravery in scholarship; she calmly takes on the archeology of the present our times require. Offering the crowd a mental glimpse into a chapter of her newest book project, *Killer Entertainments*, Terry opened her discussion with three quotes shown at right, drawing together equivalencies she suggests are underlying our sociopolitical sphere. Seeing entertainment and sentimentality as central to the state's methods of both indoctrinating the subject and valorizing the "citizen soldier," Terry is interested in the ways in which "affect not only codes ideology but interacts with it." She suggests a blurring of lines between leisure practices and the militarism/violence encouraged and upheld by "governmentality," or, in

her words, the "capillary relations of power connecting entertainment industries and the state." Offering the example of the marketing of first-shooter military-style video games, Terry reminds us that while game developers are often linked with entertainment studios and the computer industries, they are generally understood as operating entirely outside of the military's influence. Terry implies, however, that such

**Politics is the continuation of SHOW
BUSINESS by other means.**


*Ben Stein,
21st-century writer/actor/game-show host*

Politics is WAR by other means.

*Michel Foucault,
20th-century French philosopher*

War is POLITICS by other means.

*Carl von Clausewitz,
19th-century Prussian military philosopher*



products, consumed as “leisure activities,” ultimately work to serve empire.

Before screening and explicating a handful of new media texts that clearly demonstrate this linkage, Terry positioned a history of entertaining militarism and militaristic entertainments within a history of modern and postmodern warfare’s strategies of “morale management.” She discussed the idea of the “total war society,” wherein all institutions are, at base, “devoted to the fortification and defense of the nation.” She pointed out that the development of many of our entertainment, scientific, and medical technologies—including radio, air power, and weapon capabilities (increased lethality) as well as medical techniques and breakthroughs (surgery/healing techniques), were made during wartime. Similarly, following Foucault, Terry emphasized how the social sciences developed in order to calibrate and quantify human subjects, offering useful tools for the discipline of citizen-soldiers. While psychiatrists and social engineers worked on the problem of morale—namely, how to induce subjects to feel responsible for, and thus be willing to go to war for, the nation—media, laboratories, and schools all lent their subtle (and not so subtle) efforts to this process.

After World War II, Terry explained, a “military morale management apparatus” built around the concept of “unit cohesion” was well developed and in place within the military. This post-WWII unit cohesion, built on the “melting pot” idea of American soldiers of all races and ethnicities coming together to fight for a common cause, was built “across differences” in theory, while it was explicitly exclusive in others—the notion that gay soldiers would disrupt “unit cohesion” was, of course, ever present. Although homosociality was built into the structure

of the military, Terry stressed, homosexuality was simultaneously disavowed.

Psychological studies of wartime troop experiences have found that fear—specifically, fear of the loss of the American way of life—could be used as a “leveraging tool.” Even so, the problem of “cowardly troops” remained; few soldiers fired weapons readily, and usually there were only one or two “shooters” in any unit. Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Terry suggests, aptly portrayed Vietnam as it came to be understood: a giant catastrophe in morale.

Screening several Bob Hope–emceed USO performances for US troops from the 1960s, Terry demonstrated how the broadcast of a “Christmas special” from 1965 on television served multiple functions, beyond just “comforting” the troops. Not only were the troops consuming entertainment by enjoying Bob Hope’s misogynistic jokes or Jill St. John’s performance but the broadcast of the USO performance also allowed loved ones to hear and see troops being entertained while being entertained themselves. This dynamic, Terry pointed out, ensures “identification with the troops being entertained... linking empire building with leisure.”

Because of Vietnam, efforts—within the military organization and training system and then disseminated into the general media and public sphere—were made during the first Gulf War to overcome a perceived “wimp factor.” Terry enumerated multiple erotics and logics that encouraged and deployed beyond USO-based entertainments in order to boost morale, including: playing to humanitarian sentimentality (the empathy created through witnessing suffering), “technofetishism” (an obsession with weapon technologies that leads to a denial of or dis-

tancing from the human nature of targets), the “erotics of homosociality,” and the appeal of dominating what Terry called the “woundscape.”

Terry used an advertisement for a first-person shooter game called “America’s Army: Special Forces,” which marries computer graphics, captured imagery, and slogans such as “Threats to Freedom know no boundaries. Neither do the defenders of Freedom. Empower yourself. Defend freedom” to expose how absurd it is to advertise both a video game and the military at the same time and how such enticements work at the level of affect and predeliberative thought.

In the last segment of her talk, she examined how the erotics and logics of militarism have been taken up and further disseminated by soldiers themselves. She looked specifically at some of the pro-US Military do-it-yourself films by soldiers in the current Iraq war, released over the internet on sites like: www.grouchymedia.com. Terry compared the recent film “Die, Terrorist, Die,” set to the glam metal band Dope’s song “Die, Motherfucker, Die,” with its many edits, displays of male bonding and technofetishism, and clear cut demonization tactics, with the humanitarian-focused “Divine Intervention.” While “Die, Terrorist, Die” sets its chorus of “Die, Motherfucker, Die” over a montage of Muslim faces and orchestrates other segments of the song with images of planes, soldiers, tanks, bombs, and helicopters, “Divine Intervention” opens with a quote from Rousseau’s “Social Contract” and portrays soldiers constructing “Seebe Bridge—built for the Iraqi People.” Terry argues that while “Divine Intervention” offers a different tone for different audiences, it is organized by exactly the same pro-war intentions. Terry contrasted these pro-US amateur films with DIY films presumably released by Jihad fighters, such as “Jihad Hidden Camera,” available at www.infovlad.net, by Mousslim Mouwa-

heed. “Jihad Hidden Camera” mixes the aesthetics of cinéma vérité—real time, handheld camera—with early computer game aesthetics and a sitcom laughtrack that “laughs” at American soldiers being injured in sniper attacks and by explosives. Rather than quotes from Rousseau, this film incorporates quotes from the Koran. Showing a healthy degree of cynicism, Terry questions whether such films are put out by the Jihad fighters at all, or perhaps by the CIA?

Regardless, Terry concludes, digital media is being mobilized, on both sides, in similar ways—to ridicule the enemy, to identify the “good guys,” and to display supremacy, all within a convergence of politics, war, and “show business.”



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