"This Video Game We Call War": Multimodal Recruitment in *America's Army Game*

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> This article focuses on *America's Army Game*, the first-person-shooter video game now being peddled by the U.S. Army for classroom use. In my community-based literacy class, where students partner with children and teens at a local youth center, this "game" helps us to grasp and problematize literacy sponsorship and recruitment—the idea that literacy education involves not just learning a new set of practices but also trying out a social identity. Through this class, I argue for a pedagogy of multiliteracies that's committed to *counter-recruitment*: to enlarging ideological space so that critical questions can be formed and alternatives entertained.

Video games recruit identities and encourage identity work and reflection on identities in clear and powerful ways. If schools worked in similar ways, learning in school would be more successful and powerful ....
James Paul Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*

Unlike most army games that simply provide yet another arena in which to play the tried-and-true game of point and shoot, *America's Army game* is making accessible—even desirable—the identity of soldier to those who play…
Stephen Hannaford, *U.S. Literacy Politics*, University of Vermont

Using the [*America's Army*] gaming platform, a number of applications have been developed for the coming year to enhance Project Lead the Way's engineering curriculum, currently in 3,000 middle and high schools nationwide.
America's Army Team, *New Army Game Applications Look to Boost Tech Interests*

Sponsors … are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way.
Deborah Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*

No Child Left Unrecruited

By now educators know all too well that the bipartisan No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the 2001 Solomon Amendment require public secondary schools plus colleges and universities receiving federal funding to open their campuses and student registration records to military recruiters. At my local high school—in a district where well before the current recession more than a third of public school students qualified for reduced or free meals—teens can take home a t-shirt for running the Vermont Guard's inflatable obstacle course set up in the cafeteria during lunch. At my university—in a state recently ranked last for public higher-education affordability—juniors and seniors receive emails from the nearby Army recruiting station with the header "Military Pays Off Student Loans." Anti-war, veterans', and progressive teachers' groups across the country have decried what Gregory Sotir of the Coalition Against Militarism in Our Schools calls the "high-pressure sales techniques"—accompanied by "eye-candy trinkets" and "he-man danger mobiles"—that recruiters bring onto school grounds ("NCLB and the Military"). In a Spring 2008 report, the American Civil Liberties Union charged that, with the military targeting children as young as 11, the United States has violated Senate-ratified international standards against child recruitment ("Military Recruitment Practices").

Yet as deepening recession, costly mandates, and state and federal cuts sap school budgets, and as military recruiters strain to meet their quotas (at the same time that both parties in Washington call for a "surge" in Afghanistan and flirt with new fronts for the War on Terror), U.S. public schools and the military are moving into an even closer "collaboration," one aiming to bring army recruitment out of the cafeteria and into the classroom. Just before the start of the Fall 2008 school year Brenda Welburn, National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) executive director, and NASBE past-president Brad Bryant sent letters to state board of education members across the country urging them to sign up for the U.S. Army-sponsored "Building Strong Futures Together" conference held in mid-September at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. The conference, promised Welburn, would "stimulate and sustain dialogue with one of our nation's largest employers of our public school system" (Welburn,

"Upcoming Events"). Alongside the instrumentalist implication that students' educations might be tailored to Army-as-employer needs, Welburn proclaimed that "shared ideals" had brought the Army and public schools—"the two most egalitarian institutions in the country"—together (quoted in National Association of State Boards of Education, "State Education Leaders Join with U.S. Army"). In a version of John Dewey goes to boot camp, Bryant stressed that in addition to providing the opportunity to hear high-ranking officers discuss "how the Army helped them become lifelong learners," the conference would give board members

> the opportunity to test their weapons simulation (Brenda, I signed you up for the M16 simulation), do humvee [sic] rollover simulation, and overcome our fear of height [sic] with the Tower exercise. Can we say high school hands on learning! (Bryant, "Friends and Colleagues")

More, Bryant enthused, the U.S. Army planned the conference "at no cost to our members—it is on their nickel." All expenses, including travel from the fifty states plus U.S. territories served by the NASBE, were to be paid by the Army.

In addition to hosting the "Building Strong Futures Together" conference, the U.S. Army recently announced that its "3d Recruiting Brigade which coordinates Army recruiting and communications efforts throughout the greater midwest" is "teaming up" with Ohio public schools to "promote student interest in the engineering and technical fields" through classroom use of its popular first-person-shooter game *America's Army* (America's Army Team, "New Army Game"). Developed at the Army's MOVES (Modeling, Virtual Environments and Simulation) Institute at a cost of about $8 million and released in 2002, *America's Army Game* invites a user to take a soldier through four basic training modules and then "deploy" either for more training (e.g., advanced marksmanship) or to online "missions," mostly in virtual Middle East and Central Asian settings. Until very recently the Army has emphasized that the game is meant to advertise the military to "'kids who are college bound and technologically savvy'" (Col. Casey Wardynski quoted in Kirby, "The Advertising Game") and help in "'getting the U.S. Army name out there in a positive light ... like Coca-Cola'" (Army recruiter quoted in Downing, "Army to Recruiters"). As *America's Army* project director Col. Casey Wardynski told anchors on a January 17, 2008, segment of the morning show "Fox and Friends," the game doesn't "show expert information. It's designed to be like a virtual test-drive of soldiering ..." Most recently,

however, *America's Army* promoters claim that through the training modules (which include Basic Marksmanship, Obstacle Course, U.S. Weapons, and "Military Operations in Urban Terrain" or "Shoot House"), students can "explore kinematics in a ballistics project," "visualize a parabola trajectory and calculate the varied velocities," "'drive' a vehicle around a virtual obstacle course as well as perform a virtual helicopter drop," and, overall, increase "mastery, especially in technical studies" through experiencing the game's "rich virtual simulation" (America's Army Team, "New Army Game"). After piloting the video game in Ohio classrooms, the Army promises that *America's Army Game* will be ready "for deployment in all pre-engineering classes throughout the country in the 2009-2010 year."

With this repackaging of *America's Army Game* for the classroom has also come an assertion of the game's liberal educational values. In place of Madison Avenue's lingo of "strategic communication," "positive messaging," and "branding" that the military had used to describe the game's purposes, Ohio's state superintendent is advancing *America's Army*'s new-found pedagogical principles in terms we might associate with the educational philosophies of John Dewey or Lev Vygotsky:

> "When we were approached by the U.S. Army late last year (2007), we realized the great opportunity this project represented for engaging students in a learning environment that excites them ... This marks a real shift in the education paradigm to utilizing a technology platform that students are familiar with and enjoy!" (quoted in America's Army Team, "New Army Game")

What the state superintendent does not mention is that even as Ohio's Department of Education and the U.S. Army were unveiling their new partnership, the state's governor had just announced $540 million in budget cuts, including $25.9 million from the public schools. Something other than "shared ideals" appears to be driving these two institutions together. On the one side, we have cash-poor, human resource-rich public schools; on the other, lavishly funded and personnel-hungry military recruiters: It's a match made in free-market heaven.

This movement of *America's Army Game* into classrooms (the poorest of which, as Jonathan Kozol amply documents in *Shame of the Nation*, are already being invaded by corporate curricula and for-profit control) should alarm all

educators. My focus will be on the challenges it raises for literacy educators. What happens when the pedagogical perspectives of multiliteracies—with its fuller appreciation of the "increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making" in a multilingual, multimodal, multimedia world, posited as the progressive alternative to "page-bound," "rule-bound," and "more or less authoritarian" technocratic literacy (New London Group, "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies")—are championed by the Department of Defense? If the designers of *America's Army Game* do indeed understand that, as James Paul Gee writes, "Video games recruit identities and encourage identity work and reflection … in clear and powerful ways," what kinds of identities are being recruited? If the learning *America's Army* promotes is "successful" and "powerful," successful and powerful at what and for whom?

These are questions I've posed to students in my "U.S. Literacy Politics" class as we examine *America's Army Game* through Gee's claim that, part and parcel with trying out a set of practices, literacy learning involves taking on a social identity such as scientist, linguist—or soldier. But before I move into the classroom, I want to place the problem of U.S. educational sponsorship within political and economic trends that are not the sole creation of one eight-year presidential administration but result from a thirty-year period of conservative ascendancy accompanied by the decline of social movements that have historically been progressive education's primary sponsor. As I write, all signs suggest that the three-decades-long reign of conservatism in the United States has come to an end with voters rejecting not only any return of Reaganism but Clintonian conservatism as well (see Selfa, "Politics of Change"). But with prolonged economic stagnation and both parties in Washington committed to "defending our interests" around the globe, when and whether the U.S. military will be withdrawn from Iraq, from Afghanistan, and from our schools remain open questions.

Brought to You by the U.S. Army
Of course, we can say that the military presence in today's school buildings is nothing new. Rather, it marks the continuation and upgrading of 20th-century forms of educational sponsorship—think here of the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA)—that likewise linked support for schooling to national security goals. Sponsors of literacy, Deborah Brandt emphasizes, do not simply *deliver* literacy instruction and, more broadly, the means for

and access to education; they also *recruit* the services of a populace trained in practices and attitudes by which sponsors hope to gain advantage. For the United States in 1958—enjoying the seemingly endless prosperity of the long post-World War II boom but anxious too about the technological advancements of the Soviet Union—the NDEA was indeed intended to *recruit* Americans to college with the aim of securing advantage over Cold War rivals. Furthermore, as historian Richard Stacewicz points out, U.S. school curricula was enlisted to "mold" the "citizen-soldier" through widely used classroom texts such as *The Story of Democracy,* which cast U.S. military adventures as "'taking up our responsibilities in a world threatened by communism and poverty'" and admonished students to "'protect the nation and its principles by serving in the military when called on'" (25-26). With the escalation of the Vietnam War and mass social movements came Johnson's signing of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and Richard Nixon's 1970 push to expand federal financial aid for college. These we can read as examples of "guns-and-butter" educational sponsorship, aiming to recruit the allegiance of a population politicized by the decade's events. No Child Left Behind, borne of an era in which the United States was recovering from its post-Vietnam aversion to sending soldiers abroad and in which collective memory of social movements had waned, appears thus to extend into the present century forms of sponsorship that would harness education to domestic and foreign policy goals.[2] Like the Cold War before it, the War on Terror casts the United States as an "altruistic democracy, dedicated to individual freedom and committed to protect the free world" against an enemy "intent on destroying freedom" (Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers* 24) and does so in order to authorize the current national security agenda and spending priorities.

Yet there is also at least one key difference to acknowledge between federal designs on education in the Cold War era and today. The NDEA sought to funnel students into colleges and universities; it aimed to promote, but did not mandate, areas of study that might improve U.S. performance in its technical and ideological contest with the USSR. In fact, if we regard the past 100 years of federal educational sponsorship—whether motivated by expansionist (Morrill Act) and imperialist (NDEA) ambitions or obtained (Title VI and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act) through the force of social movements—we find the steady expansion of access to and, in key periods of struggle, profound democratization of education, including higher education. The latest and most significant developments in federal educational sponsorship, on the other hand, take place

in a bubble-and-bust rather than steadily expanding economy and seem designed to funnel students not into colleges and universities but into jobs (especially in the low-wage service sector) and the military (especially the infantry). The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, for example, eliminated welfare-to-college programs in favor of limited job training for welfare-to-work. No Child Left Behind vacated the question of college affordability and refilled the space with direct military recruitment. Although the stated target for *America's Army Game* is the potentially "college-bound" teen,[3] today's Army aims to recruit that teen straight from high-school graduation into service. At www.goarmy.com (the companion website to *America's Army Game* offering recruiter-staffed chat rooms for gamers and "Real Heroes, Real Stories" on its "Army Strong TV"), one must click through six videos of possible Army career paths before reaching one portraying ROTC. Much more common are portrayals of young men and women proclaiming to have successfully combined the identities of soldier and student as they take college classes, including online from military bases and war zones, while serving in lower infantry ranks. While circa 1960 the media and education were enlisted to recruit young Americans to acceptance of the draft, today we see a full battery of persuasive means—stop-loss, citizenship-for-service, military recruitment masquerading as math and engineering classes and also as guidance counseling with the rebranding of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery into the nonprofit "ASVAB" to offer schools "career exploration" services (ASVAB, "Overview")—at work to staff an "all-volunteer" army for two theaters of war and military bases that ring the globe.[4] President-elect Barack Obama's pledge to forgive college loans in exchange for national—including military—service, appears to join rather than depart from, the list.

Moreover, despite formidable rhetorical difficulties—the widespread antipathy toward the war in Iraq, a mounting death toll in Afghanistan—military recruiters are also chalking up remarkable success, reaching or succeeding their goals for the past three years. No doubt commentators are right that shrinking economic prospects for young men and women plus the lure of more than $640 million in signing bonuses in 2007 have helped (Baldor, "U.S. Military Meets Recruiting Goals"; Youssef, "Economy's Bust is Boon"). Promoters also celebrate *America's Army Game* as a recruiting tool that's delivered great bang for the buck. Army spokesperson Lori Mezoff pointed out in 2006 that 160 million hours of play are recorded each year for this game on which the Army spends just a small fraction of its annual recruitment budget (Clarren, "Virtually Dead in Iraq"). Army surveys in 2004 and 2006 found that almost a third of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 had had some experience with the game and 60 percent of new recruits reported playing the game at least five times each week (Jonsson, "Enjoy the Video Game?").

With this evidence of effective recruitment also comes a caveat: Whereas virtually 100 percent of Army recruits at the start of the 1990s were high school graduates, the Army has waived the high-school credential requirement each year since 2003 for 20 to 30 percent of enlistees (Kaplan, "U.S. Army Lowers Recruitment Standards"; Inskeep and Bowman, "Army Documents Show Lower Recruitment Standards"). This sidebar to recent news stories about recruiting success may best explain the military's motivation to repurpose *America's Army Game* for classrooms: to give the Department of Defense much more of hand in creating the pool of potential recruits from which it wants to draw.[5] That Gee cites *Full Spectrum Warrior*, the U.S. Army-funded spin-off of *America's Army Game*, as an example of a "good" video game that is also, for soldiers, a "serious learning tool" ("Good Video Games and Good Learning" 34) presents us with a challenge: of taking seriously the identities and worldviews to which U.S. Army-sponsored learning tools would recruit participants.

Multiliteracies and the Question of Critical Learning in English 107
When I bring *America's Army* into my classroom, it's not within the usual frames for decrying the game as instigating anti-social violence. Nor is it within the frames most often advanced by new media and cultural studies scholars that highlight identity negotiation and transgressive play while ignoring the ideological landscape games like *America's Army* or *Grand Theft Auto* present.[6] Both the anti-social violence and transgressive play frames would position us *incorrectly*, I believe, to approach this game, with its U.S. Army-embedded view of American soldiers and foreign terrorists, as a departure from rather than reinforcement of what is presented as a matter of routine on the nightly news and in the speeches of politicians. Instead, I bring the game's "basic training" into this community-based class as we move from descriptive accounts of and sometimes emancipatory claims about multiliteracies to an examination of education's social settings, conditions, and sponsors that would set the terms for both the uses of literacy and our ability to reflect on the "causes" (Brandt) or "identities" (Gee) to which literacy's sponsors would recruit us.[7]

In U.S. Literacy Politics, students—primarily juniors and seniors who see this elective as intersecting with their social service or social justice commitments—partner with children and teens at a downtown youth center. Over the years those partnerships have led to a range of activities such as making blogs, recording spoken-word poetry, and performing stand-up comedy. A crucial first step for my students has been to recognize that they are not "bringing literacy" to the youth center; the center is already rich with multiple, overlapping communicative and representational domains that sometimes include but are not limited to print. In particular, Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* helps students become *co-learners* at the youth center: As they begin to recognize its many "semiotic domains" and the children and teens' skillful use of many modalities—"oral or written language, images, equations, symbols, sounds, gestures, graphs, artifacts etc." (18)—these university juniors and seniors recognize, too, how much there is that the children and teens have to teach them.

In an early journal, Jeff first reflects on the meaning-making domains with which he is affiliated: "I know the literacy of running—I know that the difference between a 2:05 800 runner and a 1:55 800 is WAY more than 10 seconds in the way that a nonrunner would probably never realize …."[8] He then considers domains he knows only from the outside:

> …. I also, alas, do not know the literacy of being EMT, like my friend J.—I'm sure there's a whole culture that revolves around the ambulance, but I wouldn't be able to tell you anything about it. And just reasoning through this now, it seems as though the literacy of a situation is what keeps people from wanting to try new things. I know that I wouldn't want to ride for a night with my friend J. because I would have no idea what her and her friends would be talking about—and that would frustrate me and make me feel stupid as I sometimes also feel stupid when I'm playing Uno with Ahmad and Harun [at the youth center]. I can confidently say there is an entire language surrounding Uno, it could definitely be classified as a semiotic domain. I'm sure many people share that experience when there are particular semiotic domains they have not mastered.

With these layers of recognition—that one does not become literate once and for all but is always approaching the boundaries of new domains, those boundaries not only inviting activity and affiliation but also serving to deter

and frustrate—Jeff returns to the youth center with fresh perspectives for seeing and appreciating the complex work taking place. During an afternoon of puppetry, for instance, he is struck by the performance of one child, Shayla, who creates a puppet named "Miss Perfect" and uses the puppet to mimic and mock expectations for a teen girl's appearance and concerns. Recalling Gee's explication of "real-world" and "virtual" identities, Jeff writes in his journal about Shayla's playful and serious intervention in the "projective" space in between: "She's not afraid to critique with her puppetry (perhaps without even realizing it, perhaps knowing full well what her intention is) the 7th/8th-grade culture of beauty magazines and looking 'perfect.'"

With Gee's semiotic domains and the New London Group's emphasis on design (whether in writing a poem, composing a blog entry, or making a puppet), my students and I are much better equipped for partnerships in this neighborhood setting; these perspectives on literacy and learning enable us to collaborate *with* the abilities, interests, and commitments already present among these children and teens. Yet even (or especially) at the youth center with its variety of spaces for a great variety of activity, the need *for* sponsors and the needs (or desires, requirements, and constraints) *of* sponsors are ever-present. The teens, wanting to Xerox and distribute a 'zine that includes a drawing of two hand-holding smiling boys and two hand-holding smiling girls under a rainbow flag, have to negotiate first with the center's board of directors who are concerned about losing much-needed support from local and possibly socially conservative donors. While "sponsors may have their resources diverted to projects of self-interest or self-development by literacy learners under their aegis" (Brandt 70)—the 'zine with its LGBT pride message goes to press—we do have to account for how a sponsor would define and delimit design space. With Brandt's conception of literacy sponsorship as delivering both "the material and ideological possibilities for literacy learning" (70), we can consider that in any given design space or meaning-making domain there are constraints on available resources and ideas. For example, about the critical discernment and innovation that Jeff notes with Shayla's "Miss Perfect" puppet performance, several women in the class wonder how she will manage hang on to that stance in a sexist society, without the *sponsorship* of a visible women's rights movement or, close the memory of the women in this class, the "guerilla girls" movement.

With this view that sponsors "subsidize (or don't) the development of

people's resources" (Brandt 70)—with resources including ideas, practices, and attitudes—I am also better positioned to help my students work on the problem that arises sharply as they respond to Gee's distinction between "active" and "critical" learning. Semiotic domains like "cellular biology, postmodern literary criticism, [and] first-person shooter video games," writes Gee (18), require people not only to learn a set of practices but also to take on an identity: to "see themselves … as the *kind of person* who can learn, use, and value the new semiotic domain" (59, emphasis in original). This is active learning—precisely what is on offer for classrooms from the U.S. Army and celebrated by the NASBE officers and Ohio's state education superintendent. But how can a leaner be "willing," even "enticed" and "sucked into" seeing "themselves in terms of a new identity" (59) that will be "valued and accepted by others committed to that domain" (59, 65) yet also cultivate the reflective space—"critical learning"—for conscious scrutiny of and possibly intervention in a domain's terms (40)?

The question for my students isn't an abstract one. Stephen raises concern about the ways of being a young man that he and other male volunteers at the youth center may be promoting, especially by "roughhousing" with the teens boys because it seems like a "natural" and "easy" way to "fit in." Emily writes that the youth center's teens are "extremely involved in, as both producers and understanders, of pop culture and teen culture," but she worries that they "take for granted and accept sexism and violence." Reflecting, too, on her own recruitment to the identities of English major and writing tutor, she writes: "[H]ow do we reconcile the fact that we have been formed to think and act in certain ways, that we are knowledgeable within different semiotic domains … [but] are so immersed in the domain that we can't see it from any distance? As Gee asks, how we can get 'producer-like learning, but in a reflective and critical way' ….?" Deep concern about the identities and ideas to which we are recruited runs through our discussions, along with an emerging question about how (and, for individual students partnering at a youth center for only fifteen weeks, whether) alternatives can be sponsored. To foreground these concerns and also to put *What Video Games Have to Teach Us* to the test, we turn to *America's Army*.

Basic Training

When I introduce the game's four basic training modules—the first step in certifying a "soldier" for online deployment and the aspect of *America's Army*

now being modified for classroom use—I ask students to think about questions shaped by our readings and discussions so far, including:

- How does this game appeal to potential recruits (recruits to the game? recruits to the Army? is there a difference?) through multiple modalities (text, sound, interactivity etc.)?

- If, as Gee writes, video games "recruit identities and encourage identity work and reflection … in clear and powerful ways," how is *America's Army* "recruiting" players for "identity work"?

- If a good video game creates a space between "real-world" and "virtual" identities, allowing a player to reflect on "what I value and what I do not," what space does this game offer?

- Knowing how to "reload" an M16 in a video game is not the same as knowing how to reload an actual M16. So if *America's Army Game* aims to train potential recruits, what is the content of this training?

As we take turns at the keyboard, spending a few minutes in each mission, we also note on the board a running list of observations, including:

Evocative uses of sound. When the game boots up as well as between missions, we hear a drum- and horn-heavy orchestral score (with *Top Gun*-inflected guitar bridges) of the kind that might play during the closing credits of a heroic action film. On the virtual Fort Benning Obstacle Course and outside the Shoot House, we hear bird song, cicadas humming, distant rifle fire, and the occasional jet overhead.

Recurring visual motifs and heavy use of text. Also while the game boots up and between missions there appear silhouettes of heavily armed and armored infantrymen. They rush from a helicopter or form a fan of firing poses against a rippling stars-and-stripes backdrop. Overlaying the image is text: main menu options along with the U.S. Army logo and "T" for Teen rating; then, between missions, either "The Soldier's Creed" or "Army Values." While visuals compel our attention, students can recall bits of text: "I am an American Soldier," "I am a Warrior," "live the Army values," "never accept defeat," "never leave a fallen comrade." In addition, all missions are accompanied by a text emphasizing that one is learning "critical thinking skills" for "unpredictable battle situations" where one must make "split-second friend or foe decisions—particularly in

urban settings where enemies can hide among civilians." With this text, plus the detailed "specs" about available weaponry, we have a sense that this game is "educational" or at least borrows the ethos of alphabetic and technical literacy.

The appearance of but limits to customization. The main menu options appear to present a game rich with individual choice-making, but we find no options to customize our avatar, who is addressed as "soldier" by the virtual drill instructors. We do not see our soldier's physical appearance. (We assume he's male and white since all other soldiers who appear in these training missions are male and either white or vaguely "ethnic.") The soldier must pass the four basic training missions in order. Several options for post-basic training missions are presented—among them a disturbing screen shot of a combat mission inside a hospital—but those are listed as unavailable for our not-yet-certified soldier. Some customization is suggested under the main menu option "Personnel Jacket" where we learn, for instance, about weapons choices once a soldier is set to deploy.

Strong emphasis on firing weapons with progressively human-shaped targets. In two missions, Marksmanship and U.S. Weapons, the emphasis is on discharging weapons, which come complete with formidable sound and "kick." Though one must learn the keyboard commands for loading a rifle or lobbing a grenade, there is no time pressure or reward for selecting more difficult targets. In Basic Marksmanship our soldier shoots at targets only vaguely human-shaped. In U.S. Weapons the targets have a more distinctly human form. In the final mission, Shoot House, the "targets" appear as cardboard cutouts of men, boys, and an occasional woman. Under timed conditions, the player is to distinguish "opfor" ("opposing force") targets from fellow soldiers and civilians, though it becomes quickly apparent that the "opfor"'s are masked or hooded while civilians and fellow soldiers are unmasked and even appear at times giving a "thumbs up." (In the class demonstration, our soldier moves through the Shoot House without firing his weapon as I don't want to sponsor the shooting of targets who not only appear as human but also as racialized: The "opfors" whose heads and faces are partially visible behind masks appear marked, in hair and skin coloring, as "Arab" or "Iraqi." After walking through this mission, our soldier is both praised by the virtual drill instructor for not shooting civilians and castigated for not firing at all.)

Missions are by turn tedious and compelling. While Basic Marksmanship and

U.S. Weapons call only for a repetitive firing of weapons, with no beat-the-clock skill-building and verbal feedback from the virtual drill instructor, Obstacle Course has a try-try-again pleasure accompanied by the drill sergeant's barks of "That may be your way, but that's not the Army way," "Make like a duck and low-crawl under that barbed wire," and "Great job! You just gave 'hooah' a new meaning!" This is the mission we want to return to and play again.

Recruiting "Natural" Instincts

When we move from demonstration into discussion, students focus first on the repetitive weapon firing, which they immediately attribute to the aim of—the term Stephen, a psychology major and video gamer, supplies— "desensitization." "Although the link between video games and violence may not be as simple as violent game = aggressive child," Stephen explains in class and later writes, the gap between "virtual aggression and real aggression" may nevertheless be "mediated by the 'desensitizing' effect of violent video games (and other media)." To develop further this initial impression that, especially with the progressive humanization of targets and tediously repetitive weapons fire, the game "recruits" desensitization, we look at excerpts from Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall's *Man Against Fire*, first published in 1947. There Marshall ponders the "problem" that in World War II "no more than 15 percent of men had actually fired at the enemy positions or personnel with their weapons during the course of the entire engagement" (54). Marshall's recommendation: that the military overcome this "resistance to the idea of firing" through repetitive training with human-shaped targets and a greater emphasis on "fire volume" in place of "fire discipline" (82). "As with every other duty in life," he reasoned, "it is made easier by virtue of the fact that a man may say to himself, 'I have done it once. I can do it again'" (79). With these excerpts from Marshall—whose solution to the problem of soldiers refusing to fight appears to have been enormously successful, with 90 to 95 percent of Vietnam foot soldiers reportedly discharging a weapon in combat (Marshall 79)—we also look at a recent *Washington Post* story that opens with a gamer-turned-Army sergeant describing his first experience firing at Iraqi "insurgents": "It felt like I was in a big video game ... It didn't even faze me, shooting back. It was just natural instinct. *Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!*" (Vargas, "Virtual Reality Prepares U.S. Soldiers").

At this point in the discussion I introduce the term "alienation," defined as the

objective and progressive estrangement of human beings within capitalist social relations from the process and products of their labor (Marx, *Capital* 548) and also from what Marx held to be human nature (Wood, *Karl Marx* 20).[9] I bring in this definition of alienation for two reasons. First, I want to draw out that in Marshall firing a weapon isn't a "natural instinct." Instead it is a pedagogical problem that training, as the overcoming or alienation of human nature, tries to address: training in the "subordination of man to the machine" (Marx, *Philosophy of Poverty* 57) or the soldier to the mission. Second, I want to turn us to aspects of the game that we felt as the very opposite of "desensitization," raising the question of whether they are separate from or still related to the game's overall recruitment work. On the Obstacle Course, for instance, the class describes feeling emotionally, even physically engaged. This is the mission we *want* to return to—to improve our score, to draw a "Hooah!" from the virtual drill instructor, feeling each time a *gain* rather than loss in control and an *intensity* of rather than a reduction in sensation. How to reconcile the training's juxtaposed moments of let's-just-get-through-this tedium and let's-beat-the-clock excitement?

Good Students and Dutiful Soldiers

Stephen provides us with an avenue for considering how the two, duty and excitement, may, in fact, go hand in hand. Explaining that he "did not expect to be surprised in the least" by *America's Army*, having "logged a considerable amount of hours playing military-themed first-person-shooter games such as *Medal of Honor* and *Call of Duty*," he later writes:

> *America's Army Game*, on the other hand, appears to march to the beat of a different drum … [It] is more of a "Combat Simulator" where players are prompted to assume the hypothetical identity of a soldier … The game seems to be portraying itself as a realistic simulation of enlisting and becoming active in the armed forces … The most stunning aspect of the game is the raw realism present in multiple dimensions of the game play. From the immense visual detail on the screen, to the realism in the voices of the characters and sounds of the weapons (and birds), to the clear absence of any sort of interface … the emphasis here is clearly that, this is what you see; you *are* the soldier.

He concludes that it is "this pairing of desensitization to violence with this identity cultivation" that makes this particular video game "very dangerous— and very effective": "[U]nlike most army games that simply provide yet another arena in which to play the tried and true game of point and shoot, *America's Army Game* is making accessible—even desirable—the identity of soldier to those who play (and doing so in a very misleading fashion at that)."

Class discussion about what gives this game "raw realism," even while, as Stephen also writes, there is so much that seems "misleading," opens up a further view of this "identity cultivation" and why Stephen calls it both "effective" and "dangerous." On the side of "misleading," students focus primarily on visual representation and any claims the game might make to providing technical training: knowing how to throw a frag grenade with keyboard and mouse isn't the same as knowing how to handle the real thing; while these virtual soldiers are abundantly equipped, reports abound of actual soldiers sent to Iraq and Afghanistan without body and vehicle armor. When it comes to describing the game's "realism," on the other hand, students don't point to the visual or technical but instead to the training's tactile and aural sensations: We not only see as but are repeatedly addressed as "Soldier"; we *feel* it personally when our soldier draws criticism from the virtual drill instructor and even more so when the soldier is praised; we experience the rush of adrenaline or confused panic in the midst of the Obstacle Course test.

The desire to do well, the pressure of the test, the pleasure of praise: If students (and I) experience these sensations as real, it may be because the identity the game asks us to try out overlaps with the identity of the "good student." More, as the distance between the identities of successful student and successful soldier shrinks, so too does a space for reflecting on "what I value and what I do not" (Gee 56). Hence Stephen's conclusion that, much more than and different from other first-person-shooter war games he's played, this training also seems dangerously effective in shrinking the space between simulated and actual combat or, maybe more precisely, between simulated and actual enlistment to combat practices and attitudes. Consider: If in class we had completed the final basic training mission, Shoot House, we would have experienced the "skills" of the first three trainings now being put together. Clock ticking, the soldier must navigate each room quickly. A mechanical horn blasts as the next door swings opens. At the end the virtual drill instructor, standing by a chalkboard with the tallies, waits to deliver the score. This time, however, the score includes how many rounds our soldier fired, how many human targets he hit.

Cultural Models and Counter-Recruitment

For students in this class, it's easy to call forth and discuss *America's Army*'s work to recruit our identification with the successful soldier praised with "Good job!" Class time and journals are filled with more observations, interpretations, and connections to class readings and partnerships than I have sketched here. One student, for instance, returns to the youth center particularly mindful of the power of rebukes and of praise; she listens for where and how such language is used between staff and teens, between volunteers and teens, and also among the teens themselves. Much harder for students to identify and discuss, however, are the cultural models and ideological scripts beyond "good student" and "dutiful soldier" on which *America's Army Game*'s basic training depends: the War on Terror settings that require no explanation or justification; the idea that in a world divided between "friend and foe," we face "hostile enemies" especially in "urban areas" hidden among "civilians and other noncombatants"; the notion too that, in the end, the enemy is easy to identify by his dark skin and sinister mask. (As one game fan explains on a YouTube tutorial demonstrating how to complete the Shoot House mission: "You need to understand enemies look like terrorists.")

At first it surprised me how much of the video and its ideological constructions passed by unnoticed in our initial discussions and writings. I was surprised especially because I think it's likely that, even more than aiming to desensitize kids to machine-gun fire, *America's Army* recruits from players of all ages *consent* for the War on Terror, *acceptance* of a annual military budget now approaching $1 trillion (Bellamy et al., "U.S. Military Spending"), *faith* in the rightness that U.S. troops should be deployed worldwide. Yet, Gee suggests, we shouldn't be surprised if a game's ideological terrain remains invisible to its target audience; multimodal recruitment is most effective when it conforms to our cultural models, those cultural models not apparent to us as models at all unless something enters to threaten or disrupt (144). Both the virtual Fort Benning and the actual War on Terror appear as "already pre-existing and self-sufficient," our soldier taking up his "mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system" (Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* 89). If, as Stephen writes, we "*are* the soldier," we too must "conform to its laws whether [we] likes it or not" (89). Add the "hands-on" thrills of "Humvee rollovers" and the interesting prospect of testing Newton's laws of motion in a "virtual helicopter drop," and the chances go up that not only will we like conforming to the video game's terms, we will

not even recognize those terms—not unless something enters to disrupt and reveal them.

But how and from where does this something enter? While on this question Gee is largely silent, implying that it is a matter of self-sponsorship or the outgrowth of good game design, Paul Barrett, in an excellent (and too-rare) critique of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, suggests that a concept of *active* sponsorship is vital. "[T]here must be sense of *how* to challenge or disrupt the ideological work" of these games," he argues. "Alternative representations have to be generated that can historicize and politicize [their] narratives …" (115, my emphasis). Needed here is a pedagogy of multiliteracies committed to sponsoring disruption through the introduction of alternatives—through an effort to enlarge the ideological space in which ideas and questions can be formed and entertained. As I have thought about such sponsorship with and against the recruitment work of *America's Army*, I've come to think of this pedagogical commitment as *counter-recruitment*.

For example, in U.S. Literacy Politics, we first try to press farther with the question of whether *America's Army* allows in its design for a player to become, in Gee's terms, a "producer." Here I introduce the performance and protest art of Joseph DeLappe, a University of Nevada, Reno, art professor who has deployed a soldier in *America's Army Game* under the name "Dead in Iraq." As soon as "Dead in Iraq" enters an online game, DeLappe enters the command for him to drop his weapon. As the game continues and as, invariably, his soldier is killed, DeLappe types names, ranks, and dates for actual U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq (Clarren, "Virtually Dead in Iraq"). DeLappe describes his aim as both disrupting this game space and reconnecting virtual war with actual consequences: "[A]s an artist, I think it's my responsibility to do …things that question, critique and cause contemplation in terms of these [online] arenas that are becoming familiar to so many in our societies" (Hutcheon, "Game Activist Becomes Cannon Fodder"). Students are intrigued to see how one person intervenes in the game, but about DeLappe's work they also raise two questions: What of the responsibilities of those who are not artists? And besides contemplation and momentary disturbance, is there anything that can be done that would be a lasting disruption of the game? of the war? With these questions, we turn to excerpts from the documentary *Sir! No Sir!*, with its survey of the domains and modalities, from GI coffeehouses to mimeographed 'zines, that

composed the Vietnam War-era soldiers' revolt, and we visit contemporary antiwar blogs such as "Fight to Survive" (ftssoldier.blogspot.com), created by three U.S. soldiers during their deployment in Iraq, as examples of a soldiers' resistance movement updated through new media tools.

Before I end with two last examples of "counter-recruitment" that also provide my students and me with critical avenues back into *America's Army*, I'd like to flag some considerations regarding the sponsorship of antiwar perspectives and voices in classrooms. First, what makes it most possible for me to sponsor these materials in my classes—even more, I would argue, than my tenured status and the inclusion of AAUP's principles on academic freedom in my faculty union contract—is the presence on my campus and in the community of visible antiwar forces. Students arrive in class discussing a pamphlet distributed by the Campus Antiwar Network about the university's substantial investments in "war profiteers" such as Raytheon and General Dynamics. They have seen posters advertising Iraq Veterans Against the War's "Winter Soldier" hearings and know that among IVAW's members are young men and women who are now students at this university and other area colleges. Some of those IVAW members have also visited the youth center to talk with teens about rhetoric and reality in military recruitment. In a class concerned with multimodal community literacy practices, it makes sense that we would pay attention to a video game receiving wide promotion by military recruiters, and it also makes sense that we would pay attention to the production of texts, films, and forums by antiwar groups.

Second, by foregrounding the concept of *sponsorship* as delivering the ideological as well as the material resources for literacy and learning, we can not only justify but argue for the pedagogical imperative of these materials in a great many classrooms across a great many disciplines. Far from shutting down, discussion and investigation are, with the introduction of against-the-grain texts, opened back up. It's at this point in the class, and not when we were trying out and discussing *America's Army*, for example, that students bring up the varied experiences and views of friends and family members in the military, perhaps because now the identity of "Soldier" has been pluralized as we hear from many different *soldiers*.

Above all, in this community-based class what matters, too, is that these discussions return students to the youth center with concrete guides and provocations. Throughout the semester Emily and her classmates had struggled

with the question of how to sponsor in this extracurricular realm critical reflection on the identities, practices, and attitudes to which we are recruited. For instance, noting that *America's Army Game* rewards "pattern-thinking" and "automatization," Emily begins to attend to the patterns and habits of language and action promoted in the commercial games, music, and magazines that aren't a part of the youth center's official programming but populate and define the teen space nevertheless. Of particular concern to her is how the teen activity rooms provide a stage for gendered performance: "The boys put on a very homophobic and masculine heterosexual attitude, and the girls also display signs of homophobia and cliquey 'social queen' attitudes." Emily writes that she would "love to do an activity that made them aware of gender …. that would make them think about it." But how, Emily wonders, can she and her partners sponsor awareness, reflection, and intervention—disrupt the patterns—without seeming "preachy and schooly?"

In part, it is the visible role of music, visual art, and coffeehouse open mics in the Vietnam soldiers' revolt that provides an answer, persuading the teen program partners to reconsider (as simply reading about multiliteracies could not) their exclusion of these domains as "not counting as literacy." With a four-track recorder, Stephen and three teen boys create a freestyling cipher, an alternative to "roughhousing" for relating to one another. Through button-making, with an emphasis on messages of empowerment, Emily facilitates discussion and action about the sexism she's worried the teen boys and girls have learned to take for granted. Print literacy—penning slogans for the buttons, jotting down words and phrases to feed the cipher—is a part of virtually every activity. But print literacy is accompanied by, and often takes a supporting role to, sound and rhythm, image and design, voice and gesture—everything else that is necessary, Emily writes at the semester's end, for teens to "get involved, question, explore … and work out where they see themselves fitting in this world."

The students also see afresh how new media tools at the youth center can work to facilitate exploration and questioning. Contrasting the *America's Army* training missions' lack of reflective space with the youth center's blog, for which the elementary-age children create audio and written commentary about their activities, Emily writes:

What seems to be a great part of this blogging of their activities is the fact

that they get a chance to not only partake in activities or create things, but then they also are encouraged to talk about and explain what they have done. This seems to allow for more reflection and "identity work" than simply doing the projects. Through puppets, artwork, interviewing etc. the kids are able to explore their identities, real and virtual, and get a better grasp on what they do and do not value, what they criticize and what they accept, and their own growing relation to the world around them.

Importantly, Emily does not see this reflective space as inherent in and available only through blog design but instead as cultivated through encouraging relationships that promote talk among children about the meaning of their activities and even spark children's interest in interviewing one another about their projects. With this insight, she turns back to the teen program—currently in a section of the building that lacks Internet access, discouraging the integration of blogs into the program's daily rhythms—and considers how art projects in particular "seem to allow the teens to distance themselves enough from their insecurities and self-consciousness to talk …. The floor plan drawing [an invitation to recreate one's memory of an early home] allowed the kids to remember past homes and begin to negotiate … who they were, are, and hope to be." Her partner in the teen program, Stephen, concurs: Whether the teens are gathered around the four-track, video-taping a mini-movie, or talking over drawings and writings, what develops is "the creation of collective creative space."

From "Warrior Ethos" to *Warrior Writers*

Still, we have the question of critical learning that had been nagging at Emily, her classmates, and me all semester and that Gee leaves too much to game design, self-sponsorship, and chance: What about when the design of an activity, the space that is created by a blog or a pencil-and-paper invitation, does not in itself and by itself provoke consideration of who one hopes to be or provide a challenge to what one values and believes? What about those features and assumptions of *America's Army Game* that our own class had taken so for granted, they could not be questioned? Here I've needed to step up with active sponsorship of alternative ways to return to and reflect on *Amercia's Army* design, wrestling myself with how to enlarge political space so that new questions and insights can be entertained. For instance:

With accounts of soldiers just returned from Iraq about the widespread practice of "search-and-avoid" (Jamail, "U.S. Soldiers Shy from Battle") and the testimony of War on Terror veterans at the March 2008 "Winter Soldier" hearings (videos of which are on YouTube and the Iraq Veterans' Against the War website and transcripts of which have been recently published in Iraq Veterans Against the War, *Winter Soldier Iraq and Afghanistan*), my students and I can return to "The Soldier's Creed" that appears between training missions in *America's Army*. In the undisturbed context of the game, this creed—"I will always place the mission first. / I will never accept defeat. / I will never quit"—does indeed appear as an uncontestable article of faith, demonstrating too that (in Bakhtinian terms) authoritative, Word-of-the-Father discourse is as possible in multimodal domains as it is in the text- and rule-bound world of technocratic literacy. As Jeff points out in class discussion, this text is potentially all the more powerful because amidst so many other attention-grabbing features of the game, we don't really attend to it even as it makes an impression. But with the words of soldiers who dissent from and even refuse their missions, we can bring this text into conscious awareness and put it into dialogue and dispute, raising for the first time such questions as "Who is the author of this 'creed'?" and "What is its history?"

In fact, we discover, the history of the text that appears in *America's Army Game* is a very recent one: In Spring 2004, as the U.S. occupation in Iraq unraveled, the Army launched a new advertising campaign to emphasize "Warrior Ethos" over college benefits or job training (Hoffman, "Army Refocuses on 'Warrior Ethos'"). Along with the campaign came the rewriting of the "Soldier's Creed" to assert "I am a warrior" who "will always place the mission first ….," promoted through fast-moving videos of heavily armed infantrymen, each appearing as the hero in a brief, tense combat scenario.[10] With stirring music, iconic *mise-en-scène*, and wrenching close-ups, the multimedia "Warrior Ethos" campaign, along with the new slogan "Army Strong," seems very effectively designed to appeal and recruit through *pathos* alone. And so—to complete our exploration of multi-modal recruitment and the question of critical learning, and also to check the dismay some students begin to express that new media tools are powerfully wielded by coercive military and corporate forces alone—I ask the class to take up one more text that is also emotionally compelling: *Warrior Writers*, part of the counter-recruitment campaign sponsored by Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Warrior Writers is simultaneously a traveling exhibit of photographs, paintings,

performances, and installations by veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan; a traveling writing workshop (inspired by Maxine Hong Kingston's workshops with Vietnam War veterans) whose results have now been published in two collections titled *Move, Shoot, and Communicate* and *Re-making Sense* (Iraq Veterans Against the War 2007 and 2008); and a recruitment tool in its own right to organize more veterans and active-duty soldiers into visibly opposing the War on Terror and to broadcast anti-war soldier views to a larger public.[11] The project particularly connects with this class in U.S. Literacy Politics as an example of multiliteracies and new media in the hands of a group of people who are very consciously working to enlarge political space (they are promoting contemplation about the War on Terror) *and* win a political argument (they seek to bring it to an end).

The poems and essays I assign from the collection *Warrior Writers: Move, Shoot, and Communicate* also address the semester's key question about the activity, relationships, and reflective spaces that can make critical learning and creative intervention possible. In "Cobra never had a Mother" Hart Viges describes the socialization in "warrior ethos" that begins long before direct military recruitment:

> I was four years old when I held my first machine gun / I pictured Human beings killed by other Human beings / I was five years old when I drove my first tank / I pictured Human Beings being crushed by the tank treads .... / I was twenty six when I made killing Human Beings a living .... (Viges 8)

He then recounts a turning-point moment disrupting smooth socialization: Confronted with an enemy who "was supposed to be an Easy Kill," Viges realizes this particular man standing before him—unlike Marvel Comic's "the Cobra" and also unlike the "opfors" of *America's Army Game*—had nothing to mark him as "evil / He did not have a Cobra Mask on" (8).

In her journals, Emily draws on Viges and others in *Warrior Writers* to argue that it's the constantly surfacing "gap" between the socialized or "virtual identity" of soldier and the disruptions and variety of actual civilian and soldiering experience that "allows these writers to step back and reflect, to challenge and critique what they are asked to do." Indeed, we can think of that gap Emily notes as marking the failure of military recruitment, the failure of the subordination of soldier to mission. But the poems and reflections in *Warrior Writers* tell us, too, that there's more to counter-recruitment and critical learning

than the provocative appearance of a gap or contradiction. The writers in this collection also foreground ideas, traditions, and figures who point to, urge, and recruit new generations to antiwar perspectives—to help individuals place startling moments of recognition, such as that Viges recounts, in a tradition and politics of resistance. In the poem "Among Our Machines" (from which I take the title of this essay) José Vasquez begins with the inspiration of Vietnam-War dissenter, poet, and memoirist W. D. Ehrhart. In her introduction to *Move, Shoot, and Communicate*, IVAW field director Lovella Calica points to the Veterans Writing Group led by Maxine Hong Kingston as the genesis of *Warrior Writers'* work to organize and support dissenting soldiers and veterans in speaking out. And in a reflection titled "Defining Moments in Your Relationship to the Military/War," former Army medic Margaret Stephens recreates the moment when, at the risk of her "good soldier" identity, she drew on her past anti-racism training to interrupt a basic training lecture that dismissed the seriousness of sexual harassment and racism in the military:

> Well, this [her past education and commitment] was enough for me to get the courage to stand up—literally—in the auditorium and explain why I thought their policies on both sexual harassment and equal opportunity were a joke ... I know my voice had to be quivering. I mean it's one thing to stand before your classmates and give a speech during a rally about racist education systems—which I'd done a few years before. But it's another when it's the US ARMY. But then, I also knew it wasn't really that different. So I did it: I spoke ... (7)

What Stephens and others in *Warrior Writers* suggest is that, thirty years of conservative reign notwithstanding, the examples of 60s-era social movements plus the individuals and groups who've worked to carry them on continue to sponsor and recruit potentially powerful voices today.

That suggestion is significant for my students who have too few examples of how to look back at anti-war, civil rights, and women's liberation movements and see there a useable history, guides from the past for present challenges. When, for instance, Emily reflects on the disturbingly misogynist and homophobic "gender performances" that the teen activity rooms sometimes provide the stage for, she also notes a crucial contradiction: The program itself appears, in Emily's words, "ungendered .... Boys and girls aren't usually segregated, and they are usually working on a lot of the same projects. It is

not unusual to see girls playing ping pong or fooseball, as it is not unusual to see boys engaged in crafts." Here is a crucial moment of recognition: as much as teens may be schooled in the wider culture to "do" gender in oppressive ways, the youth center staff at least tacitly promotes alternatives. But it's more particularly when Emily reflects on this realization *through* her background and sponsors in women's studies and women's movements (this reflection itself encouraged by our class consideration of multimodal literacy and sponsorship in soldiers' resistance movements) that she develops activities like button-making that promote direct discussion of beliefs, slogans, affiliations, and commitments and sponsor the crafting of a public voice.

What I'm describing, of course, isn't at all a pedagogy with the power to stop a war or rid our society of sexist and homophobic ideas. Even the *Warrior Writers* project and the growth of Iraq Veterans Against the War will not have the power to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and halt expansion into Pakistan or the Horn of Africa—or not without the backing of a mass antiwar movement to amplify their voices and arguments that are still too easily suppressed by mainstream media channels. But in conditions of minimal educational sponsorship for progressive ideas, Emily, Stephen, Jeff, and their classmates considered what their own active contribution to the available ideas at the youth center could be. And in conditions of minimal sponsorship for a national anti-war movement between 2004 and 2008, IVAW has created organization for and a continuing tradition of soldiers' resistance. As literacy educators, we also have a contribution to make—and in many of our classrooms appreciably more political space, created by a U.S. public that in the most recent election listed withdrawal from Iraq, repeal of the Bush tax cuts on wealth, and the creation affordable health care as their top three expectations for the new presidential administration (Democracy Corps, "Post-Election Survey"). The more such texts as those gathered in *Warrior Writers* and the more such voices as those raised in Winter Soldier hearings circulate—and the more we can do to promote and work with these voices and views in and beyond the classroom—the more resources, material and ideological, we'll have for an education that is sponsored by progressive movements and not by the U.S. Army.

Endnotes

[1] Thanks to Adrienne Kinne, New England Regional Coordinator for Iraq Veterans Against the War, for alerting me to the "Building Strong Futures Together" conference. The conference press release, schedule, and Welburn's letter to members were posted in September on the National Association of State Boards of Education website (www.nasbe.org) under "Upcoming Events." No Child Left Behind critic Susan Ohanian, winner of NCTE's George Orwell Award for Distinguished Contribution to Honesty and Clarity in Public Language, has also published these documents plus Bryant's letter at www.susanohanian.org/outrage_fetch.php?id=510.

[2] Although No Child Left Behind was signed into law in January 2002, it was passed by the House and the Senate months before the September 11, 2001, attacks and the launching of the War on Terror. Well before a War on Terror was declared, however, the rhetoric of antiterrorism was shaping major legislation—for instance, the Clinton-era Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act which used the warrant of deterring terrorism to expand the federal death penalty.

[3] Although girls and young women are among its players, all "soldiers" in *America's Army* appear as male—because, as one lieutenant colonel explained when the game was first released, "females are not allowed in the infantry" (Kirby, "The Advertising Game"). The U.S. military's propensity for using the word "females" rather than the word "women" also strikes me as among the linguistic moves necessary to objectivity and dehumanize women, both those in the armed services and those trying to survive under U.S. military "protection."

[4] We should not make the mistake, argue *The Monthly Review*'s John Bellamy Foster, Hannah Holleman, and Robert McChesney, of attributing the United States' bellicosity abroad and its assaults on domestic programs, including education, to "a new irrationalism introduced by George W. Bush and a cabal of neoconservative 'political crazies'" ("U.S. Military Spending" 2). Democrats as well as Republicans from the Carter administration forward have trumpeted personal responsibility (and its educational counterpart, teacher accountability); it was on the foundation of the Carter Doctrine—the proclaimed right of the United States to use military force in any place, including Afghanistan, where energy resources and energy pipeline routes are threatened—that the Bush

Doctrine was built. In the case of *America's Army Game*, its rapid rebranding from recruiters' tool hawked in high school gyms and convention center tournaments to "compelling academic program" (America's Army Team, "New Army Game") seems less attributable to the excesses of the Bush White House and much more attributable to the now crisis-level demands for more boots on the ground in Afghanistan—a War on Terror front that an Obama White House will also support. As Rich Gibson and E. Wayne Ross stress, the military invasion of U.S. public schools is not a "sideshow to war and exploitation" but in fact vital to creating a "schools-to-war-pipeline" ("No Child Left Behind and the Imperial Project").

[5] The Army's move to more directly sponsor curricula also points to a gap between what researchers, particularly those associated with the New London Group, had predicted regarding literacy sponsorship and reward in the 21st century and the reality. Instead of promoting the education of individuals able to "think and act critically, reflectively, and creatively" and draw on multiple modalities to "design" their "social futures" (Gee *et. al.*, *The New Work Order* 7; New London Group, "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies"), public schools that must increasingly rely on corporate and military sponsors to make up funding shortfalls adopt a version of "lean" or "just-in-time production"— lean education, just-in-time literacy—that's been the true hallmark of "fast capitalism" (see Moody, *Workers in a Lean World* and *U.S. Labor*).

[6] See Jenkins, "The War Between Effects and Meaning" for a survey of compelling arguments focusing on player agency and choice within gaming communities, including *America's Army*. See Barrett, "White Thumbs, Black Bodies" for both an excellent and comprehensive examination of the neoliberal and racist ideologies promoted through *Grand Theft Auto* and a critique of the gaming theories that would simply set a game's ideological content aside.

[7] This shift in class emphasis comes just as students are beginning to swing away from seeing literacy, particularly in relation to their community partnerships, as a local matter of self- or family-sponsorship but are grappling too with how to name, talk about, and especially act on social forces and sponsoring powers that are neither so specific as *mom, dad, teacher, volunteer* nor so general and undifferentiated as *Society*.

[8] I use the actual names of students from English 107 and draw on their writing

with permission. I have fictionalized the names of the youth center's children. A special shout-out to Jeff for encouraging me to write this article.

[9] Marx and Engels made their arguments regarding human nature—a detailed explication of which I can't provide here—to refute the claims about the "naturalness" and "inevitability" of greed, competition, war, exploitation, and oppression that grew up with class society generally and legitimated capitalist development more particularly. Among the key writings are *The Communist Manifesto* and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, for the argument that economic relations, not immutable nature, create social institutions and mores, and *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,* for Marx's extended mediation on the relationship between "species being" and the activity of labor and introduction to the problem of alienation in capitalist production and relations.

[10] Two examples of these videos can be viewed at www.army.mil/warriorethos/ and www.army.mil/soldierscreed/flash_version/index.html.

[11] For more about *Warrior Writers* see www.greendoorstudio.net/remaking.html and http:// ivaw.org/node/723.

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