**Alex Wade**

**Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences**

**Birmingham City University**

**Attwood 018**

**Birmingham**

**B42 2SU**

**Alex.Wade@bcu.ac.uk**

**The Midnight Sun of the Cold War:**

**Terror and World War Three in *Theatre Europe***

**Introduction**

*Theatre Europe* was an award-winning strategy videogame released for 8-bit computers such as the Commodore 64 in 1985 and re-titled as *Conflict Europe* when released for 16-bit machines such as the Commodore Amiga four years later. Its presents a figurative World War III scenario unfolding in continental Europe, via the popular 1980s medium of the ‘big board’ graphic common to cold war thriller films such as *WarGames* (1983) subsequently updated for the contemporary era in Introversion Software’s ‘genocide ‘em up’ *DEFCON* (2006). The title of the game, ‘Theatre Europe’, is used throughout this essay in its broadest sense, drawing on notions of play, acting, mimicry and gamesmanship common to the literature, cold wars and hot peaces of the second half of the 20th century, a contingent part of what Baudrillard termed, in the very first issue of the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* the third world war (Baudrillard, 2004)

A reading of *Theatre Europe* enables an exploration of cold war strategy and the social theory that articulates it, revealing a latent genealogy, which following Gerry Coulter’s lead in ‘keeping theory as a challenge to the real’ (Coulter, 2004), allows investigation of how these totemic weapons which kept a balance of terror in the 20th century, are highly influential, politically, culturally- and theoretically - to the societies of the 21st century. Whilst always being acutely aware, as Coulter advocated, of the lines of intersection between Baudrillard and his contemporaries (Coulter, 2014), this essay draws broadly on work that overlaps with Baudrillard’s writing around war and the execution of power, including Virlio and Der Derian’s concept of the pure war, McLuhan’s commentary on games and media and Coulter’s radical analysis of the use of power in the bipolar world of the second half of the 20th century. Through these writers, it is seen that *Theatre Europe* is, in spite of, or perhaps because of, popular press reactions to its depiction of World War III, a deeply political game which reveals much about the deployment and execution of power during the 1980s, which, when extrapolated to contemporary societies, reveals much about the current use of terror as a mechanism within everyday life.

Central to conceptualising this is the projection and distancing of power so desired by contemporary armed forces, where the threat or execution of war can be deployed in theatre whilst minimising risk to human personnel and accordant civilian populations. During the era of *Theatre Europe*, this was executed via the conventional weaponry of the tank and the fighter jet/bomber and fortified at the nuclear level via the deployment of atomic weapons. Yet with reference to the the rational absurdity of game theory scenarios such as Chicken (brinksmanship) it is argued that the execution of power remains only as long as nuclear weapons are not used. Effectively, their use runs counter to warfare, due to mutually assured destruction and also in that playing these games is akin to mimicry, in that nothing in the cold war, *Theatre Europe*, or the terror of the 21st century is quite what it seems.

As the 21st century nears the end of its first quarter, it seems clear that the old tensions which were believed left behind at the end of history, are balkanising around a proliferation of regional powers (China, Russia, US, EU) where projection and distancing are being replaced by anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) weapons. Old legions of Carrier Strike Groups and nuclear submarines are countered by missile defences that are used in a manner common to the prophylaxis of weapons in the past: defence is now the best form of attack. This is not limited to the military sphere, but is a concept and process seen variedly across societies where access to raw materials, goods and services and universal human rights is deliberately limited and controlled and used as a method of terror at the individual, local, regional national, international and supranational level. As Coulter and Baudrillard remind us, this is the epoch of the fourth world war, marked by the uncertainty of the viral or fourth order simulacra. The only weapon of retaliation is radical theory itself, a position resolutely adopted by Gerry Coulter, founder of the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*. As he was an advocate of moving away from the everyday tactics of terror and the paranoid tyranny of nuclear policy and into a strategy of the beyond, the symbolic violence of radical theory is seen as a weapon that must be used if it is to be effective.

**Theatre Europe**

*Theatre Europe*, developed by Personal Software Services (PSS), based in Coventry, UK, was released for 8-bit machines and as *Conflict Europe* for 16-bit machines in 1989. The release of the original version in 1985 instigated a minor moral panic for the popular and specialist presses, with accusations that the game was in bad taste due to its simulation of a European continental – and potentially nuclear - war between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), an affiliation of Western European and North American countries, and the Warsaw Pact, a coalition of the Soviet Union and other politically aligned ‘eastern bloc’ nations. In spite of protestations from the developer to the contrary in the manual, as with other games of the time such as *Seaside Special* (1984) and *Ghettoblaster* (1985), there were political overtures and Baudrillardrian recalcitrance towards the current state of play, with the manual dedicating the game to ‘the people of the world in the hope that the game is never played for real’ (PSS, 1985, p. 1). The manual was rounded off with a moral flourish advocating for change to the current bipolar rich northern hemisphere/poor southern hemisphere status quo. This plea obviated the mortal hand-wringing from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and *The Sun* newspaper, protestations which were particularly salient given that *Theatre Europe,* although not the first representation of World War III in a game, was one if its most influential, given its critical acclaim and subsequent position as the winner of several strategy games awards in the year of its release.

Widespread approbation did not prevent the developers from placing the game in a suitably considered context with grave ruminations around the consequences of war. Their measured execution of the subject matter is evidenced in the extensive reference list in the manual (PSS, 1985, p 14) and their use of ‘contacts’ at the Soviet Embassy in London and the Ministry of Defence at Whitehall to ascertain war footing and relative strengths of the armies. Based on these metrics and intelligence, interviews with the developers reveal that when the game was run as a computer simulation, the net result was almost always a unanimous win for the Warsaw Pact due to their overwhelming superiority of their arsenal of conventional weapons (Steele, 1985, p 20). For advocates of nuclear non-proliferation and non-escalation, this is as chilling as a nuclear winter. NATO’s policy throughout the cold war was of ‘flexible response’, in that nuclear weapon use could be justified if the conventional war was lost (Mendelsohn, 1999, p 2). This is rendered doubly disturbing with one of the contingencies for flexible response being the felling of West Berlin – an extrinsic win condition for the Pact forces in *Theatre Europe*. Concurrent to this, it appears that declassified Eastern Bloc documents point towards a more restrained ‘second strike’ policy from the Warsaw Pact in that nuclear use would only occur in the face of a nuclear launch or preparation for launch from an enemy (Heuser, 1993), a strategy chiefly based around the famous 1979 military exercise ‘seven days to the Rhine’ and subsequent wargames. These treaties and pacts and accordant policy and doctrine are all based around the concept of umbrella protection: any armed attack on any ally is treated in the same manner as an attack on their own nation. This forms the basis of prophylaxis (Baudrillard, 1990) which, while initially tied to conventional conflict, becomes more acute as the stockpiling of nuclear weapons occurs. At this point potential nuclear war becomes a zero-sum game of mutually assured destruction (Kahn, 1984, pp. 100-108) which does not guarantee - and potentially does not postulate - possible winners with the outcome hinging on the radically absurd idea that a rational actor will not deploy first-strike nuclear weapons due to the - possible - inevitability of universal megadeth.

**Absence as Power**

The cover of the UK release of the game features a range of weapons deployed across a checkerboard, highlighting the ‘strategic’ nature of the game of *Theatre Europe* being a ‘serious’ wargame which appeals to cerebral and deep thinkers who may otherwise play chess. Yet the very idea that a game such as chess should be applied to an arena known as *Theatre* Europe is, in and of itself a misnomer as it toys with the very notion of play. The origin of the term ‘theatre’ derives from von Clausewitz’s *On War* (2008), which describes an arena where war takes place. Similarly, a chessboard depicts not a strategic arena, but a *tactical* one, i.e. an enclosed space where all of the information is available to all of the players at any given time (Wade, 2016). For a conventional, continental battle in central Europe, this is a clearly definable space and time. Yet the war that came before this, the global cold war, is, as Coulter recognises, more akin to nuclear war, loosely affiliated to an ‘equilibrium of terror and deterrence called “Mutual Assured Destruction” (Coulter, 2015 p. 4).

This equilibrium derives not from the known information that simulations provide for the tester and the tested in the referendum mode, but precisely because the outcomes are of the fourth order of simulacra in that their genealogy, processes and outcomes are inherently unknowable. Wargames, films and data sets in their third order simulation can tell us so much about the possibilities carried in nuclear weaponry. They could not dare to know that human shadows etched onto concrete steps and microwaved children’s lunch boxes, their exterior intact, the interior carrying the powdered remains of food, would be all that remained following the detonation of an atomic bomb above Hiroshima. That nature itself would be virulent in the black rain that fell from an otherwise crystalline sky on August 6th 1945 30 minutes following the dropping of the ‘Little Boy’ warhead. Nuclear weapons in their use and lack of use are the fourth order weapon *par excellence*. Their key contribution appears to be in making ‘the world more unintelligible and enigmatic’ (Coulter, 2004) a predicate Coulter ascribes to the radical theory of Baudrillard, and by extension one of the founding mantras of *The International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*.

Indeed nuclear weapons are the precursor to the radical thought found throughout the second epoch of the new world order and prefigure the unintelligible (for those in the West at least), of the remarkable and symbolic acts of terrorism which populate the everyday in its reversal of mass transit networks of global mobility towards immobility and terror in the face of attacks. Bled through the political consciousness via the feed of the media, (‘terrorism would be nothing without the media’ Baudrillard: 2002 p. 31)) it is evident that the ‘Cold War may be long over but its excesses are the spectre haunting the post-Marxist West’ (Coulter, 2004). In their genealogy, processes and outcomes, nuclear weapons are transpolitical, trans-spatial, trans-economic. Their after-effects do not adhere to theatres, spaces, places or times, but, quixotically for a weapon of such complexity are almost entirely at the whim of how the wind is blowing or the rain is falling. A ballistic missile with a nuclear Multiple Independently targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) payload may strike and destroy its target(s), but its fallout could descend onto friendly troops, pollute the water table for the civilian population or cause disruption to electronic communications. It is state sponsored and sanctioned terroristic reversibility, where the idea and the object revenges itself on the progenitor, making their construction inevitable and their use impossible.

Yet like rain, viruses or bugs, they are visible through their invisibility with nuclear strategy predicated not on the concept of ‘total war’ of previous 20th century conflicts, but on Paul Virilio’s ideal of the ‘pure war’: a ‘war without “real” warring’ (Der Derian, 2000, p. 217), ‘a war which is everywhere, but the front is nowhere’ (Virilio, 2008, p. 84). In this respect the *playing* of wargames, the very absence, disappearance of war into an abstract pastime is a pure war, whereas a war with a defined theatre is more akin to a hot peace as the areas around it are not directly in conflict. This also gives further credence to Baudrillard’s once controversial, but now seemingly self-evident proclamation, that World War III had already taken place with the cold war (Baudrillard, 2004). In the second epoch, this is replaced by an increasing insistence on globalisation, garnered on the NATO ideal of flexible response: removal of borders, but barring immigration; arms sales masquerading as foreign aid; the unravelling of globalisation alongside the reanimation of sovereignty in the Anglo Saxon world, which appears as some kind of slight return to the pre-atomic golden years of the first half of the 20th century. The ‘war on terror’ is the ideology of this fourth world war, one which is fought through the simulations and substitutions of the Military Industrial Media Entertainment Network or MIMENET (Der Derain, 2001) not by the Western nations, but by those who would eradicate Western sign systems. For, in spite of having all of the material riches and consumer trappings that it offers the ‘terrorists used everything the West takes for granted: money, stock speculation, computer technology, air planes, the media, and assimilated and incorporated these aspects of modernity and globalization, without losing the will to destroy the West’ (Coulter, 2004).

**Hiding in Plain Sight**

Still, the use of the word ‘theatre’ remains eminently problematic when applied to concepts of play and games. One of the mainstay pieces of literature on the sociology of play, Roger Caillois’ *Man, Play and Games* (2001) presents *mimicry* as one of the key facets of play, particularly amongst those most rational of actors, adults. Yet play as mimicry, founded as it is in the concept of simulation, is, at its best nebulous and contested, and, at its most mendacious, deliberately perverse and irrational behaviour. Instead of in ‘conventional’ games (see Juul, 2005) where negotiated outcomes and rules are known in advance, the idea of mimicry in and of theatre is to actively dissuade the other of explicit or implicit intentions: to hide, simulate or camouflage. This requires a suspension of disbelief in the actors andthe audiences: when Hamlet launches into a soliloquy against ‘The time being out of joint’, all attendees can hear and see the speaker, but pretend that they cannot, leaving the actors - rational or not - in a position where they are out of joint: they are assuming a role which presumes that they are something or someone else. This appears manifest in the psychology of the cold war and its actors and specifically in the study of these actions via game theory such as Prisoner’s Dilemma and Chicken. Rational behaviour appears as completely irrational and vice versa. As with any phenomenon of the fourth order, nothing is at it seems. The scaling up of nuclear weapons to the point where the Earth can be obliterated thirty times over is beyond the order of magnitude of conventional thought and enters the nuclear exosphere. The concept of brinksmanship (Chicken) where the action of one actor is dependent on the other and associated outcomes is bizarre *in extremis*: if the other actor moves out of the way, one wins, if not: everybody dies. Even at the individual actor level of military espionage and intelligence, the use of ‘sleeper’ ‘double’, ‘triple’ and ‘mole’ agents is predicated on the idea of mimicry, camouflage and simulation, of appearing as an integrated part of the host society, but actually being a parasite, of suckling intelligence and information out of the host in the hope of according change and damage to that which gives form to the disguise.

The use of camouflage is central to the tactics and strategies of war. Camouflage allows the individual or the machine to disappear into the background or the scenery to instigate surprise guerrilla attacks which are more likely to hurt the enemy as they come from within. Again, the strategy of the cold war and its fourth order weapons comes to bear on the tactics of terrorism, with terrorists using the ‘banality of American everyday life as cover and camouflage’ (Baudrillard, 2002, p. 19) an example evidenced in *Theatre Europe*. There are three modes of play, the first of which enables the player to engage solely in conventional warfare without the use of so called ‘special missions’ which instigates chemical and nuclear strikes at levels two and three. As this is a continental war, likely to be fought mainly on land and in the air, the use of traditional battle tanks, an integral part of the armoured divisions, is of vital importance to the success of the player. Paul Virilio, whose theory of dromology shows the importance of the tank as a blunt, yet stealthy, instrument in the execution of war, instructs how the commander, gunner and driver are to ‘stay out of reach, all the while remaining present’ (Virilio, 1986, p. 39) when ensconced in the ceramic composite shell of the tank which protects them against elements of war and nature.

This is achieved in several ways, first through the outward camouflage of the tank, which can be changed from the concealment of olive drab to the confusion of disruptive colouration, with the aim of always hiding in plain sight: this is effectively used by zebras of the animal kingdom to confuse predators’ perception. Second, it is in the proclivity of the tank of being able to both project power and distance risk which makes it a holy grail so desired by the lords of war, where force can be deployed ‘in theatre’ with minimum risk to support staff and the civilian population. It is the basis upon which aircraft carriers operate. Though the carriers themselves are large, unwieldy and vulnerable and their profile means that they are likely easily identifiable by surveillance techniques such as radar, their proclivity for being oceanically *distant* from the risk of the theatre, whilst all the while being able to *project* power terrestrially via strike aircraft is central to their use and continued investment by modern armed forces. This manifestly alters the relationship between humans and warfare. Instead of using the methods of camouflage seared in the state of nature where the warrior originally ‘identified himself with the lion, the eagle or with the wryneck bestiary of the animal kingdom, [it becomes] totally lost, he has become a phantom’ (Virilio, 2008, p. 81). Yet again, the example of atomic weaponry escalates this to the nuclear option. Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) are able to project power far beyond the silos and borders in which they sit, primed and bristling for launch. Yet they only maintain this projection and distancing when they are *not* used: it is their *absence* of use which enables their power. Following in the tradition of mimicry and disappearance, the point at which ICBMs are deployed is precisely when their projection and distancing power is exhausted as the second response will always be annihilation of civilian populations and non-combatants as seen horribly at Hiroshima.

 In *Theatre Europe* even a limited nuclear launch will almost always result in escalation through deliberate targeting of major civilian populations such as London and Warsaw. The means by which this is achieved is illustrative of the paradoxes central to nuclear war: a NATO launch will give the impression of coming from somewhere off the ‘big board’ of the theatre of war, presumably the US, with the target the eastern bloc nations. In this instance, the US becomes a singular hyperpower, impelled by the projection of its massive military might, emboldened by the distancing of its geographical remoteness to continental Europe. Europe is reduced to something from a wargame at the RAND corporation, where ‘the world becomes a map and the missiles merely symbols’ (Marcuse, 2002, p. 84). Conventional is continental. Unconventional is intercontinental. The deployment of the most awesome weaponry on the planet is an act of the fourth order. Its consequences are unknown, some unintended. It distends power from those who wield it and the Gordian knot of the nuclear zero sum game reduces the continent to rubble and progresses/regresses it through the order of simulacra where in moving beyond the ‘resurrection of history beyond its proclaimed end’ (Baudrillard, 2002 p. 28) it becomes a sad simulation of itself, realised only in TV programmes, games, and simulations. The cold war, World War III, which put an end to Communism, derives its very presence from its absence. It is in its crystal purity, like the virus, everywhere, but nowhere. The irony of unintended consequences is that Islamic terrorism could not exist without the West’s state sponsored and sanctioned nuclear terrorism seen throughout the 20th century and the theatre of Europe where the tragic play takes place.

**Hot Medium, Cold War**

As intimated by the developers of *Theatre Europe*, the destruction of civilian populations by weapons of mass destruction is not represented in the harrowing schlock and gore of its chronological television-film contemporary *Threads* (BBC, 1984), where the survival of humanity in a nuclear winter is predicated on a new mother eating the placenta which gave life to her newborn baby, but in an abstract and cleanly detached manner which would be common to the CNN Generals holed up in bunkers at the RAND Corporation, Whitehall, or the White House. In a fascinating exposition of multimedia convergence, the player of *Theatre Europe* asks the ‘Warcomp’ (war computer) to instigate a nuclear attack. At this point, the game asks the player to call a telephone number, based in Coventry, a city itself carpet bombed during World War II, to ascertain the launch code, which must be done within 30 seconds of the request. The use of the ‘hotline’ in the game is certainly technologically significant, but arguably, culturally, even more so. That such a potent sign of cold war communications between East and West is used is instructive, first, around the medium itself in that the cold war requires a ‘hotline’ between the most powerful people in the world, so that any misunderstandings, foibles or false positives can be ironed out. Second, it is clear that the phone, with its prefix of ‘tele-‘ is predicated on projection and distancing over space and time. Whether this is contingent on power and its use is open to debate. Once again in the reversibility and disappearance of the fourth order of the cold war, nothing is as it seems. Indeed, the telephone is a cool medium of low definition which provides a ‘meagre amount of information’ (McLuhan, 2006, p. 24) and therefore requires ‘rich nonvisual involvement’ (McLuhan, 2006, p. 37), from the receiver to fill in the blanks of the conversation. It is as close to a symbolic means of communication as the 20th century created.

This symbolic telephone exchange makes it well-suited to the Russian oral tradition, whereas the US’s drive for detached, impersonal transparency via the teleprinter derives from the Anglo-Saxon desire for a written, literary engagement and statement of record. This control and drip-feed of information is founded on well-meaning principles. The teleprinter’s intention is to iron out inconsistencies and ambivalence and yet, as a hot medium, the net result is that receiver participation is minimised or removed. For anyone who has written an email and found the meaning to be twisted beyond comprehension by the receiver, the written word is open to degrees of interpretation beyond the ken of the sender and is therefore, like electronic communication itself, and the nuclear weapon before it, out of control of the sender as soon as the button is pressed. It is the Western need to impress and express interpretation which makes it so at odds with the symbolism and storytelling of the East. Strangely, it is a predicate that the ecstasy of communication shares with nuclear weaponry itself. The relief when a situation on the brink of disaster can be defused in a thirty second telephone call is as palpable to the US President and General-Secretary of the Soviet Union as to a tiff between lovers on Facebook.

**Anti-Access/Area Denial**

When the launch code is provided in *Theatre Europe*, aptly termed ‘Midnight Sun’ for a limited attack, a target is placed over the city with an accompanying screech from the Commodore 64’s famed Sound Interface Device (SID) chip. There is a graphical interlude where a city with buildings and a park with trees is shown. What sounds like an air-raid siren assails the hearing, before MIRV warheads enter from the top of the screen, a white light is seen and the trees are removed from a black and white picture of a ravaged city. The Warcomp provides an update, which is typically a report detailing the extent of destruction to the city. It is the literal, sonic and graphical conveyance of war which shows how important narrative has always been to videogames, but also how the tradition of storytelling through literary and visual means is essential to Anglo-Saxon identities and the way in which videogames, as a hot medium which leave little to the imagination, reflect this.

Russia’s contemporaneous games industry of the mid-1980s produced a long-lived, but nevertheless abstract representation of time and space management in the form of *Tetris*. That *Tetris* has no story (but has had one ascribed to it, see Eskelinen, 2001), is testament to the ludological position of videogames and the widely and rightly held belief that although videogames inhere characteristics from other media, they should be treated as a special and unique entity. This is something which McLuhan himself was keen to see applied to games more generally, ascribing them as ‘extensions of man’ and ‘faithful models of a culture’ (McLuhan, 2006, p. 255-6). In being part of and influencing the cultures of which they are a part, the predilection for computer wargames thinking the unthinkable in the 1980s is perfectly reasonable: the very semiconductor technologies that enable a city to be targeted thousands of miles away is the same technology that allows programmers to simulate it in *Theatre Europe*, artists to make a political statement about it and designers to hang a story on it. Thinking the unthinkable in the second epoch is awareness of the proclivity of radical theory to generate a trap into which the world, with its unintended and unknown consequences, will fall.

In these hours of greatest stress, there is a concomitant ‘desperate need for games in a highly specialised industrial culture, since they are the only form of art accessible to many minds’ (McLuhan, 2006, p 262). When an entire civilisation is potentially 30 minutes away from nuclear holocaust, all of which is under the control of individuals whose rationality is based on the concatenation of ironies found in game theory, mimicry and disappearance, the psychological and social importance of individuals being able to play out their darkest silicon fantasies is evident. What will trigger it? What will happen? How will it end? What can I do? Games such as *Raid Over Moscow* (1984) *Missile Command* (1980) and *SDI* (1986) in their simulation of these scenarios put the power of projection back onto the agent, to the player of games, while distancing them from the exigencies of nuclear conflict. In so doing, games are placed as ‘dramatic models of our psychological lives providing release of particular tensions’ (McLuhan, 2006: 257). When the tension is as inelastic, immediate and indiscriminatory as thermonuclear war, it is better for the players, the actors, that this takes place in *Theatre Europe* than continental Europe. Better that in the formulation of scenarios around this that power remains continental, conventional, distanced and potential rather than intercontinental, unconventional, projected and nuclear. Indeed, it is the historical conventions of the European continent, of the lessons learned from the unbridled execution of technology across its central plains and the concurrent two world wars fought there, that demand the balance of power, that *power itself*, does not dissipate in nuclear fusion, but remains a threat to be calculated, war-gamed and rationalised, until the very idea, let alone action, is viewed as irrational by the actors in the wargame. Yet the weapons themselves, powerful as signs of the technological hegemony of the West (and a weapon that terrorists have yet to attain), are even more culturally significant in their position as icons of the viral and the fractal, of fourth order simulacra. They are symbolic proof that the relentless application of rationality leads to madness, in mutually assured destruction and in the mental illnesses that are pervasive of the societies which host them. It was not possible to know what the human and natural effects of nuclear fusion would be before the bomb dropped over Hiroshima, yet it is the act of this *not* taking place which leads to the current state of the art. In their disappearance, in their absence, they are more enigmatic than if they were ever extensively used by belligerents.

This is the prophylaxis: that in the endgame the universal application of rational thought, taken to its logical conclusion results in the worst of all possible worlds. It is something that was learned in the crucible of the hot peaces of the cold war. It is a game and a message that requires revisiting in the first twenty years of the 2000s to ensure the integrity of a world which is no longer a geopolitically bipolar theatre, but is multipolar, where nations are unsure of which side they are on, who they are protecting under their umbrella of power. As this essay is written, Syria appears as a new proxy war fought in the name of religious and political ideology, but with nothing more tangible than regional devastation and the dislocation of a whole society. Russian carrier strike groups steam past the UK to the theatre, projecting their power both into the middle east and, by proxy into a distended Europe ripped apart by issues of weaponised immigration, ceding of sovereignty to supra-national powers and manifest economic uncertainty. This is a new tactical and strategic battlefield, lead by the historic communist bulwarks of China and Russia. It is a decisive shift from notions of protection and prophylaxis, a tenet so enamoured by current CNN Generals focussed on drone strikes and an obsession with the ‘exclusion of death, a system whose ideal is an ideal of zero deaths’ (Baudrillard, 2002, p. 16), that it has become a mantra to wage war and set foreign policy by. It is a principle enshrined in the body of the videogame warrior shielded from any threat at Nevada Air Force Base (see Chamayou, 2015) where drones project power in a philosophy of anti-access/area-denial or A2-AD (see Gordon and Matsumura, 2013). Politically, this is an absence of symbolic violence in societies which manage and negate risk to its lowest common denominator. Zero. The lack of engagement at close, even theatre-level proximity, mean a ‘zero-death system is a zero sum game system’ (Baudrillard, 2002 p. 16) where those that value death as much as the West values life, will always be slippery and unbeatable opponents as the games we play simulate and fantasise about our own destruction and demise.

Militarily, this means that the theatre is projected outwards, via the use of cosmic, air and cyber weapons generating a front far above and beyond the Middle East and the Russo-Sino land-mass, into the international waters of the Pacific and space and cyberspace. Like an effective camouflage, this distorts historic Western notions of projection and distancing as traditional weapons such as carrier strike groups and submarines are under threat from weapons which deny access into theatre. The position of the US as a geographically distant, but omniscient – if not omnipotent – technological hyperpower is negated. The loss of the umbrella of prophylaxis means that the cultural and political idea of a Theatre ‘Europe’ is no longer sacrosanct as Russian shock-troops amass on the eastern land border annexing Crimea with their paramilitaries carrying out insurgency attacks into Ukraine and beyond.

Yet the tenet of anti-access/area-denial is not merely, or even wholly, based on the deployment of military weapons, but instead on those everyday news stories that detail the current state-of-play, the status quo of actors at every level of society. As Coulter identifies, ‘Baudrillard shows us that we are all part of the Fourth World War’ (Coulter, 2015, p. 10) Everyone, everywhere is a terrorist and everyone employs terrorist tactics in their battle, sometimes against others, sometimes suicidally. A Germanwings airliner, under the charge of a possibly mentally ill first officer crashes into the French Alps, killing all aboard. Asylum seekers who are denied entry to Western nations use lorries to traverse Europe, the same lorries are used to mow down citizens in Berlin, Stockholm and Nice. The withdrawal of the UK from the EU-bloc, an act which is possibly the most ardent national message in the war against globalisation, takes on its own militaristic acronym (‘BREXIT’). The rejection of applications for disability benefit via bureaucratic processes executed by medical staff whose first oath is to the protection of other lives, not projection of power into others lives. The substitution of petro-wars for ‘H20-wars’ in Indo-China, where denial of access to a human right is used as a strategic weapon against civilian populations. It is not only the low flying commercial airliner that is a terrorist threat anymore, but that ‘terrorism, like viruses, is everywhere’ (Baudrillard, 2002 p. 10) and is employed as a viable and notional tactic to negotiate the vagaries and ambivalence of the second epoch, the fourth world war, the fourth order simulacra.

**Midnight Sun**

One of the chief appeals of the videogame is in its proclivity to offer wish fulfilment. As individuals, and particularly as consumers, we are informed by fairy tales and those who nurture and care for us that we must be careful what we wish for. The underpinning ethos of *Theatre Europe*’s moral and political alignment was for a world not predicated on two bipolar superpowers at odds with one another, but working together to solve the problems of famine and poverty across the planet. The developers will have lived to see their wish partially granted through the end of the cold war, that is, the third world war. Yet now, instead of actors being able to project and distance their power with the aim of prophylaxis, it is virulence which has taken its place. A virulence which originated in the black rain unintentionally caused by the crucible of nuclear fusion at Hiroshima, the consequences of which we are still unsure of late into the first quarter of the 21st century.

Although nuclear strategy has been replaced by terrorist tactics, this is only another illustration of the fractal and fracturing constitution of the society of the second epoch. As this essay has shown, nuclear weapons are one of the most powerful symbols of the radical theory, Gerry Coulter, through his work on Baudrillard and his contemporaries, looked to render in his writing. That this radical theory is as enigmatic and unknowable as the world that we currently inhabit is testament to the unfathomable power of the world’s most awesome technologies. That Gerry Coulter himself, in a wider political climate of globalisation, reductionism and quantification – terrorism – brought to bear a publication as varied and inclusive as the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* is a testament to his thought, vision and forbearance. The legacy his death leaves is of the continuation of Baudrillard’s own work, enshrined in a fourth world war, which – coincidentally or not – is of the fourth order of simulacra, a battle that we are all are part of. While it appears that the radical theory of unintended acts and unknowable consequences are terroristic, the enigma lies in the disappearance, absence and reversibility. To not use a weapon as powerful as radical theory is like building a nuclear weapon and not using it. It bristles with potential, but lies in a silo projecting, but forever distant, with consequences that are unknown and unknowable. Theory, and the work of Gerry Coulter and Jean Baudrillard deserves interrogation, employment and interrogation across all theatres.

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