2 Theoretical & Historical Context

2.1 Capitalism and the desire for similarity

The desire for similarity is that very thing within ourselves that we use as a measure to define our place in our chosen society. It is how we engineer that we are not the other, the outsider or stranger in our context. The desire for similarity operates in a space that can been defined as regular or normal. In a society that is affected by the constructions and projections of it's information communication systems, broadcasts and other cultural media, increasing reference is made to projected norms as a frame of reference to define that which is not other. The limitations of these systems, such as restrictive time schedules, the need for profit, effective sound-byte information and the like, results in a limitation on what can and does get projected and thus regarded as normal.

The capitalist mechanism is the prime operator within this context, as the overarching mechanism that fuels the need to profit, and thus limits what is or isn't projected by virtue of whether it will be profitable or not. This represents a particular filter or mode within which that which is projected can be constructed. Invariably underlying this system is some or other committee of 'specialists' whose responsibility it is to ensure that that which is constructed yields profit. Similarity is often the touchstone that is turned to in these instances because it is the nearest reference point. These 'specialist' decision making bodies, become mechanisms of similarity or sameness with a mandate to filter out uncertainty and the unknown.

Within the capitalist mode, the linear route to success is to repeat and expand on your previous successes. This can happen on any scale, and it speaks of the repetition inherent within commercial society. The simple act of repeatedly selling a product; the art of engineering identical products for sale within multiple markets around the globe; re-engineering cultural artefacts for consumption by a tested audience or market; the mechanism for being elected to some political role over and over again: these are all examples of operating in this repetitive mode, where the similarities are the repetitions intrinsic to these operations and not the actions themselves. Action in this mode becomes about operating within realms of similarity and using artefacts and processes that are familiar. Similarity and expansion work hand in hand to yield a market that commerce can operate within.

Multinational companies put great effort into developing similar products and services that are vended in environments that have been engineered as similar to each other.

(www.how_to_learn_any_language.com)

Repetition within our actions is the element that speaks of the desire for similarity. This desire can be seen in any consumptive environment where, primarily, products rely on degrees of similarity in order to exist in a particular market segment. Managing to engineer and sustain similarity, in a market segment, is a route to success. Multinational companies put great effort into developing similar products and services that are vended in environments that have been developed as similar to each other, in similar situations to people whose needs have become increasingly similar. Amplification and repetition are the primary elements that morph micro successes into macro successes and then onto global successes.

This similarity or sameness is a transparent concept and yet it operates in very subtly engineered ways, modes and places, sometimes appearing as complex and impenetrable, layered and necessary. The simplicity of the concept masks the needless complexity of many of the systems that have been designed to operate on our culture. Mechanisms that we regard as symbols of our systematic civilization, such as the mechanisms of commerce, or law or politics (that are in many instances intertwined) have become adept at simulating this complexity to mask their simple, repetitive and amplificatory mode of operation. These systems of civilization have become so complex that we require

A typical transit plaza, this one at Kaihim Makuhari Station in Japan.

(www.resegers.name/im-ages)

the help of specialists to guide us through them. We have come to accept this and yet this complexity operates like a mirror does in a small space – creating an illusion of space where there is a shortage. The complexity of our systems are perhaps also for the sake of sustainability for those that guide us through these systems or the sustainability of those systems themselves. Guy Debord talks about how intrinsic this has become when discussing the technologisation of the present

> (t)echnological innovation …is an essential component of capitalist society. But since its most recent acceleration …it has greatly reinforced spectacular authority, by surrendering everybody to the mercy of specialists, to their calculations and to the judgements which always depend on them (Debord 1998:12).

However many of these systems, technological or otherwise, retain complexity, as result of their lengthy and layered genesis, over time and through generations, and reflect this in the way that they operate. Similarity remains the comfort point from which many of these operations take place.

The desire for similarity operates not only on the psyche itself

More and more places - airports, malls, 24hr convenience stores, themed holiday destinations, franchised fast food outlets and so on are engineered for maximum convenience and efficiency.

Image references clockwise from top (www.aerial-photography.com) (www.cosmocondia.com) (www.ace.caad.ed.uk/nonplaces)

and within the consumptive mechanism, but also upon space and time. An increasing number of places - airports, malls, 24-hour convenience stores, themed holiday destinations, franchised fast food outlets and so on - are engineered for maximum convenience and efficiency, which is understandable in large complex cities, where large volumes of people move and operate. These spaces have been designed so that no residual traces of those that move through them remain. The anthropologist Marc Auge refers to these manipulated spaces as non-places - places where we operate in transit, convenience or commerce and the like (Auge 1995:75). The net effect, however, with a burgeoning of non-places is a stultifying of culture, because of the teflon-like nature of these spaces, nothing other than that which has been chosen by those that engineer these non-places may remain in them for longer that is strictly necessary. Auge explores the factors the comprise place and non-place thus

> If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place (Auge 1995:75).

These non-places filter out that which is 'relational, historical or concerned with identity' in the name of convenience or efficiency, which are logistic concerns. The pace or smoothness of the flow of people operating in these zones guarantees an efficiency that operates for the benefit of commerce, although mastery of logistical mechanism has its roots in military theory.

2.2 War, Time and the Repeat Event

War appears to be an inevitable part of the project of humanity. The march of human progress, both technological and cultural, is often driven by war. It is the intrinsic logistical requirements of war that triggers technological progress, to the point that much of the technology that drives the information communication technology revolution we find ourselves in today comes out of the military industrial complex.

Wars revolve primarily around control of geographic regions, natural resources or ideologies. It was with the advent of nuclear weapons, where for the first time humans had engineered the mechanism for our ultimate annihilation, that the structure of war began shifting away from the space of analogue armed conflicts and toward wars fought in other realms by other means. One of the precursory markers for this shift in the structure or nature of warfare was the Cold War, where direct armed conflict was replaced by political conflicts, propaganda wars, espionage and technological wars, such as the arms race or the space race. The act of dominating the enemy nation becomes more about appearances than actualities. New zones of conflict are developed, new theatres of war emerge as war moves away from physical terrain toward the realm of ideas, opinion and appearances, and new mechanisms for accounting the status of the enemy are developed. This is no surprise given that this age has been broadly described as the age of information. Power begins to reside increasingly in the mechanism of information flow or projection.

As with any cultural shift, the overall effects are not all-pervasive and instantaneous. The effect of these transitions are more gradual within societies and human progress as a whole. The Cold War was the ultimate war of illusion, a drawn-out but progressive stalemate almost without direct conflict, terminating with the collapse of the Soviet Union. During this period, many traditional territorial wars involving the Western world were also fought, the wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Falklands, and the first Gulf War being a few examples. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1991, the purpose of this conflict was removed, while the mechanism of the conflict remained. Wars of conflict continued to be fought in Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East, after the end of the Cold War, the most recent of which is the second Gulf War. Much like

Opposite page. It was with the advent of Nuclear weapons, where for the first time humans had engineered the mechanism for our ultimate annihilation, that the structure of war began shifting away from the space of analogue armed conflicts and toward wars fought in other realms by other means.

(www.acm.vt.edu)

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 was symbolic of the collapse of the Soviet Union, by 1991, the cold war had ended.

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the two World Wars fought in the early and middle twentieth century there has been a pairing of these Gulf wars, or repetition of this particular world event. And while there have been different triggers and different groupings of allies or coalitions in these two pairs of wars, they have ended up being similar as world events.

This twinning or repetition of events indicates a struggle humanity has (particularly Western capitalist societies) with progress itself. The return to a previous event, to re-roll the dice or re-enact it, exposes the repetition within the human condition. Repeat events are not unique to our times, they have long been part of the human condition. There exists however an increase in both frequency and velocity of repeat events and the 'raw material' from which they are constructed also appears to be in decline. Less is being repeated more often hence repeat events are becoming increasingly similar. To understand the operation of the repeat event, particularly within Western capitalist societies plugged into 'global projected culture' one must explore the mechanisms that yield or amplify its presence.

2.2.1 The Military Industrial Complex

The relationship between the Military Industrial Complex (MIC)[1] and civilian society is of key interest in understanding the repeat event. The term Military Industrial Complex was coined by Dwight Eisenhower in 1961 and it refers to 'partial integration of economic and military institutions for the purposes of national security' (Koistinen 1980: 23). The MIC model has been transferred to other industrial liberal democratic nations in varying degrees. The US, owing to it's current engineered centrality of stage in matters of world affairs and global culture, remains the model around which discussions of the MIC will revolve in this paper.

The MIC commercialises the production of arms and military technology in ways that amplify the effect of repetition within the economies that are driven by them. Success, in the liberal capitalist sense, is only regarded as real if it can be repeated and amplified. This capitalist need for success, repetition and amplification is the industrial contribution to the military industrial complex. The effect of commerce on war is similar, driven by the mode of success - repeat and amplify, and repeat – which then drives the military machine in ways that are less about the need to control space, resources or ideas, and more about the need to be self-perpetuating and continually expanding in the manner of commerce itself.

Looking at repeat events within a military context, the most recent of which is the second Gulf War (GW II), the link between the commercialisation of the military and the political mechanism becomes more evident. Propaganda formed a large part of the build up to GW II, the transparency of which remains, for now, a hotly debated topic in the global media. Much of this propaganda emanated from military and civilian intelligence, and this perceived threat was amplified by the military and projected by the media system allied to it. This relationship between the media and the military is one also driven by commerce and brokered by an industry profiting from the need to proliferate arms. GW II is also symptomatic of increased commercialization of politics and the military, in that it is a manifestation of a mutated corporate strategy - the pre-emptive action/strike, rather than a response to an existing invasion or overt military action. This is emblematic of the end of the Cold War and a decentralization of military thought within the political arena.[2] The pre-emptive

strike unmasks a theoretical lag in political and military systems and unmasks a growing vacuum of power within these bodies. These political and military bodies are reduced to behaving in a manner that evokes power, where the actual power in these bodies is in decline, and in doing so, are imitating their merchant masters. Mirzoeff talks about the pre-emptive strike as symptomatic of the shifts in focus surrounding the locality of the nation state (and its boundaries) 'which requires careful supervision of the flows of digital culture' (Mirzoeff 2005:120) The relationship between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissipation of importance of the nation state is the starting point for this shift within the mechanism of power.[3] This is amplified by the digital communication revolution and the emergence of the 'nomad class' (ibid.). The nomad class operates with the aid of new portable logistic systems, email, the world wide web, and mobile phones which are evolutions of military technologies.

2.2.2 Civilian Military

The parallel genesis of military and civilian technology systems is widely explored by a number of theoretical probes. Paul Virilio explores symbiotic aspects of the cinematic and military optic

> From the first missiles of World War Two to the lightning flash of Hiroshima, the *theatre weapon* has replaced the *theatre of operations.* Indeed the military term 'theatre weapon', though itself outmoded, underlines the fact that the history of battle is primarily *the history of radically changing fields of perception.* In other words war consists not so much in scoring territorial, economic or other material victories as in appropriating the 'immateriality' of peceptual fields (Virilio 1989:7).

Friedrich Kittler investigates precursory military effects prior to a cohesive military industrial complex and the revolution brought about by digital communication technologies. The North American arms manufacturer Remington developed the first mass produced typewriter for the US market in 1865, triggering the relationship between civilian and military manufacturing (Kittler 1997:44). Contemporary symptoms of the ongoing military creep into civilian culture are the pervasiveness of 4x4 or recreational vehicles - vehicles which are contemporary versions of the World War II military Jeep and Land Rover (Virilio 1999:64). More recently the Hummer has also been converted and downscaled for popular civilian use in cities and suburbs. This militarization of culture can be also seen in high street fashion, where camouflage has been a fairly persistent trend in mainstream clothing

An Australian soldier equipped for desert combat.

(www.media.militaryphotos. net)

Urban camouflage has been a fairly persistent trend in high street fashions.

(www.telephoneart.com)
(www.slipmats.be)

and accessories. Civilian society has developed its own particular camo colour palate, where the dull natural greens, browns and sandy colours of the outdoor theatre of war have been replaced by a bright vibrant urban camouflage.

There are many other indicators of this militarization of civil culture, but primarily it is a way of operating that necessitates certain kinds of behaviours. Military culture is about efficiency and the synchronisation of actions. Much of the digital communication equipment that has been assimilated by the civilian realm relates to these behaviours. Mobile communications (such as cell phones and wireless communications devices) allow for efficient and synchronized communication, enabling users to operate in a perpetual now.

Logistics is a key aspect of military culture. It drove the development of communication technology. This technology forefronts logistical thinking within the communication culture we occupy. This culture of logistics within civilian society also requires increased synchronisation, not merely of operational systems in the name of efficiency, but also synchronisation of media streams, communications, information, events and opinions, all of which operate in ways that increase the perceptions of that which may be regarded as other.

2.2.3 Projected reality

Aside from physically being at the site of a conflict, the civilian experience of war and other world events is a primarily mediated event, projected by global media networks. These networks, such as CNN, SKY and the BBC World Service, have their own specific needs and motivations, many of which relate to liberal capitalist systems within which they operate, where they compete for audience share, revenues and the need to be up-to-date with nearest rivals. Where media networks are owned or financed by the state or by revenues collected from its citizens, they remains tools of nationhood, which, while they may be obliged to cater for a multitude of citizens and cultural perspectives, nonetheless remain limited to the context of the specific nation.

The media remain, however, most peoples' primary link with the apparent events of the world. The dislocation from actual events and the mediation of reality, specifically in relation to mediated projections of war, is explored by Jean Baudrillard in his book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. He describes this contempo-

Jean Baudrillard argues that contemporary war, with its simulation technology, has become like a video game.

(www.media.militaryphotos. net)

rary war as being more like a video game, where a simulation of reality exists in place of the real thing, a remote controlled reality, with no 'face to face' meeting with the enemy. In the case of the first Gulf War, he sees the opponents lost in their particular trance, 'the one lost in its virtual war won in advance, the other buried in its traditional war lost in advance' (Baudrillard 1995:62).

If one is to apply the optics of the Western media mechanism to the aftermath of GWI, and the civilian casualties following the medical and food shortages, these did not happen either. With this media mechanism being built around the projection of similarity, that which happens to an other, with their 'differences' amplified by this system, an other that the viewer is no longer able to empathise with becomes invisible.

2.3 The History Symptom

History as a cultural reflection mechanism exists as a kind of filter of human action and progress. The historian John Tosh argues 'if the individual cannot exist without memory, neither can society, and that goes for large scale technologically advanced societies as well' (Tosh 2000:3). Within a self-aware society, history has an effect because it accrues within the linear con-

text of time progression. Once a certain amount of linear time has progressed we can theoretically reflect upon the history that has accrued. With the shift from linear to nonlinear frames of reference in the context of digital media and its overarching affect, the structure of time, as we regard it, has undergone a two-fold shift. Increased logistical efficiency theoretically translates into increased productivity, more can be achieved in the same amount of time, thus time appears to accelerate. With the advent of non-linear digital media, such the internet, multimedia and other interactive media, time no longer has the appearance of unfolding in a linear manner with a beginning and an end, but appears infinite.

One has to question the overall effect this repetition or cultural stuttering has on history and progress itself. The idea that time is accelerating has been explored fairly widely by a number of thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard, Marc Auge & Paul Virilio.[4] This accelerative effect has its roots the late 18th century industrial revolution. The industrial revolution was the initiator of the mechanisation of culture where human productivity began to be measured against that of machines. With the digital communication revolution human productivity now becomes measured against digital machines that operate at increasingly accelerative rates. These rate of acceleration can be measured by Gordon Moore's law – a doubling of productivity every 18 months.[5]

Within this accelerated and increasingly mediated, projected reality, that requires a series of broadcast worthy events to happen on schedule, 24 hours a day all year round, reality itself becomes distorted by the needs of this system and the technology that feeds it. The contemporary experience becomes an existence at ever-increasing velocity. While the linear deduction could be made that if time is accelerating, so is history, where history is constructed from events that exist as a result of the passage of time. The perpetuation of repeat events implies that history is in fact receding. The repeat event highlights a lack of progress or progression over time. For the same/similar thing to happen again and again means that something other than that which is being repeated is not able to happen. The space for other events or developments is precluded by this perpetual repetition.

A velocity testing dummy.
(www.biodyn.wpafb.af.mil)

> The manufacture of the present where fashion itself …has come to a halt, which wants to forget the past and no longer seems to believe in the future, is achieved by the ceaseless circularity of information, always returning to the same short list of trivialities, passionately proclaimed as major discoveries. Meanwhile news

> of what is genuinely important, of what is actually changing, comes rarely, and then in fits and starts (Debord 1998 :13).

With the mechanism for production occupied by repetition, progress is limited or precluded. With the mechanism for reflection occupied by maintaining a self operating at increased velocity, reflection itself is limited or precluded. Without space for progression or reflection, human activity becomes inert and reactive, history is cauterized, because history requires progression and reflection for it to remain an intrinsic structural filter of human progress.

This argument is not about the value or affect history has upon society itself, it is instead to do with the way in which history is affected by the velocity of a projected reality. There does however exist a relationship between this debate, the capitalist ideology, and its effect upon history. Capitalist and Marxist views of history and its construction and operation within society are divergent. The debate between capitalism and communism was the primary power struggle for the second half of the 20th century. The failure of the communist politics in the former Soviet Union unleashed and amplified the affects of capitalism in the past 20 years. It is this recent amplification of capitalism within the context of an increasingly projected reality that has cemented the recession of the effect of history. And while liberal capitalism may have viewed history in a particular way in the context of this debate, it has come to effect it in quite another.

This argument about history receding is somewhat different than Francis Fukuyama's contention regarding the end of history. Fukuyama's argument, post the collapse of the Soviet Union, were about the triumphs of liberal democracy at that time. Fukuyama's optimism about liberal democratic systems as kind of end point or inevitable direction of history as can be seen in the following extract.

> In the political and economic sphere, history appears to be progressive and directional, and at the end of the twentieth century has culminated in liberal democracy as the only viable alternative for technologically advanced societies. (Fukuyama 1999:282)

This perhaps idealises liberal democracy and says that we could regard it as a finished and successful project. My argument about the effect of velocity upon history is about probing the frailties of the liberal democratic system within the context of the recent technology boom and rampant capitalism. Acceler-

ated liberal democracy appears to be heading for a collapse, repeat events are perhaps the symptom of this fever. A society that is enraptured by appearances as opposed to actualities (Debord's society of the spectacle), a society locked in a feverish and amplified set of repeat actions, driven by accumulation and obsessed with logistics, where time is accelerating and space is virtual and endless, may be a society that requires the services of history to prevent its destination remaining a constant present.

2.4 The self at velocity. Destination?

The upshot of this acceleration, of an amplified and perpetually accumulative society, is that progress becomes illusional. Events, objects and situations repeated with slight variations, at infinitum, project this illusion, while variation, movement and progression are halted by their own simulations. Is this simulation so fully engaging that we forget ourselves as well? Do we become the illusion? Do we accept this illusion as we gleefully wave goodbye to history? How do we locate the self within this context?

If the Cartesian maxim 'I think, therefore I am' no longer applies because the reflective state has been jettisoned in our accelerated condition, what are the implications for the individual? New definitions for confirming individual existence have been proposed such as Lacan's 'I see myself seeing myself' (Foster 1996:138) which forefronts the visual as the marker for existence, moving away from the reflection proposed by Descartes. This model is further extended by Mirzoeff's 'I am seen and I see that I am seen' (Mirzoeff 2002:10-11). Reality or existence, as defined by the probe of the surveillance cameras and of 'eyes in the sky'. Certainly these extensions speak of the forefronting of the visual within culture and the notion of continual surveillance of the individual, as a result of the pervasive eye in the sky camera systems that populate our urban spaces.

The optics of power and control that Foucault has identified as 'Panoptics' has been extended by this surveillance technology (Foucault 91:200). It is no surprise that surveillance is a military tool now transferred into the civilian realm. These organs of sight are amplified by cosmic panoptical seeing devices like Google Earth[6]. Perhaps, then, this model can be extended even further to 'I see myself, seeing myself being seen in my space from space[7].'

I see myself, seeing myself being seen in my space from space.

(www.digitalglobe.com)

Jean Baudrillard argues that we have lost that which we need to define our 'limits':

> Stripped of a stage and crossed over ... the schizophrenic (us now ?) cannot produce the limits of his very being, he can no longer produce himself as a mirror. He becomes a pure screen, a pure absorption and resorption surface of the influent networks (Baudrillard 1988:27).

It is as if the rational world and the enlightenment have been replaced by a wilderness of civilization, and a primal jungle or wild state has been re-engineered. Only the fittest may survive in these circumstances, they favour the reactive, the speedy and shun the spatial, the reflective. The notion of reason has been replaced by noise. Meaning has been eroded by the perpetuation of signs and objects that the commercial mechanism will have us focus on and then discard in ever shortening cycles. Truth becomes elusive and private, this inward state contrasts the exterior reactivity.

These contradictions occupy the everyday and guide the course of our civilization toward the reactive. A pragmatist could surmise the following: While the panoptical state remains, its zoning extended by digital technologies, our place within this context has shifted. Where we were once merely dressed in our prison clothes (as subjects of the Panopticon), wandering within the delineated space of our permissible borders. Occasionally glancing in the mirror to see that we were still ourselves, we are now armed, with our logistical equipment, and protected, by our virtual armour and our all purpose vehicles. That same pragmatist could say; 'I can operate anywhere and feel safe, therefore I am.'