Digital Animalized Camouflage:
A Zone of Biopolitical Indistinction

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In 2004, the U.S. Army adopted a new, digital pixelated camouflage pattern for its official garb. This Universal Camouflage Pattern was designed as an indiscriminate one-print-fits-all solution for desert, wooded, or urban environments.[1] By 2012, this pixelated concealment strategy had proven to be a bust, costing U.S. taxpayers $5 billion.[2] The uniform did not blend with the environment and, in contradiction to its intent, stood out, marking the soldiers who wore it as easy targets. Currently, the Army is holding contests to replace the failed pattern with a new, more effective one. As of Fall 2013, among the four finalists is a 3-D (three dimensional) biomimetic military combat camouflage solution developed by the company Kryptek that sports an "alligator/crocodile-like reptilian visual look."[3]

Although digital pixelated camouflage emerged in the aftermath of the War on Terror, digital camouflage was first introduced in the 1970s. Camouflage itself was first deployed during World War I (1914-1919). World War I introduced a new mode of warfare, one that relied on the use of trenches on one hand and aerial technology on the other. The trenches were to be occupied by camouflaged soldiers and military machinery. The space between enemy trenches came to be known as 'no man's land', although it should be more accurately termed 'no-*living*-man's land' as it became the forbidden, and often barbed-wired, space of the in-between before battle, and the nexus of abandoned machinery and dead bodies post-military contact.[4] World War I, as Giorgoio Agamben points out, "coincided with a permanent *state of exception* in the majority of warring countries," which had become land, trench in warfare.[5] The state of exception implies a suspension of law itself in situations of perceived political crisis made permanent. This shift toward national, as well as international, exceptionality has become even more pronounced in the wake of the ongoing War on Terror, with the emergence of a new mode of extralegal, no-*living*-man, in-between trench space, exemplified by the Guantanamo prison, and

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1   Daniel Engber, "Lost in the Wilderness: The military's misadventures in pixelated camouflage," in *The Slate Magazine*, July 5, 2012.

2   Erik German, "$5B Camo Snafu: Army Ditches failed combat uniform that put a target on grunts' backs for 8 years," in *The Daily*, June 24, 2012.

3   Kryptek LEAF/Camo Technologies 3-Dimensional (3-D)/Multi-Directional Biomimetic Military Combat Camouflage (Camo) Patterns at SHOT Show 2012: Is the Army's Future Soldier Going Reptilian? For more, see: www.kryptek.com/blog/kryptek-leafcamo-technologies-3-dimensional-3-dmulti-directional-biomimetic-military-combat-camouflage-camo-patterns-at-shot-show-2012-is-the-army's-future-soldier-going-reptilian/biomimetic-military-combat-camouflage-camo-patterns-at-shot-show-2012-is-the-army's-future-soldier-going-reptilian.

4   Danis Tanovic's film, *No Man's Land* (2001), can be seen as an example engaging the term 'no-mans-land' in this more literal military sense.

5   Giorgio Agamben, *State of* Exception, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (2005), 12.

the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan more broadly. World War I's paradigmatic shift toward topologies of exceptionality, ambiguity, and indistinction, culminating in the articulation of a no-*living*-man's land, was reinforced and further visualized by the introduction of combat camouflage. Military camouflage, a product of aerial photography and trench warfare, introduced by the British Navy, was soon taken up by French and American militaries. Subsequently, in its attempt to render the agents and space of combat indistinguishable, camouflage has continued to obscure the biopolitics of no-*living*-man's land unto the present. The visual reduction of the solider into an animal or digital artifact is in direct conversation with political and cultural reconfigurations of citizenship that have occurred since World War I.

An analysis of the changes of combat camouflage strategy in the ongoing War on Terror, which has been extensively theorized as an evocation of the state of exception,[6] illuminates the simultaneous technological and animalistic hybridization that have transpired with regard to both the cartography of military occupation and the configuration of the citizen/soldier. This hybridization constitutes a territorial, as well as civil, zone of what Agamben has termed an 'inclusive exclusion',[7] a topography that I argue delineates an in-between no-*living*-man's land. In this zone, the soldier, functioning both as an occupier and a sacrificial civil surplus, is asked to 'dwell' or inhabit a liminal space in-between life and death, reality and virtuality, humanity and animality.

From the use of virtual environments in training military personnel, to the implementation of digital pixelated camouflage graphics on military uniforms, the lines in war between simulation and reality, gaming and service, avatar and corporeality have become increasingly indistinguishable. This article examines the blurring of the lines between real and digital environments,[8] as well as among animality, digitality, and humanity, that has transpired in relation to the American military in the ongoing War on Terror. It explores the digital invisibility strategy of transcoding—the process of transference of computer terms into cultural practices theorized by Lev Manovich—through an engagement with the ways in which the digital media practices of zoom and pixelation have been reshaped as militarized cultural practices that signal high-tech civil and military sophistication.[9] More specifically, this project focuses on the 2004 Universal Camouflage Pattern adopted by the United States Army. Further, the paper analyzes the soldier-animal-technology convergence that structures camouflage through a genealogical engagement with the works of Abbott Thayer, considered one of the founders of camouflage theory, in the context of the contemporary shift toward 3-D biomimetic

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6   There has been an extensive engagement of the War on Terror as a Schmittian and Agambenian 'state of exception'. See: Amy Kaplan "Where is Guantanamo?" in *American Quarterly* 57:3 (2005), 831-858.

7   Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (1998), 21.

8   This fusion is discussed at length by Tim Lenoir, "All but War is Simulation: The Military-Entertainment Complex," in *Configurations* (2000), 292.

9   Transcoding in the fifth major principle of New Media according to Manovich. For an extended discussion of the main characteristics of new/digital media, see Lev Manovich. *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge: MIT Press (2001).

combat camouflage patterns developed the company Kryptek.[10] Combat camouflage, with its ability to conceal and dazzle, to disorient and disturb the gaze, reinforces a lack of distinction between the human soldier, the environment, and digital technology by producing visual ambiguity. The soldier is expected to blend with natural and computer landscapes, to become part animal, part digital artifact. Digital pixelated camouflage is being reengineered as digital animalized camo. In examining the ability of camouflage to conceal the military apparatus through a dual transference of technology and animality onto the solider/citizen/human, creating a digitized zoomorphed Agambenian 'zone of indistinction'. Accordingly, I argue that dazzle and invisibility have reconfigured in substantial ways the always already biopolitical nature of war. This reconfiguration is rooted in the dual dehumanization of war through the mechanisms of digitality and animality.

Biomimetic and Technomimetic Indistinction

The British and the American explorations into combat camouflage during the World War I were influenced by the writings of the American artist and naturalist Abbott Thayer. Thayer observed strategies of concealment and mimicry in animals and argued for their military adaptation.[11] In nature, writes Thayer, camouflage operates through a dual strategy: in some cases "the greatest need is to be enabled to catch, in others it is to escape being caught."[12] Translating animal camouflage into a disguise strategy for the military further transposes the reconciliation of those two strategies as the predatory soldier is just like the predatory skunk in Thayer's writing, always already prey. Thayer claimed that "patterns always inevitably tend to conceal," hence to render their wearer invisible by blending the camouflaged subject/object with nature.[13] This power of concealment is supposed to work "everywhere against all backgrounds" in a "direct ratio to its strength."[14] A strong pattern is supposed to work equally well against all backgrounds—to function as a universal concealer because it imitates nature so well. The camouflaged thus becomes indistinguishable by wearing a perfect image of the background of its/his/her habitat, by blending with the background through mimesis, and further by becoming the background itself.

But concealment is only one of the illusions created through camouflage. The second function of camouflage is to render its wearer invisible by dazzling and disorienting the viewer as to the shape, size, and position of the subject/object. Camouflage is meant to "dazzle and stupefy… to bewilder…as to the exact position of the chaser."[15] The dazzling effect was observed by Abbott Thayer and his son

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10 Biomimetic structures and materials "mimic the natural world, where animals and plants have the clear ability to adapt to their environment in real time." Tim Lenoir, "All but War is Simulation: The Military-Entertainment Complex," *Configurations*, (2000), 292.

11 Abbot Thayer, "Camouflage" in *The Scientific Monthly*, December (1918). 7:6, 481.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 481-484.

14 Ibid., 481, 485.

15 Gerald Thayer and Abbot Thayer, *Concealing-coloration in the animal kingdom: an exposition of the laws of disguise through color and pattern: being a summary of Abbott H. Thayer's discoveries,* New York: The

Gerard Thayer in birds and bears, whose white bodies are marked with "distractive" black stripes or spots. It is the combination of white and black or other bright colors that produces a "dazzling" effect in which "forms' and details' conspicuousness are reduced by the blazoning of some other detail."[16] The two principles of camouflage, concealment and dazzlement, work in "practically inseparable combination and cooperation."[17] A concealment pattern disorients its observer through "dazzling" when the forms and outlines of the pattern themselves become indistinguishable: *"The stronger the pattern appears, the dimmer appear the forms and outlines of its wearer."*[18] Camouflage thus achieves invisibility through a dual strategy of universal mimicry of nature, as well as through the construction of amorphous vision.

Thayer's examples of the concealment strategies of animals draw on the behavior of predatory animals in nature as well as on practices of societies seen as less "civilized", such as those of the Australian Aborigines and Native Americans. Primitive natives—characterized as brutes closer to animals than to humans, hunting for animals and being hunted down by Western colonizers—provide a cultural model for the successful implementation of camouflage as a concealment military strategy. Camouflage thus is always and already loaded with biopolitical primitivism and animality. Thayer actively sought an adoption of his principle by the military in the United States and Great Britain.[19] He was invited by Theodore Roosevelt to demonstrate his camouflage theory in action in the context of the Spanish-American War. In 1915, he sailed to England in order to present to the British War Office practical suggestions about the institution of a new, camouflaged garb for both war machines and men. He developed a series of "Notes and Essays on Concealing Coloration in Uniforms and Warships, circa 1915-1918," in which he articulated his disapproval with contemporary camouflage military efforts by providing extensive models of seemingly more effective solutions.[20] One of his proposed uniforms featured a foliage curtain that would encompass the body of the soldier and a reversible helmet-cover featuring a white sky-picture, having the effect of reproducing the sky on the soldier's head and shrubs on the soldier's body.[21] Thayer further distinguished between trench war and air-led war. He argued that camouflage, based on mimesis with shrubbery, would not be effective in an air war where there are too many soldiers grouped together, as the "whole looks too much the same from one end to the other."[22] Rather, he argued that the use of airplanes in war required a camouflage strategy based on the dispersal of soldiers across a large field. In this case, "air-men could never see them when they were still, and when

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Macmillan Co. (1909), 105.

16 Ibid., 226.

17 Ibid., 227.

18 Ibid., 227.

19 See: Roy Behrens, *False Colors: Art, Design and Modern Camouflage,* Dysart: Bobolink Books (2002), 45-55.

20 Abbott Thayer's archive has been digitized and made available by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution   at   www.aaa.si.edu/collections/abbott-handerson-thayer-and-thayer-family-papers-7440/more.   The materials pertaining to Thayer's theories of military camouflage are located in Box 3, Folder 25.

21 Abbott Thayer, "Notes and Essays on Concealing Coloration in Uniforms and Warships, circa 1915-1918," Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Box 3, Folder 25.

22 See: ww.aaa.si.edu/assets/images/collectionsonline/thayabbo/fullsize/AAA_thayabbo_360833.jpg.

they were moving they would counter-feit wind-swept vegetation."[23] Camouflage, viewed under aerial perspective rather than from an enemy trench, was supposed to be efficient only when the structure of military organization was profoundly changed away from the amassment of troops and toward a more dispersed figuration. Military camouflage thus responded to the reconfiguration of war introduced by the use of enemy aircraft. In order to be efficient, camouflage had to create the illusion of motion rather than stillness—of being wind-swept—in order to properly imitate nature.

Military camouflage developed and improved over the following decades. Most notable is the development of digital camouflage in the 1970s by Lt. Timothy L. O'Neill. What remained consistent, is the deployment of multiple versions of camouflage, depending on the combat environment—desert, woodland, jungle, etc. In 2004, the potential universal concealment power described by Thayer was realized by the makers of the digital pixelated Universal Camouflage Pattern (UCP). The UCP visualized the natural background of the woodland, desert, and the urban environment as a "pixelated marble of gray and khaki."[24] This new camouflage borrowed the language of digital media, rather than that of nature, endowing camouflage with a technological, rather than an animalistic quality:

> By taking the flowing shapes of the old woodland prints and deconstructing them into tiny squares, military engineers applied a computer logic to nature: They made over the science of camouflage, once inspired by the evolution of peppered moths and other animals, into a kind of digital screen-print that could spread through the networked military as a piece of viral media.[25]

The natural and urban background were to be imitated not through the framework of nature itself, but through the architecture of the computer screen. The soldier took on the disguise not of the animal, but of the digital artifact. Thayer's biomimetic camouflage had become a technomimetic concealment strategy. Once digitized, *all environments* were reduced to a single universal binary code which became the basis for a universal camouflage. This new digital camouflage was tested through computer experiments in which subjects were asked to look on the screen in determining how well universal digital camouflage blended with varying environments to address computerized and infrared, rather than airborne, vision. Despite its testing failures in both digital testing and real-world war settings of Iraq and Afghanistan, the UPC was adopted by the United States Army because it was seen as trendy and remained a dominant military camouflage pattern for four years.

The Universal camouflage pattern proved to be a massive failure, as it did not imitate, and thus did not blend, with Iraqi or Afghan naturescapes and cityscapes. It cost the lives of too many soldiers. As of the Fall of 2012, the U.S. Army started holding design competitions to develop new, more reliable camouflage patterns for

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23 See: www.aaa.si.edu/assets/images/collectionsonline/thayabbo/fullsize/AAA_thayabbo_360834.jpg.
24 Engber, "Lost in the Wilderness."
25 Ibid.

'woodland', 'desert' and 'transitional' environments.[26] One of the four finalists is Kryptek Inc., which has proposed a 3-D "alligator/crocodile-like reptilian visual look."[27] Their bio- and techno- mimetic design shifts the construction of camouflage away from pure digital pixelation into digital animality. Camouflaged soldiers are appearing to us as 3-D animals, much like Jake Scully's image on the moon of Pandora in James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009).

Reconfigured Vision

The shifting combat camouflage strategies over the last century speak to the emergence of new forms of vision and visuality that require adaptive blending and disruptive deception strategies. During World War I, observations about the role of camouflage in nature had to be translated into patterns of concealment and dazzlement that would be effective given the mechanized birds-eye-view of airborne surveillance. According to Barry Faulkner, the American Camouflage Corps "knew that camouflage was mostly about aerial photography, but they could not get an airplane and had never seen an aerial photograph."[28] Similarly, in France Lucien de Scevola experimented with streaked camouflage patterns that were to go undetected by an "aerial observer [who] flew over the area at a height of 300 meters," who was instructed to look for the disguised cannons and artillery team.[29]

The current computerized testing methods for digital camouflage are spearheaded by the 'father of digital camouflage'—Lt. Timothy L. O'Neill who developed 'digital' camouflage in the 1970s. At the present, the evaluation process "blends the intricacies of brain and vision sciences with the evolving art of textile deception" and further digitizes this process by inserting a mediating computer screen between the camouflaged 'target' and the 'observer'.[30] Thus, camouflage theories developed during the early 20th century are still at the core of contemporary camouflage. This genealogy is further reinforced by Kryptek's commitment to both visual blending and disruption. Kryptek's camouflage is meant be an effective concealer of its wearer in three different lighting spectrums: visible light/visual, SWIR (Short Wave Infrared)/Near IR/Night Vision/I2, and thermal/IR.[31] The 'observer' and the 'observed' thus become subjected to the logic of the computer screen and the infrared camera. Infrared goggles have become the predominant visual apparatus that both materializes and distinguishes the soldier, friend, and foe on the battlefield. The 3-D infrared-tuned biomimetic camouflage further illustrates Thomas Elsaesser's point that "technologies of imaging today are not [a] means of assisting sight, whether of real or imagined things, but technologies of

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26 Lance M. Bacon, "Army weighs 4 options to replace current camo," in *Army Times*, March 10, 2012.

27 The other camouflage solutions are equally interesting, but I do not engage them in this project. Kryptek LEAF/Camo Technologies 3-Dimensional (3-D)/Multi-Directional Biomimetic Military Combat Camouflage (Camo) Patterns at SHOT Show 2012: Is the Army's Future Soldier Going Reptilian?

28 Roy Behrens, *False Colors: Art, Design and Modern Camouflage*, Dysart: Bobolink Books (2002), 63.

29 Ibid.*,* 67.

30 Bill Briggs, "Uncloaked: How Army is testing new camo to replace flawed design," *NBC News,* July 17, 2012.

31 David Crane, "Kryptek LEAF/Camo Technologies 3-Dimensional (3-D)/Multi-Directional Biomimetic Military Combat Camouflage (Camo) Patterns at SHOT Show 2012: Is the Army's Future Soldier Going Reptilian?"

probing and penetration"—kinetic and sensory technologies that disassociate seeing and knowledge.[32]

Spaces of Indistinction

The political and visual ambiguity produced in the combat zone—the zone of exception—now spans across entire nations subjected to occupation (Iraq and Afghanistan, for example). It is shaped politically and legally through the notion of indistinction as a space and state of exception, created visually in large part through the technology of camouflage. In *State of Exception*, Giorgio Agamben theorizes the 'state of exception' as a "no-man's-land between public law and political fact, and between the juridical order and life."[33] It is the "zone of indistinction between outside and inside, chaos and the normal situation" where both the 'outside' and 'chaos' are *inclusive exclusions*.[34] The zone is engulfed by chaos and is thrown into a state of nature. Chaos disrupts the structure; it twists and turns structure into an unrecognizable 'figure'. Chaos comes to represent the lack of laws, of rules, while topology figure allows for relationality in a condition of indeterminacy. The state of exception here figures as a primordial paradigm, whose existence "opens the space in which the determination of a certain juridical order and a particular territory first becomes possible. As such, the state of exception itself is thus essentially unlocalizable (even if definite spatiotemporal limits can be assigned to it from time to time)."[35] The zone of indistinction, therefore, involves both changing shape, as well as changing spatial and temporal positions with regard to the domains of law and geography. The space of exception, in this way, emerges as something different from territory. It cannot be mapped clearly on to a fixed territory. Rather, it becomes an ever-shifting terrain.

The state of exception is a space of exception, a complex topological figure, a 'topological zone of indistinction' created by a topological process.[36] This emphasis on topology is present in the examples used to describe the state of exception—hence, Agamben's comparisons to a Mobius Strip and Leyden jar (as well as the cover of *Homo Sacer*), all of which present a map of the second master plan for Auschwitz ready for a topological investigation. A topological figure by definition is the continuous transformation of one geometrical figure into another. This elasticity, or metamorphosis, "had remained hidden from the eyes of justice" and we must "try to fix [it] under our gaze" in order to reveal it and to understand it, according to Agamben. In order to institute justice and law, it is imperative to be able to visualize the space of violence, the spaces of exception. The space of exception, in its continuous flux, seems to be endowed with a disruptive and obscured visuality that hides unjust violence. It dazzles as if it itself has been visually camouflaged. Fixing

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32 Thomas Elseasser, "The 'Return' of 3-D: On Some of the Logics and Genealogies of the Image in the Twenty-First Century," *Critical Inquiry*, 39:2, (2013), 242.
33 Agamben, *State of Exception*, 2.
34 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 19.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 37.

requires both precise visualization, as well as localization. An example of such a focal point is the concentration camp, which became politically relevant only once visualized.[37] Thus Agamben's topology is one that engages the legality of exceptionality in spatial, geometrical terms—as outlines, connections, and associations—as structures independent of their content, meaning that the topology of the exception acts universally. These points of fixity or points of localization, require a concrete geographic and historical specificity in order for their unveiling, in order for calls for justice to be meaningful and further plausible.

Dazzle and Refusal of the Fixed Gaze

So far, I have tried to show that camouflage visually obscures the biopolitics of the state exception through a refusal to fixing under the gaze both the space of exception and the people who occupy it in both senses of the term—as habitation and as military invasion. As Michael Taussig has argued, camouflage operates through two modes of visibility: "through blending to the point of concealment, as with mimicry" and through "dazzle [so that it] distort[s] and misdirect[s] attention, as with cubist-style painting."[38] Camouflage thus institutes a regime of vision that was meant to confuse and disorient the observer, rather than to forbid the look. Although the inner workings of the military have never been completely visible to the common citizen, the War on Terror has introduced a new level of concealment that has been in turn coupled with a false sense of visualization. While embedded journalists reported directly from the battlefield and gave a sense of immediacy and intimacy to the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, government censorship over the casualties of war increased dramatically. This visual regime found its most profound public manifestation in the restrictions imposed by George W. Bush on photographing and broadcasts of the flag-draped coffins of fallen soldiers. The ban was lifted in 2009, but remains a latent and emblematic strategy for the concealment of the human toll of war.[39] Concealment of the biopolitics of war here take the form of banning the act of looking. The political strategy to present a 'clean' high-tech war with few casualties on all sides is constructed through and reflected in the visual regimes instituted by digital military camouflage.

The UCP transcoded, to use Lev Manovich's term, the computer process of pixelation into a cultural reconfiguration of the solider/citizen. In contrast to analog camouflage, digital pixelated camouflage attempts to foster invisibility by punishing and reverting the gaze itself. Not only does digital pixelated camouflage deny the fixing of the eye, but even more profoundly it reverts it and punishes it. Here, the gaze toward occupation and its agents is being rejected and reprimanded. There is nothing important or worthy to see; you should not look closely, if at all. The digital process of zoom that produces the visual effect of pixelation suggests that one is looking at an image without enough distance. The eye is physically punished for the

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37 Ibid., 20.
38 Michael Taussig, "Zoology, Magic, Surrealism in the War on Terror," *Critical Inquiry*, 34:2, (2008), 107.
39 Elizabeth Bumiller, "U.S. lifts photo ban on military coffins," in *New York Times*, December 7, 2009.

act of looking. The real world, much like the digital, must be seen as a big picture at a distance. Soldiers are presented as constituents of the military, as building blocks that lack visuality and individuality, and thus visible individual presence.

The digitization and pixelation of camouflage has a profound effect on the reconfiguration of the perception of war. The computer logic behind pixelation is now a cultural logic that diverts the gaze away from the apparatus of war. The use of digital pixelated camouflage creates a dual mode of invisibility of American soldiers. This mode relies first on the invocation of the digital zoom that implicates soldiers as pixels, part of a larger structure/picture. One's gaze should be reverted from them and onto a wishful image and imaginary that they constitute, i.e. the rhetoric of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Second, it suggests that the bigger picture is present, yet cannot be clearly seen, as it masquerades and dazzles through camouflage. The first modality of this invisibility suggests an important shift of the political relations between the citizen and the state, as the right to look is intimately connected to a position of power and authority. As Nicholass Mirzoeff has argued, "the ability to assemble a visualization manifests the authority of the visualizer."[40] The ability to look is thus an indicator of authority. This holds true, as well, for panopticon vision, in which the observer is not prohibited from looking, but is prohibited from seeing. In the context of the War on Terror, citizens have been disallowed the act of looking at the inner workings of the military. This ban has been exemplified by the institution of military digital pixelated camouflage.

The second modality of invisibility, represented by 'big picture' camouflage, speaks to the spectral presence of the military in the securitization of the state, as well as in upholding civil society through a discourse of patriotic citizenship that implies that the defense of one's freedom is secured through military occupations. The distance of the big picture look does not, however, imply a critical, analytical perspective for analysis. Rather, standing far away from the scene of action, the citizen's look is sufficiently distanced such that he/she would not see anything anyway. The digital pixelated distanced look transforms the specific into an abstract and ahistorical entity. It does not transform the object seen into the subject of debate and analysis.

Writing of the dazzling British ships of World War I, Taussig suggests that they were "[m]eant to destabilize vision in real life, they mesmerize when looked at in pages of a book."[41] In its analogue form, camouflage dictates a different visual regime when seen in action or the world at large, than when seen as a static object— for example, in a photograph. In other words, once camouflage is rendered static by the image, it can be seen and admired. Digital-pixel camouflage obliterates this static/dynamic, representation/real-life distinction by remediating a digital media mode of seeing into everyday life. One might even argue that camouflage and war, as well as life and death, function similarly in the real and digital worlds. One does

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40 Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Right to Look," *Critical Inquiry*, 37, (2011), 474.
41 Ibid., 109.

not die; the game can be restarted without consequences. Was one ever a living human? A living citizen? Digital 3-D camouflage signals a cultural shift that makes Agamben's 'fix[ing] under one's gaze' and the localization of the space of exception undesirable and impossible. Digital 3-D vision with its rejection of linear perspective and its insertion of 'postpictorial spatial vision' does away with the 'fixed point of view'.[42] In the context of war generally and of occupation more specifically, the omnipresent *nomos* of exceptionality that emerged in the ongoing War on Terror situates biopolitics in a topology of the "floating presence, immaterial and invisible, as well as [of the] ubiquitous and omnipresent."[43] Seeing life and death becomes impossible and irrelevant because eyesight is no longer a precondition for knowledge and images no longer ask for observation, witnessing, and contemplation.[44] Life and death become translated into an indistinguishable array of digital binary data that can be probed, processed, and possessed.

Werewolves, Images, and Avatars

For Thayer, camouflage transforms the human into a primitive, hence animalistic and brutal, hunter—a hunter who comes to inhabit the Hobbesian 'state of nature'. Hobbes spatially localized the state of nature in the Americas, setting up 'savages' as the man of nature *par excellence*.[45] Thayer's visual examples of the Aboriginal and Native American warriors thus present visual representations of the Hobbesian state of nature. This transition, for Thayer, is explicitly visual as man, like an animal, becomes one with nature in the condition of violence: be it hunting or warfare. Current understandings of camouflage have further asserted that camouflage does more than disguise its wearer, it has a strong psychological effect in generating a 'predatory combat mindset' that allows the wearer to think like 'a hunter'.[46] Surface camouflage is thus symptomatic of an emotional transformation, but also of a more profound legal and political change.

The presence of camouflage signals a state of nature, while simultaneously obscuring its particularities. Agamben evokes Hobbes' political theory in arguing that the state of exception evokes a state of nature that becomes a zone of indistinction between humanity and animality, producing the figure of the werewolf: "this lupitization of man and humanization of the wolf is at every moment possible in the *dissoluto civitatis* inaugurated by the state of exception, during which time the city is dissolved and men enter into a zone in which they are no longer distinct from beasts."[47] The werewolf represents a threshold indistinction a "passage

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42 Thomas Elseasser, "The 'Return' of 3-D: On Some of the Logics and Genealogies of the Image in the Twenty-First Century," *Critical Inquiry*, 39:2, (2013), 240, 244.

43 Ibid., 244-5.

44 Ibid., 240, 245.

45 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London and New York: Penguin, (1986), 187.

46 David Crane "Kryptek LEAF/Camo Technologies 3-Dimensional (3-D)/Multi-Directional Biomimetic Military Combat Camouflage (Camo) Patterns at SHOT Show 2012: Is the Army's Future Soldier Going Reptilian?"

47 Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 106.

between animality and humanity," being neither man nor animal.[48] This hybrid animality renders the human into a viscous predator capable of, but also subjected to, mere violence. Agamben's notion of the 'werewolf' as a hybrid figure representing an in-between state of the obscure, morphing, elastic, disorienting transformation of the human into animal and animal into human complicates the human-animal hybridization of Thayer's camouflage. The animal-human hybrid dehumanizes by rendering those caught in metamorphosis as biopolitical subjects, decriminalizing violence. Camouflage signals and at the same time obscures precisely this legal and political dehumanization of warfare.

With its transition from animal coloration to computerized pixelation, camouflage took on a new mode of dehumanization through the rhetoric of technology. The state of nature in the space of exception, with its hybrid animal-human warriors, became a digital matrix. The werewolf now stands as avatar. The avatar, however, is both a technological and animalistic construct. The bestial and primitive as forms of animality are indispensable to the construction of the human avatar in a technological space of exception. Violence against and by the avatar is doubly justified: through its reduction to digital code, on one hand, and to the animal, on the other. It is the animalistic quality of the avatar that implies realness —hence the power and vulnerability of the hunter and prey respectively. The digital pixelated combat camouflage of the Universal Camouflage Pattern, in transforming the disguised into a sequence of visual digital code, further implies that reality itself is a digital construction.[49] The camouflaged is expected to blend with the digital environment as digital space becomes real, while analogue space enters the level of abstraction. This digital patterning failed as it was being adapted in low-technology spaces, where handmade car bombs were more prevalent than infrared and drone vision. The space of the Other could not be fully digitized. Digitized soldiers were hunting for technomimetic enemies, yet became prey of that same 'Oriental' enemy who, in their assumed primitivity, engaged in the hunt of the animal. In turn, technomimetic camouflage produced inefficient hunters who were also easy prey.

Kryptek's 3-D biomimetic, technomimetic military camouflage explicitly combines animality and technology, producing a digital animalized disguise. A three dimensional computer generated interface of a reptilian implies a mimesis not with the animal itself, but rather with its avatar. The animalistic 'look' of camouflage was a coincidental, yet welcomed byproduct of the camo-netting 3-D effect. In a digitized state of nature, the zeal of war, the institution of mere violence is evoked through the techno-primitive. The zone of indistinction created by the state of nature in the space of the exception is thus threefold: it comes to engage the digital binary, primitive animality, and civilizing humanity. The indispensability of the animalistic in the digital technological context of war is evident both in the construction of real

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48 Nathan Van Camp, "Animality, Humanity, and Technicity," *Transforamtions: Journal of Media and Culture*, 17, (2009).

49 For an extended discussion on the virtuality of war, see: James Der Derian's *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network (2009)* and Paul Virilio's *War and Cinema* (2009).

war as a digital predatory endeavor and the situation of war in the 3-D world of primitives, as exemplified by *Avatar*. Here, paraplegic marine Jake Sully enters the 3-D CGI world of Pandora, where he encounters the primitive tribal society of the humanoid Na'vi living in a Hobbesian state of nature. Upon his entry into the distant and primitive world of Pandora, he regains his physical abilities and is visually transformed into a Na'vi. As a primitive animal-technological-human creature, Sully is now wearing hunting gear associated with 'savage' societies; he obtains a blue striped camouflage skin coloration, elongated ears and nose, a tail, werewolf yellow eyes, long hair, a bow, arrow, spear, and a modesty skirt to cover his genitals. Camouflaged through the latest technology as a primitive hunter, Sully becomes a digitized 3-D werewolf who instigates a state of exception in the space of nature.

Whereas camouflage and the latest high-tech virtual reality technology transforms marine Sully into a primitive warrior, Kryptek's solution to combat camouflage translates the painted bodies of the savage hunters into technologically advanced clothing solutions that dislocate camouflage away from the bare skin and onto a layer of fabric. This fabric helps the 'war fighter' become a three-dimensional looking alligator blending with the natural background. Camouflage now does not mimic nature directly, as Thayer's stencils attempted to do. Rather, it mimics technologically created, visually realistic natural environments. Kryptek's digital animalized camouflage solution evokes the omnipresence of Cameron's computer simulated 3-D world—a world that, following the logic of the 'game', rather than the 'window to the world', is both 'immersive and interactive'.[50] If, in Elaesser's words, "Cameron's commercial-military-scientific mission to the planet Pandora is an inventory of what 3-D software is currently being used for and promoted for: computer game environments, unmanned surveillance and combat vehicles, oil exploration and land-surveillance," Kryptek's camouflage speaks to the ability of this vision to render analog reality as extraordinary, abstract, virtual and not real. Upon entering the now digitized state of nature in the exceptional condition of war, the camouflage wearing 'warrior' is transformed into a technologically synthesized reptilian endowed with a 'predatory combat mindset'.[51]

Spaceless Zone

Digital pixelated camouflage, by blurring the line between the human and the digital avatar, acts as a technological dehumanizer. The avatar, in digitizing Agamben's werewolves, comes to justify death as a necessary sacrifice, not punishable murder of those seen to dwell on the limits of society within the liminal political and geographical typology of the exception. The dehumanization of the soldier sets up the arena for the objectification and dehumanization of the act of violence itself—social violence that exacts the sacrifice of the citizen as solider and

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50 Elseasser, "The 'Return' of 3-D," 242. For an extensive analysis of the use of gaming by the US military, see: Tim Lenoir, "All but War is Simulation: The Military-Entertainment Complex," *Configurations*, (2000).

51 David Crane. "Kryptek LEAF/Camo Technologies 3-Dimensional (3-D)/Multi-Directional Biomimetic Military Combat Camouflage (Camo) Patterns at SHOT Show 2012: Is the Army's Future Soldier Going Reptilian?"

the violence of the soldier against the perceived enemy. Agamben's mere violence becomes an action that the game of digital 3-D warfare prompts. As evident by Kryptek's 3-D digital animalized camouflage, as well as by *Avatar*, animalism continues be evoked as an integral part of the technological representation of war and the war fighter. Hence, the fusion of the digital and the real that has transpired in the last decade in the military-entertainment-industrial complex has blurred the boundaries between technology, animality, and humanity. While the technological aspect of this hybridization has often been associated with the emergence of superior 'artificial' intelligence, it is the re-inscription of animality in our contemporary digital-real world that allows for the coupling of rationality and affect. War in the contemporary state of exception is guided by artificial intelligence, but is driven by primal and primitive animalism.

Digital pixelated camouflage signals a profound change in the space and state of exception. It covers up and at the same time points to the mobile and ubiquitous nature of this reconfigured digitized zone of indistinction that insists no longer on spatial or temporal coordinates. The UCP has dissolved different 'terrains' into a unified equivocal pixelated matrix—a universal environment structured by digital binary code and visualized through an omniscient technological decoy. This no-*living*-man's land is devoid both of finite life and territorial specificity. A distinction of life and death can be summoned as a fleeting and ephemeral phenomenon through the assemblage and aggregation of multiple dispersed mobile points of violence. No longer land and no longer of those living and dying, the zone of indistinction that has emerged in the ongoing War on Terror has remained invested in the animalistic. Encased in 3-D biomimetic camouflage—a digital animalized camouflage—the war fighter is promised eternal physical life as a digital avatar and at the same time is reminded of his/her emotional mortality as a wounded animal and relieved from the burden of physical pain, suffering, death. Habitats and territories regain their shimmering outlines as 3-D models. Woodlands, deserts, and alligators emerge out of the flatness of the pixelated grid. For military occupiers, the digitalization of war promises bloodless war—death becomes a 3-D blip on the screen, a dissolution into pixels that can provide matter out of which new futuristic distributed forms can be created. A future topology of exceptional extra-legal spaces has to come to terms with its holographic, rather than perspectival, interstitial biomimetic and geomimetic architecture.

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