

Rehearsal as the 'Other' to Hypercomputation

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The next few paragraphs outline the effects of the simulation paradigm on the sense of errantry in the postcolonial condition in places like Lebanon. Through an examination of two games about the Beirut war, that differ in their approach, the text examines the possibilities of opening up a space for the Other in the gap between simulation as rehearsal versus that of training.

History is apparently no longer sufficient to uphold the dominance of the western viewpoint. It must be overcome, but despite the prevalence of critical tools such as discourse analysis, genealogy, archaeology and other methods that attempt to dismantle the totalitarian universal structure of history, it is simulation that appears to disassemble it, only to take its place. However, to overcome history through simulation is to root the colonized into a past of prediction, efficiency and closed repetition. Simulation studies people and places like Beirut and their wars as strategy, in order to lock them into a position that is not indigenous to their way of being, that of errantry.

Édouard Glissant describes errantry as “rooted movement” in a sense that it’s a desire to go against the root where the root is the historical beginnings and universalization of the western point of view.¹ The history of the West has always been tied to fixed states of nationality, an idea that has been exported to the colonized nations like Lebanon, that have come to aspire to similar univocal rootedness. The idea of errantry, which Glissant believes to be native to the colonized, is a fluid subjectivity that sits between the notion of identity and movement.

In other words, what this text will put forward, is that simulation closes in on the possibilities of what Glissant describes as a poetics, creating a continuous longing for the lost but defunct and deconstructed stories of origins and history that are tied to the west. In order to foreclose on the past war like the one of Beirut in 1982, simulation engines use remote sensing and computer-generated images to build model worlds in order to programmatically train on different scenarios, from different perspectives across different surfaces of the earth. Simulation becomes a device to train actions and access history

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in a world of greater perceived uncertainty, automation, deregulation and the supposed “need” for risk management.

I need not reiterate the pages and pages written on the prominence of economics-based calculation and prediction of events that have taken over from poetry, storytelling and meaning; the decreasing importance of a stable and single point of view which is being supplemented (and often replaced) by multiple perspectives, overlapping windows, distorted flight lines, and divergent vanishing points. Farewell to History which should have long been replaced by genealogy, archaeology, discourse analysis and the evolutionary vibrations of matter, geology and exploding events, exploding long before history, contingency and accidents bubbling beneath the crust. A loss that is felt even more prominently these days with the constant interruption of screen face-to-face conversations by glitches, echoes, ventilation hum, or simply by headaches and sore eyes.

The representational scalar vocabularies of narrative storytelling are no longer good enough to describe the complex temporality and spatiality of the world. One that appears to be a composite matter of deep time water undersea, rocks, stones, forests, the body feminine, the marginalized, the repressed, the unconscious, and the algorithms. Global infrastructures, computer generated images, data behaviorism, all of the aspects of the new geo-political and economic interdependencies that make up our world. Simulation and tactical gameplay have come to replace historical folktales. History as a fictional linear progression that continuously follows on from event to event, that has a form of unity, western rootedness and continuity, is no longer perceived as sufficient enough to describe the diverse multitude of our current reality. History is the discourse of the powerful; it's the discourse of totalitarianism, of hegemony, which must be critiqued and questioned. Unfortunately these critical methods forever remain buried behind the thrust and efficacy of modeling volumetric unknowns.

Simulation is the new method of certainty, which borrows its art from cybernetics, particle physics and statistical mechanics. It has come to replace history, to break up its hold on reality, by presenting the past through multiplying perspectives. However, simulation comes in two flavors, that of *rehearsal* and of *training*. The latter is always seemingly co-opted and incorporated into volumetric regimes of the probable closing in on all the possibilities that could open up when history dissolves. The chaotic weather systems of social,

political, animate and post-colonial perspectives, under the current regimes of volumetric terror, or simulation as training are tamed, suffocated in predictive echo chambers, from contingency and accident to calculated probabilities.

However, not all tactical gameplay is designed the same, simulations can appear as rehearsal on the one hand and training on the other. An example of simulation-as-training as opposed to rehearsal is the way that crewless vessels or autonomous cargo ships are trained through various volumetric exercises and modeling. To understand the possibilities of traversing the sea in the shortest amount of time, with the least amount of trouble. The experiments of the sea of past and beyond are no longer there. An autonomous ship does not sail for exploration, however problematic that term is, when considering colonial encounters. Even the colonial ships that wanted to discover and conquer, left a little bit of space for contingency, for the accident. The cargo autonomous ships, however, leave no room or margin for error. They must train for all scenarios regardless of their position. And if these ships encounter a scenario that is not part of the training package, then they no longer know what to do. A failure in this sense is not an opportunity for discovery, a failure is complete deadlock. The training of volumetric regimes is a future speculative exercise for closing up the future for minimizing error and risk. Furthermore, the difference between the rehearsal of the first-person taking command of the simulation engine on the one hand and the rehearsal of the autonomous machine learning system that is acting as an opponent on the other, is that simulators mould, through training, the corpus of living beings to the machine, while the autonomous system extracts the bodily presence from the rehearsal process. It's not training the body anymore it's training of data archived, extracted.

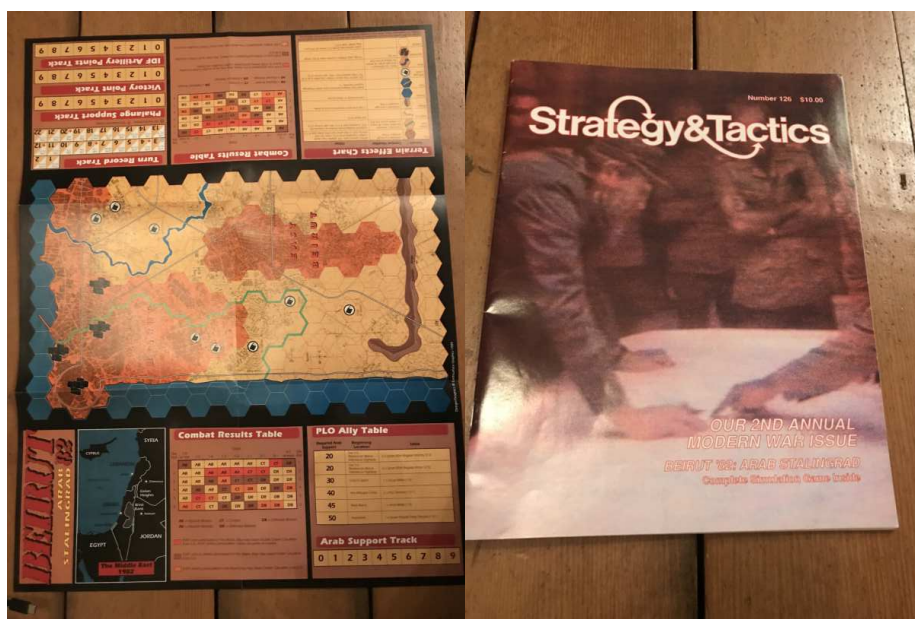
With the number of simulations trialed at the moment, it's almost as if we've entered some form of "Training Paradigm", that is if we could ever again believe in the phenomena of paradigms or epochs. From marketing campaigns to political campaigns training on consumer or voter temperament, to competing models simulating virus paths, vaccine efficacy and the rate at which black and ethnics minorities are likely to get infected due to frontline jobs they are forced into by structural racism. Train the timeline, train for the unlikely scenario, learn the drill and prepare for the victor. Prepare the seven speeches only to read out the one that seems most fitting

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when you know the results. To train, a preparation for pointless anticipated activities.

The term “re-hearse” combines the Latin (re) with the old French *herse*, meaning harrow or a large rake used to turn the earth or ground, as in to reground or to take the ground again, to rake it again until all possible grounds have been considered.² A distinction, however, should be made between rehearsal and training. If rehearsal is the repetition that maintains the openness of the rehearsed piece, a repetition that produces difference each time the piece is rehearsed, then training is the moment of closure in the process of rehearsal, when contingency is purposefully erased. What training does as every performer knows is that it destroys the spontaneity of the moment, “The performer, therefore, could not rehearse such music but rather “trained” for it like a martial art, developing ways of acting upon contingency.”³

Training is in this sense different from the practice of rehearsal, which is a gesture of putting something into action, from the theory into practice. To train for something is to consider and attempt to foreclose all possible futures by unearthing various possible grounds for any future. When one trains they repeat an action in an attempt to erase the possibility for the accident, or erase the possibility of any kind of error. Training for a sport, for example, tends to optimize all the muscles towards a very specific and closed, aim that leaves no room for the accident. The accident in sport is always an injury.



GAME RULES PAGE 1: On June 13th, 1982, paratroopers and armour of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) rolled to the edge of Beirut, joining forces with their Phalange Christian allies. They never got much farther. The Palestine Liberation Organisation's attempt to organise a regular army had failed, but so had Israel's drive to exterminate it. This was a classic confrontation of modern diplomacy, where political pressure allowed a tiny force to fend off a giant. Beirut '82: Arab Stalingrad simulates the siege of Beirut, and its victory conditions recreate the diplomatic hindrances of that struggle.⁴

The above excerpt is taken from the 1989 edition of *Strategy and Tactics* magazine which was founded in 1966 by a US Air Force Staff Sergeant named Chris Wagner. The point of the magazine, or “war fanzine”, was to produce more complex and therefore more realistic tactics in wargaming. The magazine had elements of a recreational wargaming magazine but as it was written by military political analysts and defense consultants who were keen to create something close enough to military wargaming. In 1969 James F. Dunnigan, a political analyst, formed Simulations Publications, Inc., a publishing house created specifically to publish the magazine.⁵

The excerpt is the first paragraph of the game rule page that explains the rules of *Beirut '82: Arab Stalingrad*, a game based on *The Siege of Beirut*, one of the most defining events of the Lebanese Civil War. The siege took place in the summer of 1982 when the United Nations ceasefire between the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLO), who in the early 1970s made Lebanon its base of operations, and the Israeli army. After the siege the PLO were forced out of Beirut and the rest of Lebanon. *Strategy and Tactics* was one of the first wargaming magazines to include a wargame within its pages.

The main difference between so-called recreational wargames such as *Beirut '82: Arab Stalingrad*, however realistic and complex they intend to be, and military wargames, is that the former is usually regarded as a historical depiction of war. The training on tactics and strategies is replaying the events of a distant past. Wargaming has long performed World Wars I and II and the Napoleonic Wars as an act of remembrance and an interest of historians. Recreational games generally take creative liberties, by adding fictional elements, to make

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the game more enjoyable, more playable. For instance, scenarios would often be differently simplified in order to prioritize gameplay over event accuracy. However, *Strategy and Tactics* as a magazine that sits between tactical history and military strategy prides itself on being more realistic than other wargaming magazines.



GAME RULES PAGE 5, 6.0 CIVILIAN CASUALTIES: The CRT (rule 4.22) shows if an attack might cause Civilian Casualties, and what to multiply the result by. However, these casualties still only occur under certain conditions. IDF units or artillery points must participate in the attack and the PLO must be defending a Refugee Camp or City hexagon. Otherwise, ignore Civilian Casualties.⁶

Wargaming is a descriptive and predictive apparatus that goes beyond the magazines and technologies of its implementation. When playing a game such as *Beirut '82: Arab Stalingrad* on the map insert placed in the centerfold of the publication, the gamer moves the Phalange army troops, as cardboard cut-outs of a right-wing Maronite party in Lebanon founded in 1936 by Pierre Gemayel, across the map. Such a move is a re-enactment of a particular procedure that relates to a complex system which reproduces what to some are painful historical events in relation to other possible futures, possible or probable futures that will never be. The combat is replaced with abstraction, supply and demand dynamics and other military considerations

of algorithmic and numerically founded sets of possible outcomes all made random, a flipping of events at the throw of a die. *Beirut '82: Arab Stalingrad* is interesting not for its own sake but for in the manner in which it represents knowledge or history as a combination of both rehearsal and training, as simulation, or as Haron Farocki describes, "life trained as a sport".⁷ *Beirut '82: Arab Stalingrad* is not only a simulation: it is one of the most nuanced and complex examples found in any medium. As a game it has eight pages of rules which explain actions, moves and procedures for circa one hundred game pieces and tokens around a 50cm by 40cm battle ground map of Beirut. It allows for a physically as well as conceptually extreme level of gameplay.

More than this, software gaming, from its inception, was quick to take interest in wargaming, which is different from games with military themes. Wargames were quick to translate to the screen and themes of Beirut 82 were no exception. The difference being that simulation now attempts to model all of the weapons, vehicles and aircrafts that were involved in the siege for show. Digital Combat Simulator's UH-1H Huey mission entitled Beirut 82 is an exemplar of the wargaming simulation offering a first-person experience of what it's like to be an American built Israeli helicopter flying over Beirut in 1982. The DCS website describes it as:

*Digital Combat Simulator World (DCS World) 2.5 is a free-to-play digital battlefield game. Our dream is to offer the most authentic and realistic simulation of military aircraft, tanks, ground vehicles and ships possible... DCS: UH-1H Huey features an incredible level of modelling depth that reproduces the look, feel, and sound of this legendary helicopter with exquisite detail and accuracy. Developed in close partnership with actual UH-1H operators and experts, the DCS Huey provides the most dynamic and true to life conventional helicopter experience available on the PC. The UH-1 Huey is one of the most iconic and recognisable helicopters in the world. Having served extensively as a transport and armed combat support helicopter in the Vietnam War, the Huey continues to perform a wide variety of military and civilian missions around the world today.*⁸

Here the simulation is less interested in the historical strategies that play out a future otherwise. The volumetrics of the UH-1H Huey are

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there to both produce a so-called “modeling depth” in order to train the gamer to fly the helicopter over the terrain Beirut. The “modeling depth” of the Huey relates to a calculated time of the clock, not a temporality of sorts, but rather a time in the milliseconds, for instance, that it takes to fly the aircraft for calculations sake: calculation for calculations sake.

“Modeling depth” also relates to the attention to visual and volumetric detail in the construction of the aircraft itself, to resolution. Depth here considers only pixel resolution of the type of visual dimension that captures the aircraft in a hyper computational state. It means very little to the people on the ground, viewing it as it shells its missiles, or captures prisoners who are their family members on the ground. In effect none of the events of Beirut 82 are captured in this simulation, not even the tactics and facts of history.

So, while in *Strategy and Tactics*, and the Beirut 82 replaying there is the probable and possible future that can be played and played again, even if it will never be realized. There is an opening for discussion of the past. In that sense, the past is being rehearsed as if it could have been otherwise. The tactical re-playing of past in that sense becomes a mode of open discussion within the game. Historical recollection can no longer be a simple story, narrative or folklore. Historical recollection has to include tactical exercises, a replaying, a repetition, a habit, a form of inhabiting the past which keeps its own tactical memories; the memory or schema of a victory that’s played as tactical exercise. With the DCS: UH-1H Huey, however, the body of the gamer trains to fly the helicopter where the training is performed at the individual level siloed in the aircraft shooting down at the landscape, practicing nothing but flight skills and good aim.

Only in the openings between the tactical gameplay can there be remnants or conversations about an “Other” to hypercomputation. The slight opening in *Beirut ’82: Arab Stalingrad*, within the gameplay allows for a possible outside of the probable. However, it does so in a manner that never gets cemented into writing, into a root that can be acted against, in a manner that aligns with what Glissant defined as “errantry”. We do not yet know the general movement of errantry, “the desire to go against the root”, the indigenous being of the colonized in relation to simulation, whether training or rehearsal.⁹ Even if *Beirut ’82: Arab Stalingrad* permits a type of gameplay it remains a pointlessly ephemeral, fleeting moment that passes away as the game ends

but leaves behind nothing but loss. It leaves the question open; How can the “training” convert into “rehearsal”?

Notes

1. ↑ Édouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997).
2. ↑ * Rehearse. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rehearse>
3. ↑ * Simon Yuill, “All Problems of Notation Will Be Solved By the Masses,” in *Mute* Vol 2, No. 8, 2008 <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/all-problems-notation-will-be-solved-masses>.
4. ↑ “Beirut '82: Arab Stalingrad,” *Strategy and Tactics*, 1989.
5. ↑ S. Appelcline, *Designers & dragons*. Silver Springs, MD: Evil Hat Productions, 2013.
6. ↑ “Beirut '82: Arab Stalingrad,” *Strategy and Tactics*.
7. ↑ Thomas Elsaesser, “Simulation and the Labour of Invisibility: Harun Farocki’s Life Manuals,” *Animation* 12, no. 3 (November 2017): 214–29.
8. ↑ *Digital Combat Simulator World* (n.d.), retrieved from <https://www.digitalcombatsimulator.com/en/products/world/>.
9. ↑ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

