

Programme Note

Extraordinary Rendition
by Action Hero

Throughout the process of making *Extraordinary Rendition* we were interested in the ways in which the civilian domain is militarized and the ambient presence of warfare in our daily lives. We were particularly interested in the ways in which popular culture and the military collide or collaborate, and the ways in which we might be implicated in the brutality of war through our participation in a media culture.

[the military-entertainment complex refers to] the idea that target populations in wartime are also media audiences. Also refers to the migration of technologies and processes developed in the military sphere to everyday media culture.

Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*

Although it is a global phenomenon, the military-entertainment complex is perhaps most visible in the jingoistic Hollywood projects financed directly by the U.S military, and the mutually beneficial relationship between the creator of Zero Dark Thirty, Call of Duty or 24 and the military strategists waging war via the 'battle for hearts and minds'.

We were struck however, by the more unlikely manifestations of the global war on terror. The use of Britney Spears, Queen and David Gray songs to torture detainees, the privately owned jet that flew the Liverpool football team to away matches in between rendition flights for the CIA, British detainees being asked "do you know these people?" whilst being shown photos of Donald Duck, Michael Jackson & Che Guevara. These overlaps and interlacing threads trace much deeper connections between the internal landscapes of our minds and the landscapes of Iraq and Afghanistan where a long and violent war is taking place in our name.

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Rhizome: A continuously growing horizontal underground stem which puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals.

Deleuze and Guatarri's notion of the rhizome describes a 'subterranean passage of thought'. There is no beginning or end to the world and how we understand it. Rather, it is like a rhizome. Small parts of it are visible on the surface, appearing to be separate and unconnected, but under the surface those parts are all linked together; part of the same organism. I can get from one to another in any way I like, there are no preset routes because it is all *one thing*. All the things we perceive are connected; they are all part of the same organism. There is no beginning, end, centre or periphery.

Operation Defensive Shield, led by Dr Shimon Naveh, philosopher and Brigadier General in the IDF, used the concept of the rhizome to reimagine his enemies' space in order to wage "total" war. By understanding the territory in a rhizomatic way, it therefore becomes possible to move between places via any route, not just the established pathways. Soldiers can literally blast holes in civilian's houses to travel the city. They can appear from anywhere at any time, and so the occupation of the landscape, both psychic and physical, becomes all encompassing.

For *Extraordinary Rendition* the rhizome quickly became an organizing structure through which our research (and in turn the entire world) could be understood. Everything appeared to be interconnected in an all-encompassing web of which we were part. We were not connecting things for the first time; we were simply uncovering more of the rhizome. Things that appeared to be separate were inextricably linked. Within the rhizome, some parts are visible and some parts are hidden, and yet if we accept that the rhizome exists then we accept that just because we can't immediately see something, doesn't mean it doesn't exist. In fact, the parts we *can* see can become proof of what we can't. What is on the surface, although it appears unrelated, disparate, obscure, is what leads us to the hidden interconnected threads that allow us to understand the world in new and profound ways.

In the context of the military entertainment complex, this feature of the rhizome perhaps re-contextualizes the apparently benign traces of warfare that hide in the shadows of media culture as equal parts of a larger network of violence and brutality. It became clear to us that rather than simply being a theoretical concept that helped us to understand knowledge and thought, the rhizome was real.

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Extraordinary Rendition is an extra judicial process, that is to say that it is illegal under international law. Nevertheless, 54 countries provided support to the programme, some more directly than others but all with the complicity and (at the very least) tacit consent of those in power.

After being seized, individuals were flown, usually via a European country, to a third country to be tortured by the authorities there. They were often taken and held on the flimsiest of evidence. Khalid El-Masri, a German and Lebanese citizen was captured whilst on holiday in Macedonia and was subsequently rendered to the Salt Pit prison in Afghanistan where he was tortured and held for 5 months. He had been mistaken for Khalid al-Masri.

Some detainees were also held and interrogated at "Black Sites" secret CIA run prisons on foreign soil. The flights were operated by private aviation companies which were often a front for CIA owned and operated companies. The flights would take unusually circuitous routes in order to obfuscate their true nature. Rendition flights might also run "dummy" routes that were never taken at all. The flights' human cargo had their clothes cut from their bodies before being given an enema

and put in a nappy, then detainees were restrained for the duration of the flight whilst enduring complete sensory deprivation via goggles, ear defenders and hoods.

In 2006 the artist Trevor Paglen created a map of these Rendition flights based on plane spotter logs which he pasted to a billboard in Los Angeles. This data has now been expanded to create a vast online log, cross referenced with detainee reports, of the full scale of the CIA's rendition programme and its global collaborators.

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Enhanced Interrogation Techniques are a series of officially approved 'tools' that were designed to be used on detainees at Guantanamo Bay. By classifying anyone within the system as an "enemy combatant" rather than a prisoner of war, detainees no longer had rights under the Geneva Convention, and were therefore able to be subjected to far harsher treatment and interrogation than would otherwise be allowable.

Although the use of EIT's was meant to be restricted to Guantanamo, the techniques began to be employed by on the ground in other US and coalition led detention facilities that were being operated by the military. The techniques themselves include forced standing, use of stress positions, sleep deprivation, use of dogs, forced feeding and forced rectal feeding, waterboarding, rough physical contact, extremes of temperature and use of loud and repetitive sound and music.

These techniques are considered torture under international law, however they are approved for use by the US government on anyone who can be classed as an enemy combatant. In addition to this, detainees report even greater mistreatment beyond the scope of what enhanced interrogation allows. The Senate Intelligence committee's recent report begins to confirm what has been reported by many people who have been detained, by former guards and members of the military and armed forces.

The use of sound and music as a weapon of warfare is not new. In World War 2 a tactical deception unit called the Ghost Army used sound as part of a wider range of psy ops (psychological operations) to impersonate the enemy by creating realistic soundscapes that would suggest approaching troops. In Vietnam, Operation Wandering Soul saw helicopter mounted sonic devices playing wailing sounds to the enemy below. In Northern Ireland the use of white noise was frequently reported, and in Gaza the IDF have used a Long Range Acoustic Device to fire 150db sounds over large distances.

Music can also be used as a way of occupying a space psychically before it is occupied physically. This way of occupying a territory is reflected in how music might be used to occupy the internal landscape of a person's mind, both as part of a process of interrogation and torture, but also as a 'soft' weapon by which a different kind of colonization can occur, via the use of culture as weapon to be deployed on civilians.

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Since its opening in 2002, Guantanamo Bay has held 779 prisoners, including 15 children under the age of 18. Some were handed over by their governments (this includes Western governments), some were handed over in return for cash by bounty hunters, and some were captured by coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The vast majority were released without charge, many after being held for several years. Detainees who have been charged with offences are tried via closed military commissions. 7 have been convicted or have taken plea deals and 6 more are facing formal charges. In January 2021, 40 men remain, some of whom have been held for 19 years. 5 of them have been cleared for release.

Shaker Aamer, the last a British resident in Guantanamo, was released on 30th October 2015. He had been detained without charge since February 14th 2002.

The cabin built for the performance of *Extraordinary Rendition* is built from the same materials used to construct Camp X-Ray, the temporary (and long since replaced) detainment facility at Guantanamo Bay that received its first detainees on 11th January 2002. The internal part of the cabin shares its dimensions with a detainee's cell.

To see our research and for more detailed information on all of the above and more, visit <http://bit.ly/16ihSwR>

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