Illustration 1:
Expansion of the Immersion Zone
Military Simulacra between Strategic Training and Trauma

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Since the mid-1990s, military strategists have used so-called Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) scenarios as virtual training grounds to prepare soldiers for military operations. Here, model towns and buildings serve as a topographical infrastructure for training related to military emergencies. At the same time, computer animations of these ghost towns are utilized in the ludic practice of making contact with the enemy in the same way immersive 3-D visualizations combined with role-playing are employed in the therapeutic treatment of those traumatized by military service. The constitutive factors of these kinds of ‘military dispositifs’ are the focus of Harun Farocki’s film Immersion (Germany 2009, as part of the series _Serious Games_). He makes the unsuspecting viewer a witness to a simulated experiment in which a visibly shaken test subject reconstructs a life-threatening conflict, which is simultaneously played as an animated film before his eyes. The photo series _personal kill_ (2007) by Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann also refers to the constitutive efficacy of virtual combat scenes by capturing the ubiquitous analog military model towns as dystopian parallel worlds on the edges of our civilized living environments. Both artistic approaches address the fact that immersive combat simulations are not limited to restricted military areas or to the preparation for possible peacekeeping missions. Rather, their game format contributes to the implicit totalization of a culture of hostility. To the extent that they tend to reduce encounters with the foreign to a stereotypical friend/enemy polarity, they potentially naturalize the concept of a world order that appears to be only defeasible by war.

1. Preliminary Thoughts

A missionary of the Middle Ages even tells us that, in one of his voyages in search of the terrestrial paradise, he reached the horizon where the Earth and the heavens met, and that he discovered a certain point where they were not joined together, and where, by stooping, he passed under the roof of the heavens. (Flammarion 1873: 101f.)

An imaginary dip into virtual reality, whether in the cinema, at a computer screen, in an art installation, at a concert, or while reading a novel, is usually grasped as a transition into an ‘other’ sphere or world, one mobilized by an idea. Entrance into a fictional space removed from empirical reality occurs via the process of reception of a