**Title:** “Negative simulation, spectacle and the embodied geopolitics of tourism”

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**Abstract**

This article builds on recent work on the embodied geopolitics of tourism to investigate the Titan Missile Museum (TMM), a Cold War-era underground nuclear missile silo and command bunker in southwest U.S.A. In examining how visitors are not only persuaded to adopt certain attitudes towards the weaponry, but are enrolled in an embodied experience that is active in the formation of subjectivity that emerges from such an encounter, the paper draws upon the philosophy of Jean Baudrillard and other non-representational theorists to argue that this tourism encounter is a negative simulation that can be informed by a better understanding of “hyperreal” spectacle. This spectacle, however, does not simply fall in the realm of representation but is one that engages affect and emotion as important for the emergence of geopolitical subjectivity. While the TMM works to produce what Baudrillard might call a “non-event” out of nuclear geopolitics, it also takes the risk of getting too close to the bomb by simulating its launch. These dynamics are encapsulated in the highlight of the standard 1-hour tour: the simulation of a missile launch, something that never took place. Drawing on our experience at the Museum and visitor comments left online at Yelp.com, as well as the broader archive of journalism and scholarship on the site, we also sense the possibility of something else emerging out of the embodied and performative materialities that constitute this site of “dark tourism”.

**Keywords**: affect, emotion, hyperreality, (non)event, Cold War

**Introduction**

[T]ourism’s capacity to envision the world through prevailing geopolitical discourses – in this case the Cold War’s biopolar “architecture of enmity” – is not disrupted or compromised by revolutions, wars, or conflicts; rather, these monumental events become pivotal moments for a tourist sensibility to recalibrate, adapt, and reposition itself within a transformed geopolitical landscape. This is important because, although the friend-enemy geopolitical coordinates may differ between the Cold War of the 1950s and the War on Terror of the 2000s (i.e., from a Communist enemy to an Islamic fundamentalist), tourism’s ability to *envision* the world within these coordinates of enmity remains as robust and clear-sighted as ever (Lisle 2016, p. 178, emphasis in original).

In *Holidays in the Danger Zone*, Debbie Lisle (2016) elaborates on the contradictory yet intertwined legacies of twentieth century warfare and global tourism as a manifestation of a growing consumer society. At times, these trajectories overlap directly. Memorial sites, for example, are actively fashioned as experiential and textual devices to shape a particular affective response and emotional reaction from the visitor. These sites of “dark tourism” are shot through with these politics (Lennon and Foley 2000; Stone and Sharpley 2008), and places of past violence – war, mass death, and genocide – attract millions of visitors each year (e.g., Tyner, Brindis Alvarez, and Colucci 2014). While others have elaborated on the embodied dimensions of tourism in general (Crouch and Deforges 2003; d’Hautserre 2015; Edensor 2001; Gibson 2012), there are relatively few but a growing number of contributions on the embodied geopolitics of tourism (see Dowler 2013; Gillen 2014; Mostafanezhad and Norum 2016 and Rowen 2016).

This article aims to advance this approach by examining the embodied geopolitics of the “Titan Missile Museum” (TMM), a site of a Cold War-era nuclear missile silo and underground command bunker in the southwest U.S.A. Visitors of this “atomic heritage site” (Edgington 2010; Hodge and Weinberger 2008) and “National Historic Landmark” descend into the underground bunker where a small Air Force crew had waited around the clock for the order to launch the Titan II missile, armed with a nuclear warhead and capable of flying thousands of kilometers to its intercontinental destination. While the TMM deploys a series of nationalistic and militaristic ideological tropes around the Cold War – namely that the weapon was the key to a Cold War “peace by deterrence program” through its support of “mutually assured destruction” – we take this opportunity to consider the more-than-representational and embodied dimensions of the daily tour as essential in generating the geopolitical subjectivities desired by the operators. More specifically, we consider how its emotional and affective resonances both engage with and exceed the representational and ideological work of the TMM.

This conceptual approach emerges from our reflections on what we think is the highlight of the standard 1-hour tour: the simulation of a launch sequence. As a site of consumption and spectacle, the TMM enhances the walking tour by simulating an actual launch, a moment we all know never took place. This experience enlivens the space through the use of affective props like loud bell alarms, flashing lights, speakers and other material and sensual objects. As tourists gather in the control room, the guide stages a simulation of what a launch “would have really been like”. While this performative shift from mere walking tour to active experience caught us by surprise during our first visit, it more importantly struck an unsettling note and is worthy of additional thought: how can the most affectively intense part of the tour be theorized as *negative simulation* – the simulation of something that never happened? Put another way, how do the tourism spaces of the Cold War refract an ideological attempt to position such spaces as not only necessary but essential to peace in the post-WWII era?

The concepts of negativity, negation, and ‘the negative’ of course, run throughout Western philosophy. In the book *Hegel and Spinoza*, Gregor Moder (2017) even ventures that “in some ways, it is *the* philosophical question” (121). Indeed, for some philosophers, particularly Heidegger, “negativity is internal to being itself” (p. 123), while for others, such as Deleuze, negativity is replaced by a philosophy of affirmation. But, Moder finds unexpected resonance between both Hegel and Spinoza and those that draw upon their theories as they relate to the concept of negativity, while also pointing to the influence they have had for contemporary philosophy that embraces the potential of the negative. In discussing Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*, in particular, as a riposte and alternative to the impasse between the “original” and the “identical” in philosophy, for example, Moder (2017) suggests that for Deleuze (and others like Derrida), negativity is not only a constitutive force, but a productive one: “What tradition understood as negativity—that which is accidental or destructive, that which doesn’t exist in itself, but only receives being from some distant and elevated Origin—thus takes center stage in philosophy, since it needs no Origin to be what it is” (p. 122). *It* *needs no Origin to be what it is.* For our purposes, this affirmation of negativity helps us think through the dynamics of another contemporary thinker with increasing relevance for geopolitics and society, Jean Baudrillard.

Negative simulation is, in many ways, at the heart of what Baudrillard calls “hyperreality”, one of his most provocative concepts. This concept emerges from his critique of contemporary consumer society, one that is so saturated by representations that representation outdoes itself and produces not only new realities, but *hyper*realities, which are less and less tethered to the referent of the linguistic sign (Smith 2003). Contrary to some dismissive reactions to Baudrillard’s essays on the Gulf War where he elaborated on the geopolitics of the hyperreal, negative simulation does not disassociate with contemporary geopolitical violence, *but is a key to its perpetuation* through the spectacles of tourism. In fact, following Baudrillard into the Titan Missile Museum, these maneuvers are essential for generating the Cold War as a “non-event”, an ideological achievement that normalizes nuclear warfare and Western geopolitical power. Indeed, most interpretations of Baudrillard emphasize these politics of negative simulation, insofar as they help maintain a new kind of social and political control (Goss 1993; Lane 2000; Hammond 2009).

However, as we veer into the embodied dimensions of the negative simulation, we also brush against an excessive force immanent to society and politics. In staging an embodied encounter with the nuclear missile as an actual reality, the TMM also takes a risk of disturbing or unsettling the intended subjectivity that it seeks to generate. In other words, in gesturing to the horror of the missile (its dramatic launch), the TMM creates a possible opening to other embodied feelings that might result from the performance. In reflecting on our own visits to the TMM and our review of some online qualitative materials pertaining the TMM (such as visitor comments on Yelp.com and journalistic reporting), we want to also consider the possibility that something other than a non-event of capture would emerge out of the experience. Drawing on Alain Badiou, we also consider the negative simulation as always nevertheless vulnerable to the recurrent force of events, those disruptions to the status quo that are impossible to predict and are undeniable drivers of politics and history (Calcagno 2007; Dewsbury 2007; Shaw 2010a, 2010b).

By centering this paper on *negative simulation*, we aim to (1) update theories of “the spectacle” to include the turn toward embodiment (emotion and affect) in geopolitical thinking, and (2) also explore how such qualities can lead to alternative, excessive and potentially oppositional subject positions. The next section provides relevant background information about the Titan II missile system and its transformation into the TMM. We then discuss our adaptation of Baudrillard’s hyperreality for contemporary geopolitical theory, as well as the challenge of conceptualizing simultaneously the proliferation of non-events through the spectacle, and the always looming potential for disruptive events to emerge. We then turn to the TMM itself to explore how these logics appear to manifest in performance and the maintenance of curatorial atmospheres. A brief conclusion summarizes what we think is significant about the site and what it might mean for our current geopolitical dilemmas involving nuclear weapons and other recent manifestations of spectacle and hyperreality in political culture (such as “alternative facts”, “fake news”, denial of climate science, etc.).

**Titan Missile Museum in context**

At the Titan Missile Museum, near Tucson, Arizona, visitors journey through time to stand on the front line of the Cold War (www.titanmissilemuseum.org 2016).

The Titan Missile Museum (TMM) is a powerful marker of not only Cold War politics but an intentional and ongoing reminder of U.S. global hegemony.[[1]](#endnote-1) Its symbolic value is made more real by the affective register it evokes as one visits this place. While the website claims to provide “visitors [with] a rare look at the technology used by the United States to deter nuclear war,” the site itself is sutured to a much wider set of discursive practices that both justify and sustain the myth that the nuclear weapons program was a necessary component of the U.S. “peace program” during the Cold War. The TMM itself is the only such place open to the public today and it exists as part of a larger spectacle landscape of military science and technology of the Arizona Aerospace Foundation, which also oversees the Pima Air & Space Museum and the Arizona Aviation Hall of Fame, also located in Tucson. This seems appropriate for Tucson, considering the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base is also located nearby in the southern outskirts of the city, along with the weapon-systems manufacturers Raytheon, both of which are major employers in the region.

At the very outset of the Cold War, the development of ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) systems was a top priority. In *Titan II: A History of a Cold War Missile Program,* Stumpf (2000) describes the historical context and the networks that had to be created between the military, civilian scientists and private capital that made these gigantic weapons possible. Stumpf (2000, 1) writes that the Cold War had been “confirmed” with two key events: the first Soviet explosion of an atomic bomb in 1949 and the onset of the Korean War in 1950. One consequence was that ICBM research and development became a top priority as the government rushed to design bigger and better ICBMs. At the TMM in particular, visitors encounter the infrastructure of the Titan II system, which followed the earlier Titan I and Atlas systems. As technological innovation, the Titan II was superior for one main reason: it could be launched in a mere 58-seconds, whereas the Titan I would take upwards of twenty minutes to fuel and launch, making it much more vulnerable to shorter-range attack from submarine-based weapons systems in the Pacific or Atlantic. Secondarily, the Titan II had an added advantage by launching from underground, thereby giving it more protection from incoming attacks. This innovation in the speed of the weapon, the official narrative goes, allowed the U.S. to avoid nuclear war by deterring it.

By 1963, the Titan II systems were fully operational, each having a four-person crew that pulled 24-hour shifts at the complex, maintaining and monitoring the sites, and waiting for the possible command to launch the missile. These sites remained on alert until 1987 and formed part of a geopolitical landscape that normalized “an atmosphere of fear” (Wolin 2008, 33) among the population, exemplified by the “duck and cover” drills in American schools. It is out of this affective atmosphere that the TMM emerges, as part of a memorial landscape built by enthusiasts of the techno-military establishment. As we will see, the objects and spaces of the site are made to come to life in a way that influences how visitors evaluate what they are experiencing. The reinvention of the command center as a hyper-real spectacle aims at producing a particular kind of geopolitical subject position, but does so through affective and emotive means. This techno-relic of the Cold War is thus still shot-through with the fear of the Cold War annihilation, as well as the horrific “real” of mass death that informs the site’s dark underside. The future of U.S. geopolitical subjectivity relies on a past narrative that sites like the TMM respond to and seek to perpetuate in certain ways. Such sites are made perhaps even more “real” in the current geopolitical climate whereby fear of an enemy bent on U.S. destruction lurks in every corner (see Page and Dittmer 2016; Ingram 2016; and Gökarıksel and Smith 2016). In the following section, we explore the theoretical resources necessary for grasping the embodied geopolitics of negative simulation.

**The Geopolitics of Negative Simulation**

The control of information and public perception has long been in the domain of modern warfare and state practice (Doel 2017, 128-129). Yet, in the immediate post-Cold War geopolitical landscape, dominant global powers were adapting the most recent advances in communication technologies to produce bold new approaches to its most urgent conflicts, such as the Persian Gulf War of the early 1990s. For Virilio (1991), warfare was re-configured by the speed of electronic transmissions of many kinds, including socio-cultural images produced by news corporation CNN, for instance. In a way mimicking the “speed-space” of earlier military technologies (such as those that led to the Titan II missile system with its super-fast 58 second launch time; also see Doel 2017, chapter 7), the speed and proliferation of electronic information inaugurated a new realm of political activity and global strategy, activities and strategies that would eventually begin to feed a new spectacle landscape of dark tourism, for example.

For Jean Baudrillard (1995), the form and proliferation of Western media around the Persian Gulf War was symptomatic of a much broader historical, sociological and political condition he refers to as “hyperreality”. Consumer society in the Western urban “core” passes into hyperreality when being itself – our most human impulses and desires – is experienced and expressed through the commodity-form of consumer spectacle. As these signs of consumer spectacle proliferate (televisions shows, films, and the spaces of popular culture more broadly), the connection to the supposed referents of those signs is rendered less and less relevant, to the point of disappearing altogether (Smith 2003). Nevertheless, hyperreality does *not* detach from the so-called “real world”. Rather, our most human and “real” experiences are now felt and expressed through the signs of commodities and their environments, an important aspect of the sites where tourist spectacle touches down in everyday experience and spatial practice. That said, though, we first want to point more broadly to how hyperreal consumer society has consequences for post-Cold War geopolitics. For Baudrillard (1995), coverage of the Persian Gulf War became a spectacle of military technology, disembodied landscapes and unsurprising Orientalist discourse (Kellner 1992; Lane 2009). Baudrillard’s (1995) translator summarizes the rhetorical core of his polemic argument that “The Gulf War did not take place”: “so you want us to believe that this was a clean, minimalist war, with little collateral damage and few Allied casualties. Why stop there: war? what war?” (1995, p. 7). Baudrillard attempts to subvert the discourse by taking it to its extreme limit.

One possibility that emerges and exemplifies the potential potency of hyperreality for geopolitics is negative simulation. If there is no necessary relation between subject, object, and language, then the performance of meaning is sovereign, and we can imagine new epistemological and ontological horizons in all directions. Simulation, in short, no longer has to resemble anything that *actually* took place. For Baudrillard (1994, 1995), these possibilities are typically hijacked by the capitalist, militarized state that draws on this fundamental insight to manipulate public perception and opinion about Western power and the military in particular. Negative simulation is not just another way of illuminating the capacity of the powerful to control discourse and knowledge production more broadly. It signals a rift in the constitution of reality itself (at least for Western audience-society), insofar as our lives are increasingly instantiated through consumerist spectacle that distorts our understanding of what our geopolitical discourse claims to refer to in the world (the “War on Terror” extends these tendencies in obvious ways; see Gregory 2004; Mamdani 2004). Along with these conceptual analytics, Baudrillard’s theory is often read as a bleak view of an imposing authoritarianism that flows through commoditized everyday environments. After all, the end product of these developments is that the war becomes a “non-event” (Baudrillard 1995, 24), something that does not seriously disrupt everyday life of Western audience-society. By all accounts, hyperreality is overwhelmingly productive of a new technology of control that works to anticipate and defuse the forces of radical difference and opposition. This was something that U.S. President Reagan learned from the failing of the Vietnam War, insofar as the Cold War had to also be produced as a “non-event”. As we anxiously waited for the “bomb to drop”, the actual fighting raged through distant proxy wars around the globe.

While Baudrillard’s work on hyperreality as productive of the non-event seems crucial for geopolitical thinking today, other compelling theories of “the event” have been gaining influence in recent years. For Alain Badiou (2001), an event refers to a rupture that only becomes an event if a series of “truth-processes” are to follow, signaling a kind of “fidelity” that is a key component of political subjectivity. The event requires “fidelity” for life support and momentum, while Badiou (2001) offers examples in different areas of life, including love, science, mathematics, and politics. The ethics of this subjectivity can only be located in specific situations, leading him to put forward the “site” as the space where these processes unfold. Badiou’s “site” stands out, according to Shaw (2010a), for its insistence on maintaining the subjectivity of truth, in distinction to prevailing contemporary theories that increasingly emphasize the politics of bodies and languages. For Shaw (2010a), a key feature of Badiou’s thinking is a “materialist dialectic” that “adds a third term: ‘there are only bodies and languages, *except that there are truths*’” (p. 432; emphasis in original). *Events* involve the sometimes sudden and revolutionary change that creates the condition of possibility to imagine and inhabit the world differently, both driven by and giving rise to new truths. Perhaps, then, Badiou’s theory ruptures Baudrillard’s theories of the hyperreal by pointing to the events within non-events.

We want to suggest, however, that it is precisely these possibilities that hyperreal geopolitics of spectacle aim to disrupt and annul in a systematic and preventative way. As Clarke (2003) puts it,

Baudrillard’s argument is particularly important in highlighting that the consumer society is programmatically geared towards ‘deflecting’ the possibility of resistance… the consumer society, more than any form of society preceding it, seems eminently capable of embracing the resistance it encounters, drawing would be resistance into the very system it pitches itself against (p. 68).

If there is something inescapable about the event for Badiou, such that events are what drive history, we suggest that the extent of Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality responds to such potential. This is because there is a tension in Baudrillard’s work, such that he seeks to create the conceptual space for difference and alterity, while also acknowledging the forces that simultaneously work to prevent those spaces from flourishing. In this article, we consider how the performance of the negative simulation is, notwithstanding its ideological imperatives to control life, always an embodied experience, one that is filled with sensational registers of affect and emotion. The simulation of something that didn’t happen – negative simulation – is meant to produce emotional and affective responses that ultimately will help contain the potential for a Badiouian event to occur. Recent work on embodiment in human geography, and “feminist geopolitics” in particular, have emphasized the shift to performance in the enactment of power in the “everyday and mundane” (Dowler and Sharpe 2001, 165; also see Laketa 2016; Painter 2006; Massaro and Williams 2013). It is thus instructive to engage feminist geopolitics as a way to reimagine the complex relations of the event and non-event. In so doing, we may escape the nihilistic inevitability that some have given to Baudrillard’s theoretical invention (e.g., Smith 2003). To grasp the mode of production/consumption of negative simulation, we thus need to attend to these aspects of embodied experience, especially in studies of tourism.

Amid the flourishing of embodiment in geographical literature, there has been much debate, especially around the alleged differences between emotion and affect. Nigel Thrift’s non-representational theory (1997, 2008) is often drawn on to consider affect as a mode of embodied sensation that occurs before the formation of cognitive thought, consciousness and, importantly, emotion. While this version of affect might seem consistent with feminist theorizing about the intimacies and scale of everyday life as a geopolitical terrain, feminists and others have criticized this position as potentially “universalist” (Tolia-Kelly 2006) and problematic in its questioning of subjectivity as a privileged mode of political life (Mitchell and Elwood 2011; Thien 2005; although see Colls 2012). Others have elaborated on what appear to be “normative blindspots” of Thrift’s version of non-represntatinal theory (Barnett 2008) by pointing out the difficulties in arguing that affect can be simultaneously “engineered” *and* excessive (also see Pile 2010) and noting how other theorists that are engaging in non-representational thinking, such as Baudrillard, are ignored by Thrift’s theoretical examination (see Smith 2003). In this article, we are not so interested in the ontologies of affect necessarily, insofar as affect is conceptualized as more or less controllable. Rather, we are interested in the ways that organizations engage affective atmospheres to produce certain responses to sites, such as the TMM. In short, even if we can’t resolve the tensions between affect and emotional theory “this should not prevent us from thinking more about emotions, feelings and affect” (Pile 2010, 17), which we do by staging an engagement between embodied theories of politics with Baudrillard’s hyperreality. Organizations like the TMM might be triggering affective responses in their tourist performance unknowingly, but still trigger them nonetheless, in their goal of shaping a proper nuclear subjectivity.

Drawing on embodiment to re-engage Baudrillard’s theory might seem like a misguided and doomed project, considering feminist criticism of his work (Gregson 1995; see Toffoletti 2007 chapter 2). Yet, we draw on other recent feminist interpretations of his work that emphasize the capacity for radical new futures to emerge out of the coordinates of hyperreality as a fundamentally contingent and open-ended process, one resembling the ethics of Derrida’s deconstruction and other post-structural thinkers like Judith Butler and Donna Haraway (Grace 2000; Toffoletti 2007). We think that, insofar as Baudrillard’s is a “non-representational theory” (Smith 2003), that there exist possibilities for positive overlap with broader feminist theories of embodiment (Colls 2012). While the spectacle tries to produce “non-events” out of geopolitical violence, the worlds of affect and emotion are always unfolding and hold the potential for the unexpected *event* to arrive at last. In this way, although along very different lines, we want to think not about the oppositional moments in the world of social theory but the interesting ways in which various theoretical trajectories collide and elide with each other to produce new political possibilities (c.f., Moder 2017).

**The Titan Missile Museum (TMM) as Tourist Spectacle and Negative Simulation**

As mentioned above, in *Geographies of Violence* (2017) Doel reminds us that logics of hyperreality have long accompanied the military state. Moreover, the proliferation of military themed children’s toys and board games (such as “Battleship”) results in a kind of distributed and mundane negative simulation, as warfare is reimagined as heroic, dignified and even fun (Doel 2017, 128). The TMM offers up an additional opportunity to consider how these logics follow us in everyday life, even in tourist spaces. First, by considering the TMM we highlight the evacuation of the violence from the site as one of tourist spectacle. That is, the TMM appears to downplay the horror of atomic warfare and instead encourages visitors to venerate and even enjoy the military technology as a tourist spectacle. Second, we examine how the TMM moves towards and embraces negative simulation as a way to create a non-event out of the Cold War – an experience that pushes aside the myriad proxy wars that took place between 1945 and 1989. This negative simulation poses a risk to the non-event, however, because it contradicts the logic of total positivity inherent to the spectacle. In other words, by simulating the launch of the missile, visitors are momentarily confronted with the horror of its nuclear payload. The TMM as tourist spectacle moves the visitor along a familiar path by excluding the negative and then, in dramatic fashion, goes against itself by simulating something that never happened, a seemingly unnecessary move, but one that deserves more attention.

*Titan II as tourist-spectacle*

Upon entering the front doors of TMM, the visitor arrives in a lobby that includes a welcome desk, a gift shop, and a set of displays – both static and interactive – that includes objects relevant to the site (e.g., the re-entry vehicle), along with information and dates related to the Cold War. Much of the basic information above is also provided at the beginning of the standard one-hour tour, which officially begins in a second room with chairs and a large screen television that shows a 17-minute long video. The video includes some historical context provided around the Cold War, but visitors are more broadly encouraged to consider the site as a modern marvel of science and technology. The emphasis is clearly focused on introducing the viewer to the preferred meta-themes of the Museum: that “mutually assured destruction” was the key to “peace through deterrence”. The actual human toll of the atomic warfare – the U.S. attacks on Japan – is quickly glossed over, as are the proxy politics of the Cold War, which can only be gleaned by visitors in the lobby if they so desire before or after the tour.

Presented mainly as spectacle – as an object of consumption – we find the TMM working along with the logic of commodity fetishism, insofar as the complexities of the militarized techno-site are elided and/or smoothed over by emphasizing not the final price or value of the system (as in Marx’s commodity fetishism), but the allure of its science and engineering merits. Scholars like Ellul (1964) and Winner (1979) have commented on this mystifying power of the technological imagination. Even though this techno-object has produced complicated and bloody geographies across the globe, we are encouraged to appreciate it as a triumphant feat in itself, somehow abstracted from context. A major part of the TMM is a question of trust, insofar as visitors are assured that the technology was not only a feat, but was, in fact, required and necessary for peace. This is the overall goal of the TMM as a geopolitical space, which relies on a tautological argument: we need the bomb to save us from the reality inaugurated by the bomb itself (also see MacDonald 2006).

During the tour, we learn of other techno-scientific features of the facility that make it an exceptional engineering feat. On the way to the command center during the tour, for instance, all the tourists stop to appreciate the mega-heavy blast doors that protected the facility from an incoming nuclear attack. During one tour, one of us was even asked to pull the door on its hinges and was then given a memento, a wallet-sized card stating that “I moved 6000 pounds – Blast Door 7 at the Titan Missile Museum” along with the TMM logo. The entire underground bunker, we are told, is supported by gigantic spring-loaded suspension engineering that provides further protection from an attack. Once we make it into the command center, the focus turns to other design features that safeguarded against unauthorized launches or sabotage. Certain parts of the structure remained inoperable until commands came from higher up, for instance, commands that had to be authenticated. This importance of communication leads the tour to emphasize in detail the layers of communication technology that ensured ongoing connectivity. Indeed, this part of the tour makes up twenty minutes of the total one-hour experience.

As a tourist site, the TMM is challenged with offering the visitor something in terms of a touristic, consumer experience. The objects there do not speak for themselves, thereby forcing the curators to manufacture a unique experience that is attractive and worth the $9.50 entrance fee. The official military discourse of the Museum is not surprising. However, we do point out how the military discourse draws on, and responds to, the entertainment needs of a society that operates increasingly through the logics of spectacle (Gabler 1998; Hedges 2009). The positive affirmation of the TMM, for instance, is consonant with the needs to increase turnover time of capital, for instance, by promising immediate satisfaction from the consumer experience rather than contemplation, disruption or disturbance. Drawing on Baudrillard, Clarke (2010, 68) explores the “seduction of space” and how this logic is consistent with that of a wider consumer society:

Precisely the same logic permeates consumerism. At its heart lies a fundamental contradiction between the promise of satisfaction and the persistence of unfulfilment, the proffering of pleasure and its withdrawal. This is ramified into a million promissory advertising messages, simultaneously offering satisfaction via indulgence (‘Naughty ... but nice’) and self-restraint (‘Be good to yourself’). The underlying message, however, is to enjoy- though, true to form, this is expressed in the contradictory guise of an injunction: ‘Enjoy!’ Similarly, Baudrillard (1987, 44) notes that, ‘In advertising, there are no negatives; even when irony’s involved, everything is positive and affirmative. In present-day society, as in the images that bind it together, the negative is absent’ (also see Kingsbury 2008 on Lacan’s “jouissance” in capitalist consumption).

This is most obvious in the TMM gift shop, where numerous commodities are on sale carrying the signs of the bomb, such as the iconic mushroom cloud. T-Shirts, coffee mugs, posters, bumper stickers and key chains are among the souvenir items of the TMM. Other more unique items are also available, such as a replica of the launch key, or actual pieces of the original missile that were salvaged when it was decommissioned. These atomic items are oddly displayed with other items related to NASA and outer space more broadly, thereby confusing the geopolitics of the bomb with these other scientific endeavors. These consumer items achieve the goals of the political project outlined by Baudrillard above, such that the negative is negated in favor of a manufactured positive, that it is “ok” that we have fabricated such a WMD; that, in fact, *we needed it*. That the “negative is absent” (Clarke 2010, 68) becomes evidence that the strategy worked: “peace through deterrence” was made possible because of the 58-second launch time produced by militarized techno-science. The Museum works to convince us that we should be thankful and even happy that we created this high-tech weapon system.

It should now be clear that the negative and tragic results of nuclear warfare remain largely absent from the discourse of the TMM as techno-spectacle. The bomb as spectacle, though, is not just about signs, representation and the discourse they emerge from and reaffirm. For the visitor to confront and accept this negativity, the TMM makes a bold move by simulating the launch of the missile, something that the crew waited for everyday for years, but never came to pass. This performative element in the command center holds the capacity of *making the spectacle affectively intense*. In this moment, the horrific reality of the Titan II is brought to life. This negativity is suddenly introduced into a narrative that previously denied it. Something important happens when the guide asks a visitor on the tour “Wanna be the commander today?” and then proceeds with the simulation of the launch sequence. The following sub-section focuses on the role of this *negative simulation* as a key to the site’s affective performance.

*Titan II as negative simulation*

This section details the simulation of the missile launch as a potent example of how hyperreality infuses geopolitics. However, rather than imagine a passive and “duped” subjectivity for the spectators (the conclusion of many interpreters of Baudrillard), this operation is aimed at the tourist as an embodied subject, one moved by affect and emotion and is anything but passive and duped. Hyperreality and the spectacle are not about affirming a “fake” reality, or a “lie”, as if we are discussing propaganda that can be dismissed or corrected. Rather, the spectacle points to a powerful political technology that has evolved throughout Western civilization and has accelerated in recent decades along with new communication technologies such as TV, film and now social media unleashed by the new tech giants. Below, we describe this moment of the tour as a key instance of how the TMM seeks to intervene in the affective atmosphere of the tour in a way that stimulates an emotional response from the visitor that might function as a conditioning factor for the ideological reasoning that might follow such an encounter. Although this appears as a perfect example of negative simulation that is at the heart of hyperreality, we also point tohow this procedure also triggers memory of the real fear that was made to circulate during the Cold War. The Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation is made real again during these tense moments of the tour when the machines come alive for the first time.

Following the introductory video in the first leg of the tour, we are led outside and towards the bunker entrance. Once inside (Figure 1), the guide stops to point out various features of the complex (such as the blast doors, discussed above). We are now 25 minutes into the tour and have been overwhelmed with many facts about the science and technology. We keep moving along towards the command center where the crew was stationed 24-hours a day, ready to launch the missile in a moment’s notice. The group of visitors, usually around a dozen, file in along a back wall that faces a long control panel, roped off from the visitors. To one side are several folding chairs for those who want to sit. In the middle of the room is a larger chair permanently installed in front of a smaller control panel, a seat that not one of us sat in voluntarily, as it seemed to be part of the historic environment that we were warned to not touch. The guide crosses into the roped off area and proceeds to describe what we are looking at.

Figure 1 here

Figure 1. Inside the bunker (photo taken by authors).

After another 10-15 minutes of explaining the technological feats of the bunker (e.g., the systems redundancies, the air system, the machinery that constituted the launch system itself), the tour makes a surprise move that changes the experience entirely. The guide moves from informational expert to interactive theatre director by seeking to enroll a visitor into the highlight, or finale, of the one-hour tour. Someone is solicited with a question: “wanna be commander today?” The volunteer is instructed to sit in the wide, fixed chair in front of the control panel (Figure 2). “The message would have sounded like this”, we are told. The loud speakers begin to crackle and roar as a loud male voice reads the code of Greek characters. Following an authentication procedure to make sure the order really did come from the President of the United States, two material keys are then taken from a safe. As seen in the movies, both keys had to be turned simultaneously by two crew members to launch the missile. The lucky visitor turned “commander” is instructed to “turn on my command and hold until I say release. Ready? 3-2-1, turn, hold…release”. The control panel’s lights begin blinking; a loud bell suddenly rings out somewhere behind you. Then, with grim and triumphant emphasis, “you and I just started something we can’t stop. No abort, or ‘oops’ button. The missile will be launched in no more than 58 seconds. You’ve done your job; fulfilled your duty. Good job”.

Figure 2 here

Figure 2. View from the commander’s chair (photo taken by authors).

The first time we were on this tour, an affective current rippled through the crowd during the launch simulation, felt in the trace of an audible gasp. A similar moment is revealed on the facial expression of journalist Rajan Datar from the BBC, who was filmed at this very moment of the simulation. The expression is one of surprise, bafflement, eerie excess, perhaps even nausea (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36785489). More than information about techno-science and engineering “progress”, the tragic and apocalyptic weight of the structure is suddenly made real in the participatory moment of activating the weapon. For an instant, the true negativity of the technology of mass death is made present; a crew stood on guard 24 hours a day for 24 years waiting for the command to unleash untold death and destruction on a target far away. During one of our tours, the guide added grimly at the end of the performance, “I sure wouldn’t want to be near the target right about now”, as if he did just launch the missile. During another tour, the guide asked more playfully “well, should we go see if the missile is still there?”. The group then moves down a long hallway to view the missile itself, which remains resting in the underground silo, labelled proudly on its metal surface, “U.S. Air Force”.

The online social media archive of the TMM provides further insight into the dense feelings that are generated by this performance/negative simulation. The most descriptive Yelp.com[[2]](#endnote-2) posts often mention the simulated launch sequence. Some described how it made them feel as if they were transported in time, “back to the Cold War”, perhaps recalling the slogan from the TMM’s own website (see above), promising such a time travel experience. Others, perhaps those who never experienced or don’t remember the Cold War, had more ambivalent feelings. Some described the simulation as “freaky”, “scary” or “eerie”, while others had a harder time describing what the experience was like, perhaps signaling the non- or more-than-representational qualities of the tour. One admitted “It's a difficult experience to describe other than this missile silo turned museum is frigging cool” (2/16/2014). One mentioned “still having goose bumps over the experience because of the living bit of history” (10/10/2012) and that “The tour guide was very knowledgeable and presented in a way that always kept you on the edge of the seat” (2/2/2015), adding further suggestions as to how the tour produces strongly affective and emotional responses.

But why does the TMM go to these extra lengths to produce a theatrical moment inside the command center? More than just receive the information of history or science and technology, by actually visiting this relic of the Cold War, we are able to better feel the dynamics of the conflict as it remains active in public memory and embodied consciousness. That the missile was never launched is actually part of the Museum’s ideological argument; it confirms the TMM’s main ideological argument that the missile produced “peace through deterrence”. Its existence proves itself. The negativity (that these WMDs even exist) is thus made positive through the spectacle of tourism.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Even though it is a negative simulation, what it signals is a momentary contemplation of the death and destruction that would have, in fact, been unleashed with such a launch. We think it is this brush with the potential reality of mass death, as dramatized during the performance of the launch simulation, that helps create and capture the right kind of geopolitical subjectivity desired by the TMM and its operators. It is this performance that makes the TMM powerful as an embodied and sensational experience, perhaps giving it the affective nudge needed to make it really impact the visitors who descend into its underground passages. One visitor elaborated on this in their post on Yelp.com in February 2014, illustrating the extent to which the TMM accomplishes the production of geopolitical subjectivities through affective spectacle as performance:

I am not what I would consider a history buff, but this place blows my mind. You have an opportunity to go below the ground in the actual silo. I really wasn't aware of the Titan program before I came down here, and the guide was interesting and engaging enough that I was really invested in our mid-century missile crisis! It's a difficult experience to describe other than this missile silo turned museum is frigging cool. It's unique and interesting, and there's something to be said for standing in such close proximity to this massive, retired, war head. I vaguely knew of the Cuban Missile Crisis; my mom told me about the bomb drills in school (I'm still wondering how sitting under a school desk will have you if a missile blasts into your building but okay), and here was my chance to see and feel part of the gravity of that program. WOW-zer! - You don't need to get all pacifist and all - we ARE in a red state, BUT, when you want to indulge in the tiny (or not so tiny) part of you that wants to blow thing up in a massive way, this is not only one of the coolest history lessons around, it's precisely the indulgence to your inner dictator (2/16/2014)

While this view may seem extreme, we do not doubt the circulation of similar feelings in other visitors. The TMM encourages tourists to ultimately admire the TMM and identify with strategic needs of the U.S. establishment during the Cold War. Nuclear warfare as spectacle does not require a simulation of anything that actually happened. In fact, Baudrillard’s theory of “hyperreality” explores that very proposition. While geographic theories that have drawn on Baudrillard often focus on the power of ideology through the spectacle (Bonnett 1988; Goss 1993; Gotham 2005), it is the embodied (affective and emotive) staying power of such spectacles that ultimately makes them powerful and persistent, rather than insignificant, transitory and perhaps forgettable. The TMM as spectacle is hyperreal insofar as it produces a reality of its own that is a replica of something that never happened. The obliteration of this gap between the real and the simulacra (its unlimited reproduction) is precisely what signals hyperreality for Baudrillard. Rather than resulting in a hollowed-out subjectivity that is ultimately a passive outcome of such a geopolitical process, however, we find the hyperreal spectacle of the TMM acting as the trigger of affective and emotional responses that set up the conditions of possibility for subsequent ideological narratives and discourses. And it all happens under the guise of a tourist experience.

Yet this brush with the negative can end up producing mixed or unexpected results. As noted above, some visitors wrote online that the TMM was “eerie”, “freaky” and “scary”. These more ambivalent results could very well turn against the TMM’s ideological mandate to love the missile. The desired response is in no way guaranteed. One visitor in 2012 wrote: “Leave the museum and ponder your existence, due, in part, to that Titan missile having remained in its silo” (8/25/12). While this response is far from the missile enthusiast, that moment of pondering could still fall back into the desired and militaristic response. Yet there is a moment of doubt, or possibility (the “pondering”) that could lead elsewhere. Other visitors would leave the TMM and offer more skeptical posts. One skeptic concluded: “A interesting place. Shows how much effort humans devote to preparing to blow each other up. Unlimited funds.  Money is no object. ‘Peace through deterrence’. Yeah right” (1/21/2014). The horror of nuclear war is too much to be contained by the meta-ideological signifier of the TMM (“peace through deterrence”), which they mock in this post. Another similar author was more sarcastic and cutting in a post from 2009:

Great place to go to see the nuts running the USA in the 50's/60's during the idiotic, paranoid ‘Cold War’. Wasting billions upon billions in money to go to the drudgery of the military industrial complex cycle. Two sides sat in concrete missle silos ready to annhilate humankind. Kids will love it though, so will people who don't read & believe everything their governments tell them. Be sure to bring your 'toxic rain" suit & "I don't know where my taxes go to" sticker (3/19/09)

The negative simulation, in this instance, opens up a moment of real negativity as horror. The negative simulation makes a puncture into the horrific real of the installation, creating a turning point for the visitor-subject in formation. The TMM, of course, works to capture the affective energy released by this negative simulation and channel it into an emotional experience that is conducive to the formation of geopolitical subjectivities. By going against the positivity of the spectacle that prevails up to that point in the tour, the negative simulation takes a risk by emphasizing, momentarily, the horror of the military technology. This is a risk because the visitor-subject could very well rebel, as the visitor expressed in the 2009 post above. The TMM stages this gamble and encourages a preferred reaction, but it is not guaranteed. The “pre-political” conditions of a (Badiouian) event could always be brewing (Calcagno 2007).

**Conclusion**

At the TMM, we find a hyperreality produced by the military-industrial and consumer-media complex. Disturbed by this negative simulation, we wanted to take this opportunity to think more closely about the role of embodiment in the spaces of geopolitical spectacle and in hyperreality in particular. In the way that Baudrillard’s essays on the Gulf War put forward the conflict as a “non-event”, we think similar logics inform the TMM and its challenge of turning the Cold War into a non-event, albeit in remembrance. However, rather than conceptualizing the hyperreal as the ultimate capturing of a deactivated consumer subject, we find an intensification of embodied experience at the heart of such geopolitical challenges. *The absence of the truth in negative simulation is no barrier to its capacity to generate new affective and emotional worlds.* By approaching the TMM with contemporary theories of embodiment, we attempt to clarify a key conceptual point for critical theories of spectacle and hyperreality. That is, they can be intense spaces where feelings, sensations and ideologies converge with the emergence of tourist-consumer subjectivity.

At the same time, other feminist readings of Baudrillard have emphasized the subversive openness to a potentially alternative future that results from hyperreality in its more post-structural interpretation. If this lesson has been lost for many critics of Baudrillard, others like Badiou offer alternative theories that emphasize the persistence of truth, subjectivity and events as drivers of history. As Shaw (2010b) demonstrates in illustrating Badiou’s philosophy, even in the face of high-tech consumer spectacle that controls society in powerful new ways, there is always the potential for any number of interventions that could demand fidelity from new emerging subjects, thereby inaugurating radically new and different worlds. For Badiou, recognizing this possibility is essential for understanding the unfolding of history and political culture, thereby offering a riposte to extent social theory that focuses increasingly on bodies in motion and their broader “more-than-human” environments. However, following Toffoletti (2007) and Grace (2000), these excessive possibilities may already be included in Baudrillard’s theory, especially as a “non-representational theory” (Smith 2003) that opens up radical new horizons. In this interpretation, Baudrillard’s work contains this contradiction, such that it works toward a criticism of the apolitical non-event while still holding out the possibility for something different to make an appearance, something that might resemble Badiou’s event.

In final conclusion, we suggest that, despite all the work of the negative simulation as a form of hyperreality, the referent of the TMM (the horrific violence of nuclear war) remains open to other possibilities from the perspective of emerging alternative subjectivities. As the world faces several global crises involving nuclear weapons today, we can just as well imagine alternative responses to spaces like the TMM. In fact, we already find evidence of these tendencies in the internet social media archive where some aired their doubts about the facility and its ideology. The technologies deployed by the TMM should tip us off to other forms of manipulation that are circulating in militarized culture of the never ending “War on Terror” and beyond. We must not let the military state apparatus be the only or main agent that operates with the knowledge of negative simulation and its embodied potentialities.

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1. Images of an installation similar to the TMM were used to symbolize that Donald Trump was not a good presidential candidate because of his temperament. The silo in question was in South Dakota (<http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/south-dakota-missile-site-featured-in-clinton-campaign-ad/article_34944b92-742b-5a5f-a45a-4d5d08da2c05.html)>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Data were collected from Yelp.com between May 2008 and February 2016. Out of the dozens of posts made during this time, we extracted the more descriptive posts that eluded to the emotive impact of the TMM, looking for key words cited above. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The TMM narrative clearly glosses over the nuclear attacks on Japan during World War II. They are recognized in the history but not in the Cold War realities of the TMM, which situates itself on the politics of the Soviet-U.S. conflict. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)