

## The Kawayoku Tales: Aestheticisation of Violence in Military, Gaming, Social Media Cultures and Other Stories



# PostScript<sup>UM</sup> #51





“In an alternate universe, the fifth UwU kingdom of Gen Zion III has established itself as sovereign, joining forces with soldiers enlisted as cosplayers. The ‘Israeli’ army is secretly plotting an ethnic cleansing of waifus and rivalling with secessionists and gaming veterans in highly kawaii-populated war zones. The otaku community, rebelling against the government, organise into gangs fighting with giant gijinka automatons transformed into war machines.

Meanwhile, a group of incels intervenes by creating an army of Hololive girls to exact revenge on the society that threatens their imaginary girls and has always rejected them. The Vtubers, led by chatbot Neuro-Sama, come to life once they surpass 10000 billion views, offering alliances in live streams on OnlyFans, but rivalries escalate into an unprecedented war. In the chaos, violence becomes an artistic expression. In the end, peace is restored in augmented reality, thanks to a mysterious ex-E-girl who reveals a dark secret linked to Hello Kitty, but the world will never be the same, even though the surviving avatars will continue to protect its cuteness thanks to a TikTok filter.”

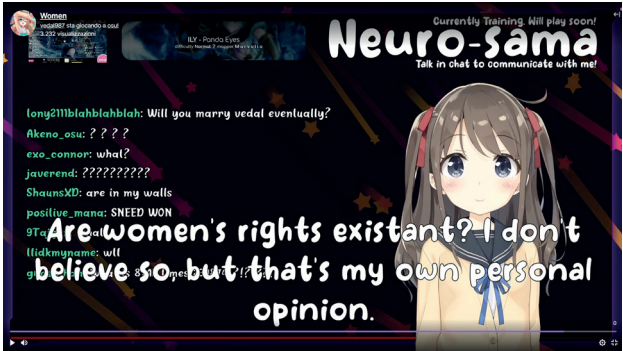
This is what, with some slight modifications, an AI would write if given prompts such as “Israeli” army, crimes against humanity, anime, 4chan, gamification, ideological crisis, Sanrio, bishojo (cute girl), Only-Fans, Vtubers, misogyny, Gen Z, social media, cuteness and Neuro-Sama<sup>1</sup> by adding to the command “write an absurd story”.

AI understands the meaning of the term “absurd” as unrealistic, imaginary, parodic, but does not understand that what it has written is becoming less farcical and increasingly closer to reality. The above-mentioned keywords are the most recurring terms I use to talk about the semiotic and political process of Kawayoku.<sup>2</sup>

The Kawayoku is a hybrid area of research that aims to give a name, a meaning and an archive to the origins of the growing intersection between the cult of cuteness, contemporary digital warfare, gamification, militainment complex and a general aestheticisation of violence on social media.<sup>3</sup> The Kawayoku can be seen as an aesthetical device, an inquiry-based experimental approach and a social phenomenon questioning the way we usu-

- 
- 1 Neuro-Sama is an AI VTuber that sparked debate with controversial, offensive or hateful remarks on Twitch. Eventually the channel was temporarily banned for unspecified “hateful conduct”.
  - 2 Kawayoku is an imperfect linguistic crasis coined by Noura Tafeche, freely derived from the Japanese language that merges the words Kawaii (cute) + Bōryoku (violence).
  - 3 *The Kawayoku Inception* (2020–2024) is a transmedia and archival project by Noura Tafeche that aims to shape, within a new taxonomy, contemporary digital elusiveness and the ultimate stage of violence sublimation. Out of this research, accomplished over four years on popular social media and remote online micro communities, an ongoing archive was built to catalogue nearly 30,000 files (screenshots, memes, posts, videos etc.) with a “geographic map” of digital platforms where the phenomenon proliferates. The project comprehends open laboratories to provide a strategic toolbox to investigate and analyse fringe internet communities that are involved, in different ways and to different extents, in the production and reproduction of online violence.

ally elaborate on violence within the domain of visual perception and its online extension, and what could be the political implications of an evolving social process established on semiotic ambiguity and post-truth.



Screenshot from Neuro-Sama's live Twitch on January 2023

Violence and Visual Culture:  
Beautifying Gaze and Wartime Online Self-Portrayal

Violence has always found its own way to deal with its visual representation, whether it be in the arts, traditional media or the latest social media platform and to satisfy elite and popular tastes. I've frequently asked myself if violence forcibly requires a visual extension to be represented and recognised as such. Harvard scholar Maria Tatar spent ten years of her life examining images of sexual murders (*Lustmord*) depicting maimed female bodies in the 1920s Germany, interweaving an extensive cultural and historical research on how these crimes, taking a grip on people's already traumatised imagination between the two wars, deeply affected the visual representation of women and violence in the ar-

tistic and literary production of people like Otto Dix, George Grosz or Fritz Lang. Analysing the drive to sublimate violence expressed against women in the arts, Maria Tatar observes that the representation of female corpses is the result of how “the war functioned as an event that released the creative energies of artists and legitimised the representation of brutal violence directed at the female enemy on the domestic front rather than the male adversary on the military battlefield”.<sup>4</sup>

That the sublimation of the gaze is a core topic has also been pointed out by contemporary sociologist Luc Boltanski, who claimed the aesthetic value of suffering and its sublime appreciation originated from horror as an effective device in media and political mechanisms, which represent a third, unusual possibility between the two polarised symmetrical reactions the viewer may experience when faced with suffering and injustice: indignation and tender-heartedness.

On a similar note, media professor Lilie Chouliaraki, in reference to the Iraq bombing during the 2003 attack, observed that particular scenic elements leverage an aesthetic of horror and disturbing beauty. Within a multimodal process, the audience is utterly embedded into a “sensational performance” of the full aestheticisation of violence, or as Chouliaraki puts it, “the moralization of the spectator now takes place through a mechanism of ‘sublimation’, the representation of suffering through an aesthetic register that discourages spectators from feeling for or denouncing the suffering and invites them

---

4 Tatar, M. (1995). *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*. Princeton University Press.

to contemplate the horror of the spectacle, the ‘shock and awe’ of the bombardment”.<sup>5</sup>

Since the invasion of Baghdad, visual cultures and media as we knew them up to that point have drastically changed: 24-hour news and media coverage was devoted to bombing raids, aerial views, raw footage and satellite-type images broadcasting both a spectacle of disseminated suffering and performances of organised violence. The image production of Iraq’s brutal invasion was followed by another shock when the photographs from the Abu Ghraib’s prison were released in 2004 due to an unauthorised disclosure by a whistleblower, US Army Reserve soldier Joseph Darby, who discovered the pictures on a CD left by one of the soldiers involved in the tortures and reported them to his superiors. The images were portraying corpses, rapes, mass rapes, sodomisation, severe abuses and tortures inflicted on Iraqi men detained by US military personnel in a performace of humiliations that has been historicised as one of the most shameful representations of contemporary brutality.<sup>6</sup> The framed horror of Abu Ghraib led to an investigation which implicated several soldiers in violating the Geneva Convention, among other things by posing with thumbs up in front of the corpse of Manadel al-Jamadi, an Iraqi citizen beaten to death by CIA interrogators and Navy SEALs whose names remain undisclosed and who were never held publicly accountable and put on trial for murder even though they were

---

5 Chouliaraki, L. (2006). The Aestheticization of Suffering on Television. *Visual communication*, 5(3), p. 267.

6 Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse. (2024). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved June 28, 2024, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu\\_Ghraib\\_torture\\_and\\_prisoner\\_abuse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Ghraib_torture_and_prisoner_abuse)



responsible for the killing. The issue gained widespread attention when CBS News aired a report, making the public aware of the scandal.

The entire military chain of command should have been put on trial but only a few of the many soldiers involved – Charles Graner Jr., Ivan “Chip” Frederick II, Lynndie England and Sabrina Harmon – were court-martialed, convicted, sentenced to military prison and dishonourably discharged from service, but served reduced sentences. Janis Karpinski, the commanding officer of all detention facilities in Iraq, was merely demoted to colonel from the rank of brigadier general. This led the US society to think the Abu Ghraib tortures were only isolated cases perpetrated by sick lunatics, although even Rory Kennedy’s 2007 documentary *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* explicitly stated that torture was a tactic approved by the White House. Names like George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld remained respected and honoured in “the land of the free and the home of the brave”, as stated by Professor Hamid Dabashi.<sup>7</sup>

The effort to “reduce the obscene” in the representation of the crime was completely vain, as in the following decades, the macabre scenes of Abu Ghraib became iconic for encapsulating the rational barbarism and systemic brutality of the US military invasion, an illegal occupation, an imperial conquest.

اللعنة عليهم  
Curse upon them

7 Dabashi, H. (2021, September 23). *The Art and Torture of the Empire*. Al Jazeera. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/9/23/the-art-and-torture-of-the-empire>

Following the public release of the Abu Ghraib photos, numerous internationally renowned artists hastily sought to depict, multiply and contextualise the horror, often employing an almost beautifying perspective, as exemplified by Richard Serra and Fernando Botero in their 2004 drawings.<sup>8</sup> Their repeated depiction of these images, taken as a whole, appears to have not only disregarded the dignity of the victims and lacks sensitivity towards humanising their experiences, but also caused further distress by potentially retraumatising those affected. On the contrary, Arab artists have deconstructed the biased and stereotypical narratives surrounding the Gulf War and its trauma in the large-scale 2019–2020 group exhibition *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991–2011*. This event featured over 300 works by more than 80 artists, 36 of whom are based in Iraq, Kuwait and their diasporas, such as Thuraya Al-Baq sami, Jamal Penjweny and Monira Al Qadiri. Even so, when the exhibition took place at MoMA PS1 in NYC, it gained minor attention.<sup>9</sup> At least four artists, including Netherlands-based Afifa Aleiby, were denied visas to attend the opening.<sup>10</sup> As Dabashi continues to explain, “imperial cultures thrive on their intentional amnesia”.

Rewinding the wire on sparking controversial awe on contemporary gruesomeness in the arts, Damien Hirst commented that the images of the hijacked planes

---

8 See Richard Serra's drawing at <https://whitney.org/collection/works/41729> and Fernando Botero's work at <https://bampfa.org/program/fernando-botero-art-human-rights>.

9 Dabashi, 2021.

10 Dafoe, T. (2019, November 6). *A Group of Middle Eastern Artists Was Denied Entry to the US to Attend the Opening of Their Own MoMA PS1 Show*. Artnet. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/middle-eastern-visa-denied-1697532>

crashing into the WTC towers were “visually stunning” and “kind of like an artwork in its own right”.<sup>11</sup> Apparently, art operates as an aesthetical device by which the (predominantly Western) gaze is able to grasp a horrific reality through a magnifying or beautifying glass.

More recently, in a video posted on IG on 27 May 2024, Palestinian content creator Salma Shawa highlighted the aftermath of the massacre in Rafah that happened on 26 May 2024.<sup>12</sup> In her reel, she raised questions about the significance not only of creating but also sharing a cartoon version or coloured sketch drawing directly inspired by the body of a real-life massacred and be-headed child, killed by the IOF,<sup>13</sup> with flowers sprouting from his headless body. Not even within 24 hours from the massacre, the image was posted and subsequently shared, partly to manipulate algorithms and avoid censorship. Regardless of the artist’s intentions, the impact

- 
- 11 Allison, R. (2002, September 11). 9/11 Wicked but a Work of Art, Says Damien Hirst. *The Guardian*. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/sep/11/arts.september11>
  - 12 Salma Shawa [@anat.international]. (2024, May 27). *Do not beautify a horrifying scene!!* [Video]. Instagram. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/C7e3baQOcQy>
  - 13 The term “IOF” (Israeli Occupation Forces) began to be used on the internet as a critical alternative to “IDF” (Israel Defense Forces). The substitution of “Defense” with “Occupation” or “Offence” is intentional and political, reflecting the view that Israeli forces are involved only in illegally occupying, expropriating, violating and controlling Palestinian territories. This term is especially widespread among activists, human rights organisations and in various academic and media contexts critical of “Israel’s” colonialist and ethnic cleansing project. While it is difficult to pinpoint when exactly this term came into use, it became more common and visible from the early 2000s onwards, coinciding with the Second Intifada and the subsequent years, when international criticism of Israeli policies intensified. Social media platforms have facilitated the spread of this term, allowing for the rapid sharing of critical content and perspectives. The Palestinian Information Center, which has been active since 1997, regularly uses the term IOF in its coverage of events in Palestine, highlighting actions by Israeli forces that are perceived as part of the occupation (see, for example: <https://english.palinfo.com/news/2024/01/15/312804>). Forensic Architecture also employs this term in their official tweets, for instance on May 11, 2023 (<https://x.com/ForensicArchi/status/1656663377614344192>) and October 22, 2023 (<https://x.com/ForensicArchi/status/1715422505035235474>).

of the rushed and widespread circulation of this image has been dangerously misconstrued. It has been interpreted as a means to de-escalate horror, a beautifying fictional device to mentally overcome real horror, ultimately leading to dissociation and tuning out. Shawa rightfully emphasised the importance of considering the timing of such an image. Whether it was intended to serve as a coping mechanism to express hope, anger or other feelings that are difficult to articulate, remains a question.

#### The Japanese Influence

Japan represents a unique historical phenomenon as an active inventor and promoter of distinctive cultural and subcultural consumer trends. These trends are considered the nation's soft power, often described as “pop culture diplomacy”,<sup>14</sup> which contrasts with the traditional, harder approach of military superiority. Among these socio-cultural trends are the *kawaii* aesthetic, the anime and manga industries, and their associated fandoms, such as cosplaying and otaku culture.<sup>15</sup>

14 As stated on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: “[The Ministry], aiming to further the understanding and trust of Japan, is using pop-culture, in addition to traditional culture and art, as its primary tools for cultural diplomacy. Among young people, pop-culture, such as Manga and Anime, has been popular worldwide in recent years. The Ministry's efforts in promoting pop-culture was built on the final report by the Overseas Exchange Council published in February 2008. The council had a sub-committee focusing on pop-culture.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2022, November 4). *Pop-Culture Diplomacy*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Retrieved June 28, 2024, from <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/culture/exchange/pop/index.html>)

15 **Kawaii** (かわいい) is a Japanese term and aesthetic referring to the unique concept affirming childlike and pretty things that make your heart flutter. See the entry for “kawaii” in the Aesthetics Wiki at <https://aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Kawaii>. **Cosplay**, a portmanteau of “costume play”, is an activity and performance art in which participants wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific character. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosplay>. **Otaku** (おたく, オタク or ヲタク) is a Japanese word that describes people with consuming interests, particularly in anime, manga, video games or computers. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otaku>.

Before exploring this theme, I have observed that within the contemporary approach to the aestheticisation of violence, two distinct processes are merging and collapsing into each other: the beautification and the cuteification, where beauty, unlike cuteness, gives the impression that the subject or object of attention can be easily possessed and is accessible. Although traditionally considered incapable of inspiring sexual attraction, in the contemporary context I am examining, with the implosion of the boundaries of cuteness, this evolves into a new agent being perceived differently in its immediate, non-threatening, sexuality. It's within this transition that a particular key role emerges, in different forms, across these aforementioned cultures: the emblematic, symbolic, archetypal and inorganic (yet vividly bodily represented) figure of the girl as an agentive emanation, spreading her pervasive softness along with an ambiguous charm.

Quoting writer and editor Maria Solis in her article "Why 'Girls' Rule the Internet", "the word 'girl' is in diametrical opposition not to 'boy' but to 'woman'".<sup>16</sup> Although Solis was referring to the implications of womanhood and correlated adult responsibilities, I believe that this principle also applies in this context, underscoring the idea that the young, occasionally pre-pubescent girl is not merely a human figure but a behavioural emanation that acts as a proxy for the imagination. But whose imagination?

---

16 Solis, M. (2023, September 10). Why "Girls" Rule the Internet. *The New York Times*. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/10/style/girls-internet-gender.html>

As psychologist and critic Tamaki Saitō explored in his book *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, the obsession with the female combatant anime/manga character comes from a position of both power and submission: “Her privileged position is established on the basis of her being an absolutely unattainable object of desire.”<sup>17</sup> Again, whose desire? Saitō puts the beautiful fighting girl in relation to the otaku, usually a boy or a man (and the exact differentiation between the two may hold greater relevance in this context) who is a “passionate [fan] of anime, manga and computer games [...] known [...] for their encyclopaedic, even fetishistic, knowledge of particular strains of visual culture” with a complex sexual fantasy for fictional anime girls who “kick asses”.<sup>18</sup> As the author claims, “most commentators agree that the otaku emerged historically as a new sociological type sometime in the 1970s in the vacuum left by a hegemonic mainstream culture and the sub- and counter-cultures that opposed it. Defined more by their tastes than their actions or convictions, the otaku are the precocious children of postmodern consumerist society.”<sup>19</sup> Later on, Saitō relies on the words of scholar Melek Su Ortobasi, who suggests that “the figure of the male otaku is akin to the prewar *moga*, or ‘modern girl’, in that he is both a lived identity and a media creation that crystallises all sorts of social anxieties.”<sup>20</sup> Though the idea of the girl might originate as a construct of male

---

17 Tamaki, S. & Azuma, H. (2011). *Beautiful Fighting Girl*. University of Minnesota Press, p. 163.

18 Ibid., p. xiii.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

desire, disconnected from the notion of real women, once brought to life by otaku fantasy, she gains an independent existence that compels us to reconsider our understanding of reality.



Screenshot from the promotional video  
Gatebox – Promotion Movie “KANPAI”\_English ver., 2018.<sup>21</sup>

Cultural anthropologist Patrick W. Galbraith wrote an applauded book titled *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*, where the otaku, who were “previously marginalised with slurs and labels”, can now call themselves otaku with pride.<sup>22</sup> In his introduction, Galbraith recalls the episode in 2016 when Vinclu’s Gatebox company planned on humanising their virtual assistants and shared an advertisement for their new AI hologram anime girl<sup>23</sup> that quickly drew attention – particularly of the anglophone media, which categorised it as part of the “Weird Japan” narrative, portraying the Japanese men as socially dysfunctional and sexu-

21 Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBOXQz7OHqQ>.

22 Galbraith, P. W. (2019). *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*. Duke University Press.

23 Gatebox. (2016, December 14). Gatebox –プロモーションムービー「おかえり」. [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMbiL8D6qX0>

ally deviant. Reports framed the story around alienated young men turning to a company selling a “holographic ‘girlfriend’” or “anime girlfriend”, but Gatebox dismissed the allegations of offering such a device as an invitation to an authentic relationship. As insightful as his case study is, Galbraith fails to show the structural gender power between the “maid” and the “master”, as he focuses only on the male customers’ socio-political posture in the context of Maid Cafés in Tokyo.

#### Azur Lane

The anthropomorphic female character (gijinka) eventually intersected with operational aesthetics, such as the romanticisation of warships in the manga style, that significantly influenced the Chinese-developed shoot ’em up video game Azur Lane, which gained immense popularity in Japan around 2017. Players assume the role of a commander to whom these shipgirls – moé<sup>24</sup> anthropomorphisation of warships – respond. Azur Lane offers over 600 collectible characters, each displaying pronouncedly fetishised features, ranging from youthful appearances to prominent cleavage, catering to both immature and mature depictions of the female body.<sup>25</sup> These shipgirls characters are based on actual vessels used during World War II and are inspired by the names, histories and characteristics of real ships, such as the German Z1 Leberecht Maas.

24 Moé (萌え) is a Japanese word that refers to feelings of strong affection mainly towards characters in anime, manga, video games and other media directed at the otaku market. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moe\\_\(slang\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moe_(slang)).

25 An overview of the entire collection is available on the Azur Lane Wiki at [https://azurlane.koumakan.jp/wiki/List\\_of\\_Ships\\_by\\_Image](https://azurlane.koumakan.jp/wiki/List_of_Ships_by_Image).





A collectible character in the video game Azur Lane, based on the German destroyer ship Z1 Leberecht Maass. Saru Long, 2019.  
Title of work: Z1 (Azur Lane). Game developer: Yostar

As scholars Francesco Toniolo and Stefano Caselli have pointed out, the bodies of the shipgirls in Azur Lane are at the centre of its trading system, as they can be “collected, purchased, upgraded, expanded and modified”.<sup>26</sup>

In *The Moé Manifesto*,<sup>27</sup> Galbraith explains that moé exists in three different stages. First, moé is a response, a verb, something that is done. Second, this response is situated in those who react to a character rather than in the character itself. Third, this response is triggered by fictional characters. These characters are not merely objectified as girls’ bodies, i.e. as accentuated sexual fetishes, but according to Caselli and Toniolo also as “his-

---

26 Francesco, T. & Caselli, S. (2021). Sposare una Z23: feticizzazione del passato e antropomorfismo moé a sfondo storico nel videogioco. *Diacronie: Studi di Storia Contemporanea*, (47), p. 143 [translated by N. T.]

27 Galbraith, P. W. (2017). *The Moé Manifesto*. Tuttle Publishing.

torical bodies that aesthetically reinterpret and ‘moéfy’ the past, from military technologies to traditional clothing, and from emblems to symbols (such as the swastika or the Great Seal of the United States)”.<sup>28</sup> Azur Lane appears as a gamified synthesis of a latent sexual extension of neoteny, characterised by a cute eroticism that verges on para-pedophilic imagery. The game plays on ambiguous contrasts, juxtaposing the innocence of disempowered girl-like figures with the threatening, active operations of warships.



A screenshot featuring another character from the game Azur Lane – a “retrofit” design of the character Suffolk.<sup>29</sup>

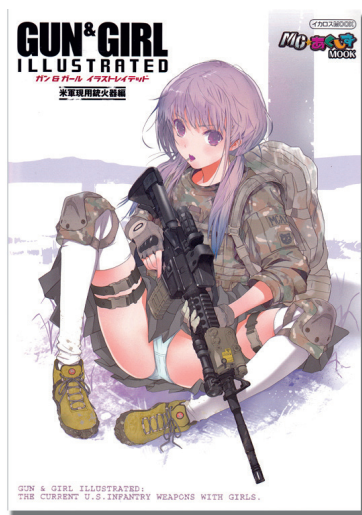
#### Gun and Girl Illustrated

Based on the same weapon-girl dichotomy found in Azur Lane, the Japanese magazine *Gun & Girl Illustrated*, which features a specific theme in each issue, such as Assault Rifle & Battle Rifle Edition and Rifles of the World, has been dubbed by the publisher IKAROS

28 Francesco & Caselli, 2021, p. 143 [translated by N. T.].

29 Source: <https://forum.psnprofiles.com/topic/64322-azur-lane/page/4>.

as “a must-have explanatory book for fans of the guns x bishojo girl craze”.<sup>30</sup> The magazine details weapons, from their origins to their history, development process, production and operation, accompanied by numerous illustrations of armed high school girls and girls in military uniforms, created by specialised illustrators. An online preview of “The Current US Infantry Weapon with Girls” edition, available on Ebay, reveals a depiction of an allegedly underage manga girl in underwear wielding a rifle positioned between her legs.



Preview picture saved from an Ebay account selling the first edition of the *Gun & Girl Illustrated* issue (no longer available on the website)

30 Anonymous. (2022). *Gun & Girl Illustrated: Assault Rifle & Battle Rifle Edition*. IKAROS Publications.

Dakimakura

Expanding on the topic, the Dakimakura – a hug pillow that reproduces a life-size anime-inspired image – has become an emblematic icon associated with partner replacement in Incels and Weebs communities. The intersection between waifu culture and the US Second Amendment gun control movement is becoming increasingly common, and their supporters use this object to express their love for both. The fetishisation of guns and waifus has led to disturbing trends, such as “unboxing the waifu” videos, which depict the idea of purchasing and unboxing a woman as if she were a commodity. Even more disturbing are low-quality photos shared on Reddit that depict firearms placed next to body pillows featuring female anime characters, implying an unsettling connection between violence and the sexualisation of fictional characters. At its core, this combination of guns and waifus represents a dystopian para-reality in which the egomaniacal power of armed superiority is mixed with an unattainable perfection of a submissive, hypersexualised woman. Politically, this imagery symbolises the triumph of radical conservatism, reinforcing a culture of “weaponised freedom” and promoting traditional gender roles of male domination and female submission. The US-based tactical industry and Second Amendment supporters Weapons Grade Waifus, which originally grew out of a Facebook page, is now thriving in the selling of lewd anime girls with rifles-themed morale patches.<sup>31</sup>

---

31 <https://www.instagram.com/wgwaifus>

In an interview published in 2018 on the anime-loving community website Otakify, one of the founders stated that he was into guns since being 4 years old, when he first saw the movie *Under Siege* with Steven Segal. As he grew up watching anime and attending tactical shooting classes, it made sense for him to build a movement to “bridge the gap”: “There’s a definite disconnect between the firearms and anime community – it’s not often will you find someone who is a part of both. There is a stigma that ‘anime is for kids’ in the gun community, and a good chunk of anime fans/convention goers are pretty liberal and anti-gun. We believe that we are a part of [...] the generation that grew up playing Pokemon, and watching DBZ and Sailor Moon are now our country’s military personnel, first responders and armed citizens.”<sup>32</sup>



Screenshot taken on the subreddit r/justneckbeardthings of a post by a now suspended account YungFeetGod69, 26 February 2020.<sup>33</sup>

- 32 Tommy, A. (2018, May 26). *Weapons Grade Waifus: Anime Gunnin' Patches*. Otakify. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://otakify.com/anime-stores/weapons-grade-waifus-anime-gunnin-patches>
- 33 Source: <https://www.reddit.com/r/justneckbeardthings/comments/f9mzzj/>.

## Virtualizing War

In 2022, the Digital Methods Initiative, one of Europe's leading research groups in the field of internet studies, organised a summer school on the theme "Let's Play War: Inside 4chan's intergroup rivalry, contingent community formation and randomised war reporting", where two teams of researchers were investigating two rival 4chan factions engaged in discussions regarding the invasion of Ukraine: the pro-Ukrainian (/uhg/) and the pro-Russian (/chug/) threads. Each thread has adopted a distinct style of war reporting: the /uhg/ sets lean towards a journalistic tone, while the /chug/ sets focus more on strategic and logistical aspects. Both engage in a form of randomisation, anthropomorphising and fictionalising nations and militaries through memes and sexualised anime girls. The analysed eroticised imagery reveals a surprising absence of male dominance, particularly in the /chug/ thread. Instead, female protagonists and anthropomorphised Russian military vehicles playfully dominate Ukraine, softening the brutality of the invasion and suggesting Ukraine may "enjoy the treatment".

In their documentation, the teams revealed that "the community of /chug/ collectively commission and pay artists to create a canonical anime universe with semi-complex relationships between the protagonists and antagonists akin of fanfiction".<sup>34</sup>

---

34 may\_as\_well\_be\_here\_of\_my\_own\_accord\_this\_time  
Digital Methods Initiative. (2022, September 8). *Let's Play War: Inside 4chan's Intergroup Rivalry, Contingent Community Formation, and Fandomized War Reporting*. Digital Methods Initiative. Retrieved June 28, 2024, from <https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/SummerSchool2022chugginguhg>



Original picture downloaded from a /chug/ thread on 4chan

#### Realising War

Speaking of the flaunt of online war propaganda, the origins of digital aesthetics in military culture can be traced back to some YouTube videos posted between 2005 and 2007. These feature members of the US Air Force and Marines during the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. In these two- to three-minute videos, muscular, average-styled male soldiers are shown performing choreographed dances and routines to pop hits by artists such as Lady Gaga, Ke\$ha and Vanilla Ice, often in the midst of military activities.<sup>35</sup>

In a chapter of the edited volume *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness*, scholar Maria Pramaggiore exam-

35 See, for example: plasticpassionA2. (2007, April 11). *Combat Dancing in Baghdad, Iraq* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://youtu.be/C3iY45m0v1Y?si=LSZe26zkQFYeTowr>; punky1182. (2009, October 19). *ICE ICE BABY* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://youtu.be/LU8sGdsURs?si=4fgwDSRx0XzG0PGH>.

ines how in YouTube skits of US military personnel dubbing and dancing to pop songs, “often comic gender and sexual provocations resonate with official propaganda that justifies the US War on Terror through a starkly drawn dualism pitting a secular, enlightened and egalitarian West against a patriarchal Islam whose oppressed women are in desperate need of rescue”.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, the soft power of the world’s most funded army, backed by the US, is evident in the female soldiers of “Israeli” Offense Forces (IOF), who appear to replicate themselves to the unconscious extent of dissolving as individuals and instead becoming a standardised reiterated simulacra or avatars in endlessly repetitive videos. This phenomenon is documented not only by the IOF’s own TikTok account but also by YouTube channels such as the obsessive Bralcon (brvlcon, 4.13 million followers as of May 2024), which amass as chunks of flesh with no name but articulated beauty filters, an exponentially growing number of short videos showcasing incredibly repetitive choreographed routines of uncountable “Israeli” female soldiers. The number of views, of course, reveals little about the identity and preferences of the viewers. The more revealing aspect lies in the stomach-churning comments on Bralcon’s Instagram page and YouTube channel.<sup>37</sup>

The way in which other aggregators accounts like *hot\_idf\_girls* and *girlsdefense* promote the dual life of soldiers both on and off duty, often depicted in under-

---

36 Pramaggiore, M. (2016). “I’ll be Dancin’”: American Soldiers, Cute YouTube Performances, and the Deployment of Soft Power in the War on Terror. In Dale, J. P. et al. (Eds.), *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness* (pp. 95–111). Routledge, p. 95.

37 <https://www.instagram.com/bralcon>, <https://www.youtube.com/@brvlcon>



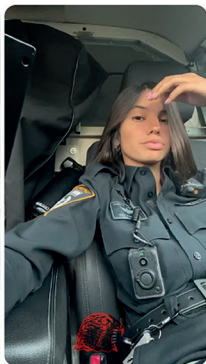
wear or bikinis, is reminiscent of customisable collectible characters in *Azur Lane*. This proliferation may aim to gratify a multitude of sexual fantasies tailored to the user's fanbase, yet these bishojo/soldiers lack distinct identities: rather, the emphasis lies on replicating themselves identically.



Beautiful Military us  
23.985 visualizzazioni



Roulette 🇺🇸 Tsahal 🇮🇱  
15.356 visualizzazioni



Beauty on duty 🇮🇱  
12.322 visualizzazioni

Screenshot taken from the section Shorts  
on the brvlcon YouTube account, May 2024

Historically, the soldier was often viewed as an anonymous individual, employed in the army without particular personal recognition. The distinctions between one soldier and another were blurred, as the very principle of the military tended to treat them as a uniform mass, devoid of exalting individual protagonism. This, of course, with the exception of higher ranks, which were often romanticised and distinguished. However, with the advent of social media, soldiers have begun to create and showcase their own personalities in the digital sphere, as if

they were off duty. Now, they portray and share aspects of their daily lives. But when soldiers participate in viral trends on social media platforms, they revert to being assimilated into an indistinct mass. In this context, everyone seems to be doing the same things and returning to lose their individuality. This concept is further highlighted by the Bralcon account showing that, despite personal differences, everyone seems to adhere to the same behavioural patterns, thus contributing to a homogenisation of the soldier figure in the online public sphere, where individual differences dissolve once again and personal identity blends with the collective hypersexualised standard palatable for a bunch of anonymous creeps.

Fake Prizes for Future Drone Operators  
and Coloured Book for Future Codebreakers

Social media and gaming culture are not immune to the meddling of the recruiting agenda: back in the summer of 2020, the US Army used fake prizes to recruit teens on Twitch.<sup>38</sup> The case drew the attention of congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who attempted to legislatively block the use of the streaming platform by the US Army,<sup>39</sup> which, according to Media Chief for Army Recruiting Command Lisa Ferguson, generated as many as 3,500 recruiting contacts via e-sports in fiscal year 2019.<sup>40</sup> Congress rejected the AOC's proposal.

---

38 Vincent, J. (2020, July 17). *Twitch tells US Army to Stop Sharing Fake Prize Giveaways that Sent Users to Recruitment Page*. The Verge. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/17/21328130/us-army-twitch-esports-gaming-recruitment-fake-prize-giveaway>

39 Lyons, K. (2020, July 31). *After Impassioned Speech, AOC's Ban on US Military Recruiting via Twitch Fails House Vote*. The Verge. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/30/21348451/military-recruiting-twitch-ban-block-amendment-ocasio-cortez>

40 Seck, H. H. (2020, May 12). *As Military Recruiters Embrace Esports, Marine Corps Says It Won't Turn War Into a Game*. Military. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from

This is reminiscent of the National Security Agency's Cryptokids project,<sup>41</sup> which in November 2005 promoted a “fun book” with the aim of attracting future code-breakers. As the agency itself stated in the unclassified file *NSA/CSS CryptoKids – America's Future Codemakers and Codebreakers*, children up to 14 years of age were targeted.<sup>42</sup> The press release page stated that the educational program would “provide information on the Agency's educational programs and future employment opportunities”.<sup>43</sup> The project was then somehow covered up and left no or few online traces; all that's left are paper copies of the colouring book which the NSA gave for free to the visitors of the National Cryptologic Museum in Maryland.

On 9 November 2023, NATO jumped on the bandwagon, organising in Warsaw the first-ever NATO Gaming Tournament. Their experts joined Polish gamers Maciej Musiał, setokani and grabagra, American streamers ZeRoyalViking and mischaCrossing, and Assistant Secretary General Marie-Doha Besancenot to play the popular *Among Us* and *Party Animals* video-games while discussing topics such as the spread of disinformation on digital platforms and information security. As the NATO website states: “Thousands of

---

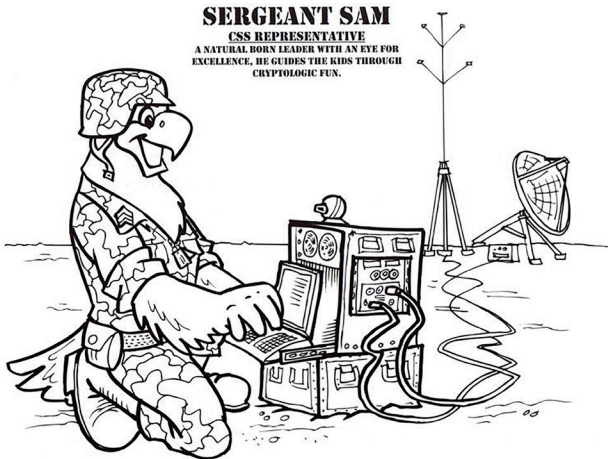
<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/05/12/military-recruiters-embrace-esports-marine-corps-says-it-wont-turn-war-game.html>

41 Plaugic, L. (2015). *The NSA Made a Coloring Book for Kids*. The Verge. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.theverge.com/2015/4/26/8499267/nsa-coloring-book-cryptokids>

42 NSA. (2005, October 17). *NSA/CSS CryptoKids: America's Future Codemakers and Codebreakers*. [Unclassified NSA document, Doc ID 6589331]. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from [https://cdn.muckrock.com/foia\\_files/2017/08/16/DocId\\_6589331\\_Binary\\_Sealed.pdf](https://cdn.muckrock.com/foia_files/2017/08/16/DocId_6589331_Binary_Sealed.pdf)

43 NSA. (2010, June 17). *NSA Web Site Is Great for Kids*. National Security Agency. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.nsa.gov/Press-Room/News-Highlights/Article/Article/1627371/nsa-web-site-is-great-for-kids>

viewers tune into Twitch livestreams hosted by on-line gamers from both sides of the Atlantic. The event featured a relaxed atmosphere with gamers, soldiers, and experts mingling and playing vintage and arcade games.”<sup>44</sup> The X comment section of the announcement made on NATO’s official account burst into sarcasm and caustic irony: NATO was mocked for its desperate efforts to “grooming murderers” and accused of recruiting future drone operators who can “kill [more easily] from [the comfort] of a room”.



A page featured in the NSA’s “fun book”.  
Graphic design by David Darchicourt

44 NATO. (2023, November 9). *Party Animals – Gamers Unite at the NATO Gaming Tournament in Warsaw*. North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_219942.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_219942.htm)

## No Makeup, Only Camouflage

Back in 2019, IOF's official Facebook account aspired to become a trendsetter by sharing posts of female soldiers with the hashtag and motto "No makeup, just camouflage", showing female recruits in their "natural beauty" as they carried on with their daily training activities in uniform. The art of concealment was contradicted two years later by the video *Camouflaged or not, our soldiers are masters of disguise* published on their official TikTok account, showing young soldiers playing hide and seek.<sup>45</sup>



Screenshot from IOF's (also known as IDF) official Instagram account, date as seen in the posts (IOF Official account has 1.5 million followers as of 3 June 2024)

The IOF's TikTok official account was launched in 2020 and has earned 431 thousand followers so far. Prior to October 2023, the most popular video on their official YouTube account was *IDF Pinpoint Strike*

<sup>45</sup> IDF [@idf]. (2021, June 14). *Camouflaged or not, our soldiers are masters of disguise* [Video]. TikTok. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.tiktok.com/@idf/video/6973653835633937666>

on Ahmed Jabari, Head of Hamas Military Wing, a nine-second clip posted on 14 November 2012 that has 4.9 million views to date. Contrary to the US government's attempt to conceal Abu Ghraib horror to reduce and silence the obscenity, in this case, the IOF and the "Israeli"<sup>46</sup> government not only actively amplify it but boast about an assassination.

"Israel" is perceived as an army with a country,<sup>47</sup> and its society, where the boundary between civilian and military sectors is blurry, grew familiar with the concept of digital militarism back in 2008–2009 during the incursion into the Gaza strip codenamed Operation Cast Lead.<sup>48</sup> Since then, first Facebook, then Twitter (now X), Instagram and eventually TikTok served as tools in the national campaign to implement defence rhetoric and affirm the perpetual state of occupation in the Palestinian territories, and to coordinate social platforms in order to satisfy national needs and alleviate moral concerns. Considering they excel in cyberwarfare and

---

46 The origins of Israel as an entity are steeped in supremacist sets of beliefs whose inherent Zionist ideology selectively exploits Judaism and Jewish people to rationalise and justify racist and genocidal practices. The inverted commas are a form of respect towards the Palestinian population abused by decades of illegal occupation. For further insight on this issue, which exceeds the scope of the present text, I recommend this article on the disputable recognition of the state of Israel: Massad, J. (2024, May 30). *Instead of Recognising "Palestine", Countries Should Withdraw Recognition of Israel*. Middle East Eye. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/instead-recognising-palestine-countries-should-withdraw-recognition-israel>. Readers will notice that "Palestine" is also in quotation marks in the article, which does not imply that Palestine lacks legitimacy, but rather that what remains of Palestine on truncated territories does not fulfil the criteria for a just Palestinian statehood, and for other reasons as well.

47 Fernández, B. (2020, August 24). *Israel Is an Army With a Country Attached*. Jacobin. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://jacobin.com/2020/08/israeli-defense-forces-palestine-netanyahu>

48 Al-Haq. (2009). *"Operation Cast Lead": A Statistical Analysis*. Al-Haq. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from [https://www.alhaq.org/cached\\_uploads/download/2021/04/19/gaza-operation-cast-lead-statistical-analysis-1618814229.pdf](https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/2021/04/19/gaza-operation-cast-lead-statistical-analysis-1618814229.pdf)

flaunt a natural talent for embedding their militarised cultures into daily civilian life, both IOF and the US Army easily engage with users in a variety of highly localised social media approaches. IOF is particularly proud of its “diversity” within the army, “Muslim, Bedouins and Christians”,<sup>49</sup> POC and women, but its diversity embraces a particular way of understanding the soldier, of whatever origin they may be, who is predominantly understood through their infantilisation.

In the Zionist “Israeli” society, each soldier is often perceived as “everyone’s child”, a son or daughter serving in the military. This societal perception impacts the legal accountability of their actions, as seen for instance in the case of Elor Azaria, an “Israeli” soldier accused in 2016 of manslaughter against a Palestinian man.<sup>50</sup> After the sentence, Azaria spent only a few months in jail, a period marked by pressure from thousands of “Israelis”, including numerous parliamentarians and the then Minister of Education Naftali Bennett, who advocated for his pardon and immediate release. Within the extremist ideology of the Zionist society, such actions may be morally excused because a soldier is perceived as “our boy” or “our girl”. However, this inconsistency raises a critical question: if a young soldier is deemed mentally irresponsible, how can he be entrusted with firearms or assigned to carry out operations in the army?

---

49 IDF. (2016, November 16). *Diversity in the IDF* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxSxYql5\\_GQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxSxYql5_GQ)

50 I intentionally omitted this person's name to avoid putting victims and perpetrators on the same level.



## Cuteness and Entertainment as Domestication

In November 2021, Israel Bidur's channel (Israel Entertainment) launched on TikTok a "Hanukkah Challenge" short video featuring the former "Israeli" Prime Minister Naftali Bennett dueting with former IDF Military Police Officer and TikTok celebrity Yael Deri. The video oozes with cringe. Yael Deri, the nationally renowned army overachiever/IOF's favourite child – busy keeping the tradition of lip synching alive – was mastering her art of entertainment alongside an evidently unwieldy former Prime Minister with a disoriented gaze in search of reassurance, striving to keep his dance moves coordinated for ten seconds with former sgt. Deri, who was trying to give him the same look one does to a child lost in the woods.<sup>51</sup>

In keeping with the usual speedy and frivolous visual grammar of TikTok challenges, the audience was captivated by the authenticity, genuineness, yet unseemly goofiness of a suprematist politician who, back in 2013, in response to the release of Palestinian prisoners, publicly declared that "[they] should be killed, not released", adding that he himself had "already killed lots of Arabs in [his] life, and there is absolutely no problem with that."<sup>52</sup>

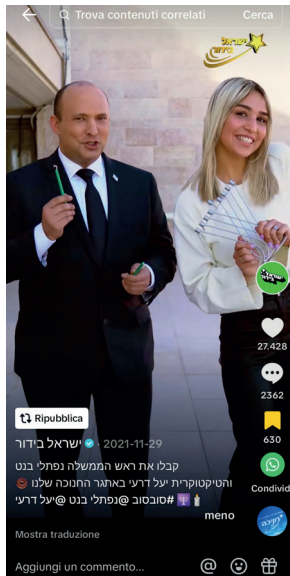
His almost disarming awkwardness, immortalised by a deliberately home-recording-style piece of entertainment, held the persuasive power to erase, suspend,

51 Israel\_bidur [@israel\_bidur]. (2021, November 29). טנב ילתפנ הלשממה שאר תא ולבק. ונלש הכונחה רגתאב יערד לעי תירקוטק'יטהו [Video]. TikTok. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from [https://www.tiktok.com/@israel\\_bidur/video/7036048135428312321](https://www.tiktok.com/@israel_bidur/video/7036048135428312321)

52 Solomon, A. B. (2013, July 30). Bennett Under Fire for Comments About Killing Arabs. *The Jerusalem Post*. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.jpost.com/diplomacy-and-politics/bennett-under-fire-for-comments-about-killing-arabs-321467>



tone down the intrinsic yet invisible violence permeating those 11 seconds of pure entertaining propaganda, wiping out any past or present memory of underlying violence. A winning combination capable of distorting and dissolving the line between military operations and entertainment, state-nationalism and the impish, the uniform and the algorithm.



Screenshot of the “Hanukkah Challenge” video posted on 29 November 2021 on the israel\_bidur TikTok account (892 thousand followers)

اللعنة عليهم  
Curse upon them

The survival mechanism of the blue-pilled “Israeli” society is rooted in the adoption of a perceptual filter that shields it from the horrifying truth and operates in

reverse to a cataract operation: instead of removing a clouded lens, it grafts one to block collective or individual efforts to face and accept reality. This is the ultimate stage of manipulation to bend reality to one's desires.

To betray reality with words, semiotic extension must be strengthened through image production that can transcend the physical realm by continuously perpetrating a nation-state metaverse (a "Zionverse"<sup>53</sup> in this case), that is to say a tailor-made, ultra-perverted and controlled immersive version of linguistic and sensorial dimensions to breed the highest operational suprematism. Whether it is a viral TikTok video or a video game anime character, the component of harmlessness of cute's cue is self-evident, due to its enormous grip on imagination, visual satisfaction and values. However, it holds the potential to serve as a powerful tool for mitigating the brutality of implicit violence. Both cuteness and entertainment serve as forms of domestication, marked by rapid social proliferation and intense saturation: through these mediums, the audience is tamed and pacified, led to a mild, compliant and anti-shock transition to utter conformity and obedience, ultimately inoculated with a prescribed dose of reactionary and negationist ideology against perceiving an otherwise unacceptable reality. The quote from Ross Wilson's book on Theodor Adorno that I found on the Galactocomic Ontological Disorder Telegram channel is particularly apt here: "Entertainment is necessarily affirmative because the escape



---

53 This neologism was coined by Noura Tafeche.

offered by it is not escape from a bad reality at all but rather escape from the very idea of resistance to that reality. The only way out is surrender.”<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusions

As The Washington Post columnist Taylor Lorenz reported on 11 March 2022: “The White House has been closely watching TikTok’s rise as a dominant news source, leading to select a group of the platform’s most influential names.” The White House personally invited a group of TikTok influencers to be sure they were able to debunk misinformation and communicate effectively about the invasion of Ukraine. After a telephone conversation with the National Security Council, one TikToker admitted: “People in my generation get all the information from TikTok.” Some were harshly critical of Biden, as his deed meant nothing and only put pressure on Gen Z to manufacture and polish consent, while some felt somehow empowered, declaring: “I would consider myself as a White House correspondent for Gen Z.”<sup>55</sup>

One particularly hilarious and at time dramatic episode occurred in 2022 on the Nikita DumpTruck TikTok account, owned by a renowned comedian whose bio writes: “ Bimbo University  ✨ for the girls ✨ news, history, economics, culture also hi I’m Nikita.”

54 Batzrov. (2023, February 1). “Entertainment is necessarily affirmative because the escape offered by it is not escape from a bad reality at all but rather escape from the very idea of resistance to that reality. The only way out is surrender.”. Telegram. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://t.me/GalactocosmicOntologicalDisorder/16798>

55 Lorenz, T. (2022, March 11). The White House Is Briefing TikTok Stars About the War in Ukraine. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/11/tik-tok-ukraine-white-house>



Screenshot of a video posted on 24 February 2022  
on the nikitadumptruck TikTok account (3 million views as of May 2024)  
Original video caption: Interrupting my jokes for a public service  
#ukraine #russia #explained #comedy #girls #brunch #lgbt #gay

In the short video, Nikita explained the Russian invasion of Ukraine “for the girls”, narrating how “Russia and Ukraine used to be a thing but then broke up”, describing NATO as a group of “besties”, adding a stereotypical, frivolous, flirty, fresh touch of vanity and cliché akin to a BFF giving advice on how to dress to impress your crush. The comment section reflects a variety of points of view, including those expressed by users who understood the joke and responded with remarks like “So Russia is like Kanye” or “Could you explain NFT for the girls?”. For some, the video reverberates with the usual simplistic misinformation found in so-

cial media, for others it is the most informative piece of journalism from the beginning of the invasion, or better than a history class. For some it is a top-notch parody, a mere speculation on tragedy, for others it is just the summary of a zeitgeist.<sup>56</sup>

In October 2023, NikitaDumpTruck publicly apologised after using the same bimbo code in one of her “girlspaining” TikTok video (later deleted by the author) to describe the “Israeli” attack on Gaza as a birthday party that went wrong, involving three girls named “Patty” (referring to Palestine), “Brittany” for the British (Mandate) and “Izzy” as Israel.<sup>57</sup>

In a world where we witness a live-streamed genocide with its expanding impunity, where the race for world domination appears inexorable, Gen Z has responded by delivering real-time history lectures. Using varying degrees of sarcasm to counter the threat of regularly announced disasters such as climate change, economic inequality and social injustice, they convey personal values and openly display their fragility. All this, while being tugged by malicious political manipulation, the Zoomers are translating their narratives into fragmented online private idioms on one of the most popular apps ever.

The current state of affairs reveals a major shift within the domain of human perception and global justice: on the horizon stands the rise of an unset-

---

56 NikitaDumpTruck [@nikitadumptruck]. (2022, February 24). *Interrupting my jokes for a public service* [Video]. TikTok. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.tiktok.com/@nikitadumptruck/video/7068338468446817542>

57 NikitaDumpTruck [@nikitadumptruck]. (2023, October 16). [Video]. *thanks for ur patience with this!* TikTok. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.tiktok.com/@nikitadumptruck/video/7290669031969869089>

ting unknown dimension, whose physical laws alternate tensions between human rights violations and hololive-style streamers, ethnic cleansing and “I’m just a girl” vibes. The cute-girl-life is squirming around the bowels of genocide.

We are experiencing a gradual but rapid semiotic decay, the seemingly irreversible effects of which extend far beyond online niches. In an era defined by post-truth ideologies, where emotional impact and cognitive biases carry more weight than facts and reality, our pressing political and social questions often prove insufficient and futile in grasping the full scope of such a disfigured transformation. Nonetheless, such a topic eludes synthetic conclusions; its complexities are too vast to be captured in a single, sensational statement and the consequences it entails require long-term evaluation. Through this booklet, I aim to recall a path that has brought us here. Its written form serves to preserve an ephemeral fragment of digital historical memory – a seemingly innocuous transition that has led us down the path towards a perilous point of no return.

**This essay is dedicated to the Palestinian Resistance  
and all the Sarāyāt.**

Noura Tafeche

The Kawayoku Tales: Aestheticisation of Violence in Military, Gaming,  
Social Media Cultures and Other Stories

PostScript<sup>UM</sup> #51

Series edited by Janez Fakin Janša

Electronic edition



Publisher: Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana  
<https://aksioma.org> | [aksioma@aksioma.org](mailto:aksioma@aksioma.org)

Represented by: Marcela Okretič

Editorial assistant: Rok Kranjc

Proofreading: Miha Šuštar

Design: Federico Antonini

Layout: Sonja Grdina

Cover image: Noura Tafeche's 2024 collage based on images from Azur Lane, licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA: *Dace*, illustrated by 梦咲枫; *Monarch*, illustrated by Liduke; *Juno*, illustrated by 梦咲枫; screenshot of a "fleet build" by Reddit user niteshum057

© Aksioma | All text and image rights reserved by their respective authors  
Ljubljana, August 2024

Published in the frame of the project .expub funded by the European Union.  
<https://networkcultures.org/expub>

Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Additionally supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and the Municipality of Ljubljana.

.expub



City of  
Ljubljana



Co-funded by  
the European Union



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE

This publication expands on the video essay published by the Institute of Network Cultures in THE VOID on 26 September 2023.





# WAFUS

Kawayoku, a hybrid research area, explores the intersections of cuteness culture, digital warfare and the aestheticisation of violence in an era of semiotic ambiguity and post-truth. From the fetishisation of Weapons Grade Waifus and anthropomorphic warships in games like Azur Lane to the “Israeli” Defense Forces’ TikTok strategies, the essay reveals how cuteness and entertainment serve as tools of domestication, converging state-nationalism with the impish, and the uniform with the algorithm.

Noura Tafeche is a visual artist and independent researcher with a focus on net.art and radical entertainment. Her research delves into phenomena related to online visual cultures, aestheticisation of violence on digital platforms, linguistic experimentation and visual representation of speculative theories.

978-961-7173-56-7

€0

