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Conglomeration, New Media, and the Cultural Production of The "War on Terror"

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5. Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 1990), 189. Jameson sees Theodor Adorno as one of the few aestheticians who have incorporated Karl Marx's concept of economic production in their reading of the form and content of an aesthetic work.

6. Alger, *Megamedia*, 48.

7. James Curran, *Media and Power* (London: Routledge, 2002), 229.

8. Edward Wasserman, "Deal Makes Murdoch the Mightiest Media Mogul," *Washington Post*, November 23, 2003, E3.

9. Harris, *Media and Power*, 13.

10. The equivalent in publishing is the News Corporation's purchase of HarperCollins whereby sales are facilitated by its ownership of Barnes & Noble, since what creates a best-seller is the book's display in what has now been reduced to a few select bookstores that distribute nationally.

11. This drive for global control projected over space in the News Corporation ("We don't see ourselves as a large corporation, we see ourselves as tiny compared to the worldwide opportunities for media") is also projected over time since Murdoch sees the corporation in "multigenerational" terms, having installed in 2003 his then-thirty-year-old son James as chief executive of BSKYB, to the consternation of the shareholders. Murdoch, quoted in McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, 96. One is reminded of Noah Cross's answer to the detective in *Chinatown* as to why, since he is already a wealthy man, he has organized a water swindle: "The future, Mr. Gittes. The future."

12. Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, the architects of the Iraq invasion, have begun implementing these policies. For the most complete description of the goals and objectives of the project, see its "Statement of Principles," June 3, 1997, www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.html.

13. Alger, *Megamedia*, 44.

14. R. W. McChesney, "The Left-Wing Media?" *Monthly Review*, June 2003, 1–16.

15. Quoted in Alger, *Megamedia*, 45.

16. "David D. Kirkpatrick, "Mr. Murdoch's War," *New York Times*, April 7, 2003, C7.

17. For the history of the resistant figure of the film noir fugitive outsider and the collaborationist figure of the vigilante cop, see Dennis Broe, "Class, Crime, and Film Noir: Labor, the Fugitive Outsider, and the Anti-authoritarian Tradition," *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict, and World Order* 30, no. 1 (2003): 22–41. For a description of the post-9/11 militarization of the space of the one-hour television drama, see Broe, "Genre Regression and the New Cold War: The Return of the Police Procedural," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 45, no. 2, forthcoming.

18. Theodor Adorno, with Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1944).

Conglomeration, New Media, and the Cultural Production of the "War on Terror"

by James Castonguay

In February 2003, national and local news outlets ran a story about a Connecticut man who wrapped and sealed his entire house with plastic and duct tape in response

to warnings and advice from the Department of Homeland Security. Symptomatic of the more general "duct (tape) and cover" ethos ubiquitous throughout post-9/11 U.S. society, the story provided an interesting context of reception for the screening of *Atomic Café* (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty, 1982) in my course on war and the media. Indeed, students were quick to point out the uncanny similarities between 1950s Cold War paranoia and the current cultural anxieties surrounding the "war on terror." The Bush administration's rhetoric prompted the *New York Times* to point out the "eerily similar" comparisons to the McCarthy years,[1] and President George W. Bush went so far as to invoke the ultimate Cold War signifier of the mushroom cloud in his speech "outlining the Iraqi threat."[2]

With the capture of Saddam Hussein, Gulf War II, as *Time* magazine called it,[3] provided the denouement for the Gulf War miniseries begun by George W. Bush's father. At the same time, although the president has announced the end of the "hot" war in Iraq, he has also prepared the U.S. public for an endless "war on terror." In the post-9/11 era, the mainstream media have uncritically embraced the Bush administration's Orwellian nightmare of civil and human rights abuses, militarism, isolationism, and anti-intellectualism,[4] while also actively promoting the "war against terror" for ratings and profit. The currently unprecedented level of concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few transnational conglomerates and the existence of a military-industrial-media-entertainment network[5] further facilitates the implementation of a Cold War logic of "us" against "them" in the context of the Manichean rhetoric of good versus evil (doers).

Although a great deal of media attention was given to criticism by Hollywood celebrities of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the film divisions of the major media conglomerates expressed their eagerness to become part of the war effort from the outset. *Variety* reported in October 2001 that "government intelligence specialists [were] secretly soliciting terrorist scenarios from top Hollywood filmmakers and writers" through "a unique ad hoc working group"[6] at the Institute for Creative Technology at the University of Southern California. Its members were U.S. Army officials and writers and directors of *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988), *MacGyver* (ABC, 1985–92), and *Delta Force One* (Joseph Zito, 1999). In a November meeting with presidential adviser Karl Rove and executives from all the major media conglomerates, the head of the Motion Picture Association of America, Jack Valenti, reminded participants of the global scope of his industry's media imperialism: "We are not limited to domestic measures. The American entertainment industry has a unique capacity to reach audiences worldwide with important messages."[7]

In the wake of 9/11, Valenti announced that Hollywood would not be making films that portrayed Islamic terrorists so as to prevent a backlash against "the decent, hard-working, law-abiding Muslim community in this country."[8] Hollywood had already done its ideological work in this regard by showing racist, essentialist, and Orientalist representations of Arabs and Islam for decades.[9] Indeed, the limited repertoire of images of and narratives about Arabs and Islam before and during the "war on terror" has served to keep much of the U.S. public ignorant about Arab and Islamic culture, thus paving the way for the dehumanizing and demonizing of the "enemy" as part of the inexorable march toward the hot and cold wars on terror. And

although the film industry claimed it would absent representations of terrorists, the television production divisions and networks within the media oligopolies have regularly depicted terrorism in both news and entertainment programming.

In an attempt to garner popular support for its existence and budget in the post-Soviet and pre-9/11 era, the CIA actively solicited and nourished intelligence-related TV and film projects by employing a former CIA officer in Latin America as a full-time entertainment liaison officer.[10] Like the underwriting and collaboration by the Congress for Cultural Freedom with artists during the Cold War,[11] programs produced with the support of the new collaborators serve as effective propaganda and desirable publicity for the CIA and, more recently, the "war on terror."

The canceled CBS series *The Agency* had been developing its scripts in close consultation with the CIA and even shot part of its pilot episode inside the actual CIA headquarters. Throughout its run, *The Agency* did not question the validity of the CIA; rather, the series ultimately functioned as a public relations vehicle for the agency. According to the program's creative supervisor, Wolfgang Peterson (*Das Boot*, 1981; *Air Force One*, 1997), "Now that the Cold War is over, people are questioning whether we need a CIA and this is a great opportunity to get the word out."[12] Although airing of the pilot episode of *The Agency* was postponed because its terrorist plot, including a reference to Osama bin Laden, "too closely resembled reality," focus groups rated the episode much higher after 9/11 because, according to Leslie Moonves, president of CBS Entertainment, people were in the mood for a "patriotic episode, with bad guys and good guys," in which "the CIA thwarts the evil terrorists."[13]

The ABC series *Threat Matrix*—which refers to the real report the president receives each morning prioritizing threats to the nation—has been promoted as "the first prime time series to take on post-9/11 American society, focusing on the heroism and the humanity of people who dedicate their lives to saving the country from ongoing terrorist threats."[14] According to *Broadcasting & Cable*, members of the Department of Defense and of Congress are consultants on the program, which also employs former deputy director of the National Security Agency Bill Crowell.[15] As Cynthia Fuchs has noted, "Any remotely counter-administration thinking that filters into *Threat Matrix* is cut short: patriotism means you toe the line."[16] This positive public relations and propaganda for the Department of Homeland Security, the CIA, and the Bush administration is particularly sinister in the context of the recent passage of the Patriot Act.

While *The Agency* and *Threat Matrix* approach reality through fiction, ABC enlisted film and television producer Jerry Bruckheimer (*Crimson Tide*, 1995; *Armageddon*, 1998; *Enemy of the State*, 1998, *CSI*, 2000–), along with *Cops* (1989–) creator Bertram Van Munster, to produce a reality series featuring actual soldiers fighting the war in Afghanistan.[17] The short-lived result, *Profiles from the Front Line*, adopted the codes and conventions of the current cycle of reality programs that use follow-up interviews, music soundtracks, fly-on-the-wall recordings of "private" conversations, and "characters" chosen with their narrative potential in mind. Although the blurring of generic boundaries has been an implicit theme in many post-9/11 shows, the particular conflation of entertainment with news in *Profiles*

created tensions between the WB production team that shot the series and the ABC news division, which felt it should have had access to any footage considered newsworthy. One could view *Profiles* as a calculated or controlled form of reporter "embedding," which in its normal manifestations during the war in Iraq became, "most obviously, a next step from *Cops*, when the officer—here the terse, camouflaged troop—pauses in his work to explain what he's doing to an inquiring mind."[18]

As I have argued elsewhere about Operation Desert Storm, most media scholars analyzed Gulf War TV news in order to expose its fictions but largely overlooked fictional programming, thus implicitly accepting the generic hierarchies that the television industry both assumes and constructs.[19] A similar trend toward focusing primarily on news programming is occurring during the current cold war. Moreover, a more complete critique of both news and nonnews programming would benefit from being plotted along a broader discursive continuum that includes Web sites, films, music, speeches, parades, T-shirts, magazines, and the other texts that comprise the cultural production of the "war on terror."[20]

During the U.S. attacks on Afghanistan, the conservative family drama *7th Heaven* (1996–), on WB, attempted to "put a real face on the war against terrorism" by including an emotional memorial with the actual widow and son of a U.S. marine who was killed in a driving accident in Afghanistan. The episode, entitled "The Known Soldier," begins with Ruthie, the daughter in the show, producing a video letter to her pen pal marine while singing along to the Tom Petty song "I Won't Back Down." The episode concludes with Ruthie's video reprising the song, thus framing the show in the context of the themes of revenge and violence epitomized by the "America Fights Back" news logos ubiquitous on television coverage during the war in Afghanistan. At the same time, this family-friendly program is well suited generically, ideologically, and politically to the project of helping families on the domestic front "cope."

More important for my current concerns, the WB network adopted an explicitly pedagogical role for this episode by constructing and promoting a companion Web site on its sister company's TurnerLearning.com. Sponsored by Target (whose logo becomes slightly ironic in the context of this episode) and presented as an "educational guide" for parents, teachers, and administrators, the first link includes a taping rights agreement that is conditional on compliance with the curriculum.[21] This is an excellent example of the ways in which a media conglomerate like AOL Time Warner could exploit "convergence" in an explicit attempt to control and contain the *7th Heaven* episode's polysemy in the context of war.

The *7th Heaven* Web site is just one example of a new kind of intermediality in which the Web has become an integral part of the production and reception of television. In the case of "Operation Iraqi Freedom," the Web became a significant rival to television as a source of information for many U.S. viewers. The cable news channels have increasingly adopted a Web page aesthetic by cramming text and images into each frame, and the major networks routinely invite viewers to log on to their complementary or supplementary Web sites for more information or multimedia presentations. The inclusion on the CNN Web site of several television feeds also enabled Gulf War II viewers to choose their own shots to look at, thus turning TV spectators into interactive armchair imperialists.

This is only the latest manifestation in a long history of screen practices dating back to at least the apparatus of early cinema and the Spanish-American War in the 1890s that have enabled Americans to participate vicariously in the U.S. imperial project as a mediated and exotic spectacle.[22] In this context, the reception of war can be viewed as a form of inter*passivity* in which Web "users" are encouraged to codirect the war (show) on terror, thereby actively embracing and constructing the dominant ideologies of consumerism, nationalism, and hyper-militarism through this new intermediality.

The emergence of the newer media of the Internet and the Web[23] not only have afforded mainstream media such as WB and CNN new modes of representation but have also provided new opportunities for the expression of dissent, new avenues of distribution for audio and video, and alternative representations of war unavailable during previous major U.S. conflicts.[24] To offer one prominent example, the video of Daniel Pearl's torture and murder, which was self-censored by the mainstream media, was uploaded in its entirety to several Web sites and made available through peer-to-peer file-sharing networks. Web sites also circulated images challenging the instantaneous electronic historiography of the "fall of Baghdad" by revealing that there were very few celebrants outside the televisual frame. In addition, during the 2003 war discussions, Arab and Arab American Web sites offered a wide range of dissenting views,[25] as did online articles and blogs from libertarians and the Left. The satellite distribution of Al-Jazeera and other pan-Arab cable network programming also offered important alternative images to those shown on U.S. networks (most notably images of dead and injured Iraqi civilians). By including Arab perspectives and voices, these images provided different contexts for understanding the U.S. invasion of Iraq and its mediation.

By offering this rather bleak account of wartime media culture, it is not my intention to argue that television spectators are passive "cultural dupes" unable to resist ideological messages, or that the Internet presents an updated version of the "hypodermic needle" model of communication. Rather, I am suggesting that the polysemy of the "war on terror text" was severely constrained or "managed," and consequently—like the Bush administration's policies toward Iraq—offered little room for negotiation. Although the new intertexts available on the Web and Arab satellite networks provided dissenting viewpoints, the complicity between U.S. media conglomerates, the government, and the military[26] created a context of reception with limited possibilities for oppositional or politically progressive readings.

Notes

1. Robert F. Worth, "Truth, Right, and the American Way: A Nation Defines Itself by Its Evil Enemies," *New York Times*, February 24, 2002, sec. 4; see also http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/24/weekinreview/24WORT.html.
2. "Bush: Don't Wait for Mushroom Cloud," CNN.com, October 7, 2003, http://www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/10/07/bush.transcript, and "President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat," October 6, 2002, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html.
3. See the cover of *Time*'s special issue, March 31, 2003, http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101030331.

4. For an excellent discussion of the regressive policies of the Bush administration, see Douglas Kellner, *From 9/11 to Terror War: Dangers of the Bush Legacy* (Lanham, Md.: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003).

5. See James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001).

6. Claude Brodesser, "Feds Seek H'wood's Help," *Daily Variety*, October 8, 2001, 1.

7. "White House Meets with Hollywood Leaders to Explore Ways to Win War against Terrorism," PR Newswire, November 11, 2001, http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m4PRN/2001_Nov_11/79942648/p1/article.jhtml.

8. Jonathan V. Last, "War? What War?" *Wall Street Journal*, October 10, 2003, sec. W.

9. See Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), and Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992).

10. See Duncan Campbell, "Hollywood Helps CIA Come in from the Cold," *The Guardian*, September 6, 2001.

11. See Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999).

12. Campbell, "Hollywood Helps CIA," 15.

13. Caryn James, "Television, Like the Country, Loses Its Footing," *New York Times*, November 4, 2001, sec. 2. As the only military drama on TV before 9/11, CBS's *JAG: Judge Advocate General* (1995–) also saw a boost in ratings after the attacks on the World Trade Center, jumping from twenty-eighth to twelfth in the wake of the attacks. *JAG*'s characters have fought the Taliban in Afghanistan, held terrorism tribunals, and participated in the rebuilding process in Iraq. One of the show's main characters lost a leg saving an Iraqi child from a minefield. CBS also premiered a *JAG* spin-off, *Navy NCIS*, in fall 2003.

14. See the TV Tome Web site on *Threat Matrix*, http://www.tvtome.com/tvtome/servlet/ShowMainServlet/showid-16750/.

15. Paige Albiniak, "Post-9/11 Becomes a Television Plot: *Threat Matrix* Feeds on New Interest in National Security," *Broadcasting & Cable*, October 13, 2003, 22.

16. Cynthia Fuchs, "Smoke 'Em Out," *Popmatters*, September 29, 2003, http://www.popmatters.com/tv/reviews/t/threat-matrix.shtml.

17. See Josef Adalian and Michael Schneider, "Alphabet Targets Battlefront Reality," *Daily Variety*, February 20, 2002, 1. As a result of the positive relationship Bruckheimer developed with the Pentagon during the production of *Black Hawk Down* (Ridley Scott, 2001), Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld "signed off on *Profiles* without reservation." "Obviously," Van Munster noted, "we're going to have a pro-military, pro-American stance. We're not going to criticize." Ibid.

18. Cynthia Fuchs, "The 'Real World' War," *Alternet*, April 2, 2003, http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=15539.

19. An important exception is Susan Jeffords and Lauren Rabinovitz, eds., *Seeing through the Media: The Persian Gulf War* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994). See also James Castonguay, "Masquerades of Massacre: Gender, Genre, and the Gulf War TV Star System," *Velvet Light Trap* 39 (1997): 5–22.

20. The discursive field should also be expanded to include less explicit representations of the "war on terror," such as Disney's *Hildago* (2004), in which a nineteenth-century American cowboy and his mustang travel to Saudi Arabia to race against "the World's greatest Arabian horses." See http://hidalgo.movies.go.com/main.html. I am grateful to Dennis Broe for suggesting this example.

21. See http://www.turnerlearning.com/thewb/7thheaven/knownsoldier/index.html.

22. See my discussion of the Spanish-American War and film in *American Quarterly's* Project for Hypertext Scholarship in American Studies, http://chnm.gmu.edu/aq. See also James Castonguay, "The Spanish-American War in U.S. Media Culture," in J. David Slocum, ed., *Hollywood and War: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming); Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner, 1990); and Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

23. Ironically, much of this alternative information was distributed over a computer network that resulted in part from the Cold War desire of the U.S. Department of Defense to create a decentralized communications network that could survive a nuclear strike. See Gene I. Rochlin, *Trapped in the Net: The Unanticipated Consequences of Computerization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

24. For a discussion of the use of the Internet and Web during Operation Desert Storm and the Bosnian War, see James Castonguay, "Representing Bosnia: Human Rights Claims and Global Media Culture," in Mark P Bradley and Patrice Petro, eds., *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 157–85.

25. See, for example, http://www.arabnews.com, http://albawabaforums.com, http://english.aljazeera.net, http://www.cafearabica.com, http://www.adc.org, http://www.antiwar.com, and http://www.alternet.org.

26. The Bush administration and the FCC have already rewarded the media oligopolies for their contributions to the 2003 Gulf War by increasing the criminalization of network file sharing (or "copyright piracy") and loosening station ownership limits by 10 percent (despite massive public protest). Capitalizing on anxieties about Internet insecurity, the Bush administration announced in March 2003 that "the war on terrorism [would] include . . . measures to prevent proceeds from pirated movies and music from becoming a vehicle for financing terrorist networks." Pamela McClintock, "Piracy Perils Pervasive," *Daily Variety*, March 13, 2003, 50. This tactic of tying illegal activities such as peer-to-peer file sharing to terrorism extends the logic of the Bush administration's public-service announcements that argue that individual illegal drug use in the United States helps to finance terrorism. Although no concrete proof of any connection between the file sharing of copyrighted material and terrorism was offered at the hearing, Jack Valenti and Hilary Rose, chair and CEO of the Recording Industry Association of America, testified on Capital Hill about the "dark paths to which [piracy] profits are put [by] highly organized, violent international criminal groups." Ibid.

Fending Off the Barbarians: Agit-Media and the Middle East

by Linda Dittmar

"Us"-versus-"them" rhetoric sustains states of conflict. In this paradigm, "we" are the aggrieved ones, whatever the grievance; "they" are in the wrong. "They" are barbaric, evil, uncivilized, and bent on destroying "us," while "we" have God,